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GOVERNOR ANDREW M. CUOMO

## GOVERNOR CUOMO OUTLINES 2021 AGENDA: REIMAGINE | REBUILD | RENEW

***In 11th State of the State Address, Governor Advances Bold Agenda to Defeat COVID-19, Begin Jumpstarting New York's Economic Resurgence, and Create a Safer, More Just State***

***Cuomo: "Do you remember last spring? Do you remember what New Yorkers did in their darkest hour? I will never forget it. When COVID ambushed New York and we went from one case to hundreds of cases in a matter of days. When sirens filled the night, stillness and mass graves were dug on Hart Island. When fear gripped New Yorkers like a vise. When global experts told us there was no way we could slow the spread. But New Yorkers said yes we could and yes we would. New Yorkers united and rose to the occasion. That is New York at her best - that is the New York miracle.***

***Time and again we have heard the voices of doubt and defeat. The state can't do a budget on time. We can't enact common sense gun safety, we can't pass marriage equality, we can't raise the minimum wage, we can't fix subway tunnels, we can't build a new Tappan Zee Bridge, we can't turn around the Buffalo economy, we can't end the AIDS epidemic, we can't provide free college tuition for the middle class, we can't construct a new Penn train hall. But they were wrong. We did.***

***We can't - only if we believe we can't.***

***That is what we mean when we say New York tough."***

Governor Andrew M. Cuomo today delivered his 2021 State of the State address. The Governor's 2021 agenda - Reimagine | Rebuild | Renew - features nation-leading proposals to not only defeat COVID-19, but also tackle critical issues facing New York and the country, including jumpstarting New York's economic recovery; creating a fairer, more just state; reopening the state; becoming a leader in the growing green energy economy; and rebuilding and strengthening New York's infrastructure. To defeat COVID-19, address New York's short-term economic issues, and ensure social and racial justice, the Governor has put forth a number of proposals focused on reimagining our health care and housing systems; finding new sources of revenue through the legalization of adult-use cannabis and online sports betting; continuing the fight for well-

deserved federal recovery funding; and creating fairer and more just criminal justice and election systems.

Proposals focused on reopening the state, becoming a leader in the growing green energy economy, and rebuilding and strengthening New York's infrastructure will be announced in the coming days.

"Do you remember last spring?", Governor Cuomo said. "Do you remember what New Yorkers did in their darkest hour? I will never forget it. When COVID ambushed New York and we went from one case to hundreds of cases in a matter of days. When sirens filled the night, stillness and mass graves were dug on Hart Island. When fear gripped New Yorkers like a vise. When global experts told us there was no way we could slow the spread. But New Yorkers said yes we could and yes we would. New Yorkers united and rose to the occasion. That is New York at her best - that is the New York miracle.

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Governor Cuomo continued, "There are moments in life that can change a person fundamentally - sometimes for the better, sometimes for the worse. Likewise, there are episodes in history that transform society and COVID is one of those moments. We see the risk and peril, but we also see the promise and potential of this moment. This next year we will see economies realign and reset around the world and New York will lead the way. In a moment when nagging insecurity can either limit your potential or give way to the energy of urgency, necessity, and innovation, we know the direction we are headed - it is our state motto, Excelsior- ever upwards."

## **2021 REIMAGINE | REBUILD | RENEW HIGHLIGHTS**

**Passing the Medical Supplies Act:** The United States was ill-prepared for a global pandemic when it came to our shores in 2020. At the outset of the COVID-19 crisis, New York State, along with the rest of the country, faced a severe shortage of basic Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), leaving our frontline health care professionals vulnerable to contracting the disease that we so desperately needed them to fight. To ensure that hospitals had the supplies needed to protect their patients and workers, New York was forced to compete with other countries — and even states — to secure critical products from overseas.

To promote domestic manufacturing of critical medical equipment and to reduce dependency on overseas products, Governor Cuomo is proposing that New York pass the Medical Supplies Act to prioritize buying American-made PPE and medical supplies. As the Buy American Act, made permanent last year, did for American-made structural iron and steel, this new policy will help create and retain local jobs while ensuring the health and dependability of a crucial sector for years to come.

**Comprehensive Telehealth Legislation:** The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the inequities in our healthcare system and showed that telehealth is a critical tool to expand access and lower costs for low-income communities, especially for behavioral health support. During the crisis, the Governor took executive action to expand access to remote care. These proposals codify and build on those successful reforms.

