



LETITIA JAMES

Public Advocate for the City of New York

Public Advocate Progress Report 2017

✔ Supporting Children and Education



✔ Preserving Affordable Housing



✔ Advancing Equality for Women and Girls



✔ Promoting New Yorkers' Health



✔ Fighting for Workers' Rights



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Message from the Public Advocate

Dear Friends,

I am proud to have been given the opportunity to pursue a mission of unity and service – bringing people together on issues we all care about. In this Annual Report, you will read about our work advancing key policy initiatives, and our work legislating, investigating and litigating to improve the lives of all New Yorkers. As I begin my second term in office, I would like to share with you an excerpt from my inaugural address which I hope you will find informative.

During my time as Public Advocate, our team has addressed over thirty thousand (30,000) constituent complaints – individuals walking through our doors without a fancy lawyer or lobbyist, but with a need for help.

We have passed more legislation than all previous public advocates combined, including groundbreaking legislation that bans questions about salary history from the employment process in an effort to close the wage gap. Because we fundamentally believe that equal pay for equal work cannot just be a slogan – it must be a reality for all employees in our city.

While it may seem at times that there are too many challenges to address, too many opportunities to realize, too many people to help, there are no insurmountable problems when we tap into our collective spirit.

As a city, we must demonstrate a resolve and unity equal to the many challenges ahead of us.

I often think about the people who built this City – the dockworkers and the bricklayers, and the construction crews who paved the way on a road we now travel.

With every rising sun, these pioneers awoke with a passion that built our storied city. And when the sun set, they dreamt again of the promise a new morning would hold.

As we begin a new day in our City, we carry the same optimism, grit, and passion that make New York, New York.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Letitia James". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Letitia James



Letitia James has served as a watchdog for New Yorkers as Public Advocate since 2014.

About the Public Advocate

Public Advocate Letitia James is a tireless champion for working families and the most vulnerable New Yorkers. In 2013, she made history as the first woman of color elected to citywide office in New York City. As Public Advocate, she serves as a direct link between New Yorkers and their government, acting as a watchdog over City agencies, and investigating complaints about City services. She has transformed the Office of the Public Advocate to deliver real results and reforms for all New Yorkers, sponsoring more legislation than all other previous Public Advocates combined, and handling more than 33,000 complaints.

Throughout her lifelong commitment to public service, she has distinguished herself as an advocate and leader on some of the most pressing issues of our time. She has fought for tenants' rights and community renewal and spent much of her career advocating for children and families.

As Public Advocate, she defended children in foster care who were the victims of irreparable harm, protected children with disabilities who were forced to ride on dangerously hot school buses, and fought to ensure that all students have access to a high quality education. James led the fight for universal free school lunch for all public school students, which was implemented in the fall of 2017. She also championed Paid Family Leave and raising the minimum wage.

James has used her platform to address the feminization of poverty. In 2016, James introduced landmark legislation to ban questions about salary history from the employment process to end gender wage discrimination, and on October 31, 2017, New York City became the first municipality in the nation to enforce a salary history ban.

Whether it's through her Worst Landlords Watchlist, legal action, or pushing for legislation, Public Advocate James works diligently to protect tenants and preserve affordable housing.

As a trustee of the New York City Employees' Retirement System (NYCERS), the City's largest pension fund, James led to the fight to divest taxpayer dollars from several of the largest gun retailers in the country and to divest from fossil-fuel companies.

A lawyer by training, James previously served as an Assistant Attorney General and a public defender. Public Advocate Letitia James is a proud graduate of CUNY's Lehman College and Howard University Law School. She currently resides in Brooklyn where she was born and raised.

2017 Accomplishments

✓ Supporting Children and Education

✓ Preserving Affordable Housing, Protecting Tenants and the Homeless

✓ Advancing Equality for Women and Girls

✓ Ensuring Public Safety and Justice

✓ Supporting Seniors in their Homes & Communities

✓ Supporting Infrastructure and Transportation

✓ Protecting Immigrant Communities

✓ Fighting for Workers' Rights

✓ Business: Supporting the Engines of our Economy

✓ Protecting Our Environment

✓ Promoting New Yorkers' Health

✓ Supporting Puerto Rico and Hurricane Victims

✓ Connecting with New Yorkers

Pushing Schools to Provide Mandated Services to Children with Disabilities

Nearly 200,000 of New York City’s children have disabilities that require an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Public Advocate James released a startling investigative report detailing the Department of Education’s (DOE) failure to serve children with disabilities, specifically through their reliance on Related Service Authorization (RSA) vouchers. RSAs are given to parents of children with disabilities when a school cannot fulfill the requirements of their specialized IEP. Public Advocate James revealed that in one district in the Bronx, one of the poorest in the City, RSA vouchers went unused 91 percent of the time, meaning the vast majority of students with disabilities were not receiving their mandated and necessary services.

This DOE policy abrogates its responsibility and fails our children, leaving hundreds of the City’s most vulnerable students without the services they need every year. Public Advocate James’ report pushed for the DOE to reevaluate its reliance on RSA vouchers and to find a way to provide adequate support for all students with disabilities regardless of where they live.

Spotlight on Children

“A report released this month by the city’s public advocate, Letitia James, found that thousands of students with disabilities who were given the vouchers weren’t receiving services to which they were entitled. The report found that nearly half of the 9,164 vouchers issued in the 2015-16 school year went unused, because the families couldn’t find therapists to work with their children.”

The New York Times

July 27, 2017

2014

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

March 11, 2014

PA James announces plan for universal school lunch.

March 13, 2014

PA James attends City Council Health Committee hearing regarding sale of dialysis clinics where she calls upon the Administration “to withdraw this application and withdraw it immediately,” citing higher mortality, infection, and poor staffing rates. HHC withdraws application for sale of dialysis clinics in May 2015.

Public Advocate James with elementary school students.



Securing Universal School Lunch for All Children

It's simple: no child should go hungry at school. In 2014, Public Advocate James successfully pushed for adoption of a universal school lunch program in middle schools and the results were clear. In the first year, participating schools saw an 8 percent increase in the number of students who received free lunch – nearly 10,000 more students eating lunch each day. Believing that school lunch should be available for students of all ages, Public Advocate James continued to push to expand the universal school lunch program to all grade levels to ensure that every child has access to free, nutritious lunch. Following a successful advocacy campaign, starting in the 2017–2018 school year, every public school student has access to a free, nutritious school lunch.

April 9, 2014

The New York Times editorial board supports universal school lunch and praises PA James.

July 2014

PA James releases report, “Improving Voting Access for New Yorkers with Disabilities.”

July 22, 2014

PA James calls for implementation of police body-worn cameras.

Preserving Affordable Housing, Protecting Tenants and the Homeless

Advocating for Permanent Affordable Housing

Public Advocate James called for a thorough review of the City’s Tenant Interim Lease Apartment Purchase Program (TIL). After hearing complaints from a number of constituents and holding a town hall meeting with TIL residents, Public Advocate James’ office investigated the program and issued a report which found that TIL is not fulfilling its purpose of providing New Yorkers with self-sufficient low-income cooperatives. As our City faces a crisis in affordable housing, it is shocking that a City-run program is allowing hundreds of affordable units to remain vacant. The TIL program was established to assist low-income New Yorkers in becoming homeowners of permanently affordable homes, yet poor management and alleged corruption have kept hundreds of units vacant for years.

At press conferences, rallies and meetings with the leaders of relevant City agencies, Public Advocate James pushed the City to do better and fully commit to the goal of ensuring that every New Yorker has a safe and affordable home.

