

The Roosevelt Institute at Cornell University

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SPRING 2022 EXECUTIVE BOARD MEMBERS

Meera Balaji '23, *President*

Meera is a junior in the school of Industrial and Labor Relations and the former Editor-in-Chief. Outside of Roosevelt, Meera is also a Project Manager at Cornell Venture Capital and a member of a social sorority. She interned as a Venture Capital intern at SVB Capital this past summer and is a former Research Assistant at the S.C. Johnson College of Business at Cornell.

Viktoria Catalan '22, *Editor-in-Chief*

Viktoria is a senior majoring in Chemistry & Chemical Biology and minoring in German Studies. She is interested in healthcare rights and public health, business and economic development, and humanitarian relief. Her long-term goal is to address disparities in low-resource communities by reforming policy and improving research-to-practice efficiency. Viktoria has also been involved in health and biomedical research, the Cornell Undergraduate Research Board, Cornell's Institute of Politics and Global Affairs Undergraduate Fellows Program, and the Cornell Women Entrepreneurs Program.

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Emily is a senior in the Dyson School majoring in Applied Economics and Management. She joined Roosevelt in the fall of 2019. Outside of Roosevelt, Emily is a member of the Society of Women in Business and the Cornell Value Investing Club, and she also serves as a Social Media Ambassador for Cornell Undergraduate Admissions.

Riya Patel '24, *Director of Internal Affairs*

Riya is a sophomore studying Policy Analysis and Management in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined Roosevelt in her freshman spring as an analyst in the Healthcare Center. Riya is passionate about healthcare policy, and she is a part of other health-related organizations on campus, such as Cayuga Healthcare Consulting and Ithaca Health Initiative. In her free time, she likes to listen to music, go biking, and play the piano or viola.

Ben Terhaar '25, *Director of External Affairs*

As a freshman in the Brooks School of Public Policy studying Healthcare Policy and on the pre-medical track, Ben is drawn towards utilizing his leadership skills and community-based advocacy to make an impact on people's lives. His experiences encompass a wide variety of healthcare interests, from administration and policy writing to clinical work and research. During his time at Roosevelt, Ben has enjoyed organizing The Roosevelt Speaker Series, as well as crafting policy through grassroots research in Ithaca.

Emily Udagawa '24, *Communications Director*

Emily is a sophomore in the College of Human Ecology majoring in Global and Public Health Sciences. She is interested in healthcare policy, science communication, and healthcare marketing. Outside of Roosevelt, Emily is an active member of the Ithaca Health Initiative and is a research fellow at the Health Design Innovations Lab.

Andreas Psahos '24, *Advocacy Director*

Andreas is a sophomore in the Brooks School of Public Policy studying Policy Analysis and Management (PAM). He joined Roosevelt in Spring 2021 as a Domestic Policy Analyst. Apart from being the current Advocacy Director for the Roosevelt Institute, Andreas serves on the PAM Undergraduate Council, is the Executive Secretary for Cornell Phi Alpha Delta, and volunteers for the Parole Preparation Program. He is interested in

pursuing a career in law, and he spent this past summer advocating for his local community on the state level through an internship with the NYS Assembly.

SPRING 2022 CENTER DIRECTORS

Hannah Ritter '22, *Center Director for Domestic Policy*

Hannah is a senior studying Industrial and Labor Relations with minors in Inequality Studies and Law & Society. She joined CRI in the spring of 2019, and this is her second year as the Domestic Center Director. Last summer, Hannah worked at a pro bono law firm assisting clients with accessing unemployment insurance benefits and representing them in hearings. She is also pursuing an Honor's Thesis studying the gig workers' access to unemployment benefits throughout the pandemic, focusing on on-demand platform and ride-sharing drivers.

Alexis Ahn '25, *Assistant Center Director for Domestic Policy*

Alexis is a freshman majoring in History and Government and minoring in Law & Society and Inequality Studies in the College of Arts & Sciences. She is interested in correctional and criminal justice reform, which intersects with a wide variety of domestic policy issues, such as education and housing. Outside of Roosevelt, Alexis is a member of the Prison Reform Education Project, a brother of the Alpha Phi Omega Gamma service fraternity, and she volunteers for Prisoner's Express.

Garry Blum '22, *Center Director for Economic Policy*

Garry is a senior in the College of Arts & Sciences, where he is pursuing a major in philosophy and a minor in public policy. He has been with the Roosevelt Institute's Center for Economic Policy since he first enrolled and is currently engaged in research regarding American anti-trust policy. Outside of Roosevelt, Garry has held internships at BMW North America's legal department and as an analyst at YD Development. He plans to attend law school after graduation.

Grace Chen '25, *Assistant Center Director for Economic Policy*

Grace is a freshman studying Policy Analysis and Management (PAM) in the Brooks School of Public Policy. She joined Roosevelt during her freshman spring as an analyst in the Economic Policy center, specifically interested in the economic analysis of social policies. Outside of Roosevelt, Grace is a brother in Cornell's Phi Alpha Delta Pre-Law Fraternity, a consultant in Social Business Consulting, and a research assistant in the PAM department. She also loves to bake, dance, and make Spotify playlists.

Aishani Shukla '23, *Center Director for Environmental & Technology Policy*

Aishani is a junior in the school of Industrial and Labor Relations pursuing minors in Applied Economics and Psychology. Outside of Roosevelt, she is a Fair Labor Association Student Committee member, a research assistant for UNI Global Union, and an editor for the Cornell Diplomat. This year, she is also interning with the State Department's Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor.

Renle Chu '23, *Assistant Center Director for Environmental & Technology Policy*

Renle Chu is a junior majoring in Policy Analysis and Management and minoring in Law & Society. She joined Roosevelt in the spring of 2021 as a healthcare analyst. Outside of Roosevelt, Renle is a teaching assistant for two undergraduate classes, serves on the Undergraduate Student Advisory Council, and is involved in a qualitative research lab. She is passionate about the policy implications of rising information technology, addressing climate change, and advocating for healthcare reform.

Javier Vega '24, *Center Director for Foreign Policy*

Javi is a sophomore in the College of Arts & Sciences studying information science and government. He joined Roosevelt during the fall semester of his freshman year. He is interested in foreign policy, especially in how nation's environmental and energy policies interact, coalesce, compete, and influence decision-making. This past summer, Javi interned at a biotechnology startup doing both business and product development. In the future, he hopes to help curb climate change through private sector change.

Jack Viehweg '23, *Center Director for Healthcare Policy*

Jack is a third-year student in the Sloan 5-year BS/MHA program at Cornell and joined the Roosevelt Institute in Fall 2021. He enjoys writing about healthcare finance, equity for chronic conditions, and rural medicine. Outside of Roosevelt, Jack is the North Campus Student Assistant Director for Cornell Dining, a violinist in the Cornell Orchestras, an editor for the Cornell Healthcare Review, and an analyst for Cayuga Healthcare Consulting.

Journal compiled by Viktoria Catalan

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

The Roosevelt Institute at Cornell University is excited to publish its seventeenth issue of the *Roosevelt Review*.

The following twenty-six proposals exemplify a high level of dedication, thoroughness, and policy engagement from our analysts this semester. I continue to be impressed by students' willingness to receive and incorporate feedback, as well as their ambition to reform deeply rooted social and political issues. Regarding returning analysts, it has also been astounding to observe their progression of formal writing since the Fall 2021 semester. The Roosevelt Institute's leadership team is further proud to see this level of commitment and involvement transcend into our advocacy projects, guest speaker events, and general body meetings.

I would also like to highlight a memorable event from this past semester, namely the launch of our first Roosevelt Institute at Cornell Annual Symposium. Through this event, students had the opportunity to showcase their recent policy proposals or opinion-editorials to the wider Cornell community. Given the symposium's success, I am excited that this public speaking opportunity will remain a part of the Institute's initiatives for years to come.

Thank you to everyone who has supported this publication and the Roosevelt Institute at Cornell University. It has truly been an honor serving as the organization's Editor-in-Chief during the 2021-2022 academic year. We hope you enjoy the policy proposals that we have prepared this semester, and we thank you for taking the time to read them.

Sincerely,

Viktoria Catalan
Editor-in-Chief

Domestic Policy

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Revising New York State’s World Language Education Standards for Students Across All Grade Levels

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The American education system is failing to provide students with adequate foreign language education. New York State should require world language education, beginning in kindergarten, to improve student outcomes and promote cultural awareness.

Background

The United States has been noted as a multicultural nation and described as a “melting pot.” Yet, its opportunities for foreign language education are severely lacking. In Europe, 92% of students learn a language in school, and more than 20 countries have a second language requirement. [1] For most students, the requirement starts between ages six and nine. [1] Comparatively, 20% of American students receive foreign language education, and only 11 states have foreign language instruction as a graduation requirement. [1, 2] Furthermore, there has been a statistically significant decline in foreign language programs offered for kindergarten through eighth grade students over the past few decades, due to budget cuts and prioritization of other educational opportunities. [3] New York State recently revised its standards for world language education in 2021, where only one credit of foreign language is required to

graduate with a high school diploma. [4] Unlike the standards for other subjects, the world language standards are not grade-based. [4] Instead, students must demonstrate proficiency at three checkpoints, which are suggested to be tested after grades eight, 10, and 12. [4] The Board of Regents has stated that the full implementation of the new standards will not go into effect until 2028. [4]

Policy Idea

The New York State Department of Education (NYSED) should revise its world language learning standards and guidelines to require the instruction of a second language for all grades. Additionally, to match the comprehensiveness of English, mathematics, social studies, and science standards, NYSED should also provide schools with world language learning goals and suggested curricula for each grade level. Such standards should require that students be taught cultural awareness in addition to the

practical use of the language, which would prepare students to be effective communicators in an increasingly multicultural world.

Policy Analysis

A wide body of research has revealed the varied benefits of foreign language learning and multilingualism, including improved cognitive abilities, health outcomes, educational achievement, employability, and cultural awareness. [5] Multilingualism has been shown to enhance cognitive flexibility; a study of multilingual toddlers found that they were better able to respond to unexpected stimuli, suggesting that their comfort in recognizing distinct languages simultaneously allows them to process new circumstances more efficiently. [6] Several studies have also found that young bilingual learners have improved metalinguistic awareness, refuting a common misconception that learning a second language while young weakens

abilities with the native language. [5] For example, a study of elementary school students enrolled in a Mandarin immersion program revealed that they outperformed their non-immersion peers in the long-term on standardized English and math exams. [7] Generally, there is no evidence that students who receive instruction in a second-language fall behind those who do not. [5] Several studies have also pointed to a connection between language learning and the development of increased cultural, social, and emotional awareness. [5] However, foreign language instruction alone does not necessarily increase cultural competence; a study focused on university students enrolled in an introductory foreign language class concluded that courses with intercultural learning as a specific component more effectively increased cultural competence than courses that solely focused on language acquisition. [8] Finally, starting foreign language earlier capitalizes on all of these benefits, and research has also indicated that students with an early start exhibit higher comprehension, communication, and confidence. [9]

Talking Points

- Learning a foreign language at a younger age results in improved long-term comprehension and communication skills and overall competence in the language, with no detrimental effect on the native language. [5, 9]
- Students who receive multilingual instruction do not fall behind their peers; in fact, they outperform their peers on standardized English and math exams in the long-term. [7]
- Foreign language education increases students' social and emotional awareness, and instruction with a focus on multiculturalism also increases cultural tolerance. [8]

Key Facts

- Only 20% of American students receive any foreign language education—which is in stark contrast to 92% of European students who do—and only 11 states require this education to graduate. [1, 2]
- Foreign language education programs for elementary and

middle school students are declining due to widespread budget cuts. [3]

- In New York State, one credit of a world language is required to graduate. Unlike other subjects, there is no requirement that world languages be taught starting in kindergarten. [4]

Next Steps

Given the numerous academic, cultural, and social benefits of learning a second language and the enhancement of language acquisition by starting young, this policy should be implemented. Specifically, implementation of the policy would require three components. First, the New York State Board of Regents would adopt and publicize the changes to the world language standards. Second, NYSED would develop and disseminate unit plans and resources to assist teachers with the transition. [4] Furthermore, the policy would require teachers and other staff to complete training programs from the Office of Bilingual Education and World Languages or other approved programs from statewide or regional world language organizations, so that they be prepared to teach world languages. [10] Together,

these three components would comprise the logistical and practical steps necessary to establish this curriculum change in New York State's schools.

Action Plan Snapshot

Prior to deciding on any revisions to learning standards, NYSED typically forms a panel consisting of experts in the field as well as leaders from stakeholder groups, including parents, teachers, and professional organizations to investigate potential changes. [11] After this panel produces a proposal for updated standards, there is a feedback period in which a broader array of community stakeholders are surveyed for their support, followed by a period for public comment. [11] To successfully advocate for the implementation of this policy, parents and professional organizations should work together to forcefully voice their support for the changes. A powerful tool could be to have schools across New York State that already provide world language education for younger students publicize the positive success of these programs. For instance, the New York State Association of Foreign Language Teachers, one of the professional organizations included in the previous world language standard

review process, reports that there are at least 100 schools across the state that currently offer a Foreign Language in the Elementary School program. [11, 12] This coalition of actors should lobby the Board of Regents to adopt the recommended provisions.

Given the training and development necessary during the implementation of the revised standards, there would need to be a phase-in period. These periods can vary in length but typically appear to last an average of 5 years. [11, 13] Furthermore, following the last roll-out model, the new world language standards would be implemented in three phases. The first phase would be the shortest and would consist of a public awareness campaign and professional development opportunities for schools to begin preparing to teach the revised standards. [11] The second phase would continue professional development and focus on creating a new curriculum. Phase three would be the complete roll-out of the new standards. [11] This format would function well in implementing this policy change, yet the total length of the phase in should be longer, due to the need to create novel curriculum for several grades and to train a large population of teachers in new skills.

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Establishing State Funding to Ensure Abortion Access and Safety in California in a Post-*Roe* Landscape

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To meet the anticipated increase in abortions sought in California, the state must allocate regular funding to abortion access groups and protect against crisis pregnancy centers.

Background

Pending the decision of *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, which was heard in the Supreme Court in December 2021, the national abortion protections established in *Roe v. Wade* may be overturned. [1] If overturned, 21 states are certain to ban abortion, and an additional five are likely to ban it. [1] However, legal abortions are incredibly important, given that child rearing is resource intensive. [2] Additionally, abortion legalization has increased the likelihood of a generation's college attendance and lowered both poverty rates and social services utilization. [2] Furthermore, access to legal abortions is especially important to marginalized groups: a 2021 study showed that legalization reduced non-white abortion-related mortality rates by 30-60%, and it also reduced non-white maternal mortality by 30-40%. [2] White women, who often had greater access to legal abortions, were only marginally affected. [3]

Abortion access funds, such as the California-based ACCESS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE, provide rigorous abortion protections by covering the costs of transportation, lodging, childcare, and other expenses. [4] Because of its attraction of those seeking abortions, California is preparing for up to 3000% of an increase in abortions sought, should *Dobbs* overturn *Roe* protections. [5] This increase in abortions would also heighten public health risks from crisis pregnancy centers. [6] Specifically, these organizations pretend to be legitimate medical clinics and aim to convince pregnant people against obtaining an abortion, yet they fail to present a comprehensive range of options to mothers with unintended pregnancies, are not staffed by licensed clinicians, and do not follow other medical ethics codes. [7]

Policy Idea

California should create a law that allocates \$3

million from the state budget and coordinates with ACCESS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE to create a list of state-verified abortion centers. Because ACCESS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE has well-established operations in California, funds from the state budget would greatly expand their services. As a result of this policy, verified abortion centers would be granted further legitimacy, and new abortion centers would be created and verified by the state.

Policy Analysis

This policy is ultimately a restructuring rather than reinvention. Giving ACCESS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE a stable revenue source via the state budget would allow the organization to increase the accessibility of its services. California has the funds to do so—the Legislative Analyst's Office of California predicted a \$31 billion dollar surplus in the 2022 state budget. [8] In 2017, the average cost of a medication abortion was

\$551, and a surgical abortion at 10 weeks costed \$549. [9] Compared to the long-term costs of social services for low-income parents and pregnant women, the aforementioned costs are low. [14] By expanding care, California would be better equipped to handle the projected increase in abortions. [5]

Additionally, creating a state-sponsored list of providers for people seeking abortions would protect civilians from receiving deliberately misleading and unsound medical advice from crisis pregnancy centers. [7] This verification is intended to reduce the number of people who mistakenly enter crisis pregnancy centers, which are often intentionally placed near legitimate abortion clinics. [7]

While this policy would be the first state-sponsored abortion access fund, numerous cities have proven it to be possible. For example, New York City, NY and Austin, TX have set aside part of their budgets for their local abortion access funds. More specifically, New York City's donation of \$250,000 from its 2020 budget allowed for 500 abortions to take place. [10] Additionally, the Austin City Council allocated \$150,000 in 2019 to support abortion access and, despite facing three lawsuits since, it has not stopped increasing its

donation amount to \$250,000 in 2020. [11, 12]

Talking Points

- Abortion procedures cost less than \$600 each, and California predicts to have a \$31 billion dollar budget surplus in 2022. [8, 9]
- New York City, NY and Austin, TX have successfully implemented several one-time donations to local abortion access groups. [10, 11]
- Despite multiple attempts, litigation against the aforementioned donations has not yet been successful. [11, 12]

Key Facts

- If *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* favors *Dobbs*, 21 states are certain to ban abortions, and an additional five are likely to ban them. [1]
- Abortion legalization reduces the utilization of socialization and lowers poverty rates. Additionally, abortion access drastically reduces maternal mortality rates and abortion related-mortality rates for non-white women. [2, 3]

- California anticipates a maximum 3000% increase in abortions sought, should *Roe v. Wade* be overturned. [5]
- Crisis pregnancy centers, which seek to dissuade people from aborting, pretend to offer medical advice but have no clinical certification and do not follow medical ethics codes. [7]

Next Steps

This policy should be enacted to alleviate fundraising burdens from ACCESS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE, thereby allowing the organization to expand its services to a larger population within California. According to its own 2020 report, ACCESS REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE required \$1 million to meet the full need of its callers which could be easily supported by the \$31 billion surplus in the California budget. [8, 13] In other states, each dollar spent paying for an abortion resulted in an average of four dollars saved from public costs that would have supported Medicaid and health expenses and food stamp programs. [14] Local representatives should pressure the California State Assembly Committee on Budget and seek guidance from those who have worked

on the Austin and New York City budgets. Furthermore, to create a list of verified abortion-providers, the state should reach out to networks of pro-choice doctors to collect names of approved centers, as well as establish necessary conditions for verification. Finally, California should run a media campaign for the list, which would be published on its Department of Health Care Services website.

Action Plan Snapshot

Organizers should reach out to New York City Councilwoman Carlina Rivera and the whole of the Austin City Council to better understand the motivating factors and roadblocks faced throughout the process of approving funds for their similar causes. [10, 11] There should also be significantly fewer legal challenges in California, since Austin's initiative is based on an unorthodox legal principle. [11] A few California Assemblymembers of interest are Dr. Joaquin Arambula, an emergency room doctor, and Cristina Garcia, who has historically championed women's issues. [15, 16] The optimal time for public comment would be when the Budget is under review in subcommittees, which would occur between March and May; efforts ought to be most concentrated at that time.

[17] However, verification criteria should be compiled prior to March to allow for collaboration with doctors about adjustments made in the comment period. Community outreach with doctors should occur at abortion centers, hospitals, and state medical conferences. Then, after such criteria are determined, the Health and Human Services Assembly subcommittee ought to organize a schedule for abortion providers to be evaluated. [17]

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Lowering Interest Rates on Delinquent Property Taxes in New York State to Preserve Homeownership

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The New York State Legislature should amend the New York State Real Property Tax Law to set the interest rate on delinquent property taxes at no greater than three percent over the current U.S. prime rate.