In partnership with the Reimagine New York Commission, the Governor will enact comprehensive telehealth reform to help New Yorkers take advantage of telehealth tools and address existing roadblocks. These reforms will address key issues like adjusting reimbursement incentives to encourage telehealth, eliminating outdated regulatory prohibitions on the delivery of telehealth, removing outdated location requirements, addressing technical unease among both patients and providers through training programs, and establishing other programs to incentivize innovative uses of telehealth.

**Ensuring Social and Racial Justice for the Vaccination Effort:** In order to ensure the vaccine is distributed equitably, especially in communities of color, Governor Cuomo created the New York Vaccine Equity Task Force. Chaired by Secretary of State Rossana Rosado, Attorney General Letitia James, National Urban League President & CEO Marc Morial, and Healthfirst President & CEO Pat Wang, the Governor's Equity Task Force will assist in overcoming existing barriers to vaccination and increase access to vaccines in Black, Hispanic, Asian, Native American, rural, poor, and public housing communities, as well as other health care deserts.

To support the vaccine rollout, the Task Force was directed by the Governor to build trust and acknowledge the pervasive structural inequities that have contributed to existing health and social disparities, address language access issues, ensure protections of privacy and confidentiality, and develop outreach efforts and community engagements that are regionally placed, culturally responsive, and representative of all communities. As vaccine availability increases from the federal government, the State will establish in partnership with private entities and localities, public clinics to reach vulnerable and underserved communities.

**New York State Public Health Corps:** While working to make New York the first COVID-19-safe state in the nation through widespread vaccination, we must also prepare for future public health crises. To support New York's massive effort to vaccinate nearly 20 million New Yorkers and support other public health emergency responses, Governor Cuomo is proposing the launch of the nation's first public health corps. As part of the effort, up to 1,000 fellows will be recruited to assist with vaccination

operations. These fellows will include students in undergraduate and graduate public health programs, nursing schools and medical schools, recent graduates, retired medical professionals, and laypeople who will receive an intensive public health training curriculum developed by Cornell University. Bloomberg Philanthropies, Northwell, and our Department of Health will manage and coordinate the Corps.

After the vaccination program is completed, New York will build on this Public Health Corps model by continuing to recruit and train public health professionals to staff State and county health agencies and this Corps will be available and prepared to serve the state in any future crisis.

**Free Citizen Public Health Training:** To empower and educate New Yorkers to be prepared for the next public health crises, the State will develop a free citizen public health training program with Cornell, offered online, to educate and certify thousands of New Yorkers to be prepared to volunteer to help their communities the next time there is a health emergency.

**Fight for Overdue Federal Support to States Fighting COVID-19:** New York was blindsided by the virus in early spring. Despite vast agencies tasked with monitoring health threats, and months of warning, the federal government failed to respond to — or even notice — the growing global pandemic. When they finally took notice, the federal government was solely focused on China such that they allowed 3 million travelers from Europe — where the virus was rapidly spreading — to enter New York City-area airports and others. This was an act of gross negligence by the federal government. New York State led the nation in its response. Left to fend for itself by the federal government, New Yorkers bent the curve and, with a science-based approach, re-opened much of the economy while maintaining some of the lowest infection rates in the nation.

However, even as portions of the economy have bounced back, many sectors have seen significant job losses and remain severely impacted, all contributing to New York's significant fiscal challenges. The State is contending with a \$15 billion budget gap created entirely by the pandemic. For too long, New York has been asked to unfairly subsidize the federal government. As the federal government's number one donor, New York already leads the nation in sending more money to Washington than it gets back in return. On top of that, Washington has relentlessly abused this state, providing the lowest Medicaid reimbursement rate in the nation, starving infrastructure funding, and curtailing the State and Local Tax (SALT) deduction, which raised New Yorkers' taxes and starved New York of \$30 billion over three years. After all of this, New York cannot also afford to pay the bill for the federal government's incompetence.

Governor Cuomo will fight to ensure that the federal government takes responsibility and delivers the fair funding New York and other states are owed.

