

THE SAFETY IS A HUMAN RIGHT AGENDA:

Safe Horizon's Recommendations to Mayor-Elect Mamdani

We are deeply energized by your win, Mayor-elect Mamdani. For years at Safe Horizon, we have known that safety is a human right, and that investment in the safety of survivors and communities is our collective responsibility as New Yorkers. City systems that work for survivors and follow leadership of communities have too often seemed just out of reach—not for lack of will, but for lack of opportunity. For the first time in many years, it feels possible to turn vision into action, in partnership with a mayor ready to think creatively and build systems that work for the people they're meant to serve.

Safe Horizon was founded in response to the challenges survivors faced navigating fragmented systems. Over time, we have become experts at helping New Yorkers find safety and stability while interfacing with systems that often fall short. Together, we are eager to help build something stronger—systems that are survivor-centered, antiracist, and grounded in trust, partnering with communities that embrace their central role in safety and healing.

While our daily anti-violence work focuses on people in crisis and the trauma they carry, we are constantly reminded of the deep poverty that shapes our clients' experiences and limits their choices. To be truly survivor-centered means confronting the violence of poverty, racism, transphobia, and more head-on—and making New York City more affordable and livable for all who call it home. We are with you on that vision.

One in three New Yorkers identifies as a survivor of violence. That reality must inform how we govern, how we respond, and how we care for one another. That's why we were so inspired to hear your pledge on the campaign trail to invest \$40.3M in expanded services to survivors. In this document, you will find our five tenets of a survivor-centered New York City, with pragmatic recommendations that can have an immediate and measurable impact on New Yorkers' lives.

At Safe Horizon, we believe safety is a universal human right—and that we all share a collective responsibility to protect and uphold it. With 150 program sites across all five boroughs and more than 250,000 New Yorkers served each year, we are deeply woven into the fabric of this city. We love New York. And we believe that together, we can make it a place where every person is safe in their community, in their home, in their body, and in their mind.

1.

KEY SYSTEMS MUST PLACE SURVIVORS AT THE CENTER

Safety takes all of us. It depends on what happens in every borough, in every courthouse and precinct, in every community space where people come together. To meet survivors' needs, New York's systems must be functional, responsive, and designed with those needs at the center—not as an afterthought.

We are excited by your vision for the **Department of Community Safety**, which would represent a major step toward coordinating the kinds of supports that research and experience show actually keep people safe: preventing violence before it happens, providing effective, coordinated responses across key systems, helping survivors heal, ensuring access to care, and mobilizing community supports.



We also recognize that producing meaningful change from within large systems is never easy. Nonetheless, Safe Horizon's Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) shows that it IS possible. CVAP is proof of what can happen when a system invests in listening and evolving. By embedding advocates directly in police precincts throughout the five boroughs, we've helped shift how survivors are treated—as people, not cases. With continued partnership, commitment, and support, we can build on this progress and create new models of transformative care.

The reimagining must extend beyond government. Culturally specific, grassroots organizations play a crucial role in reaching individuals who are most vulnerable and least likely to trust formal systems. Strengthening these networks will ensure that every survivor, no matter their identity or status, can feel safe in this city.

Tenets and Recommendations

Strengthen Survivor-Centered Partnerships with the NYPD

Many New Yorkers who experience violence or abuse do not turn to law enforcement—but many do, and they deserve a compassionate, transparent, and trauma-informed response. Our precinct-based Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) does just that. Last year alone, CVAP served over 46,000 New Yorkers, including victims of robbery and hate crimes, domestic violence survivors, and sexual assault survivors. And it is impactful: **over 94% of the people we worked with felt better and more informed after receiving assistance.** It is our collective responsibility to ensure that every New Yorker who calls the police is treated with dignity and connected to support.

The City should:

- **Restore and expand CVAP funding.** Reverse the Adams Administration's 2024 PEG and withdraw the October 2025 concept paper, which includes a plan to greatly reduce the presence of advocates inside police precincts. Reinvest in CVAP advocate positions, ensuring adequate coverage in all precincts, PSA's and SVD's, and new placements in NYPD Transit, the Hate Crimes Task Force, and the Gun Violence Strategies Partnership Unit. Forty years of precinct-based partnership show that advocates within the NYPD improve outcomes for survivors and communities alike.
- **Strengthen the CVAP program** through digital data-sharing, enhanced program coordination, and increased engagement with survivor groups and community stakeholders to ensure accountability and wrap-around care.
- **Integrate lived-experience expertise into law enforcement training.** Include CVAP advocates and survivors in police-academy and supervisory-level trainings to help embed trauma-informed practice throughout the department.
- **Launch joint public-awareness efforts** highlighting that CVAP services exist in every precinct, PSA, and Special Victims Division.

