

Trinity Church Wall Street 2021-2022 Policy and Advocacy Agenda

Trinity Church Wall Street has a long history of advocating for social justice issues that align with our core values such as bail reform and removing law enforcement from mental health crisis situations. This document details our current policy and advocacy priorities. They are informed by and build on the work of our partners, the concerns of congregational groups including Trinity Cares and Trinity Youth, our Housing and Homelessness and Racial Justice strategic initiatives, and Trinity Commons programming.

Housing and Homelessness

Trinity's housing and homelessness policy priorities align with those of the Housing and Homelessness Strategic Initiative.

1. Support the extension of eviction moratoriums coupled with rental assistance to address the needs of households significantly impacted financially by the pandemic

New York City is on the brink of an eviction crisis. COVID-19 has led to unprecedented economic distress, with the effects severely felt by many low-income renters. The Furman Center at New York University, a Trinity grantee, estimates that 279,400 lower-income renters in New York City who were receiving enhanced unemployment benefits payments are facing increased rent burdens, in addition to more than 111,000 residents who lost their job but did not claim unemployment due to immigration status or other reasons. At the end of the eviction moratorium, thousands of New Yorkers—predominantly from communities of color—are at risk of experiencing the trauma of homelessness. Undocumented households are particularly vulnerable, given that they do not qualify for most eviction prevention programs and are not entitled to receive government-funded “one-shot” deals which are used to pay rental arrears for households facing eviction.

New York State issued an eviction moratorium that was recently extended and is now set to expire on August 31, 2021. While the moratorium is a relief for some renters, it is a band-aid solution. Specifically, because the executive orders do not address arrears, the financial cliff will continue to grow for renters facing economic hardship. City landlords are also feeling the effect of the economic crisis and inability of tenants to make payments which threatens the ongoing quality and viability of the affordable housing stock. The 2021-22 New York State budget includes \$2.4 billion of emergency relief for New Yorkers struggling to make rent because of the coronavirus pandemic. This funding, which mostly comes from the federal government, provides eligible renters with financial help to cover up to twelve months of owed rent and utilities since last March as well as three future months of rent. In addition, the program contains \$575 million for homeowners facing possible foreclosure due to the pandemic. While the inclusion of this funding has been widely praised by advocates, many have expressed the need to ensure that information about the program is widely disseminated and that it is accessible to all New

Yorkers. Past State rent relief programs have been hard to access due to bureaucratic barriers and rigid eligibility requirements. The State's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance will supervise the program which will launch in May 2021. Trinity will align with and support advocacy of grantees the New York Housing Conference to ensure additional funds are allocated as needed and that as many households as possible are able to access them.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, engage mayoral candidates, use social media and work in partnership with the larger affordable housing and tenant advocate community.

2. Advocate for sound policy and evidence-based solutions to prevent and address family and youth homelessness

More than 12,000 families sleep in City homeless shelters every night, including 18,000 children. Although the shelter census numbers for homeless families declined in 2020, far too many children experience the trauma of homelessness and housing insecurity. Black and Hispanic single mothers and their children bear a disproportionate share of the homeless crisis; 95% of families with children in the shelter system are Black and Hispanic and 69% are headed by single mothers. Trinity supports the Family Homelessness Coalition led by Citizens' Committee for Children, Enterprise Community Partners, and New Destiny Housing. The Coalition's policy agenda, includes:

- Supporting a statewide rent subsidy program for low-income families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.
- Expanding neighborhood-based services including eviction prevention counseling, aftercare supports, and expanded resources for short- and long-term rental assistance.
- Given that domestic violence is a primary driver of family homelessness, increasing rapid rehousing options to help survivors remain safely in place or move quickly into permanent housing.
- Advancing policies to expand the supply of affordable housing (see below).
- In collaboration with Trinity Youth, support policies to combat LGBTQ+ youth homelessness.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, engage mayoral candidates, and use social media to push for legislation that aligns with the Family Homelessness Coalition's and Trinity's housing and homelessness policy goals, as well as through that address youth homelessness, particularly LGBTQ+ youth.

3. Ensure more extremely affordable housing is produced and the City and State allocate more funding for supportive housing

Given the loss of affordable housing in recent years and the paucity of housing affordable to extremely low-income individuals and families, Trinity supports increasing the allocation of homeless set-asides and housing for extremely low-income households affordable to families (income of \$28,170 for a family of three). Trinity also supports expanding the supply by converting underutilized spaces, such as hotels that will not recover from the pandemic, into

affordable housing. The goal is to help increase the pace of construction or preservation of extremely affordable units by 20 percent above the rate of recent years.