Background

When a homeowner falls behind on their property taxes for a certain period of time in New York State, the state tax law calls for municipalities to begin charging interest on the delinquent taxes. [1] According to the current New York State Real Property Tax Law, the interest rate on delinquent property taxes in the state's counties must be above 12% per year, a rate over three times the current U.S. prime lending rate published by the Wall Street Journal (3.50). [1, 2] Exceptions apply only for municipalities that offer installment plans for delinquent homeowners. [2] As a result of this tax floor and the lack of a ceiling, property tax interest rates vary across the state, with interest rates as high as 18% in Erie County. [3]

High interest rates on delinquent property taxes increase the potential costs of homeownership by stripping equity away from residential properties, which is particularly harmful as

homeownership is one of the primary ways Americans build wealth. [4] For low-income homeowners, these interest rates may represent an even greater threat, since the assessed values of lower-value properties are often a higher percentage of sale price compared to those of higher-value properties. [5] In Tompkins County, for example, the most expensive properties had a 1.87% effective tax rate in 2015, while the rate for the least expensive properties was 2.29%. [6] Low-income homeowners may also be more vulnerable to falling behind on their property taxes due to predatory lending practices that have eliminated helpful escrow accounts, which include property taxes in a homeowner's mortgage, to offer cheaper-sounding mortgages. [7] This practice puts homeowners at greater risk of falling behind on their property taxes. [7]

Policy Idea

New York State should adopt the delinquent property tax interest rate

mechanism of the State of Maine. [8] The state should revise the New York State Real Property Tax Law to eliminate the current floor of 12% interest on delinquent property taxes. [1] New York should instead fix the interest rate on delinquent property taxes at no more than 3% over the current U.S. prime rate, as published regularly by the Wall Street Journal. [2, 8]

Policy Analysis

Several other states have already recognized the need to lower interest rates on delinquent property taxes. In addition to Maine, which has tied the interest rate on delinquent property taxes to no more than 3% over the current U.S. prime rate, the State of Ohio only charges 10% interest on delinquent property taxes. [8, 9] It is also important to recognize that property tax delinquency does not just affect the individual homeowner who falls behind. A study in Milwaukee, Wisconsin found that delinquent properties lower the selling prices of

other homes in their neighborhoods; according to researchers, just one tax-delinquent property lowered the sales price of homes within 250 meters by approximately \$1085. [10] By reducing the interest rates municipalities charge on delinquent property taxes, and by facilitating homeowners' payment of these delinquent taxes, New York State would protect the value of homes of non-delinquent taxpayers as well.

This policy change would also preserve generational wealth. For low-income homeowners, home equity can form over half of a household's net wealth, and low-income homeowners have higher levels of wealth accumulation compared to renters. [11] When interest builds quickly at a rate of 12-18% per year, homeowners are at risk of not catching up on their taxes and, every year, thousands of properties are put up for sale at the tax foreclosure auction or lien sale because owners have not paid off their delinquent property taxes in two years. [12] Thus, high interest rates have the potential to cost New Yorkers their homes. By lowering this interest rate, the New York State legislature would take a step toward preserving statewide homeownership.

Talking Points

- Delinquent properties have been found to lower the selling price of other homes located nearby. [10]
- Lowering the interest rate on delinquent taxes would preserve the generational wealth homeowners accumulate in their properties.
- High interest rates on delinquent taxes may cost homeowners their properties if they cannot pay off their delinquent taxes and accumulated interest. [12]

Key Facts

- For most counties in New York State, the current interest rate on delinquent property can be no lower than 12% as established by state law. [1]
- This floor of 12% for the interest rate on delinquent taxes is over three times the current U.S. prime rate. [1,2]
- Homeownership is one of the primary ways that Americans build wealth. [4]
- Predatory mortgage practices have placed many homeowners at risk of forgetting tax payments and falling behind. [7]

Next Steps

To implement this policy change, the New York State legislature would have to amend Section 924-a of the current New York State Real Property Tax Law. [2] This new amendment would require the support of both the New York House of Representatives and the New York State Senate. Now is the correct time for state legislators to make this transition, since counties and municipalities nationwide have recently received additional funding for COVID-19 relief from the federal government, which could provide a buffer against the loss of income they may argue they would face due to increased delinquency or lower amounts of interest paid by delinquent homeowners. [13]

Action Plan Snapshot

New York residents should approach their New York State Congressman and Senator to ask for new legislation that ties the interest rate on delinquent property taxes to the prime rate, as determined by the Wall Street Journal. The Western New York Law Center, for example, is currently advocating for lower statewide interest rates using data from Erie County, New York. [14] Before arguing for an interest rate

tied to the U.S. prime rate, activists should survey the effects of the current property tax policy on other municipalities in New York, including the number of delinquent homeowners, the amount owed in interest to the municipality, and the potential effects on community development. New York State Senators Andrew Gounardes, Senator John W. Mannion, and Senator Elijah Reichlin-Melnick have all recently co-sponsored legislation proposed by New York State Senator Sean Ryan, a more conservative plan to lower the interest rate to 7.5%. [15] Activists should approach these legislators for support on this stronger reform measure.

Municipalities may be resistant to this policy since the interest homeowners pay is used to fund local governments. [16] To address these concerns, activists should design messaging that emphasizes the long-term, positive economic effects of this policy for homeowners and neighborhoods over the potential short-term costs. These long-term benefits would include preserving generational wealth and statewide homeownership, as discussed above.

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Increasing Investments in Community School Coordinators within Low-Resource K-12 Public Schools in New York State

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Community School Coordinators would be an efficient mechanism for addressing educational opportunity gaps in New York State. Specifically, these Coordinators would connect students to in-school resources and community-based organizations that facilitate access to wraparound services. Such services include healthcare, food, housing, and enrichment programs in districts with high percentages of students from families with incomes below the poverty line.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has both undermined academic performance and decreased accessibility of educational resources among K-12 students in under-resourced public schools. [1] Prior to the pandemic, over 25 million public school students lacked access to food, medical care, and stable living conditions. [2] School closings have only added to these disparities by causing students to lose both learning time and essential services, such as school meals and school-based healthcare, thereby further widening the educational opportunity gap. [3, 4, 5] However, public schools with existing community partnerships in place prior to the pandemic fared markedly better than those without, delivering as much as 80% of normal school functions during closures. [6] Such institutions, located throughout the United States and across the globe, are

known as Community Schools and respond to community needs by coordinating the delivery of critical resources and services to low-income students. [7, 8] The expansion of full-service Community Schools in New York State (NYS) would be characterized by full-time Community School Coordinators (CSCs) and has the potential to enrich the lives of thousands of students by improving their access to academic, health, and social services. [7] CSCs are full-time employees hired by schools to structure available resources into a cohesive network of services tailored to community needs that engage families and connect students to school and community-based services. [8, 9] The establishment of Community Schools would also address additional disparities caused by the pandemic and more effectively reduce opportunity gaps post-pandemic. [7]

Policy Idea

The New York State Education Department should mandate that each school in New York State's 225 high-need districts leverage federal and state resources to hire school-based CSCs. [10] Specifically, high-need districts are those with a high percentage of students in families with incomes below the poverty line. [11] The state would implement this initiative by requiring school districts to submit documentation of their hiring efforts as a pre-requisite to continue receiving NYS Community School set-aside funds. Applying existing funds to such hiring would be an efficient mechanism for increasing access to wraparound services for students, as it would integrate disparate community resources into a cohesive program at each respective school.

Policy Analysis

This policy is worth implementing because state

and federal funds allocated for the development of Community Schools and pandemic recovery could fund the hiring of CSCs in high-need school districts—most importantly, at no cost to the school or school district. [8] In 2021, the NYS budget increased Community School funding to \$300 million to finance investments, including funds to support CSCs and other wraparound services in high-need districts. [10] Additionally, districts could also leverage federal pandemic recovery funds—such as the Coronavirus Response Relief and Supplemental Appropriations Act, the American Rescue Plan Act, and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—to finance CSCs. [8] While these funds may support a range of programs, investing in a CSC is essential to realizing the full benefit of Community Schools. For every \$1 spent on CSCs, coordinators generate \$14 of value through their work, more than double the return on investment (ROI) of funding for general Community School programs. [12] Additionally, CSCs add value by bringing resources into their schools, for example by securing grant funding and in-kind donations, engaging volunteers, and developing partnerships with

community-based organizations and businesses. [8] Furthermore, a 2020 Research and Development Corporation study of the first three years of the development of Community Schools in New York City, all of which employ CSCs, found that Community Schools reduced absenteeism and disciplinary action, improved graduation rates, and increased math scores. [13] Additionally, an analysis of Baltimore City Public Schools' 51 community schools, whose efforts are directed by CSCs, found that students who attended Community Schools experienced positive impacts on behavioral and social-emotional outcomes and a significantly higher attendance rate compared to those who did not attend Community Schools. [14]

Talking Points

- The average return on investment for a CSC is \$14 for every \$1 spent, more than double the ROI of funding for general community school programs. [8]
- The 2021 NYS budget allocated \$300 million to high-need school districts to fund investments in Community Schools, such as CSCs and

other wraparound services. [15]

- Community Schools have a strong empirical track record of reducing absenteeism and disciplinary action, as well as improving graduation rates and math scores when implemented in New York City. [13]

Key Facts

- The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the unique value of Community Schools, since public schools that had prior community partnerships in place were able to maintain services amid school closures, including connecting students to meals and healthcare. [8, 15]
- CSCs act as the liaison between students and wraparound service providers, and they address a broad range of needs such as health, family engagement, academic support, after-school programs, and other social services. [8]
- Family and community engagement fostered through Community

Schools is associated with reduced absenteeism, improved academic performance, higher test scores, and greater trust between families and schools. [16]

Next Steps

This policy should be implemented immediately, since high-need schools must continue supporting their students while recovering from educational losses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. In developing a strategy for implementing this policy, schools should educate and engage in dialogue with community members and families about the role of the CSCs. [8] It should also be known to NYS residents that the state’s regional Community School Technical Assistance Centers, supported by the NYS Education Department, facilitate the development of effective Community Schools. [17] These centers may serve as an additional vital resource in the enactment of this policy by providing professional development training and best practices for Community School management. [17]

Action Plan Snapshot

This policy must be enacted by the New York State Education Department

as a component of the Foundation Aid Set-Aside Guidance within the annual budget. [13] Coalitions that may advocate for this policy include New York State United Teachers, the Coalition for Community Schools, and the National Center for Community Schools. [8] It is additionally essential that representatives from high-need school districts be consulted throughout the policy process. The New York State Education Department should provide the affected schools with as much advance notice as possible before the policy goes into effect within the next fiscal year budget.

In the first year of this policy’s implementation, schools would be able to qualify for Community School Set-Aside funds by demonstrating efforts to hire CSCs. Moving forward indefinitely, school districts should require their hiring and retention of such coordinators because they continuously produce value by supporting students and generating positive ROI. [8] This requirement would only be excused under extenuating circumstances, such as the school being in the process of hiring a new Coordinator. Furthermore, the policy may stay in place as long as New York State Community School Set-Aside funds remain available to high-need

districts. Under this action plan, school district leaders must also share annual evaluations of their CSC with the state, in order to verify the continued efficacy and value of the funding allocation. Contingent on positive outcomes in New York State, the funded mandate approach to promoting investments in CSCs may also be applied to other states that seek to enhance wraparound services in high-need schools.

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Mandating the Adoption of Red Flag Laws in All States

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The United States should implement red flag laws in all states in order to prevent tragedies caused by lack of gun control.

Background

In 2018, Nikolas Cruz killed seventeen students at a high school in Parkland, Florida. [1] Numerous times, the shooter’s parents and teachers reported warning signs to local authorities. Still, no action was taken legally to forbid Cruz’s access to firearms. [1] Four years prior, another incident occurred in Isla Vista, California. [2] Despite the shooter’s parents urging officials to confiscate their son’s guns, no regulation enabling law enforcement to do so had existed. [2]

It should not take a tragedy to compel lawmakers to issue comprehensive gun control. As of 2021, nineteen states have enacted red flag laws. [3] These laws—also known as “extreme risk laws”—encourage family and law officials to report when someone with access to firearms is at risk of hurting themselves or others. [3]

Not only is it crucial that all states legislate these laws, but it is also necessary for communities to be aware that such laws exist. In California, as many as two thirds of residents are unaware of their red flag law.

[4] Nonetheless, coupled with support from two-thirds of Republicans and sixty percent of gun owners, red flag laws have also proven to be effective. [5] Colorado, for example, witnessed a fourteen percent drop in firearm suicide, and Indiana’s red flag law prevented “one suicide for every 10 gun removals.” [2, 7] Nearly one hundred percent of perpetrators display dangerous behavior, indicating that it is imperative for all states to enact these laws when the warning signs are clear. [6]

Policy Idea

To prevent the aforementioned tragedies, the national government must pass a blanket extreme risk law across *all* states, whereby citizens can report when an individual is at risk of harming themselves or others with a firearm. Given that some states may differ in terms of gun laws and enforcement capacity, it is crucial that this measure involve local officials and law enforcement to refine training initiatives for their specific communities, as well as education regarding

warning signs and how citizens should most effectively report these risks.

Policy Analysis

Crucial to the establishment of red flag laws in all fifty states is broad-based support. Currently, seventy-seven percent of families support family-initiated extreme risk laws, while even far-right politicians—including former President Donald Trump—support such provisions. [5]

However, such a wide reform must address concerns surrounding infringements on citizens’ second amendment rights. To sustain support among gun owners and Republicans, the policy should include steps that lead to the first legal gun confiscation and that empower citizens themselves. For instance, California’s red flag law is one of the most sophisticated in allowing family members to directly petition courts to have firearms confiscated from relatives. [8]

Though the effectiveness of red flag laws is clear, a lack of public knowledge undermines their implementation. Federal

lawmakers should increase public knowledge around these bills, including informing residents about red flag laws by operators who help receive 911 calls, or by guiding citizens in-person after reported threats, specifically with the process of filing petitions. [8]

Another low-cost initiative could be to launch virtual programs that assist citizens in identifying and reporting threatening behaviors. Following New York’s passing of its Extreme Risk law in 2019, citizens could begin seeking information warning signs—such as homicidal and suicidal threats online—via a website or call center. [2] Additionally, federal lawmakers could provide grants to organizations that hold meetings nationwide, in order to educate communities on their state’s red flag laws. [8]

Talking Points

- All states must enact laws that protect families from potential shootings or suicides, particularly as a result of seeing warning signs of gun violence.
- To sustain support among gun owners and Republicans, this policy should include steps that locally empower citizens and

legally confiscate guns. [2]

- The effectiveness of red flag laws relies on how informed law enforcement are, as well as how informed the public is for their appropriate usage. [8]

Key Facts

- Red flag laws are supported by two-thirds of Republicans and sixty percent of gun owners. [6]
- Colorado witnessed a fourteen percent drop in firearm suicide, while Indiana’s red flag law prevented “one suicide for every 10 gun removals.” [2, 7]
- In California, two thirds of residents are unaware of their red flag law, which is why it is so important that the legislation carry funding and measures to encourage widespread education efforts. [4]

Next Steps

While nineteen states have adopted red flag laws, the case in California illustrates why legislation needs to incorporate cohesive steps that law enforcement and state officials can take to ensure the public’s adequate receipt of information relating to red flag laws. As

such, federal funding should be used to craft some form of a database that tracks how effective these laws are, while also serving as incentive for states to properly enforce them.

Locally, law enforcement and city officials should be primarily responsible for outreach and education. These initiatives could include town hall meetings, informative websites, and social media pages that consistently update the community on how to use red flag laws.

At the federal level, lawmakers should equip these bills with some degree of federal funding. Given that the outreach would largely be conducted by local officials themselves, it is important to compensate for additional time commitment and transaction costs.

Action Plan Snapshot

While these bills do receive exceptional support, both from political parties and from the public, support may not directly encourage immediate action. [5] Following mass shootings, non-profit organizations supporting anti-gun regulation are typically quick to stall the enactment and enforcement of red flag laws. [8] Therefore, the first step in initiating red flag bills for all fifty states must include nonprofits and lobbying

groups that support gun regulation. Such support would encourage legislators to act to prevent other tragedies, as well as to serve as a check against reactionary policies—particularly if any official against gun regulation becomes elected into office.

Following legislation of the red flag laws comes their enforcement. Some states would already have significantly more experience in ensuring that these laws are properly executed. Therefore, these states' specific measures should serve as an example for others that have yet to enact red flag laws.

Lastly, coupled with outreach via law enforcement and local officials, there should be educational programs conducted on school campuses. It is quite rare that school shootings are perpetrated by those not involved with the school community. [9] Additionally, warning signs displayed by a potential perpetrator are more likely to be noticed by students, given that they engage with these cues on a day-to-day basis. Consequently, educational programs centered around red flag laws would need to include students in their overall enforcement: through in-person assemblies and social media pages, federal

officials could conduct educational programs through the nation's public schools, in order to ensure that students know how to protect themselves and others. Media communication plans should therefore not only include school administrative officials, parents, and teachers, but they should also include students interested in partaking in the broader national movement to end gun violence.

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Providing a \$15 Minimum Wage to Student Workers in U.S. Public Universities

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Public universities in the United States should be required to provide student workers with a \$15 minimum wage to close educational achievement gaps associated with race and socioeconomic status. By mandating a livable minimum wage through a reallocation of state tax, students would be guaranteed greater accessibility and equality in their education.

Background

The federal minimum wage was most recently set to \$7.25 in 2009—a figure that has not been adjusted in over a decade, despite changes in costs of living and inflation. [1] As a result, in 2012, a national movement called “Fight for 15” spread across the nation, specifically after a group of fast-food workers struck for a higher minimum wage. [2] The movement advocated for the minimum wage to be bolstered to \$15, an amount that would have the power to remove 900,000 people from poverty. [3] Furthermore, it is estimated that 70% of full-time undergraduate students are employed in the United States and, as of 2019, student loan debt in the United States exceeded \$1.6 trillion, which is among the highest internationally. [4, 11]

The completion of higher education has stark racial disparities in college students of color, especially among Black and Hispanic students, who are less likely

to attend four-year colleges due to financial limitations. [5] These limitations are also correlated with lower graduation rates, with many academic achievement gaps being driven by poverty due to excess time spent working to afford the cost of education. [5] FAFSA filing rates are also the highest among students of color, especially Black students (84.4%). [6] With many institutions (including the State University of New York system) requiring students that qualify for financial aid to complete federal work-study programs, it is imperative that NYS provide livable wages to students, particularly those of color who are disproportionately affected by poverty. [7]

Policy Idea

Public universities should reallocate 10% of their state-subsidized funding to increase the campus student minimum wage to \$15. University payroll offices would enforce the increased \$15 minimum

wage and restructure their Federal Work-Study allocation systems.

Policy Analysis

There have already been widespread criticisms over student wages, especially in regard to how undergraduate institutions distribute Federal Work-Study funds. [8] In 2018, higher learning institutions received a total of \$1.068 trillion in revenue, with \$149 billion coming from federal funding. [9] Furthermore, most college students view a \$15 minimum wage positively, stating that it would improve standards of living (67%), increase financial freedom (56%), and make student loans easier to pay off (50%). [10] By raising the student minimum wage, higher learning institutions would reduce burdens experienced by low-income students on campus and would improve their educational experience.

Nationally, the necessity of a \$15 minimum wage has been

acknowledged, with bills such as the 2019 House of Representatives Raise the Minimum Wage Act gaining popular support. [11] Despite backlash regarding the economic effects of raising the minimum wage, a study by Card and Kruger on the fast-food industry in New Jersey and Pennsylvania found no evidence that a rise in the minimum wage reduced employment and, in fact, could increase employment in minimum wage jobs. [12]

Stagnant wages coupled with the rising costs of secondary education leave low-income students struggling to afford the costs of a degree, a fact only exacerbated by the coronavirus pandemic. The \$15 minimum wage policy proposal seeks to prioritize the well-being of students and, by reallocating 10% of their state-subsidized holdings towards wage welfare, the retention rate of low-income and students of color graduates can be increased.