**Pass a Comprehensive Adult-Use Cannabis Program:** In 2019, Governor Cuomo signed legislation to decriminalize the penalties for unlawful possession of marijuana. The legislation also put forth a process to expunge records for certain marijuana

convictions. Later that year, the Governor spearheaded a multi-state summit to discuss paths towards legalization of adult-use cannabis that would ensure public health and safety, and coordinate programs regionally to minimize the cross-border movement of cannabis products.

Building on that important work, the Governor is proposing the creation of a new Office of Cannabis Management to oversee a new adult-use cannabis program, as well as the State's existing medical and cannabinoid hemp programs. Additionally, an equitable structure for the adult-use market will be created by offering licensing opportunities and assistance to entrepreneurs in communities of color who have been disproportionately impacted by the war on drugs. Cannabis legalization will create more than 60,000 new jobs, spurring \$3.5 billion in economic activity and generating more than \$300 million in tax revenue when fully implemented.

**Enabling Online Sports Betting:** The sports gambling market is evolving rapidly. In 2018, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Murphy v. NCAA* overturned a federal law prohibiting most states from authorizing sports wagering. Sports wagering is now legal online in 14 states, including the bordering states of New Jersey and Pennsylvania, while it is only legal in New York at four Upstate commercial gaming facilities and Native American gaming facilities. An industry study found that nearly 20 percent of New Jersey's sports wagering revenue comes from New York residents, costing the State millions of dollars in lost tax revenue.

Under Governor Cuomo's proposal, the New York State Gaming Commission will issue a request for proposals to select one or more providers to offer mobile sports wagering in New York. This platform must have a partnership with at least one of the existing licensed commercial casinos. The Commission will also require any entity operating mobile wagering apps include safeguards against abuses and addiction.

**Create a Rapid Testing Network as a Tool to Help Businesses Reopen:** Over the past several months, Governor Cuomo's New York Forward reopening plan has paved the way for many businesses to resume operations safely through a phased approach and in accordance with public health protocols. While this has unleashed the ingenuity and creativity of New York businesses — such as new outdoor dining spaces and delivery options — it has also created significant financial struggles for these industries.

New York has been at the forefront of developing testing capacity throughout the COVID-19 crisis and will use that experience to help support the reopening of businesses. The State will continue to scale up the availability of testing to help businesses safely reduce capacity restrictions, as well as work with testing companies to stand up a network of convenient testing sites in city centers, starting with New York City. New York will also work with local governments to cut through any red tape to set up this critical infrastructure quickly. With this new network of rapid testing locations, a customer can stop into a new rapid testing facility, get tested, and 15 minutes later be

cleared for dinner or a movie. This will provide an added layer of protection and confidence as New Yorkers resume economic activity.

**Facilitating Policing Reforms:** This year, Governor Cuomo took swift and aggressive action to respond to community concerns and rebuild public trust in the law enforcement profession following the tragic deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Daniel Prude, and far too many others. The Governor signed the "Say Their Name" reform agenda which repealed 50-a, banned chokeholds, prohibited race-based 911 calls, and codified his 2015 Executive Order that appointed the Attorney General as an independent prosecutor for police involved deaths of unarmed civilians. He also signed legislation creating the Law Enforcement Misconduct Investigative Office within the Attorney General's Office to investigate complaints of misconduct filed against law enforcement agencies.

However, unrest and distrust continued to roil communities in New York and across the nation. Maintaining public safety is imperative; it is one of the essential roles of government, and communities require mutual trust and respect between police and the communities they serve. In recognition of this, Governor Cuomo issued Executive Order 203 creating the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative. This collaborative process requires all local governments and police forces to develop a plan to modernize their policing strategies and strengthen relationships with the communities they serve. Localities are required to engage their community and ratify a plan by April 1, 2021. Failure to complete this process will result in loss of State funding.

**Facilitating the Creation of Statewide Childcare Options:** The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted how a lack of access to affordable childcare can disrupt low-income families and force caregivers, primarily women, to choose between putting food on the table and caring for their children. While affordability serves as a barrier to families securing child care, there is also a lack of general accessibility of child care programs, as well as insufficient high quality provider capacity across the state which can inhibit families from accessing child care.

To make child care more affordable and equitable for our most vulnerable children and their parents, Governor Cuomo will invest \$40 million to reduce the burden of parent subsidy copays to help approximately 32,000 working families. This will ensure that no New York family pays more than 20 percent of their income above the federal poverty level for a child care subsidy co-pay, with the rest of the cost of care being covered by the subsidy.