In addition, as a member of the United for Housing Coalition, Trinity supports recommendations outlined in its report issued in 2020 (linked [here](#)). These include recommendations similar to those of the Family Homelessness Coalition listed above as well as:

- Provide leadership at City Hall by empowering a single deputy mayor for housing opportunity and economic development.
- Establish a minimum target of at least 8,000 units of housing for extremely low-income households per year.
- Create a flexible City rental subsidy of at least \$200 million a year, matched by \$200 million from the State.
- Build partnerships between City and State corrections departments and address housing discrimination against people with criminal histories to end the prison-to-shelter pipeline. This includes pushing for passage of the Fair Chance for Housing bill (Intro. 2047), City Council legislation which would end housing discrimination against people with conviction records.
- Link housing and healthcare by providing medical respite for vulnerable populations that ultimately leads to permanent housing and improves coordination and data sharing between the City's public hospitals and the homelessness system.
- Expand programs that promote housing stability and prevent homelessness, including: making more low-income New Yorkers eligible for the City's Right to Counsel program and homelessness set-asides through HPD, Section 8 and NYCHA; increasing access to "safe haven" shelters for the hardest to serve street homeless; providing comprehensive aftercare services for individuals and families leaving shelter; and expanding rent increase exemptions for seniors and people with disabilities.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, engage mayoral candidates, and use social media to push for passage of Intro. 2047, as well as other potential legislation that aligns with Trinity's housing and homelessness policy goals.

Racial Justice

Trinity's racial justice policy priorities align with those of the Racial Justice Strategic Initiative. They also reflect those of Trinity Youth and the Trinity Cares group which have identified addressing racial justice in education and policing reform and mental health as some of their focus areas for advocacy.

1. Ensure continued and equitable jail and prison decarceration

New York City Jails: While the jail population fell to just over 4,000 in April 2020 when the City worked to reduce the number of incarcerated people to mitigate COVID-19 transmission, it has steadily increased to more than 5,000 (as of March 2021). About three-quarters of those being detained are pre-trial and approximately half have been designated by the City's Department of Correction as having a serious mental illness.

In October 2019, the City Council and Mayor de Blasio made a public commitment to permanently close the 10 jails on Rikers Island by 2026 and move people to four smaller and more humane borough-based jails (one of which is planned for Lower Manhattan). However, in recent months, the Mayor has walked back this commitment, delayed the closure timeline to 2027, and reduced the budget required to move forward. In addition, advocates believe that the City can safely reduce the jail population even further than the 3,300 people projected as part of the close Rikers plan.

Trinity supports legislation and other reforms to safely decarcerate City jails, including:

- Closing the Rose M. Singer Center on Rikers Island by reducing the number of incarcerated women to less than 100 and identifying a stand-alone facility off of the Island.
- Demolish empty jails on Rikers and sites in Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn.
- Honor the funding commitments in the [October 2019 Points of Agreement](#) between the Mayor and the Council for the closing of Rikers and development of borough-based jails.
- Support efforts to boost community investments, particularly in the areas of housing, mental health, and violence interruption.

New York State Prisons: About 40 percent (or 40,000) of those in State prisons are New York City residents and the vast majority are Black and Latinx. Many of those currently incarcerated can safely be released, a health and moral imperative during the ongoing pandemic and beyond. The State should lower hurdles to release for seriously ill people applying for medical parole, as well as those being held in prison for technical parole violations, and those nearing the end of their sentences.

Trinity supports legislation and other reforms to safely decarcerate State prisons, including:

- The Fair and Timely Parole bill (S497/A4346) which would ensure that the parole release process in New York State is based on rehabilitation and someone's current risk to public safety and requires that the New York State Parole Board exclude any consideration of an incarcerated person's past crime and conviction.
- The Elder Parole bill (S2144/A9040) which would allow people in State prison aged 55 and older who have served 15 or more consecutive years to be considered for parole, regardless of their crime or sentence.
- The Less is More parole bill (S1144 /A5493B) which would limit the use of re-incarceration for technical violations of parole, strengthen due process for those accused of technical parole violations, and provide for earned time credits for those on parole.
- Sentencing reform that would eliminate mandatory minimums, reduce excessive maximum sentences, eliminate sentencing enhancements, and create additional opportunities for people to be considered for release.

Lastly, Trinity will consider supporting potential legislation that provides post-conviction relief for offenses that New York has since decriminalized, wrongful convictions, and convictions based on faulty evidence or in violation of the defendant's rights.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, including district attorneys, and use social media to push for passage of the bills cited above, as well as other potential legislation that aligns with Trinity's racial justice policy goals.