Spotlight on Housing

“Public Advocate Letitia James is calling for an independent review into a housing program that allows renters to buy city-owned apartments for as little as \$250.

The city’s Tenant Interim Lease program...offers below-market rents in city-owned buildings with the understanding tenants will eventually be able to buy the apartments....”

THE REAL DEAL
NEW YORK REAL ESTATE NEWS

April 27, 2017

Ensuring Fairness and Access to the City’s Housing Lottery

The City’s affordable housing programs are meant to support New Yorkers, yet the selection criteria to qualify for the housing does not take into consideration the realities of the economic circumstances of many applicants. The current affordable housing lottery selection criteria set forth by the City’s Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) bars many low-income New Yorkers, families, those experiencing homelessness, and the elderly from access to the safe and stable housing provided through the lottery. Public Advocate James released a report recommending improvements to the stringent Tenant

2014

August 1, 2014

PA James files a brief with Council Members in support of a NYC Human Rights Law challenge to a landlord’s denial of services to rent stabilized tenants. Landlord removes the denial of services policy, giving all residents equal opportunity to use the building on October 26, 2015. New York City Commission on Human Rights overturns landlord’s policy and awards financial compensation to tenants on July 31, 2016.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

Public Advocate James with Picture the Homeless.



Spotlight on Housing

“The changes that Public Advocate James recommends would help address an insidious form of racial injustice, in which people of color are disproportionately blocked from the City’s limited affordable housing stock, based on their alleged credit history.”



Sarah Ludwig, founder and co-director of New Economy Project

Selection Criteria, and calling for greater transparency and accessibility in the housing lottery process.

The goal should be to help individuals and families get back on their feet, not to adopt strict criteria that shut them out. A fair shot should be given to all New Yorkers.

Fighting Housing Discrimination Against Transgender Individuals

On the heels of International Transgender Day of Visibility, Public Advocate James released a report identifying the severity and scope of serious transgender housing discrimination and recommended a number of improvements to protect the transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) community. The TGNC community experiences significant discrimination in many forms including in seeking housing. Twenty

August 11, 2014

PA James releases report, “The Cost of Improper Procedures: Using Police Body Cameras to Reduce Economic and Social Ills.”

September 10, 2014

City Council passes PA James’ Local Law 104, requiring ACS to report information relating to youth aging out of the foster care system.

percent of TGNC New Yorkers have been refused a home based on gender identity discrimination, and many more have been the victims of discriminatory behavior when seeking a home.

Everyone should be safe from discrimination and deserves the right to find a home regardless of gender identity. Public Advocate James recommended reforms to City law and policy to better protect the TGNC community, including for the City’s Commission on Human Rights to receive and file complaints at all borough offices and to provide community based organizations small grants to compile discrimination complaints. The Public Advocate met with the Commissioner of the NYC Commission on Human Rights to discuss these concerns and work towards improvements to ensure that every community has the necessary tools to seek justice and feels like they have a place to turn when victimized.

Worst Landlords, Reformed: Examples of Improved Buildings

- 1725 Fulton Street, Brooklyn: 753 violations as of October 2016 to 37 violations as of September 2017.
- 1122 1 Avenue, Manhattan: 125 violations as of October 2016 to zero violations as of October 2017.
- 35 East 60th Street, Manhattan: 107 violations in October 2016 to zero violations as of October 2017.
- 230 East 89th Street, Manhattan: 129 violations in October 2016 to 12 violations as of October 2017.

Worst Landlords List

No New Yorker should be subjected to hazardous conditions in their home, yet bad landlords in our City are forcing too many tenants to live in dangerous and indecent conditions.

In November, Public Advocate James released the 2017 Worst Landlords Watchlist, an annual database of the worst landlords in New York City. The Watchlist is an information-sharing tool that helps to empower tenants and advocates and hold unscrupulous landlords accountable. This year’s Watchlist was more powerful than ever before, using a full year’s worth of data of HPD complaints.

There are some unscrupulous property owners who have chosen to exploit the market and the dire need for housing. They subject their

2014-2015

September 15, 2014

PA James releases “How Safe is Your Nail Salon?” report.

December 3, 2014

PA James calls for special prosecutors following non-indictment in Eric Garner case.

Public Advocate James announcing the Worst Landlords with impacted tenants telling their experiences with landlord harassment and numerous building violations.



Spotlight on Tenants

Sylvia Tapia lives in a building owned by 2017's Worst Landlord. Sylvia lives with her three children. With no working lock on the front door, trespassers lurk in the hallways to sell drugs. Trash piles up in the courtyard, and the landlord ignored her requests for basic repairs – all while flipping other apartments from rent stabilized to market rents.

tenants to dangerous and unsanitary conditions – apartments infested with vermin and mold, collapsing ceilings, no heat or hot water, no electricity, units that are literally falling apart. The Landlord Watchlist shames them and pressures them to make repairs.

Public Advocate James continued to pressure landlords from the previous 2016 list, with results. Six of the top ten landlords from 2016 were no longer on the Watchlist in 2017, having made repairs to their buildings. There were also 280 buildings that were no longer on the list.

January 6, 2015

PA James moves to intervene in a lawsuit against the DOE alleging that School Leadership Team meetings should be open to the public under the State's Open Meetings Law and the Education Law. Supreme Court Judge Moulter issues a decision in April finding that School Leadership Teams are subject to the Open Meetings Law.

Spotlight on Housing

“The public schools are woefully unprepared to meet the needs of an exploding population of homeless students – and kids are suffering because of it, a new report charges.

Public Advocate Letitia James ripped the city’s services for homeless public school kids in a Wednesday press conference at City Hall unveiling the report.”

DAILY NEWS

October 18, 2017

Unveiling the Money Financing the City’s Worst Landlords

Public Advocate James revealed the 10 banks that loan to the most buildings owned by the City’s worst landlords, as designated by her Landlord Watchlist. She called on these banks to reform their lending practices to protect tenants. This is the first time the financial backing of the worst landlords has been made public.

Banks must take responsibility for their role in unsafe and unhealthy housing conditions for New Yorkers. Public Advocate James used the list to expose the irresponsible lending practices of these banks and to push them to use their economic leverage to get bad landlords to take responsibility for maintaining basic living conditions in their buildings.

Legal Support to Rent Stabilized Tenants

Public Advocate James, along with numerous elected officials, filed an amicus brief in support of the tenants in two rent stabilization cases. One million New York City apartments are protected from skyrocketing rents through rent stabilization laws and codes. Unfortunately, some unscrupulous landlords attempt to circumvent these laws, charging tenants market rate prices. Fortunately, the New York Supreme Court ruled in favor of the tenants who sued their landlord after their rents were substantially raised, even though their apartments were stabilized through the 421(g) program.

Helping Homeless New Yorkers

Public Advocate James has played a central role in pushing to turn vacant land into affordable housing for the homeless. Legislation she sponsored is the centerpiece of the Housing Not Warehousing Act, three bills in the City Council that seek to convert New York City’s vacant lots and unused or underused buildings into affordable housing.

2015

February 19, 2015

Upon learning of a questionable contract set to be approved by DOE, PA James writes letter to DOE re: questionable IT contract. The following month, DOE cancels the IT contract.

February 25, 2015

PA James kicks off series of mayoral control forums in Brooklyn.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

Serving community members on St. Patrick's Day. Public Advocate James is a tireless advocate for New Yorkers' housing rights and access.



Tackling rising homelessness in New York City must be one of the City's top priorities. Throughout 2017, Public Advocate James not only fought to give homeless New Yorkers a shot at stable, affordable housing, but also to improve the lives of those stuck in a rapidly growing shelter system. This includes the 23,000 children sleeping in shelters every night.