Talking Points

- Public universities should reallocate 10% of their funding from state taxes to increase the campus student minimum wage to \$15.
- Reallocating 10% of state tax holdings

towards wage welfare can increase the retention rate of low-income and student of color graduates. [10]

- Studies have illustrated that raising the minimum wage does not reduce employment and could instead increase employment in minimum wage jobs. [12]

Key Facts

- Federal work-study programs disproportionately employ students of color who are reliant on their wages to pay for their education and living expenses. [7]
- Black and Hispanic students are less likely to attend four-year colleges due to financial limitations. [5]
- FAFSA filing rates are also highest among students of color, especially among Black students (at 84.4%). [6]
- Many institutions, such as the State University of New York system, require students that qualify for financial aid to complete federal Work-Study programs to pay for tuition. [7]

Next Steps

This policy should be enacted by all public higher education institutions to promote social and educational equity among its students, and thus the broader national workforce. Student advocacy has already pressured politicians toward implementing a national \$15 minimum wage, meaning that greater efforts should be made towards mandating that public institutions reallocate their state funding toward student wages. [10] Considering the economic impact of the coronavirus pandemic, it is more pertinent than ever to provide financial assistance to students. In fact, in 2021, a number of public institutions (including the University of Rochester and the University of Kentucky) announced their intentions to raise their campus minimum wage to \$15. [12] The Department of Education should therefore compile a list of public institutions that have not made similar commitments and should begin establishing communicative efforts to advise how to both reallocate their state funding and begin providing a \$15 minimum wage.

Action Plan Snapshot

Organizers should collaborate with representatives from their

State Departments of Education, as well as the U.S. Department of Education, to establish a timeline and framework for raising institutional minimum wages. If necessary, temporary regional committees should be established to advise individual universities on the redistribution of their fiscal budgets, ensuring that no more than 10% of their state and federal subsidies be allocated towards the increased minimum wage. If inherencies are preventing higher education institutions from successfully transitioning to a higher price floor, members of the committee would be in charge of investigating barriers towards budget realignments. In extreme cases, underfunded universities should be prioritized to receive more subsidiaries to achieve a \$15 minimum wage.

The committees should be composed of commissioners from each state's Department of Education, to best assess financial and geographical needs. The committees' ultimate goal would be to ensure that each university can sustainably transition to a \$15 institutional minimum wage, and monthly reports would be filed to record the progress made on the policy proposal; under existing circumstances and

professional estimates, the proposal foresees a timeline of 3 years, reaching completion in 2025. [13]

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Federally Adopting the Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum as an Integral Part of U.S. Public Schools

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The Social-Emotional Learning curriculum must be adopted at the federal level to ensure that school districts foster the development of the “whole child” in education, rather than narrowly assessing academic outcomes.

Background

In 1968, two professors at Yale University’s Child Study Center decided to create a program to bridge the gap between the academic and social-emotional development of students in public schools. Their program, now called the Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Curriculum, would put their ideas of supporting the “whole child” in our nation’s public school system into practice. [1] Upon implementing SEL, they observed an increase in academic performance and a decrease in challenging behaviors among the students of two schools in New Haven, Connecticut. [1] Between the years of 1988 and 1992, they began the New Haven Social Development program in response to an increase of risky adolescent behaviors in the school district, which pioneered the SEL strategies for all K-12 classrooms. [1] Furthermore, in 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional

Learning (CASEL) was formed as a means of ensuring that social-emotional learning became an integral part of preschool through high school education. [1] The SEL curriculum was then officially published in 1997, “Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators.” [14] All students should be exposed to the SEL curriculum to foster their development. However, only 30 states have created regulations and statutes regarding the implementation of SEL, and it has been mandated in only 15 states. [15] Therefore, the SEL Curriculum must be implemented on a national level in order for our nation to uphold the value of supporting the whole child.

Policy Idea

To ensure that the social and emotional development of students is a priority in the U.S. public school system, Congress should pass legislation requiring every school

district across the nation to implement the SEL curriculum, specifically to also comply with the guidelines laid out in “Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators.” As such, each district would be required to make health a required subject for students. School districts must dedicate a portion of the school day to health class for middle school and high school students. Additionally, the life skills curriculum (a part of the SEL program) would be embedded into students’ current health curriculum. The goal of this policy is to help students develop practical abilities that extend beyond the classroom, and these abilities would be measured in an annual survey assessing students’ social-emotional competencies.

Policy Analysis

The SEL program is a means by which school districts can assess and foster their student’s emotional and social well-being beyond academic standings. As an

outcome of the curriculum, students would develop the following life skills: self-management, problem-solving and decision making, and communication skills. Additionally, students would learn how to develop healthy attitudes towards themselves, others, and their tasks. In a study done by CASEL, SEL was shown to have improved outcomes in classroom behavior, stress management, and academic gains. [13] In the appendices of "Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators," a comprehensive curriculum and implementation guidelines for educators is provided. [14] For example, the fifth guideline states, "SEL programs engage students as active partners in creating a classroom atmosphere where caring, responsibility, trust, and commitment to learning can thrive." [14] The book also provides measures that schools can use in an annual assessment to evaluate the effectiveness of the program, as well as growth of students in the above areas. [14] Using this evaluation method would allow schools to effectively assess whether SEL is reaching its goal of promoting the healthy development of all students.

Currently, all government expenditures on public elementary and secondary schools total to

\$762 billion, which amounts to \$14,891 per pupil. [4] In order for school districts to come into compliance with national standards, costs would increase by \$15 per elementary school student, \$18 per middle school student, and \$13 per high school student. [5] Currently, schools are spending \$640 million on SEL per year; however, total government expenditures on public education must expand to approximately \$846.4 million per year. [5] Given that total government spending on education fluctuates by billions of dollars each year, this amount is feasible. [17]

Talking Points

- Over 90% of educators across the U.S. support Social-Emotional Learning methods being implemented into their classrooms and embrace their role as "whole-child" educators. [12]
- A 2017 meta-analysis from CASEL shows that investment in SEL has led to improved classroom behavior, better stress management, and 13 percent gains in academics. [13]
- Implementing the Social-Emotional Learning Program is economically feasible

and the plan for implementation on the part of teachers is laid out in the book, "Promoting Social-Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators." [14]

Key Facts

- The Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum, put forth by CASEL, is an evidence-based approach to implementing SEL in schools. [1]
- The book "Promoting Social Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators" lays out 39 guidelines for implementation, as well as strategies for assessment. [14]
- Implementation of Social-Emotional Learning into school districts has been mandated in just 15 states, and 30 states have regulations and statutes regarding SEL. [15]

Next Steps

Based on the extensive benefits this program is proven to have for students, this policy should be implemented. On a federal level, the educational curriculum for all U.S. public schools would need to extend beyond academic requirements to foster the

needs of the “whole child.” Therefore, the federal government would need to mandate an expansion of the current educational curriculum for public schools to encompass the requirements set forth in the Social-Emotional Learning curriculum. Furthermore, the federal government should pass a law mandating that every school district in the U.S. implement these guidelines for the Social-Emotional Learning curriculum for students K-12.

Action Plan Snapshot

Recently, there has been ample support in Congress related to the aforementioned efforts. In April 2022, for example, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro passed a bipartisan bill providing \$82 million to implement SEL. [16] In order to complete the implementation of the SEL program into all schools, the President of the United States would need to sign a bill that expands the overall education spending budget to \$846.4 million, in order to fund the whole-scale adoption of SEL. [5] School districts across the U.S. would implement the curriculum based on the guidelines laid out in “Promoting Social and Emotional Learning: Guidelines for Educators.” [14] The publication has an

array of guidelines that orchestrate a plan for educators to implement this program that would serve to meet the developmental needs of students at each grade level. [14] Educators must start with the first guideline, which states that school districts need to adopt a plan for implementing the curriculum into their classroom environments. [14] Additionally, teachers’ timelines for covering their coursework and classroom material should be adjusted to account for the additional SEL lessons that must be completed by the end of the school year at each grade level. The federal government would mandate that each school district across the United States reconfigure their typical school day to include the lesson plans dedicated solely to SEL. Lastly, schools must assess the efficacy of SEL in promoting healthy child and adolescent development, specifically by conducting annual assessments of student’s knowledge of the curriculum through the evaluation methods laid out in the book. It would also require teachers to follow the guidelines set forth by CASEL to adopt appropriate classroom practices that would allow students to achieve the SEL outcomes.

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Adding a Question Regarding Refugee Status in Select Federal Demographic Surveys

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To coordinate more effective refugee resettlement policy and provide more accurate data on refugees residing in the U.S., the Census Bureau should incorporate a question on refugee status in some demographic surveys.

Background

In March 2022, the U.S. announced that it would welcome up to 100,000 people fleeing Ukraine due to the Russian invasion in February. [9] The U.S. intends to use a variety of legal mechanisms to receive Ukrainians, including the refugee admission process. [9]

Under U.S. law, a refugee is a person outside of the country of their nationality who cannot return to their home country due to “a well-founded fear of persecution.” [1] Unlike asylum seekers, refugees apply for refugee status from outside of the U.S. [3, 17]

Despite having admitted over 3.1 million refugees since 1975, the U.S. has not made a systematic effort to gather and publicize demographic data from this growing category of immigrants. [18] Major federal data sources, such as the Current Population Survey (CPS) or the American Community Survey (ACS), do not

identify immigrants by refugee status. [7]

As complex methods are required to guess likely refugees from survey responses, scholarship on refugee well-being after their resettlement is scant. [5] This translates into fewer evidence-based solutions for pressing issues, such as the lower educational attainment of refugees who arrived in their high school years, or the fact that 62% of refugees are Limited English Proficient. [5, 6] In fact, education, and language ability account for up to 60% of the labor earnings difference between refugees and natives. [7] This result contributes to refugees’ lower median household income of \$42,000, which is \$8000 less than that of natives. [6]

Policy Idea

The Census Bureau should introduce a question on respondents’ refugee status in the ACS and the CPS. Specifically, the question should ask if the respondent has ever attained a referral to the US Refugee

Admissions Program. [2]

This would enable the collection of broad-based socioeconomic data from refugees, with education, income, and employment being particular subjects of interest. The data would inform policy recommendations for reforms in the U.S.’s refugee integration process.

Policy Analysis

There is currently no Census-administered federal demographic survey that separates refugees into a category. [13] While there are studies that have analyzed ACS data to identify likely refugees, they are not up to date: the newest studies were authored between 2015 and 2017, using data dating to 2014 at the latest. [5, 6, 7] As 290,000 refugees have been resettled in the U.S. since 2014, their needs and challenges may have changed. [12]

The new refugee status question would enable more research on refugees’ resettlement process. The appearance of regularly

updated official refugee data would simplify the methodology of studies that analyze how refugees fare after resettlement in the U.S., and it would provide more accurate data. In turn, these studies would highlight existing issues facing the refugee community to the public and policymakers, thereby motivating policy solutions.

Potential critics of this measure may point to concerns that asking a question related to the respondent's legal immigration status may lower response rates. However, a question that would only be answered affirmatively by seven percent of foreign-born people is unlikely to affect how other immigrants would answer. [10, 17] Furthermore, unlike the Census, the ACS and the CPS already include a question on citizenship status, whose potential impact on non-response far outweighs any decrease in responses that may be caused by the refugee status question. [4]

Talking Points

- The lack of federal data on refugees stifles quantitative analyses of how refugees fare after their resettlement in the U.S. [7]
- The simple addition of a refugee status

question in some federal surveys (the ACS and CPS) would ease access to up-to-date data on refugees' resettlement process in the U.S.

- By enabling more research into refugees' resettlement process in the U.S., legislators could funnel more attention and resources towards improving the lives of this growing group of Americans.

Key Facts

- Since 1975, the U.S. has admitted at least 3.1 million refugees. [18]
- Refugee status is not identified in either the annual American Community Survey or the monthly Current Population Survey. [7]
- According to an analysis of 2009-2011 ACS data, the median household income of refugees was roughly \$42,000—\$8,000 less than natives' median income. [6]
- Both education and language ability account for as much as 60% of the difference in the labor earnings between refugees and natives. [7]

Next Steps

The ACS and CPS are administered by the United States Census Bureau (USCB). [8, 16] While legislation is not required to change USCB policies, outside effort from demographers and immigration researchers is needed for the Bureau to define non-American-born demographics beyond the simple categorization of "foreign born." Therefore, researchers could include this measure in a list of recommendations on survey design to the USCB. These recommendations could also include additional steps that the Bureau can take to improve data on immigrant groups without explicitly asking for their legal status. In addition, the addition of this question to the surveys would not introduce any new costs outside of the resources needed to design the question.

Action Plan Snapshot

First, a group consisting of researchers advocating for more accurate quantitative data on immigrants and refugee resettlement agencies should be assembled. These researchers should collectively draft a memo detailing their concerns over the lack of detail in the ACS and CPS's categorization of

immigrant groups. They should also provide recommendations regarding steps to alleviate these issues, including refugee status questions that could be used. The letter should then be sent to the Census Bureau's director Robert L. Santos, who has previously expressed support for gathering new types of data in USCB surveys. [11, 14]

At the same time, the Census Bureau Newsroom should also announce the new addition of a refugee status question in the ACS and CPS surveys and clarify its purpose. While USCB treatment of survey data already makes it impossible to personally identify respondents from their responses, the announcement should further stress that the Bureau and its employees are prohibited by law from disclosing any identifying information of individuals and businesses. [15]

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Bunches of Boroughs: Consolidating Municipalities in Allegheny County

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Allegheny County must merge its 130 townships, boroughs, and cities into larger municipal entities, to both save the amount that taxpayers spend and alleviate the effects of poverty.

Background

Allegheny County, PA has 130 constituent municipalities, 46 of which have less than 1 square mile and 14 of which have fewer than 1000 residents. [1] The smallest, Haysville, has 74 inhabitants. [2] These municipalities formed from the different ethnic and racial groups settling in the area—neighborhoods with names like ‘Polish Hill’ hint at past demographic structure. [3] Through the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Germans, Croatians, Italians, African Americans, Ashkenazi Jews and other groups each settled communities. [3] Some formed for economic reasons, whether it be providing supplies to farms or providing workers to factories. [1] These ethnic and economic ties have since largely dissipated. [3]

No matter their size, each municipality has first responders, utility bills, health insurance costs, and infrastructure for which to pay. [4] Such expenses (especially pensions) are costly. A 2016 Brookings

report estimates that local and state governments have \$3 trillion of unfunded pension liabilities. [5] On average, local governments must reduce expenditures by 5.7% to prevent the aforementioned liabilities from rising. [5] Furthermore, a 2015 Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) study comparing metropolitan areas concluded that doubling the number of municipalities per 100,000 residents decreased regional labor productivity by 5-6%. [6]

Little municipal amalgamation presently exists. [7] Some municipalities utilize Pittsburgh emergency services, neighboring municipalities’ public works departments, or Pennsylvania State Police. [7] Aside from these paltry measures, the 130 municipalities are standalone structures.

Policy Idea

Elected officials should invoke Pennsylvania Title 53, Section II, Chapter 7, which allows municipal merging, provided that local

governments consent. [8] In particular, the approximately twenty economically depressed municipalities surrounding the Monongahela River’s coast (an area colloquially called “Mon Valley”) should merge into one entity. Previous advocates have called this proposed entity ‘River City.’ [15] This hypothetical new municipality would be comparable in size to nearby Penn Hills Township or Plum Borough and would have a population of around 120,000 people. [7] The policy would simultaneously improve the local economy and governmental efficiency by eliminating unneeded bureaucracy.

Policy Analysis

Merging Mon Valley achieves many material benefits. The previously cited OECD study suggests that doubling the population base of a city increases productivity by 2-5%, thus increasing GDP. [5] The cities of Clairton and Duquesne, components of the prospective River City, have poverty rates of 19.5% and

34.7%, respectively. [2] Bolstering productivity reduces poverty and provides a tax base within these cities; both city governments are considered financially distressed by the state. [9] Optimizing property and local services tax administration further saves governments 19-27% on cost. [10] In fact, 93.9% of North Carolinian County managers and administrators saw that consolidating municipalities' public services with each other had a positive financial impact. [11] Additionally, a multi-year study examining Montreal's amalgamation with nearby towns and subsequent de-amalgamation showed that income inequality between municipalities decreases post-merger, and it increases if municipalities once again separate. [12] Post-merger, new governments in state progressive tax systems to fund public services, which levy higher taxes on higher-income individuals. [12] River City would increase equity in Mon Valley.

Some suggest that Allegheny County should absorb all its municipalities into one consolidated city-county, but this approach is not desirable. [13] The Philadelphia city-county merger did not produce the anticipated economics of scale and lowered suburban quality of life. [13]

Furthermore, egregiously large municipalities have a detrimental effect on individual citizens' political power and relevance in their local governments. [14] Local governments are institutions of the local community and ensuring that individual community members can hold local leaders accountable is valuable.

Talking Points

- Making property and local services tax administration more efficient through merging could save governments 19-27% on cost. [10]
- Bolstering productivity via consolidation reduces poverty and provides a tax base for indebted cities in Mon Valley. [9]
- Consolidating municipalities has a positive financial impact through sharing public services, and the resulting municipality has less income inequality in it than the municipalities did before. [11, 12]
- A merger into a consolidated city-county is not desirable because it would not produce the anticipated economics

of scale, and it would instead diminish individual citizens' political relevance in local government. [13, 14]

Key Facts

- Forty-six of Allegheny County's municipalities have less than one square mile of land, and fourteen have fewer than 1,000 residents. [1]
- The OECD reports that doubling the number of municipalities per one hundred thousand residents in one single metropolitan area decreases regional labor productivity by 5 to 6%. [6]
- Municipalities opting to use Pittsburgh emergency services or Pennsylvania State Police, plus the county government handling some tax collection work, represent the only present 'consolidation' measures that currently exist among Allegheny County's 130 townships, boroughs, and cities. [7]

Next Steps

Mon Valley municipalities should proceed with this policy proposal to create one municipality. As this area has an inordinate number of municipalities and arguably experiences the most intense economic malaise in the county, it is appropriate to push for consolidation here to prove its effectiveness to other municipalities in Allegheny County to convince them to merge. [2] Research shows that tiny municipal entities are more likely to accept merger proposals from larger entities. [16] As such, the highly populated City of McKeesport and large West Mifflin Borough should spearhead the initiative because of their large populations. [2]

Action Plan Snapshot

There is very little chance that this policy proposal would be put into action, for a myriad of reasons. For one, creating River City would entail as many as hundreds of local politicians essentially agreeing to eliminate their jobs. These politicians would be receiving pressure from township/borough employees and outside organizations such as police unions—knowing that merging would mean downsizing, layoffs, and forced retirements. Additionally, locals’ attachment to their little

communities would block River City. Locals’ attachment stops smaller mergers presently: a recent push to have Pittsburgh annex Wilksburg has been ferociously fought by Wilksburg residents and politicians alike, despite the obvious financial boons annexation might provide. [17] Pittsburgh’s park services, youth programs, and Urban Redevelopment Authority could easily serve Wilksburg’s 15,000 denizens. [2] Plus, Wilksburg’s property tax rates are two times higher than Pittsburgh’s. [17] These facts were ignored; County Executive Rich Fitzgerald and City Controller Michael Lamb were booed by the public, and most Wilksburg borough councilors voted to remain independent of Pittsburgh. [17]

There is some hope, however. Municipal consolidation has happened in the past. For example, Pittsburgh’s North Side used to be the City of Allegheny, and neighborhoods Carrick and Knoxville used to be independent as well. [3] For River City, getting the city councils of McKeesport and West Mifflin on board with merging would be essential. Officials like Rich Fitzgerald should promote the Councils of Governments (CoGs), which are forums of neighboring municipalities.

[18] Many CoGs exist in Allegheny County, including the North Hills Council of Governments, the South Hills Area Council of Governments, and the Quaker Valley Council of Governments. [18] Reaching out to all of these through the Pennsylvania Association of Councils of Governments would help reinforce that municipalities could cooperate with one another, making the idea of merging less unthinkable. [18]

The most important facet to achieving mergers, however, is ensuring locals that their community would be preserved. Civilians around Pittsburgh feel pride in where they grew up, and people fear that this identity would be destroyed if consolidation were to occur. [17] Such concerns are seen in the Wilksburg debate. Community identity does not wither with consolidation: Pittsburgh’s many neighborhoods retain distinct vibes and traditions. [19] Maintaining identity is the key to negotiating a form of local government that allows for local identity and autonomy to flourish while consolidating public services to achieve greater efficiency.

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Establishing an Employment Quota for People with Disabilities in New York

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To address the high unemployment rate of people with disabilities, New York State should pass legislation requiring that public and private sector employers contain 2.5% and 2.2% (respectively) of employees with disabilities.