To ensure that all families have access to high-quality child care, New York State will invest \$6 million for start-up grants to create programs in child care deserts; increase the value of the New York State Employer-Provided Child Care Credit by expanding the amount a business can claim for qualified child care expenditures to up to \$500,000 per year; create a new toolkit to provide guidance and assistance to businesses looking to subsidize and facilitate access to child care for their employees; and establish permanent child care sector workgroups within the Regional Economic Development

Councils REDCs to guide and inform council decisions. The Governor will also establish a new Excelsior Child Care Investment Tax Credit available to recipients of the Excelsior Tax Credit as a bonus incentive to create and provide child care services for employees and their families.

To ease administrative burdens and make it easier and less costly to provide child care services, Governor Cuomo will adopt the Child Care Availability Task Force recommendations to standardize and modernize the child care subsidy system to eliminate waste, duplication, and confusing rules for families. Specifically, the Governor will direct the Office of Children and Family Services and the Council on Children and Families to examine federal and state statutes and regulations to identify opportunities for reform and streamlining; eliminate redundant background checks that increase administrative burdens and costs for providers; and advance legislation to eliminate the requirement that individuals seeking employment at OCFS or in New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene regulated programs submit a new Central Register of Child Abuse and Maltreatment clearance form when they move to a new program.

**Streamlining and Enhancing Work to Address Gender-Based Violence:** Ending domestic violence and sexual assault has been at the top of New York's agenda since Governor Cuomo first took office. Throughout his time as Governor, Governor Cuomo has signed extensive legislation relating to ensuring safety for girls, women, and all survivors of domestic trauma and abuse, including legislation in the FY 2021 budget authorizing law enforcement to remove guns from the scene of a domestic violence incident, and requiring judges to consider the effects of domestic violence while determining distribution of marital property. The Governor also signed the Enough is Enough law in July, 2015 to address sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, and stalking on college campuses.

The Governor is now proposing to take this work a step further through a comprehensive package of initiatives to combat domestic violence and gender-based violence. The package includes a proposal allowing courts to require abusers to pay for damages to housing units, moving expenses, and other housing costs related to domestic violence, as well as a proposals to create a domestic violence misdemeanor label to close the domestic violence gun-purchasing loophole to ensure abusers cannot obtain weapons who are convicted of misdemeanor assaults on a domestic partner.

Additionally, the Office for the Prevention of Domestic Violence will be transformed into a reimagined agency, the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, and will be tasked with addressing the intersection of the many forms of intimate partner violence, including domestic violence and sexual violence, in a survivor-centered and comprehensive manner.

**Providing Rent and Mortgage Relief for Tenants and Small Business Owners:** The COVID-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented economic dislocation across the United States, and New York is no exception. The financial hardships arising from

business closures and resulting unemployment touch on every aspect of life but are perhaps most acutely felt by New Yorkers in danger of losing their homes or businesses because they can no longer afford to pay their mortgage or rent.

The Governor has already signed legislation placing a moratorium on residential evictions until May 1, 2021 for tenants who have endured COVID-related hardship. Taking this effort a step further, Governor Cuomo will codify his Executive Order banning fees for late and missed rent payments during the pandemic and allowing tenants to use their security deposit as immediate payment and repay the deposit over time, keeping those protections in place through May 1. The Governor will also codify his Executive Order to establish a statewide moratorium on commercial evictions until May 1 for commercial tenants who have endured COVID-related hardship.

**Eliminating Health Care Premiums for Low-Income New Yorkers:** The COVID-19 pandemic showcased the persistent, staggering healthcare disparities in this country and in New York State. Blacks, Latinos, Asians and poor communities paid the highest price for COVID-19. Higher rates of underlying conditions were a major driver of these disparities. Increasing access to affordable healthcare will help address these disparities and help ensure that New York emerges from the pandemic stronger and more equitable.

Through New York's successful health insurance exchange, the New York State of Health, low-income families qualify for the state's Essential Plan for free or with a maximum premium of \$20 a month per person. However, families and individuals still struggle with the expense. To make coverage more affordable for low-income New Yorkers, Governor Cuomo will eliminate these monthly premiums for over 400,000 New Yorkers, saving families nearly \$100 million per year in premiums and enrolling 100,000 New Yorkers who are currently uninsured.