In October, Public Advocate James released an alarming report on the struggles that homeless students face in New York City, including chronic absenteeism. The report found that those schools with the largest population of homeless students, and therefore a greater need for mental health and other services, actually had the lowest levels of funding and staff for these needs. Public Advocate James' report highlighted the challenges that these homeless students face and called on the Department of Education to address the shortcomings in services.

March 2015

PA James releases report, "Protecting Internet Service for All New Yorkers."

May 1, 2015

PA James holds press conference to call for regulation of nail salons; City Council holds hearing on PA James' legislation to ensure the health and safety of nail salon workers and patrons.

Banning Salary History Inquiries

Previous salary should have no impact on current compensation. That's why Public Advocate James introduced a bill, which was signed into law in March 2017, that bans employers from asking about salary history. This groundbreaking law impacts approximately 3.8 million workers in New York City, and makes New York City the first city in the nation to put such a ban into place.

This law is one very important step forward in addressing the persistent gender wage gap that has impeded countless women for decades. Public Advocate James' report found that women in New York City earn about \$5.8 billion less in wages than men annually. Not surprisingly because of racial inequality, this wage gap disproportionately affects women of color.

Banning employers from inquiring about salary history will help end the pay gaps that begin early in women's careers. Notably, this will not just benefit women – it will be a boost for all employees who deserve to be paid based on their worth, not simply what they made at their last job.

Throughout the year, Public Advocate James hosted a variety of outreach and educational events to inform the public about this law. On March 30th, Public Advocate James gathered advocates, students and supporters, including Chelsea Clinton, to discuss how to close the wage gap in the City and the best practices of other regions that the City can learn from. On October 31st, the Public Advocate's Office partnered with the United States U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and the NYC Commission on Human Rights to inform employers about the implementation and enforcement of the law.

Spotlight on Women and Girls

"Earlier this month, New York City passed legislation that bans interviewers from asking job applications about their salary histories...This most recent legislation is the handiwork of New York City public advocate Letitia James, who proposed the bill in August 2016 and inspired Mayor Bill de Blasio to approve an executive order three months later that enforced it for all municipal agencies."

ELLE

April 20, 2017

2015

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

✓ **May 26, 2015**

PA James releases report calling for sweeping reforms to mayoral control.

✓ **May 29, 2015**

PA James stands with Governor Cuomo to announce manicurists' bill of rights and consumer awareness initiatives.

Celebrating with Mayor de Blasio at the signing of New York City's salary history ban legislation in 2017. Public Advocate James proposed this groundbreaking legislation in 2016.



PA James on Wage Equity

“More than ever, New York City needs to identify the tools and supports that help women achieve economic security and balance the demands of work and caring for their family. And that starts with this law – ensuring that women are not stuck in a system of underpayment with no recourse.”

– from Public Advocate James’ speech, Salary History bill signing, May 4, 2017

Challenging Corporate Sexism and Racism

Following reports of racism and sexual harassment at Fox News, Public Advocate James called for investigations on multiple fronts into workplace discrimination and shareholder deception at the news agency.

In a letter to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), Public Advocate James questioned whether Fox News’ failure to make public information about complaints of sexual harassment and payments made

✓ June 2015

PA James releases the paid family leave report and recommends passage of the state law which becomes law on January 1, 2018.

✓ June 2015

PA James releases report highlighting the retirement crisis in New York City and proposes a solution.

Standing with Chelsea Clinton and event participants at the Public Advocate’s “Closing the Wage Gap” roundtable event. Throughout the year, Public Advocate James hosted a variety of outreach and educational events to inform New Yorkers about the salary history ban law.



Advancing Equality for Women and Girls (continued)

to resolve those complaints constituted a failure to disclose material information that would allow its shareholders to assess the risk environment in which the company operates. Public Advocate James called on the SEC to investigate whether the company’s failure to disclose violated federal law.

In a second letter to the New York City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), Public Advocate James urged CCHR to investigate whether Fox News and then on-air host Bill O’Reilly violated the City’s Human Rights Law’s prohibitions against racial and gender discrimination and sexual harassment.

Following the intense public scrutiny, Fox News removed Bill O’Reilly from the network. Public Advocate James continues to advocate on this issue and in December testified at the CCHR hearing on workplace sexual harassment.

2015

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

July 5, 2015

PA James releases report showing children spend too much time in foster care using data from hotline.

July 7, 2015

PA James calls on NYC’s 5 pension boards to divest from Walmart until the chain stops selling assault weapons.

Public Advocate James on Sexual Harassment

In the post- “#MeToo” era, the whole world now knows what women have known since we first set foot in the workplace, since we first went to school, since we were old enough to understand the differences between right and wrong:

Sexual harassment is pervasive, it is corrosive, and it has been a silent roadblock on the road to career growth for generations.

Public Advocate Letitia James

NYC Commission on Human Rights Hearing, December 6, 2017

Ensuring Public Safety and Justice

Enforcing the “Ban the Box” Protections

In February 2017, Public Advocate James filed an amicus brief in an NAACP lawsuit against employers who expressly prohibited people with criminal records from applying for jobs in online advertisements. A criminal record can be an albatross around the neck of individuals, making basic reintegration into society extremely difficult. The profound racial disparities of our criminal justice system are only exacerbated as the collateral consequences of criminal convictions compound over the years. New York City has already done the right thing and banned employers from considering criminal records, but the use of national internet job search engines provides a backdoor method for this insidious form of discrimination.


After Public Advocate James submitted her legal brief, the case was settled and the companies have ceased violating New York law.

Closing Down Rikers, Once and for All


For years, Public Advocate James has pushed for sweeping changes in the treatment of individuals being held on Rikers Island. The Public Advocate successfully petitioned to create new rules to address high rates of sexual victimization on Rikers and authored legislation to end the financial exploitation of inmates’ families who are charged exorbitant rates to send money to their loved ones. In 2017, Public Advocate James called for the Rikers Island Jail to be shut down once and for all.

2015

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

 **July 8, 2015**

PA James stands with Governor Cuomo as he signs executive order for special prosecutors in Eric Garner case.

 **July 8, 2015**

PA James, along with ten foster care children, files a class action lawsuit against the NYC Administration for Children’s Services and the NYS Office of Children and Family Services for causing irreparable harm to children in New York City foster care.

Public Advocate James is fighting hiring discrimination against individuals with criminal records, is calling for the shutdown of Rikers, and is championing the use of body-worn cameras by New York police officers.



Advocating for a Fair, Transparent Body-worn Camera Program

Since her time in office began, Public Advocate James has been New York City’s leading champion in the quest to equip all NYPD officers with body-worn cameras. Following her repeated calls, a report issued by her office in August 2014, and a demonstration of the technology, the City launched a pilot program in September 2014. In Fall 2017, body-worn cameras began to be phased in and will be worn by every patrol officer by 2019.

As the NYPD expands its use of body-worn cameras, Public Advocate James called on the department to procure body-worn cameras with a technical capacity that meets the demand of the program. Public Advocate James also pushed for an objective and transparent process when it comes to releasing footage from body-worn cameras.

July 28, 2015

NYCERS overwhelmingly votes in favor of PA James’ resolution to begin divestment from gun retailers.

October 2015

PA James releases report on subsidized childcare options in New York City.