2. Shut down pipelines to the criminal legal system

School-to-prison pipeline: A national survey conducted by Data for Progress and The Justice Collaborative found that 57 percent of voters support the statement, “[C]ities and schools should invest more money in behavioral, mental health, and emotional support for students, even if it means cutting the number of school resource [police] officers on campuses.”

Echoing this approach, in June 2019, Mayor de Blasio announced an initiative to replace punitive zero-tolerance policies with social-emotional learning and restorative justice programs in all public middle and high schools, along with reduced reliance on suspensions and arrests. However, it is critical that this effort be closely monitored, particularly because thus far the City has not decreased the number of “school safety agents.” These NYPD employees do not carry guns but often use other police equipment and have the authority to make arrests. In fact, at a recent City Council hearing, a Department of Education official testified that the NYPD is planning to spend \$20 million to hire 475 new agents.

Trinity supports efforts to improve implementation and scale restorative justice practices, including the needed funding, as well as the removal of NYPD personnel from public schools. In addition, the Trinity Youth community seeks to change the narrative of what a healthy, just, and wholesome education looks like. Items Trinity Youth will advocate for include:

- Ensuring culturally responsive and sustaining education
- Robust summer opportunities through the City’s Summer Youth Employment program
- Increasing ways inside and outside of school for civic engagement, arts, and music programming
- Dismantling admission screens and other barriers to equity

Crim-imm pipeline: The criminal legal system is increasingly enmeshed with an immigration system that many characterize as lacking due process and being shrouded in secrecy. Because there is currently no assurance of government-funded counsel in the immigration system, those facing deportation without an attorney are very likely to lose their cases. Trinity will consider supporting potential State legislation which would enact a right to counsel for all immigrants facing deportation. New Yorkers also need safeguards to ensure that no State or local resources, including law enforcement, are used to fuel mass deportation or separate families. As such, Trinity also will consider supporting legislation that limits how law enforcement interacts with and supports efforts of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and Border Patrol.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, engage mayoral candidates, and use social media to push for passage of the legislation and the necessary public funding to address these issues, as well as support youth-led initiatives.

3. Use public health first responders for mental health emergencies

Although police officers generally are the first to respond to mental health crises, they are poorly equipped to do so, often resulting in an unnecessary and lethal use of force (as was the case with former Trinity parishioner Deborah Danner). Additionally, when municipalities send police officers to respond to mental health calls, people experiencing a mental health emergency often receive a criminal legal response that results in exposure to arrest and incarceration, potentially a

criminal record, and the range of other consequences that result from interaction with the criminal legal system.

Trinity supports ensuring that New Yorkers who experience a mental health emergency receive a medical response from non-police public health teams that are trained to provide appropriate medical and social services. New York City has announced a pilot program that will begin in Spring 2021 to begin to dispatch non-police response teams to mental health calls in two pilot precincts. Additionally, lawmakers in New York State have begun to introduce legislation that will create non-police response mechanisms for mental health calls. Other cities such as San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver, and Toronto are embracing similar responses.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, engage mayoral candidates, and use social media to push for policy changes and passage of legislation and necessary public funding to address this issue.

4. Scale community-defined public safety initiatives

The murder of George Floyd at the hands of police last summer led to a wave of protests in New York City and across the country calling for policing reforms and the reimagining of public safety. A critical component of this is creating a community-defined public safety agenda that ensures residents have an active role in guiding budget priorities. Budgets are often referred to as moral documents that offer a window into a jurisdiction's values and priorities. Public safety budgets should begin with the underlying premise that communities are already strong and powerful, and that investments should build on these fundamental strengths.

This concept is being used in other cities. [Los Angeles County's Alternatives to Incarceration Workgroup](#) is an example of a public-private partnership that has developed a concrete road map to scale alternatives to incarceration and diversion, ensuring that services are provided first, and incarceration is used only as a last resort. And the state of [Colorado](#) is also devoting more than \$50 million over the next few years to a community reinvestment strategy that supports community-led and community-based safety strategies to benefit neighborhoods disproportionately impacted by crime and incarceration.

Trinity supports establishing an infrastructure and process by which the City would partner with impacted communities to reshape its public safety agenda and corresponding budget. One way to achieve this is by expanding participatory budgeting, which has been in effect in some council districts New York City since 2011. Trinity is also providing grant funding to the CUNY Public Science Project to conduct participatory action research that engages New Yorkers in defining public safety. This research, set to published later this year, will amplify the leadership of communities of color in the public discourse on public safety and advance policy and organizing goals to improve racial justice.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, advocate with elected officials, engage mayoral candidates, use social media, and work with grantee partners to push for the development of strategies and necessary public funding to support this approach.