Background

People with disabilities make up the largest minority group throughout the country (with 50 million people). [1] It is estimated that over 3 million people in New York have a disability, where 1 in 5 people are limited in daily activities due to a chronic health problem or condition. [2] Due to both the natural barriers and discrimination that they face, people with disabilities are severely unemployed. [4] In fact, although individuals with disabilities encompass such a large group of people, they are employed at drastically lower rates than any other minority group. [3]

Specifically, in New York, the employment rate for a person with a disability aged 18 to 64 is 31.2%, compared to 72% for those who do not have a disability. [4] Moreover, 28.6% of people with a disability are impoverished, which is disproportionately higher than the 12.3% of people

without a disability who are impoverished. [4]

No passing or introduction of legislation in New York has been found, whereby a specific employment quota for people with disabilities has been established. Democrats would likely be more receptive to such a policy, but it appears as though no disability employment quota has ever been proposed in New York.

Policy Idea

To increase the employment of people with disabilities, the state of New York should require public sector employers to have 2.5% of their employees be those with disabilities, as well as private sector employers with over 100 employees to have 2.2% of their employees be those with disabilities. If employers do not meet this quota, they should be required to pay \$500 a month for each employee under the quota.

Policy Analysis

This policy seeks to decrease the discrimination and barriers people with disabilities face when searching for employment in New York. By instituting a quota system, the policy seeks to increase the employment rate of people with disabilities in the state of New York.

While an employment quota like this has never been implemented in the U.S., it has been implemented in over 100 countries. [5] Specifically, the quota system has been very successful in Japan, France, and Germany. [5, 6] In the Japanese system, for example, the employment quota was effective in increasing the employment rate of people with disabilities and did not necessarily affect the profit margins of the companies impacted by the quota. [6] In France, 79% of private sector employers have hired at least one person with a disability, which has increased the employment rate of

individuals with disabilities overall. [5] Finally, a 2005-2013 study in Germany showed that the quota system was also successful in increasing employment levels of people with disabilities, creating a 10-percentage point increase in the employment of people with severe disabilities. [5]

Because New York has a Democratic supermajority in its legislative branches and a Democratic governor, it is likely that this policy would be passed. [7] Such a policy has never been tried in New York and is very similar to affirmative action policies, which is a politically contentious issue. While this policy might seem unfeasible due to its similarity to affirmative action policies, Professor Saleh in the School of Industrial and Labor Relations at Cornell suggests it would withstand constitutional scrutiny due to the Court's interpretation of past disability policies and its difference from affirmative action policies.

Talking Points

- Over 100 countries have implemented a quota system for employing people with disabilities. [5]
- Japan's quota system saw little effects on the profit margins of the companies

impacted by the quota. [6]

- France's quota system had 79% of private sector employers employ at least one person with a disability and saw an increase in the employment of individuals with disabilities overall. [5]
- Germany's quota system had the employment rate of people with severe disabilities increase by 10% between 2005-2013. [5]

Key Facts

- People with disabilities are extremely under-employed due to discrimination and natural barriers. [4]
- 3 million in New York have a disability, which is defined as a limitation in daily activities due to a chronic health problem or condition. [2]
- The unemployment rate for people with a disability is 40.8 percentage points less than for people without a disability. [4]
- The rate of people living in poverty for people with a

disability is 16.3 percentage points higher than those who do not have a disability. [4]

Next Steps

To enforce these requirements, employers would be required to pay \$500 a month for each employee they are under the quota. Due to the time it takes to hire, train, and become acclimated to the new rules, employers would have the next three years to meet the quota.

Action Plan Snapshot

Due to the political infeasibility of this policy, mass grassroots organizing is necessary to pass this policy in the New York state government. More specifically, a coalition of organizations that work to improve the lives of disabled people should form to help advocate and lobby for this policy. Organizations such as Disability Rights New York and the Center for Independence of the Disabled New York, which both advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, could be part of this coalition. [8, 9] These organizations should also meet with Assembly Members and State Senators to find someone to introduce the legislation. Then, they could continue to meet with

legislators to find other subsequent sponsors.

After the bill is introduced to either the Economic Development, Job Creation, Commerce and Industry Committee or the People with Disabilities Committee, the coalition would need to meet with the stakeholders and committee chair to advocate for passing the bill through committee. In addition to meeting with legislators, the coalition should then coordinate together to plan rallies, phone bank, create petitions, text bank, start a letter writing campaign, and set up lobby days at the state capitol to lobby the state of New York to pass the law. Assemblymember Chris Burdick, the Chair Subcommittee on Employment Opportunities for People with Disabilities, or Assemblymember Thomas J. Abinanti, the Chair of the Committee of People with Disabilities, could possibly be leaders who could spearhead this effort. [10]

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Reducing the Economic Consequences of Misdemeanors through a Rehabilitative Diversion Program in New York

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The cascading financial ramifications of a misdemeanor record burden millions of New Yorkers. Rather than improperly relying on an expensive, punitive system that leads low-level offenders to re-offend, a rehabilitative diversion program would mitigate recidivism and financial hardship without requiring a judicial overhaul.

Background

New York, a state where imprisonment has gradually fallen, still operates a massive criminal industrial complex. The largest criminal contingent is misdemeanor convictions for minor law infractions, including loitering, trespassing, and low-level shoplifting or drug charges. [1, 2] In 2021, New York City criminal courts alone processed 228,632 misdemeanor arrests, of which 30,000 led to convictions. [2] These convicts are jailed for public safety, while their current health rehabilitative needs and future consequences of their incarceration are also ignored. While less severe than a felony, misdemeanor convictions still reduce lifetime earnings by 16% annually, totaling \$100,000 in a lifetime. [3] In contrast to prosecuted misdemeanor defendants, non-prosecuted defendants are 58% less likely to reoffend within two years. [7] Therefore, criminal justice system reform must thoughtfully consider how

negative labor market and recidivism effects from criminalized populations harm public safety.

Rather than prosecute these low-level “crimes of poverty,” New York should prioritize individuals’ health and economic recovery through pre-trial diversion. [3] Diversion programs offer personalized intervention measures for which misdemeanor suspects can complete to avoid prosecution. In contrast to the broad punitive standards of criminal charges, diversion tailors the justice system towards the complex needs of its community. [4] In New York, where Black populations alone account for 35% of misdemeanor convictions, mitigating the consequences of minor criminal sanctions is a necessary step to reduce pervasive criminal justice inequities. [3, 5] Though the recently signed Less is More Act makes significant improvements by restricting re-incarceration for technical parole violations, New York

must go further to avoid incarceration beforehand. [6]

Policy Idea

New York should institute pre-trial diversion programs as the primary criminal resolution for most misdemeanor charges while constraining court proceedings. Regional district attorneys would agree to forgo prosecution if defendants fulfill their rehabilitative requirements enforced by probation officers. These supportive programs would include drug recovery, education, physical therapy, healthcare, and mental health team counseling. Corrective services would be personalized to address individuals’ root health causes. Operational funding should be locally funded and designed to meet community needs. For timely labor market reintegration, New York would also automatically seal misdemeanor charges from public record after one year.

Policy Analysis

Focusing on the criminal justice process, various controlled studies have established better future economic, health, and behavioral outcomes for misdemeanor defendants for whom prosecution was abstained. [7] In a Massachusetts study investigating nonviolent misdemeanor cases, The National Bureau of Economic Research found that forgoing misdemeanor prosecution substantially reduced subsequent criminal infraction with the largest effect for first-time defendants. [7] The study further found that a new policy presuming non-prosecution of these low-level offenses similarly decreased recidivism. [7] Since misdemeanor cases comprise over 80% of charges processed countrywide, there are likely significant social benefits to capture from the community improvement and justice system burden relief of non-prosecution. [7]

Though pre-trial diversion is a relatively unexplored topic, controlled trials comparing rehabilitation participants with court defendants have demonstrated the advantages of restorative justice. [8, 9] For instance, a controlled experiment comparison of

first-time felony defendants in Texas documented significant behavioral benefits of diversion, including a 48% decline in recidivism and 53% rise in employment. [8] More specifically, young Black men with prior misdemeanors, the leading group for recidivism risk, benefitted the most from corrections services and evading criminal stigma. [8] A 1978 evaluation in Washington found that its pre-trial diversion program for first-time felony offenders saved \$1620 annually by circumventing expensive court and prison costs. [9] Lastly, NYC-based diversion program Project Reset provides a convincing precedent. [10] Under Project Reset, multiple borough District Attorneys forwent prosecuting certain misdemeanor offenses, conditional upon fulfillment of two community-based program sessions. [10] 98% of participants completed the programs, amounting to 4000 who avoided court proceedings. [10] This group was four times less likely than prosecuted defendants to be re-arrested within a year. [10] Though the social benefits greatly outweighed its cheap cost—\$710,000 in the Bronx, for example—Project Reset lost its funding in October 2020. [10]

Talking Points

- Criminalizing minor misconduct undermines public safety, due to the negative consequences of incarceration on recidivism rates. [3, 7] Furthermore, restorative justice strengthens public safety, due to the social welfare benefits of rehabilitation. [7]
- Most misdemeanors are for shoplifting, drug possession, loitering, which are predominantly driven by the impoverishment and health problems worsened via court fees and jail sentences. [2, 8]
- Diversion and record sealing evade the stigma of a criminal record, which perpetuates negative labor market and behavioral effects through employer discrimination and personal demotivation. [8]
- Diversion is a cheaper option than court proceedings because operating the judicial system and industrial prison complex are significantly more expensive compared

to corrections programs. [9]

Key Facts

- A misdemeanor conviction reduces lifetime earnings by 16% annually, totalling nearly \$100,000 in a lifetime. [3]
- In 2021, New York City criminal courts processed 228,632 misdemeanor arrests, most of which were non-violent. [2] 30% were drug charges while 35% of offenses were “other” charges including turnstile evasion, loitering, and prostitution. [2]
- Nonprosecuted misdemeanor defendants are 58% less likely to be issued a new criminal complaint within two years post-arraignment than are prosecuted defendants. [7]

Next Steps

Community diversion programs would be implemented locally and be run by borough district attorneys. Though all programs would require certain restitution and community service requirements, the education and health rehabilitation needs would be partly

personalized based on participants’ struggles and criminal activity. Diversion would also differ based on defendant age, with younger defendants likely receiving more educational and developmental assistance than older ones. Once instituted, first-time misdemeanor offenders would be sentenced with an individualized diversion program rather than a formal court processing. Participants would be frequently monitored but treated with some leniency for errors, with the understanding that rehabilitation is an arduous process. Therefore, only a very small percentage would fail their programs to be sent to legal proceedings. Decreased convictions would relieve law enforcement duties, allowing New York to easily transfer its jail staff and probation officers to diversion monitoring. New York City DAs would also dismiss charges upon successful completion, followed by sealing them one year later.

Action Plan Snapshot

One year is a sufficient timeframe for New York City to begin its general diversion system. First, legislators must consult with attorneys, law enforcement, and criminal justice experts to draft a broad policy. Next, each borough’s leadership

would discuss with legislators about how best to structure their borough-wide process for managing the programs. Once the law is passed, NYC would allocate staff and planners to design several baseline programs, including those for mental health, education, and drug treatment. In addition, policy experts and community leaders would play a role in designing the more specific program details based upon the overarching needs and struggles of their areas. It is crucial that the legal setup prohibit any legal prerequisites, such as pleading guilty or filing court documents, merely for the diversion program. Otherwise, attorneys and law enforcement could abuse defendants by forcing them to plead guilty, followed by sending them to court proceedings after waiving their diversion. With a Democratic legislative trifecta in New York and a rather progressive New York City Council already focused on criminal justice reform, this policy is very politically feasible. Additionally, previous independent diversion programs in the state provide precedent for a more widely implemented system.

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Releasing Funds to Raise the Standard of Education in Colorado

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The egregious disparity between economic growth and education funding in Colorado is explained by the state's hallmark budget control, the Taxpayer's Bill of Rights (TABOR). [1] An amendment to TABOR granting an educational exception would raise the quality of schooling.

Background

In 1992, Colorado residents approved an amendment to Article X of the Colorado Constitution called the Taxpayer Bill of Rights (TABOR). [7] Under TABOR, state and local governments cannot raise taxes or change fiscal policy without direct voter approval, which is typically achieved through ballot initiatives every November. [1] Since its inception, few referendums have loosened spending restrictions, including the requirement that tax revenue in excess of the TABOR spending cap would have to be directly returned to taxpayers. [1] However, it has remained the most significant piece of tax policy in the state for the past 30 years. [7] Through TABOR, about \$2 billion has been returned to taxpayers since 1992. [1] Over the past thirteen years, \$10 billion has been legally allocated to education, only to be reallocated. [7] Perhaps by consequence, teachers are thrice as likely to work multiple jobs compared to

similarly educated professionals. [2]

Unfortunately, TABOR has inflicted tremendous harm on Colorado's education system. [7] The state ranks 49th out of 50 in the nation for teacher pay (despite coming in fifth for economic growth), and about two-thirds of teachers hope to leave the industry in the near future. [2] Additionally, only 1% of public-school teachers feel valued by state leaders. [2] Although the state's Democratic majority prioritizes education funding, it cannot act because fiscal policy is TABOR-controlled. [7]

Policy Idea

Through voter approval, the state government should add a TABOR amendment that provides a *carte blanche* exception for education funding. This policy would allow more discretionary fiscal policy to meet the challenge of underfunded public schools and low teacher pay, both of which

contribute to talent shortages and retention failure. [5] Releasing tax revenue from TABOR statutes would allow most Colorado politicians that support more education funding to enact much-needed legislation. The amendment (rather than a repeal) would preserve the bipartisan and centrist values inherent to TABOR.

Policy Analysis

The most salient effect of constrained funding is abysmal salaries. [7] There is little incentive for debt-laden college graduates to work in public schools for a low wage that often falls behind the cost of living. Despite their work and sacrifice, few educators feel valued by politicians because of the state of spending. [2] There are also infrastructural issues within the schools that need to be addressed, which could be achieved by an educational amendment to tax law. Further, although citizens do not trust government spending, they would be assured by the amendment's education-

specific quality. A historical objection to weakening TABOR is conservative, rural districts. [7] However, in this case, these districts would have the most to gain and would be more predisposed to supporting the measure.

An amendment would also allow revenue, including from the highly profitable marijuana industry, to finally arrive at schools. The amendment would provide a blank check for education spending to allow for flexibility in response to contemporary economic circumstances. These circumstances could be the strong economic growth Colorado experienced since 2000 or the recent economic recession from COVID. Under TABOR, there is almost no allowance for “emergency funds,” and there is no capacity to use those funds to respond to the economic downturn; therefore, teacher salaries freeze, school repairs pause, and cafeterias stop serving breakfast. [7] Public schools cannot maintain quality without a strong workforce and adequate resources for food security, construction, and classroom materials.

Talking Points

- The state of public education funding in Colorado is deplorable. Modifying TABOR would allow

the excess tax revenue to be devoted to insufficiently funded schools.

- More funding would translate to higher pay for teachers, which would lead to better retention rates and attract high-quality candidates. [5]
- An amendment (instead of a total repeal) would ensure governmental accountability but provide an exception for the nonpartisan ideal of a strong education system.
- Rural communities would likely support the measure with sufficient outreach.

Key Facts

- In 2021, two out of three Colorado teachers were reportedly considering a departure from the profession. [2]
- Although Amendment 23 to the Colorado Constitution provides parameters for educational spending, there have been repeated shortfalls adding to \$10 billion since 2009. [7]
- Teachers are three times more likely than other professionals of a comparable

education level to work multiple jobs, and 1% of public-school teachers report feeling valued by state leaders. [2]

Next Steps

The amendment to the Colorado Taxpayer Bill of Rights would emerge through a statewide ballot initiative. The first few steps involve drafting the language and title of the law, both of which would be subject to multiple reviews and revisions by a government committee, after which petitioners could start gathering signatures. Any ballot initiative must gather at least 5% of the number of votes cast in the most recent Colorado Secretary of State election (124,632 through 2022) and, because such is a constitutional amendment, it would further require at least 2% of voters in each of Colorado’s 35 senate districts to add a signature. [4] Then, the initiative would be up to a 55% supermajority vote in the next election cycle. [4]

Action Plan Snapshot

The most important part of realizing the goals of a TABOR amendment is gathering widespread support. There have been many local initiatives to raise educational funding, but most have failed, often because residents do not want a tax increase to further support

schools financially. [1] The TABOR amendment would avoid this pitfall by simply changing the rules for lawmakers, not necessarily by directly raising taxes on constituents. The outreach campaign would have to encompass more than merely the liberal strongholds of the state, including Denver, Boulder, and Fort Collins. These cities require the most resources, but it would be important to improve support across the state. Four-day weeks, such as those implemented in rural districts, strain other expenses such as childcare, meaning that rural districts often feel the pain as much as anywhere else. [7] It would be important for a campaign to stress that taxes would not be raised on people.

With enough emphasis on the crumbling state of public education and immense pressure on the teaching profession, the initiative could pass the legislature. The Democratic majority of state politicians, including Governor Jared

Polis, have signaled strong support for education funding. [6] Therefore, if a TABOR cap were removed, politicians would be able to act on those campaign promises. Although past measures have failed, statewide support for education funding has increased as Colorado has become more liberal. [2] With voter mobilization and support, education would finally get the exception it deserves.

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Investing in Building Inspectors to Protect Worker Safety in New York City

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New York City should strengthen the Department of Buildings by creating community inspectors to hear local concerns related to workplace safety, as well as to investigate claims.

Background

The construction and extraction industry has historically been one of the most dangerous occupations in America, with an average of 13.5 fatal work injuries per 100,000 workers. [1] While New York has a slightly lower construction worker job fatality rate (11.1 deaths per 100,000 workers), the state and city have shockingly high injury rates. [2] This rate has recently increased at an alarming rate, with three consecutive years of rising fatalities and a stubbornly high number of injuries. [3]

When looking at factors that contribute to dangerous conditions in construction sites, one factor becomes apparent: a direct relationship exists between Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) violations and accidents. [4] The federal Administration, which is tasked with overseeing workplace injuries and deaths, has continuously conducted fewer investigations, even in increasingly dangerous

conditions. [4] However, OSHA is not the only agency that can inspect work sites and issue violations to shut down unsafe workplaces; the New York City Department of Buildings (NYC DOB) is the primary issuer of Stop Work Orders (SWO) on account of labor violations. [5, 6] The lack of NYC DOB safety inspections is well-known, with reports as early as 2002 highlighting widespread failure to comply with simple safety procedures. [7] More recently, NYC DOB's "Zero Tolerance" citywide sweep of construction sites resulted in over 3,600 violations, including 1499 SWOs for the most serious safety violations. [8] With widespread violations occurring concurrent to a marked uptick in construction worker deaths and injuries, the problem facing New York workers boils down to a single overlooked action: enforcement.

Policy Idea

NYC DOB does not have the necessary funding to maintain the investigatory

staff necessary to keep up with the nonstop construction across the city. In FY2022, the NYC DOB had a \$182.1 million budget, including \$154.2 million towards personnel. [9] In addition to its current inspections, the NYC DOB should create 51 new inspector posts for each NYC Council district to receive and investigate complaints, creating additional lines of communication between the public and the NYC DOB. In addition, monetary awards should be given to respondents.

Policy Analysis

The NYC DOB is best prepared to address these problems because of its city-specific knowledge of dangerous contractors, active construction projects, and hazardous conditions in construction trades. Therefore, solutions to the persistent issue of construction worker deaths and injuries should be redirected to the NYC DOB.

NYC DOB investigation policies are partly successful, with many

of the most unsafe sites being shut down and given monetary penalties for egregious violations. [8] However, this is not enough, as violations still run rampant across the city [3]. As a result, a new, concurrent approach is needed to end unnecessary jobsite risks.

Relying on community member complaints is not new for NYC. In fact, 311 receives over 42 million complaints per year, including over 700 complaints to NYC DOB and 3200 complaints to NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development. [8] However, relying on 311 constitutes a reactive rather than proactive approach. NYC DOB needs to rely on proactive enforcement through community-based representatives in each of the 51 NYC Council districts (approximately 165,000 residents per district). With additional community-based representatives, NYC DOB could adopt community outreach policies similar to those tried by the New York City Police Department, specifically through community policing—namely, communicating with community members, hearing common complaints, and restoring relations with communities who previously have not reported (such as undocumented construction

workers). [11] With an average salary of \$80,000 per inspector, this program would cost north of \$408,000, which is feasible in the NYC DOB budget. [9]

Talking Points

- Creating one community NYC DOB inspector per NYC Council district would allow for new opportunities for communication between construction workers and the agency tasked with overseeing the industry.
- With additional inspectors hearing complaints, New York’s rising construction worker injury rate could be stemmed. [3]
- This policy would cost between \$408,000 and \$612,000, less than half of a percentage of the greater NYC DOB budget. [9]
- Further studies or pilot programs are needed to analyze whether this community-based approach would be effective—like with the NYPD—or a misdirection of efforts and funding.