Supporting Seniors in Their Homes & Communities

Taking Action to Ensure Senior NYCHA Residents and Those with Disabilities Have the Right to Remain in Their Homes

Every New Yorker has the right to age gracefully in their own home, and receive accommodations for their disabilities, regardless of whether they live in public or private housing. For years, the City's Housing Authority (NYCHA) has denied aging New Yorkers with disabilities the right to have a family member move in to care for them. This is often the final step between a senior staying in their home or having to uproot to move into a facility, which is usually overwhelming for the senior and more costly for all involved. Public Advocate James took multiple actions to ensure senior residents with disabilities in NYCHA buildings have the right to age in place. She filed an amicus brief in a lawsuit to allow a family member to move in with and care for a loved one in NYCHA housing, released a policy report that documented NYCHA's failures and issued recommendations to address those failures, and testified at a City Council hearing to bring greater public attention to this issue.



Spotlight on Seniors

Victoria Aponte was an 87-year-old woman with dementia living in a NYCHA apartment. Victoria's son, Jonas, wanted to move into her apartment to care for his mother. NYCHA refused more than once to grant Jonas permission to join her household, giving him two options: move in and put her at risk of eviction, or allow her to live by herself, which was no longer safe.

Public Advocate James filed an amicus brief on behalf of **Jonas Aponte** (pictured at left) on August 7, 2017.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

2016

February 2016

PA James releases report highlighting the failure of HPD's Neighborhood Homes Program.

February 1, 2016

PA James files lawsuit in New York State Supreme Court alleging that the DOE is failing to track the needs of students with disabilities through SESIS.

*Celebrating senior New York veterans.
Public Advocate James took multiple actions
to ensure senior residents with disabilities
in NYCHA buildings have the right to age
in place.*



Celebrating Seniors

Public Advocate James and her team visited senior centers throughout the City, helping seniors access information and resources, and helping to resolve constituent issues. Public Advocate James advocated for increased City funding to support senior services including home care, meals and case managers.

Public Advocate James hosted a sexual education and HIV prevention training event for senior New Yorkers. Assemblymember Latrice Walker and the AIDS Community Research Initiative of America (ACRIA) participated in the event. A health fact sheet created by the Public Advocate's Office was published and distributed.

April 4, 2016

Governor Cuomo signs into law \$15 NYS minimum wage and 12 weeks paid family leave.

April 11, 2016

PA James releases report that reveals wage gap in NYC.

Supporting Infrastructure and Transportation

Spotlight on Transportation

I know some transit groups around the city are coming up with some innovative ways to make the buses more reliable, from fare payment to signal priority, and I hope the MTA hears them out. We need a public transportation system that is accessible. The transit system is not accessible if New Yorkers can't afford the fare.

There is a lot that we need to do, but we have get to work. The quality of the public transit system is central to our quality of life. A transit system that works for New Yorkers is one that is reliable, accessible, and promotes opportunity. That is our goal, and I look forward to working with the Council, the mayor, the governor, and the MTA to achieve it.

Public Advocate James
Testimony at New York City Council
Hearing, February 13, 2017

Ensuring Access for All

New York City must be accessible for all, and this includes our subways, our streets, and sidewalks. Throughout 2017, Public Advocate James acted to expand transportation access for New Yorkers. She championed the “Fair Fares” proposal to create a half-priced Metrocards program for an estimated 800,000 eligible low-income New Yorkers. Such a program would achieve equity goals and remove the barrier to economic opportunity that occurs when low-income New Yorkers cannot afford the transit fare.

Public Advocate James also stood up for transgender and gender non-conforming individuals, writing in June to the MTA leadership to demand that they remove the gender designation on all fare cards that currently have them. By making these changes, we can make these individuals feel more welcome and safe when boarding an MTA train or bus. The MTA subsequently announced that it would end the practice of requiring gender identity on the fare cards.

And in February, Public Advocate James filed an amicus brief arguing that the city must do more to make intersections accessible to New Yorkers with disabilities. The legal brief argued that New York City failed to maintain pedestrian pathways and provide access to City sidewalks for New Yorkers with disabilities. The case is in progress.

Supporting our City's Infrastructure, Riders and Workers

A procession of major delays and breakdowns on the subway and commuter rails in 2017 spawned the “Summer of Hell” for mass transit commuters. In August, Public Advocate James stepped up and questioned MTA officials at a City Council hearing, pointing out the huge monetary contribution that New Yorkers make to keep the trains and buses running,

2016

May 11, 2016

PA James calls for the administration to increase protections for homeowners ahead of its annual water lien sale.

August 2, 2016

PA James files amicus brief supporting DOJ and DOE direction on transgender students rights, joining the national fight to protect the civil rights of transgender students.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

Assisting a New Yorker as part of the Sidewalk Accessibility program.

Photo: Yeong-Ung Yang



including fares, taxes, and tolls. She called for greater accountability at the MTA and a bigger voice for the City in making the decisions that impact transit riders. Public Advocate James will continue to push to make mass transit reliable for all New Yorkers.

When the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey proposed to place a fee on taxi and for-hire vehicle trips to and from the airport in February, Public Advocate James quickly took action to prevent the cost from falling on the backs of New Yorkers. Writing to the governors of New York and New Jersey, Public Advocate James forcefully criticized the proposal for a \$4 per-trip fee that would have been passed on to riders, pointing out that taxi trips to the airport can already cost \$60 or more, and

August 10, 2016

PA James introduces bill to ban employers from asking about salary history.

August 11, 2016

State Supreme Court rules in PA James' favor in the lawsuit against the DOE for failing to track the needs of students with disabilities.

Championing transportation access for New Yorkers through the Fair Fares MetroCard program.



Supporting Infrastructure and Transportation (continued)

that New Yorkers cannot afford another fee on top of these fares. The scheme would have also been a burden on vehicle operators, who would have had to pay an additional \$5,000 to \$200,000 for a “privilege permit.”

Public Advocate James similarly stood up for operators in her push for a rule that would have required every app-based car hailing service the option to tip within the app itself. Without the requirement, industry-wide, workers miss out on hundreds of millions of dollars per year. One ride-hailing app company moved to include in-app tipping in July. The City’s Taxi & Limousine Commission passed a rule to this effect a few weeks later.

2016

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

✓ August 17, 2016

PA James releases report and announces recommendations to protect New Yorkers from Zika Virus.

✓ September 8, 2016

PA James launches campaign to expand protection for students and education for parents about bullying and sexual harassment in NYC public schools.

Protecting Immigrant Communities

Opposing the Border Wall

In March 2017, Public Advocate James released a plan to use New York City's economic leverage to thwart President Donald Trump's efforts to build a wall along the U.S. southern border. The plan called to study divesting New Yorkers' pension investments from any company that participates in building the wall and called for a ban on such companies from doing business with New York City.

Educating on Immigrants' Rights

In the face of increasing deportation raids, intensifying fear, and growing concern amongst many New Yorkers, Public Advocate James launched a public service video campaign to inform New Yorkers what to do in the case of raids by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). New York is a Sanctuary City committed to protecting all of our immigrant residents. There has been a tremendous amount of anxiety and misinformation, and Public Advocate James is committed to fighting fear with facts.

Public Advocate James also hosted trainings for staff of state and local elected representatives on how to advise constituents as federal enforcement of immigration laws continues to change. The training focused on preparing for an interaction with ICE, planning for affected family members and children, and how to retain free legal representation.

The Office of the Public Advocate held a forum *Taking on Hate in NYC – Responding to Hate Crimes Targeting Muslim, Arab, Sikh, and South Asian Communities* which was a widely attended event to empower communities that experienced a multi-fold increase in discrimination and hate crimes. Specifically, the Office sought to educate New Yorkers about the varying roles of, and to build relationships with, local, state, and federal agencies.

September 14, 2016

PA James' legislation to protect pedestrians crossing at intersections passes in NYC council.

September 28, 2016

PA James' legislation to increase training and transparency for Minority and Women-owned Business Enterprise (MWBE) procurement is enacted into law.