Tenets and Recommendations

Build a Survivor-Centered Family Court System

Survivors who turn to Family Court deserve a system that works. Yet too many face delays, barriers, and opaque procedures that compromise safety and justice. Although Family Court operates under state authority, the City can lead by strengthening access, accountability, and survivor care.

The City should:

- **Guarantee access to quality representation.** Provide sustainable, multi-year City funding for nonprofit legal service organizations so every survivor—regardless of income or immigration status—has trauma-informed counsel in Family and Supreme Court. Expand support for 18-B counsel, assigned counsel panels, and free civil legal aid.
- **Expand supervised-visitation services through increased City funding and statewide collaboration.** Safe, trauma-informed visitation options are essential for protecting children and survivors while maintaining family relationships under court orders.
- **Ensure that Family Court judges have the right expertise.** End judicial rotations from Civil Court and ensure that new Family Court appointments go only to judges trained and committed to handling family and gender-based violence in a survivor-centered, trauma-informed manner.

Support Families of Homicide Victims

When a life is taken, families are left navigating unimaginable loss while confronting complex systems. They deserve immediate outreach, compassion, and connection to support.

The City should:

- **Make immediate linkages to qualified providers in every case.** Require the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner (OCME) to collect and share contact information for a family representative so advocates can reach out quickly, providing timely assistance with emergency compensation, emotional support, and long-term resources available through the NYS Office of Victim Services (OVS).
- **Increase HRA's financial assistance cap for funeral expenses to \$12,000.** This resource is the only option available when a family is ineligible for OVS compensation and has no other financial resources.

2.

SURVIVOR VOICES MUST LEAD THE CITY'S COMMUNITY SAFETY STRATEGY

Survivors of violence and abuse are experts in safety. Every day they make choices to protect themselves and their families. Safety, healing, and justice look different for every person, and a survivor's path intersects with public systems, family members, neighbors, and community networks.

As a survivor-led organization, Safe Horizon has seen firsthand the power of lived experience to drive meaningful change. When survivors are at the table—and especially when they lead—systems become more compassionate, effective, and responsive to real human needs. The Department of Community Safety should reflect that truth. It should be led by a survivor whose lived experience can guide New York City toward policies rooted in healing. Survivor leadership isn't symbolic—it is strategic.

We also recommend establishment of a cabinet-level **Community Safety Task Force** made up of survivors, advocates, faith leaders, family members, health professionals, law enforcement, violence interrupters, and other community stakeholders that can help shape a truly coordinated city-wide approach to safety. This task force would advise on cross-system reforms and generate new ideas rooted in lived experience and shared accountability.



Investments are needed in upstream violence prevention strategies for all forms of violence, and in community-based responses that support survivor safety and healing.

At the same time, investments in youth advocacy, leadership development, and culturally-specific healing networks will ensure that survivors are not just consulted but leading the conversation.

The responsibilities of the Community Safety Task Force should include:

- Helping the Administration ensure survivors receive consistent compassionate care no matter where they turn for help, with parallel investments in two essential models: advocates embedded in systems like the courts and police department, and grassroots programming that includes culturally-specific and neighborhood-based services.
- Guiding the development of “The State of Safety in NYC,” a biannual survey of crime victims to track trends and identify systems problems and unmet needs.

3.

ALL SURVIVORS DESERVE A SAFE PLACE TO STAY AND A PATHWAY TO PERMANENT HOUSING

It is a simple fact: **no one is safe without a safe place to sleep.** Stable, secure shelter and housing are the foundations for safety and healing. When survivors don't know where they will rest at night, stability is not just difficult—it's impossible.



All New Yorkers deserve access to emergency shelter that offer flexible options to meet their needs and pathways out of homelessness, including deeply affordable housing. By expanding housing programs, streamlining communication between shelter systems, and funding supportive services, we can ensure survivors, youth, and families have the security they need to heal. Safe shelter and housing aren't just basic needs—they are essential for a safer city.