Reentry for the Formerly Incarcerated

Trinity's reentry policy priorities align with those of the Faith Communities for Just Reentry campaign under Grants and Mission Investing.

1. Ensure health and safety for incarcerated individuals released from City jails

The following changes are critical to ensure the health and safety of those released from Rikers Island and other City jails, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Provide identification upon release: Service providers and formerly incarcerated individuals who have spent time in City jails report that many individuals are released without their personal belongings, including IDs. Valid identification is critical to access housing, health care, employment, and public benefits, and the lack of these documents can lead to reincarceration.

Trinity is calling for an executive order by the mayor or City Council legislation followed by interagency collaboration to ensure that every person released from Rikers Island and other City jails is provided an IDNYC card, the Mayor's signature municipal identification card program.

Effectively transition people's healthcare from Rikers Island to their community: Due to a lag in re-enrollment in Medicaid, many people released from City jails do not have sufficient medication or immediate access to health care. In addition, service providers often struggle to quickly access health records, rendering them unable to meet clients' needs, particularly for those who struggle with mental health issues and substance abuse.

To address these issues, Trinity is calling on the mayor to ensure that the City's Department of Correction and its Correctional Health Services guarantee continuity of care between correctional and community settings. In addition, the New York State Department of Health should re-submit a request to the federal Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to waive the inmate exclusion provision that prohibits using Medicare funds for anyone who is incarcerated. In 2019, the Department submitted but then rescinded a waiver requesting permission to activate Medicaid for those who are incarcerated 30 days prior to discharge from prisons and for a 30-day period as needed in jails.

Provide every individual with COVID-19 testing and vaccine access: The COVID-19 infection rate on Rikers Island has been several times higher than that in the whole of New York City. Like those living in other congregate settings where conditions do not allow for physical distancing, New Yorkers in jails are at extraordinarily high risk for infection from COVID-19. Additionally, the staff of these facilities go home to their families and communities, increasing the risk of spread.

Incarcerated New Yorkers and the staff who work with them should be prioritized for access to vaccination. To address the historical and legitimate mistrust between those in jail and their in-custody medical providers, Trinity is calling on the mayor and City Council to ensure comprehensive public health education by trusted entities such as reentry and community health care providers on the "inside." Optimally, these trusted outside partners also should physically administer the vaccine, rather than existing jail staff. Additionally, people in jail should be

guaranteed COVID-19 testing as part of the discharge process so they can protect their families and communities when they return home.

2. Unlock housing supply for justice-involved individuals and their families

Because housing is fundamental to ensure that those released from jails and prisons are successful when they return to New York City communities, the changes described below are needed to expand access to stable, safe and affordable homes.

End NYCHA's permanent exclusion policy: The New York City Housing Authority has the power to deem NYCHA residents as “dangerous” and “undesirable,” leading to permanent exclusion from their homes and separation from family. This policy goes beyond federal requirements by broadly removing individuals with any kind of criminal justice system involvement, even residents who have been arrested but not convicted of a crime. Trinity is calling on NYCHA to revise its guidance to enable more people to with criminal justice histories to reunite with their families.

Expand the NYCHA Family Reentry Program: The program launched in 2013 as a pilot for individuals transitioning from jail and prison back into NYCHA housing and connect them with education and employment services. It has successfully reunited over 100 families to date and is a critical source of support for justice-involved residents as they navigate the transition. A 2017 study by the Vera Institute showed that 68% of program participants were reunited with at least one parent and 15% were reunited with their children. Nearly half of those surveyed said that they would be forced onto the streets, shelters, or three-quarters housing were it not for the program. Trinity supports expanding the program which currently is only supported by two staff across all NYCHA housing developments.

Expand who qualifies for federally funded supportive housing: Individuals who are jailed for 90+ days do not meet the federal government's definition for chronic homelessness, excluding them from federally funded supportive housing. Trinity will consider supporting potential federal legislation and a new rule from the Department of Housing and Urban Development that would revise the criteria to expand opportunities for those who need supportive housing.

Allocate a portion of city-financed housing to justice-involved New Yorkers: The City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development finances the development of affordable housing projects, including on public land. It often sets aside a portion of the available housing units for certain populations like those residing in the local community and people with disabilities. Trinity supports advocating for a similar set aside for families with justice-involved members, including through the passage of legislation by the City Council.