Key Facts

- New York City construction workers face a workplace death rate of 11.1 per 100,000 workers, which is higher than most other industries and near the national average (13.5 deaths per 100,000 workers). [1, 2]
- The NYC DOB is the principal agency tasked with regulating construction site safety, but has not properly responded to worsening jobsite conditions. [5]
- The \$182.1 million budget for NYC DOB has resulted in an investigator shortage compared to the number of projects across the city, leaving dangerous workplaces for construction workers. [9]

Next Steps

While this policy might benefit jobsite safety across NYC, there have been no studies found linking the number of investigators (or spending on investigatory units) to reductions in violations nor workplace safety. Therefore, while this policy is likely beneficial, there is no way to ensure its success until it is piloted. A smaller pilot program would be optimal, allowing NYC

DOB to collect data on the program's efficiency and to justify further funding. Additionally, investigators would likely need a more substantial budget for community outreach and official agency travel, increasing costs by as much as 50% (totaling \$612,000). [9]

For this policy to take place, it would need passage in the NYC Council, a 51-member unicameral legislature with control over New York City's budgeting, taxation, and many local policies. [12] Once passed by a majority, it would need to be signed into law by NYC Mayor Eric Adams. [13] Once enacted, the NYC DOB would be tasked with establishing and carrying out this program.

Action Plan Snapshot

For New York City, a city where registered Democrats outnumber registered Republicans nearly 9-to-1, policy proposals are only successful if they garner the support of the 46 Democrats in the NYC Council. [14] Therefore, this policy would only be successful with the support of Democratic power players, such as NYC Council Speaker Adrienne Adams, Majority Leader Keith Powers, and Chairwoman of the Committee on Housing and Buildings Pierina Ana

Sanchez. [15] Once a majority vote is obtained in the Council, the policy would need to be signed into law by Democrat Mayor Eric Adams. [13]

This policy is likely to see mass support by pro-worker groups in the construction industry, such as labor unions and worker rights groups. Notable union coalitions, such as the New York City Central Labor Council and the Building and Construction Trades Council of Greater New York could both rally support among the hundreds of thousands of members that they represent in the construction trades.

[16] Additionally, the New York Committee for Occupational Safety & Health advocates for construction worker safety and is a likely ally in supporting this policy. Opposition is likely to come from anti-labor and anti-worker groups, such as the Real Estate Board of New York and Associated Builders and Contractors. [17] However, with the current climate of the Council, this opposition will likely be minimal.

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Reducing Naturalization Test Costs and Increasing Citizenship and Immigration Services Funding in the United States

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Because the United States naturalization test costs too much for many immigrants, the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) should reduce test costs for immigrants working with nonprofit organizations. In addition, Congress should shift more of its funding from U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) to the USCIS.

Background

The United States naturalization fee is \$725. [1] This cost is divided between a \$640 fee for an N-400 form and an \$85 fee for a biometrics appointment. Seniors, active-duty military members, and veterans can apply for fee waivers and reductions. [1] Low-income applicants can also apply for reductions; however, the price still ranges from \$320-\$405. [1] As part of its immigration agenda, the Trump administration attempted to make the naturalization test both more difficult and costly. [2] For example, the administration instructed the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS)—the federal service in charge of the naturalization test—to increase the price from \$725-\$1,170. [3] However, a federal judge in California blocked the cost increase, writing that it “prevented low-income applicants from applying for citizenship.” [4] Experts warn that the steep application fee is a major

barrier for eligible citizens; however, naturalization application costs remain high because the USCIS is funded by these fees. [5, 6] The USCIS requested a \$1.2 billion bailout from Congress but was instead directed to increase premium service fees, forcing the burden onto applicants rather than the federal budget. [7]

Policy Idea

The USCIS would begin partnering with nonprofit organizations—including Citizenshipworks, One Percent of America, or the American Civic Organization—and would create a system that reduces fees for applicants who apply and/or take classes through such nonprofits. The USCIS would reduce the fee for these applicants by 72.4%, making the fee only \$200. [1] Thus, with around 830,600 applications per year, the USCIS would lose \$436,065,000 in revenue. [8] To remedy this lost funding, Congress would reduce Immigrations and Customs

Enforcement (ICE) funding from \$8.3 billion to its 2016 \$6.2 billion level. [9] The \$2.1 billion difference would be appropriated to the USCIS to fund the applicants going through non-profits. To accommodate this change, the President would direct ICE to reduce its number of interior agents and deportation targets to reduce the budget.

Policy Analysis

The USCIS is currently in a funding crisis and is unable to cope with any fee reductions. [17] Therefore, to avoid fee increases, Congress must increase USCIS funding. Taking these funds from ICE would keep the USCIS afloat. In May 2020, the USCIS requested a \$1.2 billion bailout from Congress but was denied. [10] The \$2.1 billion appropriated from ICE would provide the USCIS with ample funding to stay afloat while offering reduced fees. [1, 8] Furthermore, the USCIS could use the increased funds to offer better

civics and English classes in tandem with nonprofit classes.

This proposal accomplishes three goals: reducing the naturalization cost for immigrants, keeping USCIS sufficiently funded, and reducing ICE's interior enforcement while still maintaining exterior border facilities.

By partnering with nonprofit naturalization organizations, the USCIS can reduce naturalization costs for applicants while also equipping applicants with the resources needed to pass the civics and English tests. Many applicants need to take classes to pass the civics and English tests and do this through non-profit organizations. [11] The USCIS already has a database of location-based resource centers that applicants can turn to if they need help studying or completing the naturalization application. [12] The USCIS has to only reduce the application fee for all immigrants who go through one of those non-profits, which would both encourage applicants to utilize non-profit organizations and also provide increased legal support. This proposal also gives applicants above the threshold for official fee waivers a means of having reduced costs. Applicants may be more than 200%

above the poverty line, but if multiple family members are attempting to naturalize, the fees could place the family under significant financial pressure. As such, many families cannot naturalize. [13] Stanford University's study found that lowering the naturalization fee for low-income immigrants who do not currently qualify for fee waiver programs would increase their naturalization rate. [14]

This proposal's impact on ICE would be drastic; however, it would be in line with the current presidential administration's stance on immigration. [15] President Biden already instructed ICE to only target undocumented immigrants who pose a threat to national security, are aggravated felons, or who have recently crossed the border. [15] This proposal reduces funding for internal arrests and deportations rather than border enforcement and security. Furthermore, ICE received drastic funding increases under former President Trump, both through budget increases and also through Trump's national emergency declaration, which enabled him to direct more funding from different federal agencies. [16] Trump used the increased funding to hire more agents and to direct the agency to arrest more

undocumented migrants. [16] Biden would roll all these changes back and return ICE to its 2016 level funding, both to continue with his political goals and to ensure that the federal government would not increase spending, in order to allow the USCIS to give more fee waivers.

Talking Points

- The \$2.1 billion appropriated from ICE would provide exactly what the USCIS needs to stay afloat and begin offering reduced fees. [1, 8]
- This proposal accomplishes three goals: reducing the naturalization cost for immigrants, keeping USCIS funding sufficient to accommodate reduced fees, and reducing ICE's interior enforcement while still maintaining exterior border facilities.
- President Biden already instructed ICE to only target undocumented immigrants who pose a threat to national security, aggravated felons, or those who recently crossed the border. [15]

Key Facts

- Experts claim that the large naturalization application fee is a major barrier for eligible citizens. [5]
- Low-income applicants can also apply for reductions; however, the price still ranges from \$320-\$405. [1]
- The USCIS requested a \$1.2 billion bailout from Congress but was instead directed to increase premium service fees to force the burden onto applicants rather than onto the federal budget. [7]

Next Steps

This policy proposal should not be implemented during the current Congressional term. There are two components to this proposal: funding changes authorized by Congress and instructions given to the USCIS and ICE by the President. President Biden is likely to support a reduction in naturalization applications, since he already canceled the Trump administration's application fee increase. [17] Biden has also already instructed ICE to reduce the number of arrests and deportations made and can do that again. [15] However, it is highly unlikely that Congress would pass this funding change. The Senate is split

evenly between Democrats and Republicans, with Democrats ultimately gaining control through Vice President Kamala Harris's tie-breaking vote. [18] Two Democratic Senators would most likely stand in opposition to this bill: West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin and Arizona Senator Kyrsten Sinema. [19, 21] Joe Manchin has previously advocated for funding increases to ICE in order to combat drug trafficking over the Southern border. [19] Manchin would much rather focus on lowering government spending instead of reallocating it. [20] Sinema represents a border state and thus would not want to reduce ICE funding. [21] She has also voted for bills increasing ICE funding and even sided with Republicans against Democrats to further support ICE. [22] With these two Democratic Senators voting against the funding bill, it would most likely fail in the Senate. In order for this proposal to be implemented, the Democrats must gain a larger majority in the Senate while still retaining control of the House and the Presidency.

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Combating Climate Change with Essential Federal Marijuana Agriculture Reform

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The United States' drug control policy should account for the environmental impacts of drug production by modifying its marijuana cultivation regulations, which would prioritize environmental damages related to pesticides, habitat destruction, and trafficking.

Background

The production of illicit substances, particularly marijuana, has led to water and soil pollution, deforestation, and a high-carbon footprint both domestically and abroad. [1] In the United States, drug prohibition has forced growing operations into increasingly remote environments, disproportionately contributing to the deforestation and degradation of a variety of ecosystems in some national and otherwise preserved forests and ecosystems. [2] Additionally, agrochemical use in marijuana production has become of increasing concern for the environment, with many experts worried about severe soil degradation and pesticide resistance from the high numbers of pesticides used in marijuana production. [2] In California, where 80-90% of the marijuana industry remains underground, over 5445 pounds of fertilizer and 260 pounds of rodenticides are used per year in the

production of marijuana. [3, 4] This production is especially problematic in California, where much of the nation's produce is grown, and pesticide resistance and contamination can have far-reaching impacts on the environment. [6] In addition, one kilogram of consumable marijuana produced in an indoor facility results in an average of 4600 kilograms of carbon dioxide emissions. [4] The negative ecological impacts of drug regulations are compounded by the high profits that smugglers earn from moving drugs into countries with strict laws concerning cultivation, possession, and use. [2] Thus, creating environmentally conscious drug policy is essential to combating climate change.

Policy Idea

The United States federal government should take a multipronged approach to marijuana cultivation regulations to ensure that the environment is protected. This approach should implement decriminalization

measures alongside legal systems of supervised drug crop production. Decriminalizing drugs would lower profits for drug smugglers while ensuring that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) can provide oversight for crop growth. Decriminalization of marijuana—meaning the removal of criminal penalties for possession, sale, and cultivation—alongside agricultural reform is the path forward for sustainable drug policy.

Policy Analysis

Decriminalization would have a myriad of effects on the ways illegal substances are cultivated and transported. Prohibition has forced drug cultivators domestically and abroad to move their growing operations into increasingly remote areas. [2] Traffickers often carve out their routes through biodiverse frontiers and forests, damaging both ecosystems and habitats. [2] EPA supervised growing that regulates location and fertilizer use alongside

decriminalization could greatly reduce the environmental impacts of prohibition. Some policymakers advocate for drug crop eradication, but modern studies find that the destruction of drug fields often contributes more to forest and habitat loss. [2] Furthermore, when drug fields are destroyed, they are often recreated elsewhere, thereby compounding the ecosystem damage. [2] The destruction of drug crops should not be a policy focus, and supervised growing should take precedence over crop eradication.

Bolivia's social control model allows farmers to legally grow illicit substances within a fixed area with heavy governmental involvement. [2] More relaxed policies toward cocaine production have been associated with lower rates of deforestation in Bolivia. [2] These policies ensure that drugs are cultivated without causing extreme damage to protected ecosystems and with less damaging pesticides. [2] Decriminalization in countries like Portugal has also, historically, significantly reduced illegal trafficking, and therefore the environmental damages that come with it. [5] In contrast, the United States' policies, which make drug cultivation and possession almost

entirely illegal, cause sustained environmental damage by enabling heavy pesticide use and ecosystem damage. [2] Federal decriminalization can have great, and often unrecognized, benefits.

Talking Points

- Crop eradication is not a sustainable solution to drug cultivation, as destroyed drug fields compound environmental damage by forcing cultivators to relocate to often increasingly remote locations. [2]
- Bolivia's relaxed approach to drug cultivation has been associated with lower rates of deforestation in agricultural-focused regions, a potential solution to the environmental destruction related to drug cultivation throughout California. [2]
- Decriminalization of drugs in countries like Portugal has been associated with lessened environmental impacts from trafficking routes that often cut through protected land and fragile, isolated ecosystems.

Decriminalization could protect ecosystems damaged by trafficking routes in the United States. [2, 5]

Key Facts

- 80-90% of the marijuana industry in California remains underground while utilizing improper fertilizers and agricultural methods, oftentimes on protected land. [3, 4]
- In California, the marijuana industry uses 5445 pounds of fertilizer and 260 pounds of rodenticides per year, which contributes to pesticide resistance and environmental damage. [3, 4]
- Producing one kilogram of consumable marijuana in an indoor facility results in an average of 4600 kilograms of carbon dioxide emissions. [4]

Next Steps

As marijuana cultivation under current prohibitions is detrimental to the environment, federal decriminalization of possession alongside significant government oversight of marijuana

cultivation should be adopted. Safe cultivation practices would improve the health of America's ecosystems and soils, as well as protect nearby bodies of water and food crops. To implement this policy, the federal government should allow the EPA to actively monitor marijuana cultivation in tandem with implementing policies that decriminalize possession. This approach would prevent environmental issues that arise due to improper cultivation, as well as reduce the environmental impact of underground trafficking. States could also independently form agencies to regulate and provide oversight to marijuana growing operations.

Action Plan Snapshot

Organizations such as the Drug Policy Alliance and Students for Sensible Drug Policy could place pressure on both state and federal lawmakers to pass these policies. [7,8] These organizations have the resources and lobbying ability to influence lawmakers and generally promote the adoption of these policies. Since agricultural reform, especially in regard to drug cultivation, is a niche issue, building public awareness would be a necessity for successfully

passing this policy. Education pertaining to this issue would be highly important, and social media outreach could have a large impact on public perception of the issue. Social media accounts for the Drug Policy Alliance and Students for Sensible Drug Policy could also post pertinent information about these environmental issues and how these policy solutions would promote sustainability. Public health campaigns could also highlight the adverse effects that unregulated fertilizers utilized in drug cultivation may have on both humans and the environment, mobilizing those who may care less about sustainability and more about their personal health. [2]

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Reintroducing Bike-Sharing Programs in Ithaca, NY

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Bike-sharing programs can help decrease carbon emissions by encouraging riders to shift away from car usage. Small cities with expansive climate policies, such as Ithaca, NY, can benefit from such an implementation.

Background

From their production to their destruction, cars have an enormous carbon footprint. [1] The average car, for example, emits 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide, making it one of the country's largest polluters. [2] However, bicycles are the most environmentally friendly vehicle and are even more energy-efficient than walking. [3]

Ithaca has been at the forefront of the climate action movement's efforts to reduce the environmental impact of transportation by passing its version of the Green New Deal in 2019, including by reducing emissions from the city's fleet by 50% by 2025. [4] In 2021, the city's public transportation system (TCAT) launched its first electric bus fleet, with the goal of a fully electric vehicle fleet by 2035. [5] Additionally, a survey by Bike Walk Tompkins reported that 52% of those in Ithaca who commuted to work used sustainable modes of transportation. [6]

In 2019, Ithaca, NY was named the top very small city to live car-free, due to its

various transportation methods, including public bus transportation, walking, and bike-sharing. [7] From 2018 to 2020, a dockless electric bike-sharing service named Lime Bikes operated in Ithaca. [8] Despite the company's removal of its bikes in March 2020 as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as its discontinued operations in June 2020, bike-sharing was widely used, and Lime Bikes' ridership exceeded expectations. [9] In 2016, SmartTrips Ithaca launched an educational campaign to encourage sustainable transportation, depicting the popularity of these initiatives. [10]

Policy Idea

Ithaca Common Council should reintroduce a bike-sharing system into the city in order to reduce carbon emissions and to provide a more sustainable transportation option to residents. This policy would be in accordance with the Ithaca Green New Deal goals. The City could implement this policy through a bike-sharing

program operated by an outside company funded by sponsorships, a company-operated and funded dockless service similar to Lime Bikes and CitiBikes, or a community-funded and managed bike fleet.

Policy Analysis

Bike-sharing programs in cities such as Shanghai have proven to have substantial positive environmental impacts, such as by saving 8358 tons of petrol and decreasing CO₂ emissions by 25,240 tons in 2016. [11]

However, in less dense cities, bike-sharing programs' impact on the environment is truly seen through riders drifting away from a car-dependent lifestyle. From data provided by Lime Bike about Ithaca ridership, 28% of users drove alone less often, and 24% took Ubers less often due to a new mode of transportation. [8] In Denver, CO, 43% of bike-sharing rides replaced car trips, leading to a decrease in 15,868 gallons of gasoline consumption. [10] A decrease in fuel consumption also helped save on fuel

costs; Portland, OR is projected to save approximately \$218 million in fuel costs by 2040 due to bike-sharing investments. [10] The carbon emissions offsets help Ithaca become less carbon dependent.

In Ithaca, bike-sharing is useful for micro-mobility or for covering distances that are both too short for cars and too burdensome for walking. [12] Cornell and Ithaca College students and late-night service workers could benefit from this service, especially at times when other forms of public transportation stop operating or cannot be accessed. [12] Expanding services to college campuses can also generate more use.

Lime Bikes were eventually discontinued because of low profitability, which can be mitigated by introducing electric scooters and mopeds. The city would also need to invest in biking infrastructure, including bike lanes and controlled traffic stops, to decrease safety and maintenance concerns. [12]

Talking Points

- When bike-sharing programs were introduced in Ithaca (a less dense city), 28% of users drove alone less and 24% took Ubers less often. [8]

- Bike-sharing increases micro-mobility, which could be particularly useful for college students and other low-income individuals who are unable to pay for buses or when public transportation stops operating. [12]
- Investing in biking infrastructure—including bike lanes and traffic calming devices—as well as new products—including electric scooters and mopeds—can increase ridership, profitability, and safety. [12]

Key Facts

- The average car emits 4.6 metric tons of carbon dioxide, and its production and usage makes it one of the country's largest polluters. [2]
- Bike-sharing programs are an alternative from car usage, and previous programs introduced in Ithaca have exceeded ridership expectations. [6]
- The city of Ithaca has adopted a Green New Deal plan to reduce carbon emissions from transportation, with the goal of

reducing the city's fleet's emissions by 50% by 2025. [4] Another goal is to adopt a fully electric bus fleet by 2035, indicating support for more sustainable modes of transportation. [5]

Next Steps

This policy should be implemented by the Common Council of Ithaca. First, the city would have to invest in biking infrastructure, such as by creating protected bike paths and traffic controlling or by establishing calming devices to ensure the safety of users and pedestrians. Then, the city would have to secure bikes, along with electric scooters and mopeds. They could acquire a fleet of micro-mobility vehicles through company-operated and funded programs, such as the for-profit company Greenride Bikeshare in Burlington, VT or the non-profit organization Reddy Bikeshare in Buffalo, NY. [12] The city could also invest in and manage its own fleet; however, company sponsorships could subsidize the cost of the program and provide more accessibility to low-income individuals and college students. The Common Council and Transportation Committee should begin implementing this in downtown Ithaca and

on the college campuses, which are busy locations.