Tenets and Recommendations

Create a New Model of Short-Term, Trauma-Informed Housing for Survivors

Every day, survivors of domestic violence are forced to make life-altering decisions in a matter of minutes while in crisis. Often, this means choosing whether to enter a shelter system that, while lifesaving for many, can feel overwhelming, restrictive, or not the right fit.

The City should:

- **Pilot an innovative short-term, trauma-informed housing model** that gives survivors a few days of safety, respite, and breathing room to plan their next steps. This option would interrupt the cycle of violence and empower survivors to make thoughtful, informed choices about their future.
- **Provide funding for service providers, City agencies, survivors, and community leaders to come together** to conduct research, design, and test this model, ensuring it is survivor-centered, culturally responsive, and scalable.

Modernize HRA's Domestic Violence Shelter System

Emergency shelter should provide safety, stability, and space to heal, while helping survivors achieve independence and permanent housing. Yet too many survivors find the current system inaccessible, rigid, and ill-suited to their needs.

The City should:

- **Work with the Governor and the State Legislature to enact the SAFE Shelter Act, a bill which will improve access to emergency shelter for single (non-parenting) survivors of violence, abuse, and exploitation.** These survivors, who are disproportionately LGBTQI, older, and victims of trafficking, are currently denied such access in 80% of cases. This is dangerous and unconscionable. The bill would provide full reimbursement even when a room for two is used by a single survivor—recognizing that safety, not occupancy, must guide policy. The Legislature passed the Act in 2024, yet the Governor vetoed it. In addition to making this commonsense change, which would provide immediate relief, the City should invest in the development of new shelter capacity to meet the needs of single survivors in the years ahead.
- **Work with the Governor and the State Legislature to remove arbitrary 180-day shelter limits.** Survivors should be able to remain in DV shelter as long as necessary to secure stable housing and safety. Inflexible time limits disrupt recovery and place survivors at risk.
- **Work with the State to reform the per diem reimbursement system** to cover true operating costs and sustain providers who offer trauma-informed care.

Tenets and Recommendations

Address the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth

Runaway and homeless youth are among the most overlooked and under-resourced populations in New York City. These young people carry a heavy load of exposure to multiple forms of trauma and profound systemic failures. They deserve the same safety, stability, and pathways to housing as every other young person.

The City should:

- **Fully implement Local Law 170 of 2021 as intended**, ensuring RHY can access CityFHEPS vouchers without being forced into DHS shelters.
- **Grant homeless youth priority status for NYCHA housing**, recognizing their heightened vulnerability.
- **Create youth-specific mental health shelters** that provide therapeutic support for young people with complex trauma who cannot safely return to DYCD shelters.
- **Baseline funding for RHY Housing Navigators and Specialists**, increase RHY shelter bed rates, and ensure that 100% of RHY drop-in clients have access to case management—not just the 10% currently covered.

Expand Access to Affordable and Supportive Housing

Safe, stable, and affordable housing remains the number one need among survivors we serve across all programs. To meet that need, the City must move beyond incremental progress and build systems that truly reflect survivors' realities.

The City should:

- **Build more deeply affordable housing units**, not just more affordable units overall. Very low-income New Yorkers continue to face the steepest barriers to access and are too often overlooked by successive administrations.
- **Expand HPD housing programs** currently available to unhoused New Yorkers in DHS shelters to include survivors in domestic violence (DV) and runaway and homeless youth (RHY) shelters.
- **Safeguard housing vouchers against federal threats.** During the pandemic, Safe Horizon helped nearly 500 clients secure emergency housing vouchers. No survivor should lose housing due to federal policy shifts.
- **Radically reform NYCHA's emergency transfer program** to eliminate the average 800-day wait time for DV survivors, intimidated victims, and intimidated witnesses. In addition to timely transfers, the program should offer wrap-around services to help survivors successfully transfer and stabilize. This could be done through a dedicated internal team and through contracts with community-based organizations.

4.

ALL NEW YORKERS DESERVE TO BE SAFE



New York City's strength has always come from our diversity and from the contributions of the immigrant communities who make this city special. But today, too many immigrant New Yorkers, including undocumented and noncitizen residents, are living in fear. Federal actions and indiscriminate and aggressive immigration enforcement have created an environment of terror that prevents survivors from reporting violence and seeking help. This makes all New Yorkers less safe.