Standing with the New York Immigration Coalition to support our City's immigrant community.



Protecting Immigrant Communities (continued)

Removing Barriers to Surrogate's Court for Immigrants

The Public Advocate's Office initiated an investigation into how courts are handling guardianship cases. Through interviews with legal practitioners and surveys of individuals in the court system, our office learned that New York City's Surrogate's Courts were failing to provide full language access and were wrongfully barring certain non-citizens from filing petitions to serve as guardians.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

2016

✓ **October 2016**

PA James releases report on expanding 3-D Digital Mammograms at the City's Public Hospitals. In 2017, the State of New York expands Medicaid and insurance coverage.

✓ **October 5, 2016**

PA James calls on federal government to clear citizenship application backlog before voter registration deadlines.

To address these findings, Public Advocate James contacted the Office of Court Administration (OCA), urged the OCA to issue guidance and training materials for court staff, and clarify that petitioners are not required to be U.S. citizens. As a response, the court informed Public Advocate James that it would address the issues with all judges and clerks' offices to meet its obligations to fulfill the promise of equal justice for all.


Challenging the Muslim Ban, and Engaging in Activism

Throughout the year, Public Advocate James stood front and center at numerous rallies and marches defending immigrants' rights and denouncing President Trump's "Muslim Ban" (the Executive Order banning the entry of immigrants and refugees into the U.S. by citizens from mostly majority Muslim countries) and proposed construction of a Mexico border wall. She protested with thousands of New Yorkers at JFK airport as travelers were detained as a result of President Trump's Order.

In February, 2017, Public Advocate James filed an amicus brief in support of a lawsuit asserting that President Trump's Executive Order on immigration and refugees violates fifth Amendment procedural and substantive due process rights as well as U.S. immigration statutes. Public Advocate James' brief detailed the essential contributions of foreign-born residents to New York City's economy, and their significant cultural impact. It also elucidated the destructive toll the ban will take on the City.

 **October 7, 2016**

PA James releases in-depth investigative report and announces two recommendations to reform the tax lien sale.

 **November 2016**

PA James releases report with proposals to improve transit access to NYC airports.

Meeting with union employees in the workplace. Public Advocate James issued sweeping recommendations to protect workers' rights, shedding light on the use of forced arbitration as a term of employment for workers in New York City and beyond.



Fighting for Workers' Rights

Combating Fraud in Construction Worker Training

Every year in New York City, hundreds of construction workers lose their lives while on the job. In fact, roughly one-third of all New York City workplace deaths occur in the construction industry. Although federal and local safety and training standards apply, Public Advocate James conducted an investigation and issued a shocking report that revealed widespread fraud and negligence in the safety training issued to construction workers.

2016-2017

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

November 16, 2016

PA James' legislation to expand the ACS reporting requirements for youth aging out of the foster care system is enacted into law.

November 22, 2016

PA James' legislation establishing a public list of commitments made by the city in connection with city planning commission decisions is enacted into law.

Spotlight on Workers

“We commend the public advocate for bringing needed attention to the disturbing proliferation of forced arbitration agreements in the workplace. These agreements serve as get-out-of-jail-free cards for employers who steal, cheat, or discriminate against their employees; effectively rolling back hard fought wins for working people like the \$15/ hour minimum wage. We’re committed to working with the Public Advocate’s Office to ensure New York’s workers are able to enforce their rights.”



Meg Fosque, Lead Organizer,
Make the Road NY

Based on that investigation, she proposed a series of recommendations, including designating a City agency to oversee authorized Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s (OSHA) trainers, allowing workers to exchange illegitimate completion cards for free workplace safety trainings, and increasing local access to trainer certification programs to make workplace safety trainings more accessible and transparent, increase public awareness, and hold employers more accountable.

Reforming Mandatory Arbitration in NYC

Public Advocate James issued sweeping recommendations to protect workers’ rights, shedding light on the use of forced arbitration as a term of employment for workers in New York City and beyond.

Forced arbitration is a practice that requires employees to resolve workplace disputes, including disputes regarding wages, sexual harassment, and wrongful termination through binding arbitration instead of in a court of law. The facts, decisions, and settlements of these cases are kept confidential. These clauses are often hidden in long employee contracts or employee handbooks, and frequently unknown to employees until a dispute occurs. Public Advocate James called for several reforms to protect workers, including requiring companies to register in a public database if they use forced arbitration; requiring companies that use forced arbitration to publicize this fact in job listings; and requiring companies that receive New York City benefits or incentives to not use forced arbitration.

March 21, 2017

PA James’ legislation creating voluntary recycling incentive pilot programs in public housing is enacted into law.

April 3, 2017

PA James releases report to combat housing discrimination against transgender individuals.

Businesses: Supporting the Engines of Our Economy

Spotlight on Business

When business owners retire, a scary situation for employees could become their opportunity, according to a policy brief from Public Advocate Letitia James Wednesday.

James' office estimates that 114 businesses with sales over \$1 million close each year in New York City because the owner is retiring, costing 2,220 employees their jobs.

"These businesses could have been converted into ESOPs" – employee stock ownership plans – "instead of closing," the report says. It recommends that the city's Small Business Services agency create a "succession planning unit" and that the city's Economic Development Corp. lend workers money or provide loan guarantees to make the purchase.

CRAIN'S
NEW YORK BUSINESS

May 24, 2017

Preserving Jobs

Small- and medium-sized, independently-owned businesses are the bedrock of New York's economy and the lifeblood of its neighborhoods. But over 13,000 New Yorkers lose their jobs each year as a result of business owners retiring and closing their business, often because they cannot sell them. Public Advocate James is committed to saving as many of these businesses as possible and investigated how New York City can stem some of these business closures by encouraging a transition to employee ownership. Doing so would not only ensure that hardworking individuals keep their jobs but that they would also own a stake in the business, and these businesses will stay in their communities.

Public Advocate James was able to hear firsthand about the benefits of employee ownership at a forum she convened at a well-known employee-owned business: the Grand Central Oyster Bar. This restaurant may have closed down many years ago if it were not for the option of employee ownership. She also urged Governor Cuomo to sign a bill establishing an advisory panel to support and promote employee-owned enterprises. The Governor signed the bill into law in November 2017.

Supporting Small Business and Improving Financial Health with Community Banking

Too many New Yorkers are forced to use fringe financial services, such as predatory lending, when an emergency expense hits, which can jeopardize credit and spiral one into a lifetime of debt. Public Advocate James convened a forum on community banking and credit unions with elected officials, industry leaders, and nonprofit leaders and later released a report recommending how New York City can improve its financial health by utilizing community banks, credit unions, and Community Development

2017

✓ April 27, 2017

PA James investigated the TIL housing program and released a report finding that TIL is not fulfilling its purpose of providing low-income cooperative housing.

✓ May 4, 2017

PA James' legislation prohibiting employers from inquiring about a prospective employee's salary history is enacted into law.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

Working with elected officials, industry leaders, and nonprofit leaders, Public Advocate James released a report recommending how New York City can improve its financial health by utilizing community banks, credit unions, and Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs).



Spotlight on Business

“The CDFI fund has a proven record of success in urban and rural communities alike, and we appreciate the Public Advocate’s efforts to maintain and highlight the importance of this program here in NYC, that benefits both the bank and its customers.”



Eric Pallas, President, Spring Bank

Financial Institutions (CDFIs). Among her recommendations were the establishment of a small dollar loan program for City workers at community banks, credit unions, and CDFIs and exploring ways that the City of New York could bank with these institutions. By making it easier for more New Yorkers and small businesses to use community banks and credit unions, we will not only improve individual lives, but we will boost our entire economy.