Create new justice-involved supportive and transitional housing: While the City has master-leased hotels to provide emergency housing for some released from jails, there is no pathway to permanent housing for these individuals. Trinity supports increasing funding to develop transitional and permanent supportive housing. This could mean focusing on Justice-Involved Supportive Housing that avoids federal restrictions and moving up the allocation of \$25 million promised in the Close Rikers Points of Agreement.

3. Develop a coordinated reentry system accountable to the well-being of each person

No single City agency or individual has oversight of reentry services nor is held accountable for the outcomes of individuals once released from jail. By working in close collaboration with justice-involved individuals, advocates, and experts, the mayor can use his authority to create a unified reentry system that coordinates the actions and policies of the Department of Correction, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice, Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Department of Social Services, and Department of Housing Preservation and Development. To address these challenges, Trinity is advocating for the following changes.

Strengthen local law 103 to increase authority and coordination: [Local Law 103 of 2016](#) mandates that the mayor establish a Municipal Division of Transitional Services and appoint a coordinator to lead it. While the law calls for the division to create a coordinated reentry system, it does not give the division the authority to mandate policy and program changes by other agencies. The requirements of the law are currently being carried out by the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice.

The mayor should work with the City Council, justice-involved New Yorkers, advocates, and service providers to amend the law to ensure that the coordinator is a high-level position reporting directly to the mayor or a deputy mayor and the division has the authority and accountability necessary to mandate needed changes.

Consolidate service provider contracts: The City's Department of Correction manages contracts with nonprofit organizations to provide services in City jails and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice manages separate contracts for reentry services. Because there is overlap between services and providers in these contracts, the City should consider consolidating them to improve coordination and avoid duplication. It also should ensure the use of best practices across providers, and these contracts should be managed by the entity overseen by the high-level coordinator described above.

Additionally, this should include integrating, expanding, and funding the Health Justice Network, which is overseen by the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and provides comprehensive reentry services through partnerships between reentry and healthcare providers. It is staffed by community health workers who have lived experience with the criminal justice system and serve as navigators and mentors. The program is currently funded through the Manhattan District Attorney's Criminal Justice Investment Initiative through February 2022 and initial evaluation results look promising. Trinity supports baselining funding for this program in the City budget.

Increase capacity of health and human service agencies to serve justice-involved New Yorkers: New York City is home to a plethora of health and human service agencies. However, only a small number of these organizations have the expertise, experience, and funding to effectively work with those with justice system involvement. The mayor should lead an effort to partner with and fund a wide range of organizations to increase their capacity to work with and support these New Yorkers.

Strategies: sign onto support letters, meet with the mayor and senior City Hall officials, advocate with City Council members, engage mayoral candidates, use social media, and work with grantee partners to advance these policy solutions.

Food Insecurity

Trinity's food insecurity policy priorities have been identified through the Church's emergency food distribution efforts.

1. Expand and enhance the emergency food system

New York City's emergency food system is made up of a patchwork of hundreds of community organizations, many operated by volunteers on shoe-string budgets, as well as large distribution agencies including the Food Bank of New York City and City Harvest. Even before the pandemic, these providers struggled to meet demand, with an estimated 1.2 million New Yorkers considered to be food insecure. The economic fallout of the pandemic raised that number to more than 2 million last year, with about 1.6 million currently food insecure.

2. Increase access to healthy, affordable food in communities of need

New Yorkers of color, those with low education levels, and those living in high-poverty neighborhoods consume far less nutritious food than their more affluent white peers, increasing their risk of chronic disease such as diabetes and hypertension.

The Mayor's Office of Food Policy recently released a 10-year plan to boost the capacity and efficiency of food pantries and soup kitchens to distribute more food, particularly fresh produce and other healthy options, as well as better support food workers and small food businesses, make food supply chains more efficient and resilient, and ensure that the City's food is produced, distributed, and disposed of sustainably. Trinity supports these efforts, particularly those that provide more healthy food in underserved communities.

Strategies: join coalitions and advocacy efforts and partner with local elected officials to increase healthy food distribution in lower Manhattan.

Climate Justice

Climate change is one of the highest priority concerns for the Trinity Youth community and will continue to be a defining issue for their generation as it relates to racial justice, housing, homelessness, and immigration. As with food insecurity, homelessness, and education inequity, the price for the climate crisis will be paid by low-income communities of color. Trinity commits to support the youth-led movement for climate justice.

Strategies: Amplify and collaborate with youth-led advocacy projects such as protests, lobby days, and social media campaigns, and support efforts and volunteer opportunities to "green" New York City.