No one should have to choose between safety and deportation. Every survivor should be able to walk into a courthouse, a precinct, a school, or a hospital without fear. To stand with immigrant survivors, New York City must ensure that safety is accessible to everyone—regardless of status, language, or origin.

Tenets and Recommendations

The City should:

- **Invest in a citywide public awareness campaign to ensure all New Yorkers know they can access free and confidential support from victim service and health care providers without fear of deportation.** This multilingual campaign should celebrate the city's diversity and make clear that safety belongs to everyone.
- **Create a trauma-informed language access line.** While interpreter services exist, many interpreters are not trained in the effects of trauma or the nuances of communicating sensitively with survivors. The Mayor-elect should convene survivors, victim service providers, and language access experts to develop a compassionate, trauma-informed language line that centers healing, clarity, and trust
- **Protect sensitive spaces from immigration enforcement.** Work with the State and District Attorneys to keep ICE and federal law enforcement agencies out of courthouses, schools, hospitals, shelters, and other community institutions that must remain safe and accessible to all.
- **End unnecessary cooperation with ICE.** Work with the State to prohibit local agencies—including the Department of Motor Vehicles and other licensing and administrative offices—from sharing information with immigration enforcement or participating in actions that endanger immigrant New Yorkers.
- **Ensure personnel at all city agencies can accurately and compassionately address immigration-related questions.** For example:
 - At HRA, clarify benefits eligibility and access for immigrant households.
 - In precincts and District Attorneys' offices, ensure staff can explain visa certification processes and reporting options and provide referrals to community organizations.
- **Provide financial assistance for immigration-related costs, including asylum fees and mandatory medical exams,** to remove financial barriers that prevent survivors from pursuing legal status or protection.
- **Increase baseline funding for wraparound immigration legal services** so that every noncitizen—not just those in removal proceedings—has access to an experienced immigration attorney, advocate, and case manager. Comprehensive support prevents exploitation, violence, and trafficking.
- **Create a uniform U-visa certification process across all city and state agencies** to reduce confusion, improve timeliness, and ensure consistent access to protections for crime victims cooperating with law enforcement.
- **Strengthen enforcement against the Unauthorized Practice of Immigration Law (UPIL)** to protect immigrant New Yorkers from fraud, exploitation, and misinformation.

5.

ECONOMIC STABILITY IS SAFETY

No one can truly heal while struggling to survive. When survivors are forced to choose between paying rent, buying food, or seeking safety, recovery becomes nearly impossible. Poverty and financial abuse are among the most common—and most enduring—forms of harm that survivors face. For many, economic instability is both a cause and a consequence of violence.

That's why direct cash assistance programs and survivor grants are so vital. They recognize a simple truth: survivors know best what they need to rebuild their lives. Whether it's covering rent, paying for a phone to stay connected to support networks, replacing stolen documents, or securing childcare, flexible financial support provides immediate stability and restores dignity and control.

We know this kind of investment is not small—but it is smart. The cost of inaction is far greater. When survivors are left without resources, the strain is felt across our city—in emergency rooms, shelters, courtrooms, and public systems stretched beyond capacity. Direct financial support saves money over time, but more importantly, it saves lives.

By incorporating direct cash programs into the continuum of care, New York City can ensure that survivors are not only safe, but secure. Economic stability is the bridge between crisis and lasting recovery—and it is the foundation of a city where everyone has the chance to heal and thrive.



The City should:

- **Dramatically expand funding for Home+ and survivor microgrant programs.** Advocates across our programs continue to face barriers in accessing funds for lock changes, security devices, and emergency grants due to underfunding. The City should expand and strengthen these programs so survivors receive critical resources when they need them—not weeks later.
- **Guarantee rapid-response funds in every borough.** Establish a citywide infrastructure that allows advocates to issue small grants for immediate safety and stabilization needs within 24 hours.
- **Integrate trauma-informed financial assistance with case management.** Ensure survivors who receive cash grants are also connected to supportive services—housing, counseling, and employment pathways—to promote long-term stability.
- **Improve access for immigrant survivors.** Make all microgrant programs linguistically accessible and explicitly available to undocumented and mixed-status families.