May 18, 2017

PA James’ report points out that NYC could avoid job losses when business owners retire through transitioning to employee ownership.

June 8, 2017

PA James releases report recommending improvements to the HPD affordable housing lottery selection process.

Protecting Our Environment

Spotlight on Our Environment

“From rising seas and temperatures to extreme weather that brings storm surges and unprecedented heat, climate change is a threat to the health and safety of every New Yorker and to the vibrant economy of our city. With the absence of leadership on this issue at the federal level, it has become even more incumbent upon our local elected officials, like Public Advocate James, to be bold in the face of this threat, and promote policies that can mitigate the impacts of climate change, help our city adapt to its effects, and serve as a leader to other cities across the nation.”



Adriana Espinoza, Manager, New York City Program
New York League of Conservation Voters

Tackling Climate Change

Public Advocate James led the fight to divest from fossil fuels. In November, following the fifth anniversary of Superstorm Sandy and on the heels of a disastrous hurricane season, she hosted a hearing to discuss the potentially catastrophic consequences of climate change and how New York City can implement strategies and solutions to challenge its effects. The hearing featured testimony from scientists, advocates, public health professionals, business leaders, and elected officials who highlighted the consequences of human-induced climate change and proposed solutions for New York City to prevent future damage.

Public Advocate James held this hearing as part of her role to defend the rights and interests of all New Yorkers as well as her position as a Trustee of the New York City Employees Retirement System (NYCERS). NYCERS is invested in fossil fuel companies that contribute significantly to global warming and may suffer financially as renewable alternatives become more viable. The hearing was an opportunity to discuss different steps the City can take to mitigate climate change.

Several key recommendations emerged from the testimony given at the hearing, starting with increasing energy efficiency in buildings by transitioning to more efficient heating systems, using technology to better control and monitor indoor temperatures, and improving building maintenance. Another was to expand the use of green infrastructure as a low-cost and effective solution to reduce flooding and the urban heat island effect. Renewable energy was also cited as a fertile area for further investment and growth, as the technology becomes more advanced and accessible to consumers, with the potential to help low-income communities work together to produce renewable energy and lower their utility bills.

On December 20, 2017, Public Advocate James called for the

2017

July 12, 2017

PA James' investigative report details DOE's failure to serve children with disabilities, specifically through their reliance on Related Service Authorization (RSA) vouchers.

July 17, 2017

PA James' report details how NYC can improve its financial health by utilizing community banks, credit unions, and CDFIs.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

*Leading the Fight Against Climate Change with Mayor de Blasio.
Public Advocate James called for the immediate divestment from fossil fuel companies by New York City's pension systems in December 2017.*



immediate divestment from fossil fuel companies by New York City's pension systems.

Expanding Recycling in NYCHA

In March, the City Council unanimously passed Public Advocate James' legislation to incentivize recycling in NYCHA residences. Recycling in the City's public housing developments had been difficult due to a variety of factors, including a lack of space to accommodate proper recycling bins and inadequate outreach and education to residents. As a result, recycling rates are often lower in community districts with high rates of public housing residents.

Public Advocate James recognizes recycling as one of the easiest ways we can protect our environment and conserve precious resources and saw this as an opportunity to ensure that the largest public housing system in the country is playing a simple, but vital role in preserving our planet. This legislation will require NYCHA to take a holistic look at expanding recycling in public housing, including through incentive programs. These programs can help educate New Yorkers about the importance of recycling, but also support small businesses by injecting money back into the local economy and help save our City millions each year.

August 7, 2017

PA James' report details NYCHA's failures to reasonably accommodate seniors and residents with disabilities so that they can remain living in their homes.

August 10, 2017

PA James releases investigative report to improve construction workplace safety and trainings.

Expanding Access to Breast Cancer Detection Technology

Following a recommendation from Public Advocate James' report on Digital Breast Tomosynthesis (DBT), a new three-dimensional technology used to detect breast cancer, Governor Cuomo announced in February that health insurers in the state must provide coverage of DBT without copays, coinsurance, or deductibles. In November, the Governor signed into law a bill that requires insurance companies to cover DBT. Women across New York now have access to this innovative new technology which can lead to early detection and help save lives. Expanding access to DBT may also go a long way in closing the racial and economic survival gaps among women with breast cancer.

Protecting the Affordable Care Act

Though 23 million Americans were threatened with loss of health insurance, no public hearings were held in Congress to discuss the proposed Republican healthcare bills. Public Advocate James held an official hearing as an opportunity for New Yorkers to speak out on how a repeal of the Affordable Care Act would affect their lives and families. The hearing discussed the impacts that the proposed bills would have on New York City residents and the New York City budget. The hearing, which featured testimony from doctors, medical experts, patients, and health organizations, demonstrated the far- and wide-reaching consequences that the proposed bills would have on consumers, providers, and especially low-income Americans.


The bill ultimately did not pass, but Public Advocate James will continue to fight to ensure that New Yorkers have access to healthcare coverage.

2017

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

 **September 6, 2017**

Mayor de Blasio funds universal school lunch for every public school student; PA James joins for announcement.

 **October 2, 2017**

PA James' report raises the alarm on the increasing use of forced arbitration by private companies which poses a significant threat to workers and their families.

Speaking out for healthcare at City Hall at #SaveOurHealthcare event with the New York State Nurses Association.



Transforming New York City's Health Care Infrastructure

In March, Public Advocate James hosted a forum on the financial, technological, legal, and labor challenges of transitioning from an inpatient to outpatient treatment model in New York City. Since 2003, 18 hospitals have shuttered their doors in New York City. Our public hospitals are especially vulnerable. Meanwhile outpatient care continues to grow at rapid rates. There are many reasons for this change including the use of new technologies, better prescription medications, improved case management, and reforms to inpatient reimbursement. Yet sufficient resources have not been deployed to address the growing need for outpatient care. Public Advocate James is convening a taskforce on healthcare delivery to identify innovative solutions to create a more resilient and effective delivery model that improves healthcare outcomes in New York City.

October 18, 2017

PA James' startling report focuses on the struggles that homeless students face and calls for common sense solutions.

December 11, 2017

City Council passes PA James' legislation requiring developers to submit workforce disclosure records for certain construction projects.

Public Advocate James advocated for and supported hurricane relief efforts, and efforts to support displaced individuals arriving in New York City.



Supporting Puerto Rico and Hurricane Victims

Following the immense damage that Hurricane Maria caused to Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the humanitarian crisis that ensued, Public Advocate James convened a broad coalition of advocates to urge New York to take immediate action to assist the many displaced U.S. citizens who would be coming to New York seeking stability with family and friends. Public Advocate James released a plan to support those displaced by Fall 2017 storms. The following week, Mayor de Blasio announced the opening of a service center to support these displaced individuals and families.

The Public Advocate's staff also supported the Hispanic Federation for Puerto Rico relief efforts with resources and communications assistance.

Public Advocate James proudly co-sponsored a Three Kings Toy Drive led by The New York State Latino Officers Society. Over 300 toys were collected and distributed both on the island of Puerto Rico as well as at the Bronx P.A.T.H. Shelter on Three Kings Day.

2017

December 19, 2017

City Council passes PA James' legislation requiring HPD to create an online portfolio report of registered property owners.

December 20, 2017

After holding a hearing on climate change, PA James calls for immediate divestment from fossil fuel companies.

The Public Advocate: A Timeline of Accomplishments

Connecting with New Yorkers

2017 Outreach Events

Constituent Services: Helping Everyday
New Yorkers Get the Services They Need

2017 Constituent Case Stories

Continuing to Fight for New Yorkers

2017 Outreach Events

Public Advocate James met with New Yorkers throughout New York City boroughs in 2017.