Action Plan Snapshot

The idea of reintroducing bike-sharing has been gaining momentum since Lime Bikes stopped their operations. [12] Bike Walk Tompkins, a bike-sharing advocacy organization, presented its findings on the success of the previous program and outline for restarting the program in August 2021 and has been active in discussing biking infrastructure with the Common Council. [12] In addition, Bike Walk Tompkins is also reintroducing the Streets Alive! car-free festival in May 2022. [13]

Bike Walk Tompkins, along with Downtown Ithaca Alliance and student groups such as Big Red Bikes, which organizes bike-sharing on Cornell's campus, the Cornell Cycling Team, Cornell's Bicycle and Pedestrian Traffic Safety Committee, and Ithaca College's Bombers Bikes, could collaborate to organize support for this initiative through petitions, social media, news articles, student outreach. Furthermore, many of these organizations could provide input to the City's Transportation Committee regarding how to improve bicycle and pedestrian safety.

These organizations are vital to ensuring community support and momentum, with the goal of implementing this initiative through legislation. Ultimately, the decision to restart a bike-sharing program in Ithaca falls under the Common Council. [12] However, reimplementing bike-sharing would require Council to reach out to potential companies and organizations who can provide a fleet and maintenance, in addition to making investments to secure vendors if needed.

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Rethinking Progressive Carbon Taxation and Reimbursement

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Taxation on carbon-intensive products, followed by annual reimbursement allocated on the basis of wealth and income, would serve as an effective means of curbing carbon dioxide emissions and altering public behavior.

Background

Anthropogenic climate change has continued to threaten the economic and social security of many communities across the United States. Specifically, sporadic precipitation patterns, annual increases in average temperatures, and the expansion of invasive species have posed considerable issues for American agriculture. [1, 2] In particular, one industry at risk is viticulture production in upstate New York. [3] The science is unequivocally clear: society as a whole must significantly curb emissions—such as carbon dioxide emissions—if the deleterious impacts of climate change are to remain below a catastrophic level. [4]

Many solutions have been proposed to address society's emissions problems, some of which are radical in nature. A typical solution commonly proposed by economists is a tax on carbon emissions. Under such a system, a product would have a tax levied that is proportional to the amount of carbon that was emitted in

the production of the product. [5] The issue with carbon taxation of this type, however, is its regressive nature. [6] That is, individuals who are less financially fortunate tend to pay a larger portion of their incomes on such taxes and find themselves less equipped to make the transition to alternatives than their wealthy counterparts [6]. Such a policy, however, wields the power of the market and may be altered to lead to more equitable and efficient mitigation of environmental detriment. [7, 8]

Policy Idea

The federal government should establish a tax on all products that involve intensive carbon emissions in their production. The amount of the tax must be proportional to the amount of carbon emitted in the product's production, beginning at \$15 per ton of carbon dioxide. [9] The per-ton amount may be subject to adjustment every two years. Importantly, the tax should not generate revenue for the federal government. Instead,

the gains should be redistributed to citizens on a monthly basis, with allocations proportional to household income.

Policy Analysis

Three critical dimensions in which a carbon tax-reimbursement policy would need to succeed are (1) timing and efficacy in emissions reduction, (2) mitigation of economic ramifications, particularly those associated with lower-income groups, and (3) cost and efficacy of implementation. First, emissions and the economy would be considered.

The ultimate goal of this policy is to lay down a framework of incentives that would serve to alter public behavior away from carbon-intensive activities. The literature suggests that such programs may be effective in leading to lasting behavioral change at the price of a timely transition. [10] Such a tradeoff proves difficult to evaluate in the case of a carbon reduction policy. In order to avoid the most significant impacts of climate change, science prescribes

the largest reduction of carbon emissions possible in the shortest amount of time. The reality for the United States would certainly be a less drastic reduction, evidenced by U.S. political and social history. [11] Therefore, if the price of carbon is set so as to curb emissions over the next few decades—starting at \$15 per ton emitted, for example—the question then becomes if the reduction would be sufficient given the economic structural changes and resulting inequities it would incite. The answer, thus far, appears to be that the reduction will not be considerable enough in the short-term to warrant the social and economic cost, particularly for the most vulnerable in society. [12]

However, this conclusion does not mean that the policy should be disregarded. First, the long-term benefits of such policy drastically outweigh the short-term costs, indicating that it is most appropriate to amend the policy to address potential inequities. One possibility is the inclusion of legislative provisions to alleviate the cost on certain members of society while the transition away from carbon-intensive activities takes place. Such provisions may take the form of subsidies of renewable energy infrastructure or electric cars,

or even an initial moratorium of the tax for lower income groups to alleviate the cost of immediate price hikes in consumer goods. Ideally, such accompanying provisions would serve to increase the equity of a societal transition in both the short and long term.

Talking points

- Economic incentives generate solutions within the established economic structure, and for this reason are more likely to gain widespread political and social support.
- Perhaps most importantly, the reimbursement component of the policy serves to increase the equity of a societal transition away from carbon-intensive activities, while simultaneously increasing public support.
- The emissions reductions resulting from this policy would indeed take time to come into effect but are likely to be long-lasting; after a period of time, the impacts of this policy would not be reliant on an incumbent political administration.

Key Facts

- The impacts of climate change include significant changes in precipitation, wind, or temperature patterns. [1] Specifically, in upstate New York, the impacts of climate change pose considerable issues for agriculture, particularly sensitive crops (such as grapes), and related industries (viticulture). [3]
- In order to avoid the most significant impacts of climate change, global societies must significantly reduce carbon dioxide emissions. [4]
- A carbon tax system applies an extra cost to a good that is proportional to the amount of carbon emitted in its production. [13]
- In a carbon tax-reimbursement system, revenue generated from the tax is reallocated to citizens based on income. [9]

Next Steps

The results of the analysis show that a carbon tax-reimbursement policy has the potential to lead to

considerable emissions reduction while mitigating the economic ramifications of a societal transition and gaining significant public support. The analysis also revealed, however, the importance of the reimbursement component of the policy and its need to be accompanied by legislative provisions that dedicate resources to its implementation. The policy would therefore not be effective in ensuring the equity of a societal carbon emissions reduction without such measures. As a result, it is recommended that research in designing the systems for an effective reimbursement, as well as an initial voidance of the tax for certain low-income groups be incorporated into the policy. Without these measures, the policy simply cannot be the socially equitable piece of environmental legislation it is designed to be.

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Protecting Biometrics through National Data Collection Regulation

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The United States lacks a comprehensive law prohibiting the nonconsensual collection of individuals' biometrics. A law should thus be passed to regulate biometric data collection.

Background

In late January of 2022, the Internal Revenue Service announced that taxpayers seeking to access their online IRS.gov accounts would be required to verify their identities through ID.me, a third-party company that uses facial recognition technology. [1] The IRS faced immediate backlash from data privacy advocates over its decision and withdrew its plans. [1] Amidst this discourse surrounding the IRS's intentions to integrate facial recognition, the pressing matter of the collection and privacy of biometric data rose to the forefront of national attention. [2] Illinois and ten other individual states (with less stringent laws) have passed legislation requiring private companies to acquire consent for collecting biometrics, including retina, fingerprint, voice, and facial scans. [3] However, there is yet to be any equivalent law at the federal level. [3] The closest analog, the National Biometric Information Privacy Act of 2020, was introduced in the 116th

Congress but failed to even reach a vote. [4] The current lack of biometric data protection legislation leaves individuals vulnerable to the nonconsensual collection of their biometrics online and in public. [5] Furthermore, with a government agency like the IRS considering implementing facial recognition for access to critical tax information—including child tax credit payments—it is more important than ever that a biometric data protection law be passed to shield American citizens from nefarious or otherwise opaque data collection practices. [1]

Policy Idea

A biometric data protection law inspired by the National Biometric Information Privacy Act of 2020 should be passed at the national level, in order to protect individuals from unauthorized biometric data collection. This law would require an individual's consent for the scanning of their retinas, voices, faces, fingerprints, or any otherwise uniquely identifiable

characteristics. Additionally, the sharing of personal data would be impermissible under the absence of consent or a warrant. Lastly, an individual would possess the right to request the destruction of their biometric data.

Policy Analysis

This proposed biometric data protection law would directly address the current lack of comprehensive private data protection legislation in the United States. In contrast with the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation (which requires private entities to request individuals' consent to share data and provides individuals deletion, access, and manipulation rights), the United States's existing legislation lacks a similarly comprehensive law with biometrics. [5, 6] Modeled after the National Biometric Information Privacy Act of 2020, the proposed policy would specifically work to protect individuals' biometric data. In removing non-consensual biometric data

collection, this policy would also support recent findings that biometric data analysis is still in its infancy, especially with regards to equal efficacy rates across demographics. [7] In a landmark study from 2019 by the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the false match rate of facial recognition algorithms was between 10 to 100 times worse for Asian and African Americans compared to Caucasians. [7] Furthermore, removing the precedent set forth by the IRS to require biometric data collection for domestic mechanisms, such as viewing tax information, would reduce the severity of future data breaches. This action would reduce the total collected biometrics and prevent a possible civilian iteration of the 2015 U.S. Office of Personnel Management leak, in which 5.6 million fingerprints of “current, former, and prospective Federal employees and contractors had been stolen.” [8] To prevent non-consensual and universal biometrics collection is to prevent such leakage on a larger scale. To cooperate with this proposed policy, numerous private entities are already changing their policies surrounding biometrics collection by offering opt-in choices for individuals. [9] Law firms such as Hart David Carson LLP and Foley and Lardner

LLP are already encouraging companies to take a more proactive approach to the collection and handling of biometrics. [9, 10]

Talking Points

- A domestic umbrella law that regulates the collection of biometric data by all entities should be enacted.
- Consent for the scanning of retinas, voices, faces, fingerprints, and all other biometrics must be obtained prior to biometric data collection. The sharing of personal biometric data would be disallowed without consent or a warrant. Furthermore, the destruction of the collected personal biometric data must be available to the individual.
- The precedent set forth by the Internal Revenue Service to require biometrics for unavoidable domestic routines exposed the severe lack of federal legislation protecting American citizens’ biometric data.

Key Facts

- The Internal Revenue Service introduced the required usage of a

facial recognition service offered by the third-party company ID.me to access important tax documents on the IRS’s online accounts. [11]

- A total of a mere twelve states have legislation related to the protection of biometric data and regulation of biometric data collection. [3]
- The closest legislation pertinent to regulating biometric data collection, the National Biometric Information Privacy Act of 2020, died in the 116th Congress. [4]

Next Steps

The analysis of this proposal indicates its great potential effectiveness and demonstrates its practical necessity. Implementation of this policy should thus be conducted immediately at the federal level. However, there still seems to be a lack of widespread awareness and support for the immediate implementation of the policy. [5] The most feasible, immediate course of action is to lobby for state biometric data privacy legislation. Further delineation of the banned biometrics must be conducted by lobbyists and

researchers to aid in garnering state support. Replicating and bolstering the laws in place in twelve states into the rest of the country (at the state level) would allow for a smoother federal implementation. A bill regulating biometric data collection should be proposed and endorsed in the House of Representatives, given the additional state support. Subsequently, the President must sign the bill into federal law.

Action Plan Snapshot

Because no substantially more state-level legislation regulating biometric data collection has been passed, the proposed policy would likely meet a similar fate in Congress as the National Biometric Information Privacy Act of 2020 did. [5] It is thus advised that sufficient national support be gathered. First, sufficient support should be garnered at the state level. Trade organizations focusing on aiding those working with privacy technologies to protect their data, such as the International Association of Privacy Professionals, could help generate a positive public sentiment towards protecting biometric data. [12] This state level action would aid in states passing legislation similar to Illinois's Biometric

Information Privacy Act, which contains many of the critical clauses within the proposed policy. [2]

Subsequently, to approach the federal implementation of the proposed policy, NGOs and data privacy lobbying organizations should conduct further research into the exact mechanics and technicalities behind the biometric data collection methods to be regulated. NGOs and data privacy research groups with extensive experience testifying before Congress on privacy-related matters—for example, the World Privacy Forum—could provide a more clinical analysis of the dangers and downfalls of continuing to allow biometric data collection to both citizens and companies alike. [13] By representing the issue as one that appeals to privacy advocates, large technology companies, and government agencies, this proposed policy would have a greater chance of achieving a successful vote and becoming a law.

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Foreign Policy

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Restoring The Right to Vote for Immigrants in Local Elections

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Immigrants must be included in municipal-level elections to ensure higher quality-of-life protections in matters such as income, hunger, and education.

Background

Recently, New York City (NYC) passed legislation enabling legal non-citizens (green-card and visa holders) to vote in city-level elections. [1] By allowing 800,000 residents to join voter registration, NYC has restored the right to vote to 1 in 3. [2] Contrary to popular belief, immigrants in the U.S. have historically held the right to vote in elections; previously, voting was restricted primarily on the basis of gender, race, and class. [3] Other municipalities have failed to implement similar reform under the objection that immigrants have a pathway to voting through citizenship. [4] States such as Colorado, Florida, Alabama, and Arizona have gone as far as adopting rules that would preempt any attempt to pass laws, such as the recent NYC bill. [5] However, this argument fails to realize how citizenship is not available to all—unlike the United States, not all countries allow dual citizenship—the difficulty in obtaining citizenship, or

personal reasons that make obtaining citizenship difficult for many immigrants. Given that immigrants pay billions in taxes (NYC immigrants pay \$8 billion in taxes), are counted for districting purposes (10.5 million legal immigrants are counted), and are essential workers within the community, it is imperative to implement the democratic principles of one-person-one-vote and allow legal immigrants everywhere their right. [6]

Policy Idea

Any person who is a lawful permanent resident or authorized to work in the United States, who has been a resident of the municipality for at least 30 consecutive days, and/or who meets all the qualifications for registering to vote under the Election Law other than U.S. citizenship, should be eligible to register to vote as a “municipal voter.” Registered municipal voters would be entitled to vote in any primary, special, general, or run-off election, as well as on any local ballot initiative.

Policy Analysis

Although there are exceptions, immigrants score low on many quality-of-life benchmarks such as income, hunger, and education. Such trends are the consequence of political disenfranchisement. [7] At its worst, politicians can run xenophobic campaigns buoyed by the fact non-citizens will not punish them at the polls. At its best, ignorance can lead to discriminatory public policy. [8] Thus, allowing a permanent class of nonvoters to exist on the margins is indirectly discriminatory. Given that local elections are about ground-level legislation with tangible community-wide effects, it is all the more crucial to give immigrants municipal civic responsibility. Furthermore, opponents argue that immigrants who want to vote should simply become citizens. This argument fails to recognize the steep application fees, wait time, and lack of access to English and civics classes needed to prepare for the naturalization

exam that many immigrants face. [9] If laws like the poll tax were struck down on the basis that they created an undue financial burden on voting, citizenship for immigrants should be treated no differently. [10] Frighteningly, the level of political exclusion of immigrants approximates the level of disenfranchisement of women and African Americans in the past; the African American population in NYC during the pre-civil rights era was approximately 25%. [11] The non-citizen population of NYC is 22% today. [12] It can take years to become a citizen and, in the meantime, immigrants need to vote on the issues crucial to their daily lives.

Talking Points

- Immigrants score low on many quality-of-life benchmarks such as income, hunger, and education. [13]
- The level of political exclusion of immigrants approximates the level of disenfranchisement of women and African Americans in the past. [14]
- Immigrants are counted for districting purposes, pay billions of taxes, and are essential workers

within the community. [15]

- Two-thirds of the nation allowed non-citizens to vote at one-point (curtailed in the early 20th century due to nativist policies). [16]

Key Facts

- States such as Colorado, Florida, Alabama, and Arizona have gone as far as adopting rules that would preempt any attempt to pass non-citizen voting laws. [17]
- Immigrant families in New York City pay an estimated \$8 billion in City and State personal income taxes. [18]
- There are today about 10.5 million legally resident non-citizens, with that number growing at the rate of 400,000 to 500,000 each year. [19]

Next Steps

Since the U.S. Constitution categorically grants all persons able to vote in state legislative elections the right to vote in federal elections, non-citizen voting at the state level should be avoided. [20] Instead, advocates should focus on gaining non-citizens the vote in local school board

elections. Voting rights at the local level, in less threatening venues like school board elections, could act as a bridge to a wider expansion of voting rights for non-citizens. Once immigrants have the right to vote in local elections, it would be difficult to find any principled way to justify their exclusion in state and federal elections.

Action Plan Snapshot

Non-citizen voting rights activists have long waged campaigns entirely on the issue of fairness. However, such movements have seen little success. Until recently, just San Francisco and nine Maryland cities have allowed non-citizens to vote in local or school board elections. [21] Nevertheless, it is difficult to make a claim based on the benefits immigrant voting would bring because of such a small sample size. As such, it is necessary to start small (i.e., with school district boards) and to show hard evidence quelling any concerns. Advocates should also closely align themselves with other voting rights movements, such as felon and minority voting rights groups, to build a broader coalition. Recharacterizing immigrant voting as an aspect of larger voting rights protections could make more Americans sympathetic to

this cause, given recent voting restrictions passed in Republican state legislatures. Furthermore, immigrant voting rights groups should educate Americans on the history of voting rights. The most oft-cited defense denying immigrants the right to vote is citizenship. Evidence that two-thirds of the nation allowed non-citizens to vote at one point would likely make more Americans open to reform. Just as the civil rights movement needed to expand its coalition to expand voting rights to African Americans, any non-citizen voting rights movement needs more Americans on board.

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Launching a Single Aviation Market in the ASEAN Region

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Following the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN member states should collaborate to launch a Single Aviation Market in the region to strengthen the recovery of the aviation industry in the Asia Pacific region.

Background

The COVID-19 pandemic has heavily impacted the global travel industry, with combined passenger numbers on commercial airlines in 2021 remaining nearly 50% lower than in 2019. [1] Recently, the global airline industry has shown signs of recovery, with travel restrictions gradually being removed across the Americas and Europe. [2] However, despite the creation of quarantine-free travel schemes in Singapore and Thailand, other countries in the Southeast Asia region have generally remained hesitant to eliminate all COVID-19-related entry protocols. [2, 3] The International Air Transport Association (IATA) indicates that travel in Asia will remain drastically reduced at 11% of pre-pandemic levels, compared to 75% for intra-European travel. [4]

As nations attempt to rebuild their travel industries, there has been increased attention towards the implementation of a single aviation market (SAM) for members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations

(ASEAN). Pioneered in the European Union, SAMs harmonize air traffic regulations, aviation safety, and air traffic control. [5, 6] Supporters of the scheme tout increased consumer choice and air service, lower fares, and increased competition among airlines as benefits. [5] These benefits have not eluded ASEAN members, who had historically pushed for the implementation of a SAM within the bloc by 2015. Yet, these efforts largely stalled, in large part due to ratification delays from less-developed member states. [7] However, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, an integrated aviation market may provide additional stimulus for the industry to rebound.

Policy Idea

ASEAN member states should seek to ratify the ASEAN Single Aviation Market (ASAM) scheme to liberalize air travel within the Asia-Pacific market. The single market would support the recovery of an industry hurt by the COVID-19 pandemic, provide benefits to consumers, and improve aviation safety standards.

Policy Analysis

Looking towards the European Union (EU), the creation of a single aviation market has resulted in increased competition and consumer benefits. A 2012 report found that the launch of the EU's single aviation market resulted in increased competition on passenger routes for existing and low-cost airlines, reducing the average price by 155 Euros for certain types of airline fares. [9] Furthermore, ASAM ratification would bring benefits to the economies of member countries. A 2019 analysis projected that a proposed ASAM would result in an overall increase in GDP in Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Vietnam, ranging from a modest 1.2% in Myanmar to a large 6.1% in the Philippines. [8] For Indonesia, representing 40% of the ASEAN population, the implementation of the ASAM would increase the nation's GDP by 650 million USD and add 29,000 jobs by 2025. [10]

Regional politics remains the largest barrier for ASAM. A 2021 analysis of

geopolitical factors relating to the ASAM noted ASEAN's lack of integration compared to the EU limits its authority to impose a SAM. [11] The same report also identifies domestic political pressures to retain protectionist policies toward the aviation industry. These pressures include a desire to protect government-owned "flag carrier" airlines, as well as a need to respond to lobbying efforts by local airline industry associations and workers groups. [11] Furthermore, infrastructure limitations and inconsistencies in aviation regulation mean that nations are often reluctant to liberalize air travel, especially at airports that are already exceeding their original capacity. [12]

Talking Points

- The relatively slower recovery of the aviation industry in Southeast Asia during the COVID-19 pandemic has created a pressing need for governmental initiatives to encourage growth in a heavily impacted economic sector. [1]
- The implementation of a SAM is projected to lower airfares, increase consumer choice, and drive economic growth

across various ASEAN countries. [8, 9, 10]

- Domestic political pressures to protect local aviation industries from the increased competition need to be overcome for the successful implementation of the ASAM. [11]

Key Facts

- Intra-Asian travel is projected to remain at 11% of pre-pandemic levels, in comparison to Intra-European travel which has now reached 75% of pre-pandemic levels. [4]
- The establishment of a single aviation market in the European Union has historically created benefits for consumers in the form of increased competition among airlines, lower airfares, and increased consumer choice. [9]
- Economic analysis has concluded that the implementation of the ASAM would result in notable growth in GDP and employment across many developing ASEAN member nations. [10]

Next Steps

The COVID-19 pandemic has created an opportunity to overcome the geopolitical barriers that have plagued the implementation of the ASAM. Airline industry organizations that have historically opposed the ASAM may be more receptive to its implementation, considering the extensive government support provided to the airline industry by many ASEAN member nations. [12] The projected growth in aviation sector employment resulting from the implementation of the ASAM may also result in increased support for the initiative from worker's organizations. The unprecedented downturn in travel in the region has created a domestic political environment in many ASEAN countries that will allow for the successful implementation of the ASAM.