**Continuing New York's Liberty Defense Project:** Launched in 2017 under Governor Cuomo's leadership, the first-in-the-nation Liberty Defense Project has provided more than 45,000 vital legal services to immigrants and communities in need — particularly those who have been targeted by federal immigration enforcement tactics, including those in Deferred Action for Early Childhood Arrivals (DACA) or Temporary Protected Status (TPS). The project is administered by the Office for New Americans and runs in partnership with law firms, legal associations, advocacy organizations, colleges, universities, and bar associations across the state. The Liberty Defense Project provides free legal consultations and screenings for immigrants throughout New York, direct representation in deportation proceedings and other cases, assistance in applying for naturalization and employment authorization, and other education and support, including connection to social services and health care.

This year, Governor Cuomo will continue to support the Liberty Defense Project to keep fighting for immigrants seeking a better life for themselves and their families. New York's

strength, character, and pride are found in the diversity and rich culture that makes us the Empire State. We will continue to support and defend all who call New York home.

**Strengthening and Expanding Access to Elections:** Building from New York's previous landmark election reforms, Governor Cuomo has put forth a transformational proposal that continues to expand access to voting and improves procedures to speed up vote counting, and add additional time for early voting. Specifically:

- *Expand Access to Early Voting:* Governor Cuomo will advance legislation that extends early voting hours from 6:00 pm to 9:00 pm on weekends as well as on a minimum of three week days during the ten-day early voting period.
- *No-Excuse Absentee Voting for All New Yorkers:* In 2019, Governor Cuomo celebrated the Legislature's passage of a resolution beginning the process of amending the state constitution to make no-excuse absentee voting a reality in our state. In 2021, the Governor will call on the Legislature to act quickly to pass the resolution again so that the proposed amendment can go on the ballot to be ratified by the voters.
- *Allow More Time for Voters to Request Absentee Ballots:* The state's election law currently prohibits voters from requesting their absentee ballots more than 30 days prior to Election Day. Particularly in elections with large numbers of absentee voters, this timeline may make it difficult for county boards of elections to process ballot requests in a timely and efficient manner. This, in turn, provides voters with less time to receive their ballots, vote, and mail them back. Governor Cuomo will advance legislation allowing voters to request absentee ballots 45 days prior to the election, ensuring they can be mailed as soon as the ballot is finalized and approved by the Board.
- *Speed Up the Counting of Absentee Ballots:* New York State's election law does not facilitate the speedy counting of large numbers of absentee ballots - the law only requires that boards of elections meet to process and count ballots within two weeks of a general election and within eight days of a primary election. To ensure that New York State counts absentee votes quickly and efficiently after each election, Governor Cuomo will introduce legislation requiring county boards of elections to process absentee ballots as they are received and to begin counting and reporting those ballots on Election Day.

**Creatively Repurposing Underutilized Commercial Space for Additional Housing:** As the COVID-19 pandemic has unfolded, New York, like states across the country, has seen an increase in telework and a reduction in travel. New York City must, and will, remain a global commercial hub, by ensuring that its central business district remains the paramount location for the world's most innovative and successful businesses and their employees. Reduced demand for office and hotel space has created an opportunity to repurpose formerly commercial space that has far greater potential for use as housing, including affordable and supportive housing, to create dynamic, 24/7 walk-to-work neighborhoods.

Governor Cuomo will propose legislation to create a five-year period during which property owners may convert office buildings and hotels in the Manhattan central business district to residential use. Stimulating housing conversion will create thousands of good-paying jobs, increase housing affordability, and support long-term economic growth by helping New York's employers attract and retain talent.

**Ensuring Safe Shelters and Providing Sustained Care for Homeless on the Street:** Governor Cuomo has been a leader in protecting and serving homeless New Yorkers throughout his entire career, and he took action during the COVID-19 crisis to ensure they received the support and care they need. In September, Governor Cuomo directed the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to issue guidance to all social services districts across the state clearly laying out the requirements for providing safe shelter conditions amidst the global COVID-19 public health emergency. OTDA will ensure strict compliance with the guidance and directive through a combination of announced and unannounced visits to the shelters. Localities that do not maintain safe and secure facilities will be held accountable.

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