The goals of the meetings and events are to provide direct access to government and ensure that our City's services are being effectively delivered. Public Advocate James wants to ensure that New Yorkers have a voice in their government.

Outreach events included her ongoing "Talk to Tish" community forums, the hosting of celebrations and roundtables on behalf of the City's many valued immigrant communities, the public safety-focused National Night Out, and rallies against injustice toward New Yorkers.

Examples of the Public Advocate's outreach events, which were attended by thousands of New Yorkers in 2017, are shown on the following pages.



January 17, 2017 Russian speaking Job Fair – Public Advocate James hosted a job fair for Russian-speaking residents in South Brooklyn. Over 1000 residents attended the job fair, with over 60 employers including city agencies, small businesses, non-profits, and private businesses.



February 27, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted her 3rd Annual Lunar New Years event. Over 400 people attended.



March 1, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted her 45th Talk to Tish in Harlem, where resident shared their concerns regarding issues impacting their community. Over 500 people attended.



March 7, 2017 Public Advocate James held a rally against President Trump's Border Wall. Over 200 people attended.



March 31, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted her 46th Talk to Tish in Bushwick/Cypress Hills, where residents shared their concerns regarding issues impacting their community. Over 75 people attended.



April 12, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted a rally in front of Fox News due to several sexual harassment and discrimination allegations. Over 80 people attended.



June 29, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted her 3rd Annual LGBT celebration, at which she honored several leaders in the LGBT community and celebrated their accomplishments. Over 200 people attended.



August 1, 2017 Public Advocate James celebrated National Night Out and attended several PC events in the Bronx. Her Community Affairs division attended every PC event in the city.



May 16, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted her 47th Talk to Tish in Long Island City, where residents shared their concerns regarding issues impacting their community. Over 300 people attended.



June 7, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted her Caribbean American Heritage Celebration. The PA honored several people from the Caribbean community. Over 200 people attended.



September 26, 2017 Public Advocate James hosted a Greek Round Table lunch, at which she met with 30 Greek leaders regarding issues that impact their community.



November 23, 2017 The PA Outreach division hosted two Thanksgiving meals giveaways – one in Harlem and another in Washington Heights. Over 500 people were fed a healthy meal for Thanksgiving.

Constituent Services: Helping Everyday New Yorkers Get the Services They Need

Helping the most vulnerable individuals and families in need is the bedrock of Public Advocate James' Constituent Services operations. Since she took office in 2014, the Public Advocate's office has helped over 33,000 New Yorkers. Each month, thousands of New Yorkers call or visit the Public Advocate's office where they receive help cutting through red tape, identifying resources, getting questions answered, and obtaining general support. The office's Constituent Services team has helped families with heat and hot water complaints, stopped unfair evictions and investigated and reported wrong-doing that results in low-quality public services.

Total Number of Constituent Cases since January 2014:	33,029
Total number of 2017 Constituent Cases:	6,858
See pages 42-43 for Constituent Case Stories.	

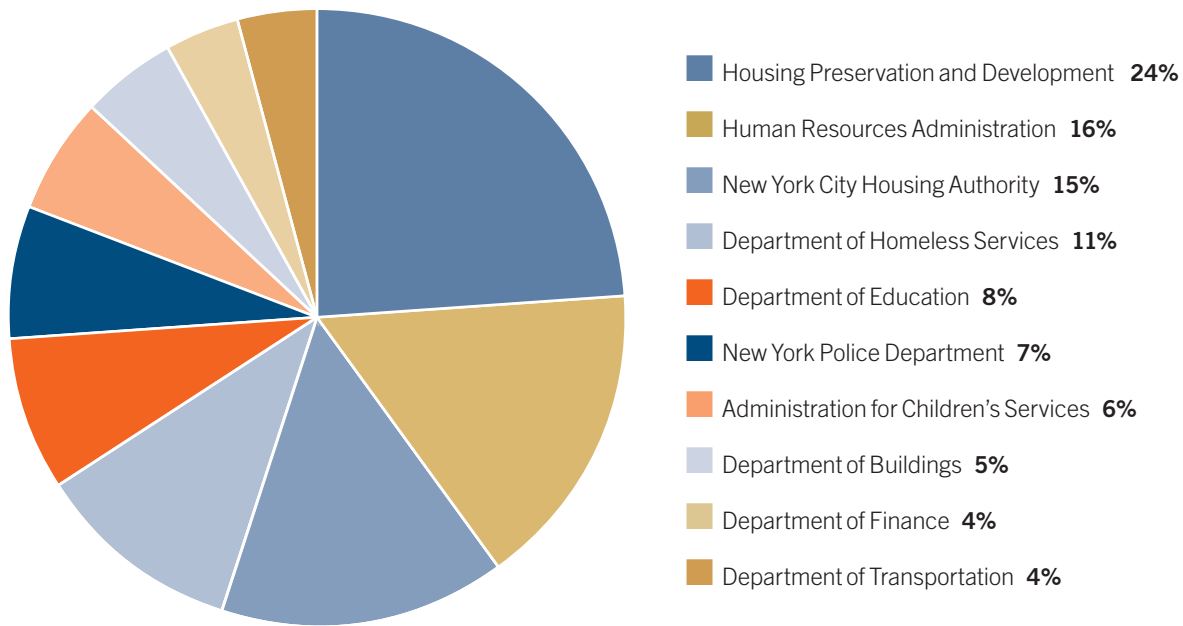
Herkimer Gardens Tenants Association

Spotlight on Constituent Services: Veronica Cromwell, Herkimer Gardens Tenants Association – Brooklyn

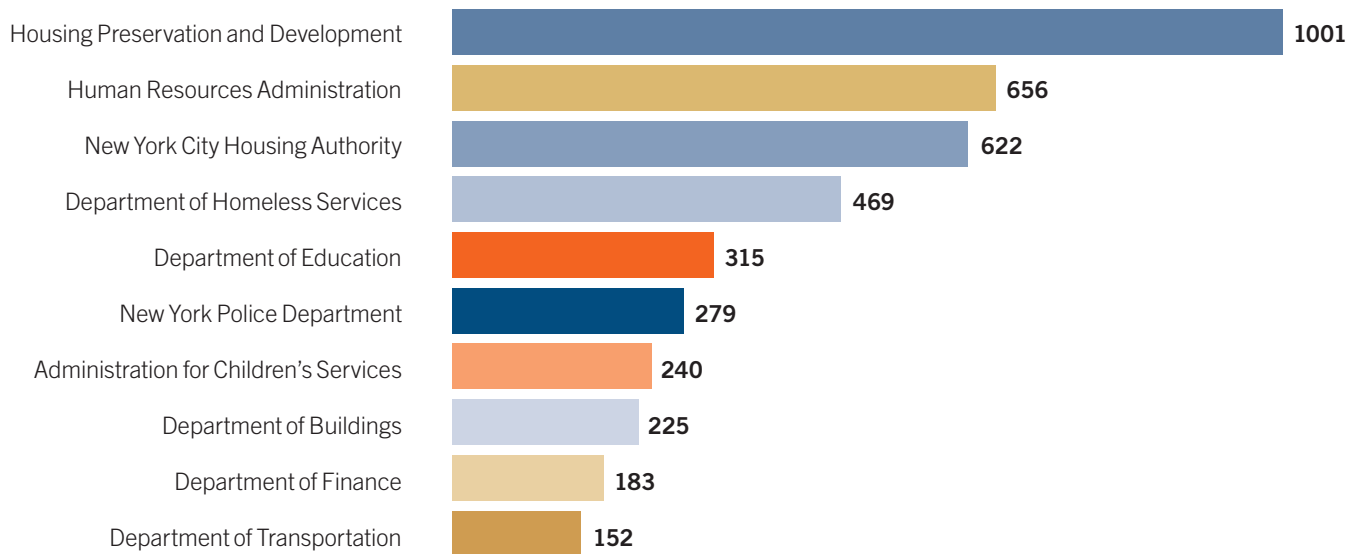
Veronica Cromwell contacted the Public Advocate's Office because her entire building did not have heat, hot water, or elevator service. The water was so cold that that the residents had to boil it in order to shower. The apartments were freezing due to lack of heat. In addition, the elevators in the building were shut off without any notice beforehand. Due to the advocacy of the Constituent Services team with the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and Department of Buildings (DOB), the landlord was forced to restore the heat and hot water, and make repairs to the elevators.