Action Plan Snapshot

ASEAN member states should take advantage of the policy window that has opened and act immediately to begin the process of ASAM ratification. Individual member states would need to manage domestic political pressures by conducting stakeholder engagement with the aviation industry and workers organizations. Governments could also provide one-time

monetary incentives in the form of additional stimulus to ensure that domestic aviation firms remain well-supported in the eventual transition to a liberalized regional aviation market. [12] Such incentives would also work to increase support for ASAM ratification among stakeholders. As a bloc, ASEAN members should also seek to come to a preliminary agreement to limit and phase out protectionist economic policies aimed at the aviation industry.

Five years prior to the planned implementation of the single market, ASEAN member states should seek to harmonize commercial aviation regulations and standards in preparation for the launch of ASAM. Major discrepancies on safety standards and commercial aviation operations procedures remain in the Asia Pacific region. Hence, ASEAN member states should begin working towards achieving a set of unified regulations to improve overall air safety and to ease the integration process of various aviation markets. Specifically, countries in the bloc with a strong history of passenger safety regulation—such as Singapore—could work to support member states with lower safety standards. [13] Furthermore, the bloc could

work with regional development organizations such as the Asian Development Bank to address aviation infrastructure gaps between ASEAN countries, which are a major barrier to ASAM implementation. For example, less developed ASEAN countries could benefit from upgraded air traffic control systems to enable for more frequent departures and arrivals at airports, benefitting both consumers and the aviation sector. [12]

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Healthcare Policy

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Reducing Healthcare Costs in the United States via a Fee-for-Service and Capitation Hybrid Payment System

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To reduce wasteful medical costs in the United States, the federal government should change its current national physician payment system from fee-for-service to a hybrid with capitation, beginning with independent primary care practices.

Background

Healthcare expenditures account for almost 18% of the U.S. GDP, more than in any other country worldwide. [1] About 25% of healthcare spending is directed towards redundant tests and screenings, inefficient care delivery, excessive prescriptions, and unnecessary or ineffective procedures. [1, 2] Many physicians overspend out of fear of malpractice, at the request of the patient, and due to difficulty obtaining the patient's medical records. [2] These excessive costs also discourage patients from receiving preventative services, thereby worsening health outcomes. [3]

Most U.S.-licensed physicians are paid via a fee-for-service (FFS) payment system. [4] The more that the physician overutilizes and sets higher prices for services, the more that a health insurer has to cover these costs and the more that the physician profits. [4] In the 1980-90s, a short-lived capitation system was established, where each

physician received a fixed payment within a given time period, regardless of the number or type of services provided. [4] However, physicians started using their services sparingly and avoided providing the highest quality of care. [4, 5] The prioritization of profits over the patient generated discomfort during clinical decisions and, therefore, backlash from physicians. [4, 5, 6]

Neither FFS nor capitation has proven to effectively reduce medical costs and waste, while also incentivizing physicians to prioritize the patient. Some blend of the two payment systems is needed to increase affordability, accessibility, and high-quality care.

Policy Idea

In this policy, the U.S. integrates more capitation mechanisms within FFS. A new government-funded organization mediates costs between a given practice and its patients' health insurers. This mediator organization provides a fixed

payment to each physician, guaranteeing additional FFS reimbursements for more specialized services. Monthly or quarterly payments are adjusted based on the practice's clinical decisions, outcomes, and costs. The organization also evaluates each physician individually with pre-determined quality measures (such as the necessity of the physician's expenditures, patient reviews, patient health outcomes, etc.) and financially rewards the physician if high-quality and low-cost care is provided in the best interest of the patient. The federal government regulates the organization's operations through a similar hybrid payment structure.

Policy Analysis

Physicians must remain at the center of medical decisions. However, rather than profiting directly from health insurers, if all physicians from a practice are affiliated with one mediator organization, then they must work collectively to ensure that their large budget

suffices across all patients. Physicians still benefit from their current system by receiving payments for services worthy of FFS. Health insurers are also prevented from not covering high-quality care just to reduce costs.

Unfortunately, capitation mechanisms incentivize healthcare workers to serve as many relatively healthy patients as possible. [7] This policy therefore includes a population-based payment model, where if payments are dependent on the health of a designated population, then the practice is focused on keeping everyone in the population as healthy as possible. [4] Furthermore, health insurers cannot exclude covering people that are deemed “too ill” or “high-cost.” Capitation is also criticized because physicians may over-refer patients to a secondary care provider, create appointments for more patients than they can care for, and prescribe less than what patients need. [7] However, because the mediator organization controls the larger budget, any population health outcomes creating deficits in physicians’ paychecks disincentivizes providers from abusing this power.

Since public health systems cannot control patient volume and costs,

capitation would be financially unnerving. Independent primary care practices are an ideal target for this policy, since about one billion U.S. doctor’s visits correspond to primary practices, and 85% of these visits are for highly prevalent and costly chronic conditions, including hypertension and diabetes. [8]

Talking Points

- The current FFS framework should be modified so that there are still financial incentives, but only as a result of prioritizing the patient’s health.
- If all physicians from a practice are affiliated with one mediator organization, then they must work collectively to ensure that a large budget suffices across all patients.
- Any population health outcomes generating deficits in physicians’ paychecks would disincentivize a practice from abusing capitation.
- This policy targets independent practices, which have a more stable patient volume than do public health systems, and primary care practices, which correspond to many

high-cost U.S. doctors’ visits. [8]

Key Facts

- Healthcare expenditures account for almost 18% of the United States GDP, more than in any other country worldwide, and about 25% of these expenditures are wasteful. [2]
- In the United States, most physicians are involved in a fee-for-service (FFS) payment system, where physicians over-utilize and set lucrative prices for medical services and treatments. [4]
- Neither FFS nor capitation has proven to effectively reduce medical costs and waste while also incentivizing physicians to prioritize the patient.

Next Steps

The federal government should first encourage Medicare and Medicaid to adopt this hybrid payment system, followed by the launch of new federally funded mediator organizations. This process would include figuring out capitation rates and key quality measures. Each capitation payment must be

relatively higher than its respective physician's individual salary to account for potentially heavier treatment expenses and administrative costs, and the payments must differ between practices. [5] Private insurance companies would not have to identify these measures themselves and would be more willing to follow the lead of these large public insurance programs.

While the goal is to prevent further wasteful costs, there should not be too rapid of a change such that physicians and health insurers observe a drastic decrease in salary. Therefore, this policy should start with a capitation payment equal to the physician's current salary, but then the payment increases by a percentage smaller than the U.S.'s annual real economic output increase.

Action Plan Snapshot

Medicare and Medicaid should begin adopting this policy over the course of the next 5 years. Physicians should begin with their current salaries as the first capitation payment, yet instead of increasing by ~2.5% each year, roughly the percentage by which the U.S. real economic output increases per year [9], the capitation rate should increase by 1.5-2.0% each

year. Congress must also identify the mediator organization's minimum quality measures to evaluate practices and health insurance programs: number of enrollees/patients and appointments each year, patient satisfaction, length of time to obtain an appointment, overall health of the population, total healthcare expenditures, etc. Once the federal government sets capitative rates and other extensive regulations for Medicare and Medicaid, private insurance companies and other independent practices would likely follow within the next 10-20 years in order to reduce their overall costs.

Because the U.S.'s medical technology advancements prove more useful in secondary and tertiary practices, capitation mechanisms would disincentivize this production and worsen health outcomes. Additionally, in rural or less densely populated regions, the need for secondary and tertiary care may change drastically from year to year, and capitation may lead to overpaying secondary and tertiary care physicians. Therefore, at least until independent primary care practices have assimilated to the hybrid payment system, these specialized services should remain in a FFS framework.

In 2019, the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions voted 20 to 3 to pass the bipartisan Lower Health Care Costs Act. [10] Proposals from 36 Democratic and 29 Republican senators included increasing transparency of costs and quality between physicians, patients, and health insurers; preventing patients from receiving surprising out-of-pocket medical bills; and improving public health in the United States. [10, 11] Although the report focuses more on improving patient costs than physician costs, Section 303 advocates for the "designation of a nongovernmental, non-profit transparency organization to lower Americans' health care costs." [11] Similar to the concept of a mediator organization, some functions of this proposed transparency organization include informing patients about the true costs and quality of their health care, as well as encouraging providers to make more high-value but cost-effective healthcare decisions. [11] It would be sound to consult with legislators from the 2019 Lower Health Care Costs Act about the mediator organization policy, and then have these senators on board to rally for this policy in Congress.

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Ending Medical Sexism: Providing Women Equal Representation in COVID-19 Vaccine Research & Development

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Clinical vaccine trials are causing disproportionate side effects in women—including death—when getting vaccinated during a pandemic. The federal government must take urgent and expansive action to protect women during a global health crisis without slowing down overall vaccine distribution by issuing an executive order to incentivize companies to create more inclusive research and development procedures.

Background

Clinical trials for the COVID-19 vaccine are not representing or recruiting women equally, or they are disaggregating data by sex when reporting results. [7] This approach to research causes women's vaccine reactions and health issues to go unreported. Although COVID-19 vaccines are crucial to maintaining public health, overlooking sexist factors in the research and development process has resulted in female recipients being disproportionately harmed by the COVID vaccine. [1]

More specifically, women make up over 90% of reported severe adverse reactions to the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines. [1] The proportion of women reporting mild reactions to the vaccine is 9.15 times higher than men following the first dose and 3.28 times higher after the second dose. [2] A fatal blood clotting

condition called thrombosis (with thrombocytopenia syndrome) was observed solely in women following the AstraZeneca and Janssen vaccines. [3] Although there have been no studies on the vaccine's effects on the menstrual cycle—due to health professionals not noting them as side effects of the vaccine—over 55% of respondents in an informal study had variations on the length, volume, cycle, and discomfort/pain of their periods. [4] Additionally, pregnant and lactating individuals were actively precluded from participation in clinical trials, and it has been found that the vaccine carries higher risk and lower efficacy for them than for other women. [5] Women also develop a higher antibody response and can produce the same immunological response to half a vaccine dose as men do to a full dose. [6]

Policy Idea

The Biden

Administration should sign an executive order requiring that all vaccine research and development centers disaggregate data by sex and ensure gender equality when conducting clinical trials. This policy also focuses on developing adequate safety measures when research is conducted on pregnant individuals. If the organization does not comply, then it will be fined with 5% of all proceeds gained through improper investigatory processes. Furthermore, revenue generated from this tax would be reallocated to other vaccine development organizations that employ disaggregated data and inclusive trial groups. Overall, this policy would be enforced by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

Policy analysis

Medical research has a history of creating disadvantages for minority populations. A meta-analysis of COVID-19 clinical studies showed that, of the trials that did not justify unequal sampling, only 31% were gender-balanced, and 89% did not even mention gender or sex. [7] This analysis has dangerous consequences for women, whose physiological needs are often overlooked by medical research. [8] 80% of drugs removed from the U.S. market by the FDA have posed greater health risks to women than to men, including liver and heart disease. [8] Only 7% of all co-ed medical studies disaggregate data by sex at all. [9] While such research has demonstrated that vaccines are generally safe and have high efficacy for both men and women, factors such as adverse reactions and dosing are very rarely broken out by sex. [9] Not only does this lack of analysis disproportionately harm women, but it also misses an opportunity to learn about the workings of the disease. Women have a higher efficacy profile, meaning that a lower dose of the vaccine may be equally effective in protecting against the virus compared to a full dose for men. [5] Potential alternative dosages could influence the cost and accessibility of COVID-19 vaccines.

Even if a research center refuses to use gender-inclusive procedures and produces a vaccine, if it is very successful, then other companies could work towards gender equality with a portion of that revenue. Thus, the vaccine research would occur at a rate comparable to our current roll-out speed, while still combatting vaccine-related medical sexism at its source. President Biden has executive power over federal agencies (including the FDA) and could require them to enforce sex-equitable and safe research practices. [10]

Talking Points

- The consequences of imbalances within vaccine research have caused women to suffer worse side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine and irregular dosing reactions. [5, 9]
- Medical sexism within COVID vaccine research may lead to a missed opportunity of providing women, pregnant individuals, or lactating individuals with different vaccine doses, thereby changing the overall access to the vaccine. [5]

- Even companies who do not change their practices to be more inclusive could still contribute to the fight against medical sexism.
- President Biden has the executive power to direct federal agencies towards the goal of this policy. Such organizations include the FDA. [10]

Key Facts

- Female recipients are disproportionately harmed by the COVID-19 vaccine due to a lack of representation within clinical trials. [1, 7]
- Compared to men, 9.15 more women report mild adverse reactions to the first vaccine dose, and 3.28 more do after the second dose. [2]
- Only women have been killed by a blood-clotting condition resulting from some COVID-19 vaccines. [3]
- Menstrual cycle effects are rarely noted as true side effects even though 55% of respondents in an informal study observed irregularities. [4]
- Pregnant and lactating individuals face

higher risks and lower efficacy due to their complete exclusion from most clinical trials. [5]

Next Steps

The FDA should conduct regular unannounced inspections at each vaccine research facility to ensure adequate safety and inclusion of women. In addition, the organization should review all development data to ensure that results either disaggregate by sex or include reasonable justification to not include gendered data. In the latter case, reasonable justification should be defined by the FDA upon passage of this order to include only scenarios where the data would be inaccurate if split by sex. Upon proof of misconduct, the FDA would collect revenue from fines against such companies and would re-allocate it proportionally to vaccine development firms that do not employ sexist practices.

Action Plan Snapshot

This public health crisis is urgent and requires an immediate executive order, as even one of the strongest scientific lines of defense is harming (and even killing) women. Many human rights scholars have argued that the underrepresentation of women in vaccine trials is

a human rights violation. [11] The Biden Administration must act now to face this humanitarian emergency across the United States.

Some worry that “suggesting a sex difference where one might not exist can be harmful” and would lead women to have increasingly limited women’s access to medications and treatments. [12] More specifically, gendered data may lead to claims that such treatments are less effective for women. [12] Thus, it is imperative that this policy accompany a federal ban on restricting vaccine availability by gender. There must be equal rights provisions included in U.S. laws and systems that ensure that vaccine distribution be equal for men and women.

Policymakers, interest groups, and citizens must pressure President Biden to pass this law as soon as possible so that the FDA can begin to implement it immediately. Of concern, however, is that many vaccine companies would likely slow vaccine distributions, given their already large profit margins in comparison to the relatively small safety tax. [12] However, since vaccines are free to the public in the United States, price increases should not be a concern. [13] In fact, many experts within the FDA have already been

advocating for more inclusion of women as well, and they have even started conducting research on how to create safe trials for pregnant and lactating women. [14, 15] Furthermore, with the implementation of this policy, the FDA should take a month post-signing to define new regulations and guidelines in order to facilitate more efficient enforcement.

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Caregiving Crisis: Addressing Home Health Aide Shortages in New York State Through Enhanced Training & Education

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New York State Governor Kathy Hochul should pass a bill authorizing the creation of a holistic standardized education and training program for home health aides in order to retain professional home caregivers and to meet the demands of an aging population.

Background

More than 2 million home care workers across the country provide assistance and healthcare support to seniors and people with disabilities in a home setting. [1] In the coming years, the rapidly growing cohort of older adults will derive an even higher demand for home care workers. By 2050, the population of people 65 and older will nearly double, from 47.8 million to 88 million. [2]

Unfortunately for New York State (NYS), the quality of direct care jobs does not reflect their essential contribution. [3] Such jobs are characterized by poor training, limited advancement opportunities, and a general lack of support. [1] As a result, employers struggle to recruit and retain home health aides (HHAs). [3] The state has also experienced a significant decrease in the number of home health aides: with about one in six positions being left unfilled due to staffing shortages, about 74% of NYS seniors and people with disabilities

are unable to retain home caregivers. [4, 5] Without enough workers willing to take on these roles, the elderly and disabled are forced to go without the services they need, and their loved ones are left without support. [5]

Enhanced training and education for caregivers has been proven to lead to better patient and home aide satisfaction in some states. [6] However, NYS's standardization of regulatory education requirements for home health aides, or lack thereof, contributes to NYS having one of the largest shortages in home health aides in the country, leading to an estimated shortage of 80,000 aides by 2025. [7]

Policy Idea

Governor Hochul should mandate a standardized education and training program for home health aides, which would be approved by the NYS Department of Health and would include disease-specific training, classroom curriculum, scenario

simulations, and field training in client homes. The creation of such a program would lead to increased caregiver confidence and career preparedness, as well as reduce the number of caregivers leaving the job or the industry entirely.

Policy Analysis

Studies show that enhanced training can benefit HHA's ability to deliver quality care and generate stability in the workforce overall. A 2015 study involving nearly 150 HHAs in the NYS Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute examined the efficacy of 200 hours of chronic disease training. [8] The researchers found an 8% reduction in the rate of emergency department visits among 1439 patients who receive home health care. [8] The same study found that such training improved job satisfaction among HHAs by 61%. [8]

Multiple other studies indicate the effectiveness of disease-specific training. For example, one study found that home care workers who

have been trained in heart failure are more satisfied with their jobs and feel more prepared and confident working with heart failure patients. [9] In addition, a 2020 cross-sectional study surveying 323 HHAs who cared for heart failure patients found that HHAs receiving little to no heart failure training felt 82% satisfied with their job. [9] In a fully adjusted model, however, HHAs who received some to a lot of heart failure training had 14% higher job satisfaction than those with little to no heart failure training. [9] Moreover, mandated upskilling of more than 6,000 HHAs in California contributed to a 41% decline in the rate of repeat emergency department visits and a 43% decline in the rate of hospitalization, yielding savings up to \$12,000 per patient. [10] These studies demonstrate that mandating enhanced training policy increases HHA confidence and job satisfaction, while also reducing the frequency of hospitalizations in patients who receive home health care.

Talking Points

- Home health aides who underwent heart failure training reported 14% higher job satisfaction than those with little to no

heart failure training. [9]

- Mandated enhanced training of more than 6,000 HHAs in California resulted in a 41% decrease in the rate of repeat emergency room visits and a 43% decrease in the rate of general hospitalizations. [10]
- 200 hours of chronic disease training found an 8% decline in the rate of emergency department visits among 1,439 patients who receive health care within their home and improved job satisfaction among HHAs by 61% in New York State. [8]

Key Facts

- New York State is experiencing a significant decrease in the number of home health aides: with about one in six positions being left unfilled due to staffing shortages. [4]
- About 74% of New York State seniors and people with disabilities are unable to retain home caregivers. [5]
- Enhanced training and education for caregivers has been proven to lead to

better patient and home aide satisfaction in states such as California and New Jersey. [6]

- It is estimated that New York State will face a shortage of at least 80,000 home care workers by 2025. [7]

Next Steps

Due to the increase in job satisfaction rates among HHAs and improvements in overall health outcomes for those who receive home care, mandated HHA enhanced training is a promising approach that should be implemented to address the shortage of HHAs in NYS. First, on a broader state-level, registered Democrats could advocate this policy to Senator John Mannion (D), Chairman of Committee on Disabilities, and Senator Rachel May (D), both of whom have experience advocating for home care services. [12] At the community level, NYS HHAs should petition their respective local town board members. Cooperation with organizations such as New York Advocates for Home Care (NYAHC), an association dedicated to advocating on behalf of HHAs, could lead to further expression of concerns regarding poor training. [13] This selection should be

made, as both the Paraprofessional Healthcare Institute and NYAHC have expressed explicit support for mandating enhanced training for HHAs in NYS. [8, 14] Such advocacy would ideally streamline the support for this policy into a unified voice of change.

