



**03.22.24 - Trinity Church Wall Street Testimony - Committee on Children and Youth - FY25 Preliminary Budget Hearing**

To Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth:

My name is Natasha Lifton, Managing Director of External Affairs and Special Projects at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for this Fiscal Year 2025 preliminary budget hearing. We urge the Mayor and City Council to fund comprehensive, high-quality services to address the academic and social-emotional needs of New York City's young people, particularly those from under-resourced communities of color that continue to recover from the loss of life, income, learning, and stability caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners, who come from all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out our mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy.

Ensuring the well-being of young people is a major priority for Trinity. Under the umbrella of Trinity Youth, we seek to create a safe and validating community for as many young people as possible. We provide an afterschool program that serves approximately 150 6<sup>th</sup>- 12<sup>th</sup> graders every day, a youth choir, a youth group, music education at 8 public schools and community-based organizations, and summer programming for children and youth. We also make grants to nonprofits that help disadvantaged youth of color stay (or return)—and thrive—in school, acquire the skills needed to get a good job or further education, and engage with their communities as life-long learners. And we partner directly with our neighborhood schools to provide support and resources such as food, backpacks, and clothing, including to those serving children from asylum seeker and homeless families.

In this context, we urge the City to invest in our young people and are deeply concerned about the funding reductions proposed by the administration on top of budget cuts to essential youth programs that have already suffered over the past year. Afterschool programs, particularly those that operate year-round, are high quality and well-resourced are an important part of the continuum of services, ensuring that students get the academic support they need and have access to social and recreational programming, and parents can fully meet their work and/or education requirements. Research demonstrates that youth who participate in these programs are absent from school less often, fail fewer classes, and have higher high school graduation rates than their non-participating peers. Significant gains in test scores have also been linked to attending quality afterschool programs, as have fewer behavior problems.

In addition, gun violence prevention programs such as those operated by the Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) Office of Neighborhood Safety, which use credible messengers to intervene before conflicts arise and mediate them when they do, have been shown to reduce shootings in target communities.

As such, we urge the Mayor and the Council to:

- Restore \$1.5m in this year's budget for the DYCD COMPASS program and reject a reduction of \$6.9m in the outyears to save 3,500 afterschool slots.
- Restore \$6.1 million for the Summer Youth Employment Program.
- Resist a \$66 million cut to the DYCD Office of Neighborhood Safety to maintain:
  - the capacity of the Crisis Management system, which deploys teams of credible messengers who mediate conflicts on the street and connect high-risk individuals to services that can reduce the long-term risk of violence; and
  - the Precision Employment Initiative, a jobs training program that targets neighborhoods with high rates of gun violence.
- Enact and financially support the youth-focused recommendations made by the [Commission on Community Reinvestment](#) and the Closure of Rikers Island, established by Local Law 193, which propose investments that prevent or remove young people from criminal justice system involvement and ensure that they achieve healthy, productive, and positive outcomes.

Lastly, we ask the Council to pass a resolution calling on our leaders in Albany to make the [Solutions Not Suspensions Act](#) law. This legislation would end the overreliance on suspension as the default disciplinary method, which disproportionately impacts students of color, and instead use proven restorative justice practices and social-emotional supports.