"Thanks to the Public Advocate's Office for promptly contacting HPD on this matter and requesting that they conduct a site inspection as soon as possible. Heat and hot water is now better. Elevators are all working."

Percentage of Cases by Agency



Number of Cases by Agency



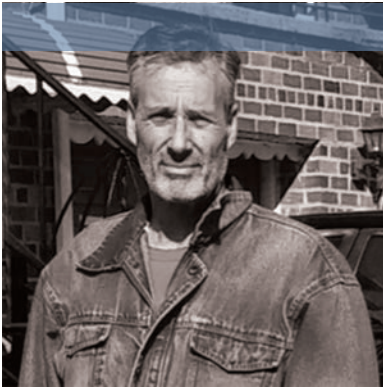
2017 Constituent Case Stories



Danielle McPhill – Queens

When Danielle’s father fell ill while she was pregnant with her daughter, she needed to find a new place to live. She struggled to get the appropriate voucher from the City that would help ensure she stayed out of the shelter system. Danielle contacted Public Advocate James’ Office, and the Constituent Services team expedited the processing of the affordable housing voucher – and got mom and baby into their home.

“My life took a turn downward when I, the household’s provider, became the one in need. I found out I was pregnant and needed somewhere to live. HRA was giving me the run around for the City’s Family Eviction Prevention Supplement (FEPS) voucher that I was approved for. I was desperate and called the Public Advocate’s Office. My life changed when the Public Advocate’s Constituent Services associate worked with me and my case. Now my baby girl and I are in our new apartment. I am eternally grateful.”



Michael F. Winter – Brooklyn

Mr. Winter contacted the Public Advocate’s Office seeking assistance regarding a violation that was issued to his home for a 14 year old violation for a broken sidewalk. The repairs were completed in 2004, and all necessary documentation was submitted to the Department of Transportation (DOT) confirming the finished repair. Mr. Winter was in the midst of selling the property but the violation resurfaced; further research on his end found that DOT never adequately recorded the completion of the repair. Mr. Winter reached out to DOT and attempted to resolve the problem to no avail. The Public Advocate’s Constituent Services team was able to arrange the necessary inspection to have the violation removed and Mr. Winter was able to move forward with selling the house.

“I contacted 311 to remove a sidewalk violation on my house in Brooklyn. The permits plus work were completed. A request for inspection was submitted October 27, 2016, another one on December 12, 2016 and again on January 18, 2017. But the DOT did nothing. Only when the Public Advocate’s Office stepped in, it was finally inspected and removed.”



Scott Rifkin – Manhattan

Scott received a parking ticket which was dismissed because it was issued in error. He thought that was the end of it but then his car was towed. The towing fee was \$185. He tried to contact the City’s Department of Finance to get the fee removed but after repeatedly calling them, he got nowhere. The Public Advocate’s Constituent Services associate contacted the Department and continued to follow up, both via email and phone to Scott and the Department. In the end Scott was sent the refund check.

“I reached out to the Public Advocate’s Office on a tow fee refund for a parking ticket that was already dismissed. The Public Advocate’s Constituent Services associate responded right away in both a professional and cheerful manner. I commend both the professionalism and efficiency of the Public Advocate’s Office.”



Laura Murillo – Staten Island, NY

Ms. Murillo reached out to the Public Advocate's Office with concerns regarding the City's Build It Back program. Though repairs were made to the Hurricane Sandy damaged home, a proper inspection was never conducted. Because of this, when National Grid had visited the home, they found that the pipes were faulty, subsequently shutting off the gas and removing the meters. This led to Ms. Murillo having to move out of her home because she no longer had heat or hot water. Her landlord had called the City's Build It Back program, but they had advised him to hire a private plumber as they had closed his case with the recovery agency. In an effort to assist, the Public Advocate's Constituent Services unit contacted National Grid, Build It Back and Housing Preservation and Development (HPD). Within a week of contacting our office, Ms. Murillo had her gas services restored.

"Stressed and frustrated, I reached out to the Office of the Public Advocate, which intervened on my behalf and had the matter resolved in days. The actions of the Constituent Services associate represent the best qualities in public servant workers that are all too often overlooked. The empathy to these situations along with the effective advocacy skills had a huge impact on the quality of my life. I wish to acknowledge the efforts and take this opportunity to thank the Public Advocate's Office for the important work that is being done on behalf of New Yorkers in need."



Natalie Alejandro – Bronx

Ms. Alejandro contacted the Public Advocate's Office as she was in the process of receiving an eviction notice because she owed rent arrears of \$3,700. She applied for emergency rental assistance but was denied by the City's Human Resources Administration (HRA). The Public Advocate's Office provided various resources to assist her with rent arrears and advised her to reapply. In addition, the unit contacted HRA and shared that the constituent was denied an extension from court and was facing eviction, and requested that they review this matter. HRA then approved the constituent's request to pay her rent arrears and she and her daughter were able to stay in their home.

"The Public Advocate's Office went the extra mile to have HRA approve me for the one shot deal. I can't thank the office enough for this or else I don't know where my daughter and I would be right now. Not only was the Public Advocate's Constituent Services associate able to have my case approved but he was very professional, kind and very much helpful. Again I would like to thank you so much for helping me get approved for the one shot deal. I have got to be the happiest woman right now because that's one less thing I have to worry about...."



Continuing to Fight for New Yorkers

Public Advocate Letitia James at the beginning of her second term, taking the oath of office at City Hall.

Edwin J. Torres/Mayoral Photography Office



On January 1, 2018, I took the oath of office for Public Advocate of the City of New York, and I am honored to serve New York City for another term. As we look to the challenges ahead, we must demonstrate a resolve and unity equal to the problems that face us. Whether it's the lack of affordable housing, saving our small businesses, or reforming our criminal justice system – we will do it all with the optimism, grit, and passion that makes New York, New York. We have always led this City with strength, opportunity, and unity. These next four years will be no different.

From Public Advocate Letitia James' Inaugural Address,
January 1, 2018



LETITIA JAMES

Public Advocate for the City of New York

The Public Advocate for the City of New York is a citywide and second highest ranking elected official. The Public Advocate serves as a direct link between residents and city government, effectively acting as an ombudsman, or “watchdog” for New Yorkers by providing oversight of city agencies, investigating residents’ complaints about city services, and taking legislative, legal and policy actions to improve programs and policies for all residents. The Public Advocate presides over New York City Council stated meetings and is a non-voting member of the Council with the right to introduce and co-sponsor legislation.

Office of NYC Public Advocate Letitia James
1 Centre Street
15th Floor
New York, NY 10007
www.pubadvocate.nyc.gov
(212) 669-7200



facebook.com/paletitiajames



[@nycpa](https://twitter.com/nycpa)