Action Plan Snapshot

In terms of funding, reallocation of tax payer dollars would be the primary way in which this program could be supported. Moreover, Congress' passing of the Training Reimbursement Act, S.1190, would increase federal matching payments for home health aide training programs focused on the direct care workforce. [15]

Once the collaboration of stakeholders has been constructed, Governor Kathy Hochul would be an additional supporter of the proposal. Hochul has been vocal in her support of NYS' historical \$20 billion multi-year healthcare investment in fiscal year (FY) 2023 budget. [16] This new healthcare investment FY budget will invest \$7.7 billion to increase home care worker minimum wage by \$3 and direct funds toward current NYS HHA training programs—both of which align with the goals of implementing enhanced training programs to address

the HHA shortage. [16] Since Governor Hochul's role is crucial to the approval of this budget, it is necessary to procure her support for the bill.

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Addressing Chlamydia in New York State by Implementing School-Wide Testing and Treatment

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The New York State Department of Health should expand New York City's School-Based Testing and Education Program for Urban Populations (STEP UP) program to public high schools. STEP UP would help combat rising state-wide chlamydia infections among those aged 15-19.

Background

Chlamydia, a bacterial sexually transmitted disease (STI) caused by *Chlamydia trachomatis*, is rampantly increasing in prevalence throughout the State of New York. [10] In 2019, 124,389 students were diagnosed with chlamydia in New York, and the state ranked 9th highest in the United States for the total number of chlamydia diagnoses. [10] Individuals aged 15-24 have the highest risk of infection, and about 27,000 New York teenagers aged 15-19 are diagnosed with chlamydia each year. [9]

This STI, while curable with antibiotics, is an issue of concern because it often infects individuals without presenting symptoms. [10] Those with chlamydia are left unaware of their condition if they do not get tested. [10] If chlamydia is not diagnosed and treated, it can lead to infertility and reproductive organ malfunction. [10]

Chlamydia testing, like most STI testing, is

recommended annually for ages 25 and below and those who are sexually active. [6] This testing is widely available at New York State sexual health clinics, but screening rates are low. [13] In 2017, only 61% of NYS Family Planning Program female individuals aged 15-24 were tested for chlamydia. [13] Additionally, those within this age range may refrain from getting tested because they worry that their health insurance would inform their insurance policyholder—often a parent—about the STI test, as well as additional testing costs. [2]

Policy Idea

New York State Department of Health should expand New York City's School-Based Testing and Education Program for Urban Populations (STEP UP) chlamydia testing and treatment program to all public high schools in the state. These programs would be cost-free, confidential, and annually administered by medical professionals.

Students would anonymously report whether they are sexually active or not at the beginning of each school year and receive anonymous chlamydia testing and treatment as necessary. More specifically, the administered test would be a non-invasive urine-based nucleic acid amplification technique (NAAT). [3]

Policy Analysis

A school-wide chlamydia testing and treatment program at all New York State high schools aims to increase chlamydia diagnosis and treatment among 15-19-year-old students. This proposal could be evaluated based on its impact on two goals: increasing the number of individuals ages 15-19 aware of their chlamydia status and increasing the number of chlamydia patients receiving treatment.

The New York City public schools STEP UP program has been a successful model. This program conducts free, routine chlamydia and

gonorrhea testing, treatment, and STI education for high school students. [8] In 2010, STEP UP educated 19,600 students and tested 8,300 students from 100 different New York City schools. [8] Through testing, they identified 543 cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea, meaning that about 6.5% of this population was affected by these infections. STEP UP helped treat about 90% of infected students. [8] Research shows that this program and school-based STD screening in other states improves students' beliefs and attitudes about STD testing. [3]

Additionally, non-Hispanic black and Hispanic individuals are disproportionately affected by chlamydia. [10] In 2019, these populations had the highest overall diagnosis rates, though the data may be underrepresented due to limited testing within these populations. [10] New York City's STEP UP program helped increase testing accessibility and treatment for communities of color, with most of those tested self-identifying as Black, non-Hispanic (42.7%), or Hispanic (47%). [12] A New York State school-wide chlamydia testing and treatment program could have the same positive effect on these communities.

Talking Points

- New York City's STEP UP program shows that free, school-wide STI testing and treatment programs are effective in identifying and treating cases of chlamydia and gonorrhea. [3, 8]
- Research finds that school-based health centers that provide STD screening effectively identify adolescents at high risk for STDs. [3]
- School-based STD screening improves students' beliefs and attitudes about STD testing. [3]
- School-wide STI testing increases testing accessibility and treatment for communities that typically lack access to testing and appropriate care, such as Non-Hispanic black and Hispanic individuals. [10, 12]

Key Facts

- New York State ranks 9th highest in the United States for the total number of chlamydia diagnoses. [10]
- About 27,000 New York teenagers ages 15-19 are diagnosed

with chlamydia annually. [3]

- STI testing is widely available at New York State sexual health clinics, but screening rates are low. In 2017, only 61% of NYS Family Planning Program female individuals ages 15-24 were tested for chlamydia. [13]
- Individuals ages 15-24 avoid getting tested and treated at NYS sexual health clinics because they worry about their parents getting notified. [2]
- Communities of color are disproportionately affected by chlamydia. [10]

Next Steps

No bill has been found to be introduced in the New York State Senate in support of implementing school-wide chlamydia testing. A related bill currently in the Senate is S937, which aims to provide STD treatment to minors without requiring a parent or guardian's consent. [5] However, this bill remains in committee within the Senate. [5] Therefore, the first step to organizing chlamydia testing in New York State public schools would be to draft a bill that expands the STEP

UP program—specifically its free, anonymous chlamydia testing and treatment—to New York State public schools for students ages 15-19. Additionally, S937 should be passed by both the State Assembly and the Senate and signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul. More information should also be published in regards to New York City’s STEP UP program and its success in identifying and treating cases of STDs, as well as increasing accessibility for students of color.

Action Plan Snapshot

In order to generate support for a proposal for New York State public school-wide chlamydia testing, partnerships with several organizations are necessary. Planned Parenthood, the National Coalition of STD Directors (NCSD), and the American Sexually Transmitted Diseases Association (ASTDA) are all organizations in support of an increase in chlamydia testing, especially for the age range of interest. [1, 7, 14] Through social movements and media, these well-known organizations could help bring attention to S937, as well as the new bill dedicated to implementing school-wide testing and treatment. These organizations could also emphasize the two main

goals of school-wide sexual health care services.

It is also imperative that community outreach be conducted to gauge support for the proposal. High school administrators and school district health department staff working in New York State schools should be contacted and informed about the proposal. If these administrators support the policy, this support may help encourage New York State politicians to review S937 and this new bill.

Governor Kathy Hochul should also be contacted and informed about the proposal. Hochul has been dedicated to ending the HIV epidemic and has supported Planned Parenthood in its efforts to increase access to birth control and STD testing. [4, 11] The New York State Governor’s support may also motivate other New York State politicians to focus their attention on both a chlamydia testing and treatment bill and S937.

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A Plea for Help: The Need for Robust Action Against Maternal Mortality in Oklahoma

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The state of Oklahoma should implement Medicaid reimbursement for doula care to improve its maternal mortality and morbidity rates. Additional funding for doula assistance programs would improve birth outcomes and ease the stress of pregnancy and birth for expectant mothers.

Background

Maternal mortality (MMR) is defined as a death attributed to “a pregnancy complication, a chain of events initiated by pregnancy, or the aggravation of an unrelated condition by the physiologic effects of pregnancy,” which occurs during pregnancy and up to one year postpartum. [1] Similarly, maternal mortality refers to physical or mental illness directly related to pregnancy or childbirth. [2]

Oklahoma faces one of the highest rates of MMR in the United States, with an average of 23.5 deaths per 100,000 live births—an increase from 17.4 deaths per 100,000 live births in 2018. [2] Oklahoma’s Maternal Mortality Review Committee (MMRC) determined that 70.6% of these deaths could have been preventable. [2] This issue has racial implications, as the MMR for Black women was 40.8 deaths per 100,000 live births, 1.6 times the rate for non-Hispanic white women (25.4) and 9.3 times the rate

for Hispanic women (4.4). [2]

In response to increasing fears of hospital births in the 1970s, women turned to doulas for dedicated emotional support. [3] Not considered healthcare professionals, doulas act as coaches and companions that provide constant communication and encouragement to improve the experience of labor, birth, and postpartum care. [3] Despite the medical progress made since the 1970s, expanded doula access could lead to improved birth outcomes for mothers in Oklahoma.

Policy Idea

Through increasing the proportion of doula-assisted childbirths, Oklahoma could decrease its maternal mortality and morbidity rates. Therefore, the Oklahoma State Department of Health should expand Medicaid coverage to include reimbursement for doula coverage. The emotional support and advocacy provided by doulas

would be especially helpful for expectant mothers who are disproportionately affected by maternal mortality and morbidity, as well as more likely to be discriminated against during childbirth.

Policy Analysis

Studies show that birthing people that receive doula care have improved birthing outcomes, both for themselves and for their infants. For instance, doula-assisted mothers were four times less likely to have a low birth-weight baby, two times less likely to experience a birth complication involving themselves or their infant, and more likely to initiate breastfeeding. [5] Additionally, women receiving doula care have been found to have shorter labors, lower cesarean rates, and higher Apgar scores—the last of which is a physical exam performed on newborns five minutes after birth to assess their health. [9]

Additionally, a study focused on mothers with

Medicaid-funded doula care found that the odds of a cesarean delivery were 40.9% lower for doula-supported births. [10] If Medicaid reimbursement were expanded across the country and each state experienced similar reductions in cesarean rates for Medicaid recipients, nearly all states would save at least \$2 million per year, and at least half of states would have savings of over \$9 million. [10]

However, doula fees often range from around \$600 to \$1500, a price that is out of reach of many low-income expectant mothers. [6] In addition, Oklahoma's Medicaid program pays for over 57% of the births in the state but does not cover doula services. [6] In fact, almost 70% of the mothers who died between 2009 and 2017 were covered by Medicaid, according to the Oklahoma MMRC. [7] Providing stipends for doula coverage would allow mothers to afford a birth companion that can provide culturally appropriate, patient-centered care and that can advocate for their best interests. Expanded coverage could not only improve birth outcomes, but it could also decrease Medicaid costs in Oklahoma.

Talking Points

- Mothers assisted by doulas experienced better health

outcomes; they were less likely to have a low birth weight baby, less likely to experience a birth complication involving themselves or their baby, and significantly more likely to initiate breastfeeding. [5]

- Continuous support during birth led to a 38% decrease in the baby's risk of a low five-minute Apgar score. [8]
- Doula fees can range from around \$600 to \$1,500 in Oklahoma. SoonerCare, Oklahoma's Medicaid program, does not cover doula services. [6]
- Almost 70% of the women who died between 2009 and 2017 were covered by Medicaid, according to Oklahoma's Maternal Mortality Review committee. [7]

Key Facts

- Oklahoma's reported three-year maternal mortality rate for 2017-2019 was 23.5 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births. [2]
- According to the Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, Oklahoma persistently ranks among the states with the worst rates (40th) of maternal deaths in the U.S. [4]

- In Oklahoma, the maternal mortality rate for Black women (40.8 deaths per 100,000 live births) was almost double the rate for non-Hispanic white women (25.4) and over 9 times the rate for Hispanic women (4.4). [2]

Next Steps

Doula care is a promising approach to combating existing disparities in maternal health, but Medicaid reimbursement for doula services requires state-level legislation. Reaching out to lawmakers in Oklahoma, such as Senator Carri Hicks (D) and Senator Jo Anna Dossett (D), who have experience advocating for health-related services, would be the first step. [12, 13] By communicating with local organizations that have similar goals, widespread support for expanded Medicaid-supported doula services could be expressed. Organizations such as Metriarch, a collaborative that specializes in resource curation and outreach for women's health in Oklahoma, could provide grassroot support so that the

residents of Oklahoma can express their concerns against maternal mortality. [11]

Action Plan Snapshot

As previously mentioned, reaching out to lawmakers who hold membership on the Oklahoma Health and Human Services Committee to show support would be the initial step. Oklahoma is a majority Republican state, and therefore advocating for increased Medicaid funding would be difficult. [16] For instance, Oklahoma Medicaid expansion was approved by voters in June 2020 and expansion officially took effect on July 1, 2021. [15] In fact, Medicaid expansion was strongly opposed by the Republican legislators in office, and therefore reaching out to such legislators to demonstrate that this issue is not one of politics, but rather health and safety, would be key to passing this legislation. [15]

In addition to Metriarch, the Black Mamas Matter Alliance and Tulsa Birth Equity Initiative also hold the universal goal of improving maternal health outcomes, specifically for Black women. [11, 17] Both of these organizations advocate for policies to eliminate U.S. health disparities and have experience lobbying for Medicaid expansion for

pregnancies. [11, 17] Thus, collaborating with such community-based organizations could bolster support for this bill. [14]

In terms of funding, reallocation of tax payer dollars would be the main way that this program could be financially supported. Furthermore, after the bill's passing, there would need to be an advertising campaign that informs low-income expectant mothers of their newfound option to have a doula-supported pregnancy. A campaign showing the benefits of a doula and advertising the new stipend by Medicaid coverage could motivate mothers to reach out for doula coverage.

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Mandating Music Therapy Education Programs in New York State

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The New York State Department of Health should establish an education program that acquaints and trains nurses (within nursing homes) on the benefits of music therapy as a non-pharmacological treatment for Alzheimers and dementia symptoms.

Background

By 2050, the national incidence of Alzheimer's is expected to more than double, suggesting an aging population, increasing health expenditures, and an increased burden on caregivers. [2] In New York State (NYS), 410,000 people aged 65 and older suffer from Alzheimer's disease, with 586,000 caregivers burdened with keeping their loved ones healthy. [1] Nursing homes are important in providing intense care for those with chronic conditions, including Alzheimer's, that would not be possible from an at-home caregiver. [8] Furthermore, music therapists work in nursing homes and assess the emotional and physical health of patients, as well as their cognitive skills through music responses. [9] Nationally, there are only 26,000 music therapists—suggesting a low number of licensed music therapists in NYS—and the highest concentration of nursing homes in NYS are in New York City. [4, 7]

Those with dementia typically exhibit polypharmacy; however, current pharmacological interventions like acetylcholinesterase, which aim to stall Alzheimer's and dementia, have limited effects in improving cognition and behavior. [3] Music therapy is a natural solution that complements pharmaceuticals in slowing down the cognitive decline associated with aging. [3] Studies have shown that music therapy improves cognitive function, quality of life, and depression symptoms in people suffering from dementia. [3] However, the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) does not currently have a music therapy program, nor does it mandate that nursing home staff be trained and educated in how to implement a music therapy regimen. [15]

Policy Idea

NYSDOH should implement a music therapy education program, beginning in New York City.

A team of certified music therapists would travel to nursing homes and present a training program aimed at teaching the benefits of music therapy and how to implement a unique clinical regimen. Additionally, NYSDOH should implement a fine to all nursing homes if they do not offer a music therapy program. This policy would broaden the expertise of nurses, provide an avenue of natural therapy, and alleviate symptoms of neurodegeneration while lowering the instance of polypharmacy.

Policy Analysis

A meta-analysis of eight articles found promising results of the effect of music therapy for those suffering from dementia, and music therapy could improve cognitive function in these patients. [5] More specifically, listening, and especially singing, most greatly improves cognitive function. [5] Furthermore, statistical analyses showed that quality of life improved for dementia patients and for

those also suffering from depression; additionally, music therapy positively impacted their depressive states 6 months after the intervention. [5]

According to a 2021 paper published by Li et al., there is a gap in knowledge and literature about nurses' attitudes towards the implementation and understanding of music therapy. [6] It has been suggested that music therapy should be a mandated component of nursing education, but few nurses understand the benefits of it. [6] After providing a survey questionnaire to 1213 nurses in Taiwan, over 80% agreed that music therapy has positive impacts on patients and can improve quality of care. [6] Additionally, over 70% of the participants believed that music therapy education programs should be implemented during nursing training. [6] Furthermore, more than 65% of the participants believed that applying music therapy in a health care setting could improve nurses' professional status. [6] Nearly two-thirds of the participants believed that the only barrier in implementing music therapy programs was a lack of education for nurses. [6]

Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM), health care practices that are not part of conventional

medicine, classifies music therapy as a mind-body domain. [12] CAM practices are used internationally, and an increasing number of U.S. medical schools are teaching the clinical effects of music therapy. [6]

Talking Points

- Quality of life and cognitive ability are improved through music therapy, and depression symptoms are lowered in the long-term. [5]
- In Taiwan, 80% of nurses acknowledge the positive effects of music therapy and agree that it can improve quality of care. [6]
- A lack of education in nursing school is the only barrier in implementing music therapy programs according to two-thirds of Taiwanese nurses. [6]
- More U.S. medical schools are integrating Complementary and Alternative Medicine techniques and the clinical effects of music therapy into their curriculum. [6]

Key Facts

- The prevalence of Alzheimer's is expected to double by

2050; currently there are 410,000 people who are 65 and older in NYS that suffer from Alzheimer's disease and 586,000 caregivers are burdened with taking care of their loved ones. [1, 2]

- Nationally, there are only 26,000 music therapists which suggests few licensed music therapists in NYS. [4]
- The highest concentration of nursing homes in NYS are in New York City. [7]
- NYSDOH does not currently have a music therapy program or mandate that nursing home staff be trained in how to implement a music therapy regimen. [15]

Next Steps

To implement a Music Therapy education program in nursing homes in NYC, the NYSDOH commissioner of health, Mary T. Bassett, should be informed of the lack of non-pharmacological treatment of neurodegenerative diseases and the benefits of music therapy. [13] Music therapists from the American Music Therapy Association should immediately present to the NYSDOH about the benefits

of music therapy programs in nursing homes. [14] Once the idea is accepted, a special team of music therapists would be created within the NYSDOH that would be tasked to create a curriculum focusing on training nurses of the clinical benefits of music therapy. In order to ensure that nursing homes maintain and provide a music therapy program, a fine could be implemented if they do not adhere to NYSDOH guidelines; this ramification is further described by section 1.21 of noncompliance or nonconformance penalties of the NYSDOH regulations. [10]

Action Plan Snapshot

Implementing this policy would be a gradual process that would require educating NYSDOH on benefits of music and cognition, creating a strong curriculum to teach nurses how to implement unique music therapy regimes, and ensuring that nursing homes are upholding their responsibilities of the program. Before the policy is passed, NYSDOH must first become aware of the lack of music therapy education throughout NYS and of the benefits of implementing a music therapy program for Alzheimer's and dementia patients in nursing homes. Therefore, music therapists

from the American Music Therapy Association should present to NYSDOH the importance of music therapy and why it should be a standard practice in nursing homes. They should also propose creating a music therapy education center, which would aim to highlight the benefits of music therapy and ways for nurses to implement the practice. Once NYSDOH has agreed to create a center of music therapy education for nursing homes, it should recruit a team of music therapy experts to assess current knowledge of this therapy throughout the state, as well as to begin forming a related curriculum. To garner support from nursing homes, it would be important to educate the New York State Health Facilities Association, which represents almost 400 skilled nursing providers and adult care and assisted living communities, including nursing homes. [11]

The curriculum would include what music therapy is, how to recognize what type of music resonates most with a patient, and how to create a unique music therapy regimen to alleviate the burdens of neurodegeneration. Music therapists working in the center would travel to nursing homes within NYC and train nurses in weekly workshops

on how to effectively administer music therapy.

To fund this policy, state taxes would contribute to creating a team of music therapists in the NYSDOH, since one currently does not exist. Enforcing this policy would require state taxes at all nursing homes to ensure that they are maintaining and adhering to guidelines.

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