



This Week in New York

Covering New York State and City Government

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"Obstacles don't define us. Rather, it is the unparalleled courage and character of us that defines us as a people. So my confidence in the future is steeped in our glorious past - in the face of adversity, we always persist. We persevere, we prevail." Governor Kathy Hochul

In the News-New York State

New York State Department of Labor Announces Millions in Recovered Wages



On August 10, the New York State Department of Labor announced that the Division of Worker Protection and its investigators have recovered nearly \$12 million in stolen wages to about 12,000 workers across the State since the beginning of the calendar year.

These findings follow a July 2022 announcement by Governor Kathy Hochul in wherein she revitalized New York State's push to combat wage theft and protect the State's workers. In that announcement the Governor touted \$3 million in wage restitution and contributions owed to the State by the Wage Theft Task Force – a collaboration between the Department of Labor, the New York State Attorney General, and Offices of District Attorneys across the State. She also revealed a hotline and online portal where New Yorkers can report wage theft directly.

This most recent announcement, which puts the Department on track to recover \$20 million in stolen wages in 2023, is exemplified by over \$200,000 recovered in six notable cases that the Division of Labor Standards were able to reach settlements in:

- A grocery store worker in Elmont who received **\$37,095**
- A dry-cleaning employee in Manhattan who received **\$20,000**
- A jewelry store worker in Jackson Heights who received **\$65,000**
- A tow truck operator in Elma who received **\$25,900**
- An installer working for a restoration company in Yonkers who received **\$11,400**
- A technician working for a transit company in Plattsburg who received **\$48,000**

The Division of Labor Standards, which operates as a part of the Department's Worker Protection Division, employs various strategies to recover wages, splitting specialized functions between several units including the Field District offices that conduct on-site investigations to review records and verify compliance, the Mediation Unit that aids in the swift and fair resolutions to conflicts between employees and employers, and the Central Investigations Unit that speedily investigates more basic wage claims from individual workers that may be owed wages.

Following the recent successes, the Department of Labor requested that the New York State Department of Civil Service conduct a study to evaluate the various duties and pay structure of its Labor Standards Investigators, in comparison to their Civil Service description, to ensure that their employees have a suitable work environment and pay that is equitable.

New York State Department of Labor Commissioner Roberta Reardon urges any New Yorker that believes they are a victim of wage theft to contact the Department as soon as they can. The number of the hotline is 833-910-4378.



Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams Collaborate on Kingsbridge Armory Redevelopment

This week, Governor Hochul and Mayor Adams announced steps to transform the historic Kingsbridge Armory in the Bronx. Hochul and Adams each pledged \$100 million to revitalize the 5-acre property which is also the largest armory in the nation.

In 1996, the United States military transferred the title to the property to the City of New York. Since then, the City has seen several failed redevelopment projects for the armory including a Bloomberg era mall proposal that was challenged by the City Council over worker wages, and a skating rink with stadium seating that fell through when financing couldn't be achieved.

While a specific use of the armory hasn't been laid out yet, there is going to be a strong focus on the priorities of community members. Some of the industries that community stakeholders identified as potential uses for the armory include film and television, manufacturing, and urban farming. Most recently, the armory has been used as a food distribution site during the peaks of the COVID-19 pandemic, and as a storage center for victims of the Twin Parks North fire last year.

With this new re-development, the Governor and Mayor hope to create 1,800 jobs (1,100 of these being construction jobs) and an economic impact of up to \$10 billion to the Bronx.

Officials will release a request for proposals to redevelop the site in September and a winner will be announced next year. The project is expected to break ground in 2027.



In the News-New York City



Adams Administration Warns of Ballooning \$12 Billion Migrant Crisis Costs

New York City Mayor Eric Adams this week announced the City has updated its forecast on the costs of the ongoing migrant crisis to over \$12 billion through July 2025. During the August 9 press conference, the Mayor highlighted that these updated figures reflect the cost of the crisis to the city over the next two fiscal years, should the state and federal governments refuse to participate in the management of this emergency.

So far, in Fiscal Year (FY) 2023, New York City has spent \$1.45 billion providing services, food, and shelter for the nearly 100,000 asylum seekers that began arriving in 2022. With more than half of these arrivals remaining in the City's care, some officials have described the City's shelter system as beyond its breaking point.

This announcement comes after days of harrowing images and accounts of dozens of asylum seekers sleeping outside of the Roosevelt Hotel after arriving on the morning of August 7. The historic hotel is used as the City's primary Arrival Center for the asylum seekers, where they would typically be provided access to legal services, medical services, transportation to their final destinations, and connections to shelters or humanitarian relief centers if needed. Unfortunately, due to the lack of space, the lines outside of the Roosevelt Hotel stretched for as much as 3 city blocks.

Despite these conditions, which local elected officials such as City Council Majority Leader, Keith Powers, described as "inhumane and concerning", Mayor Adams was not able to guarantee that such an event would not happen again, should the state and federal governments fail to provide the City with additional support.

Following the press conference, President Joe Biden sent the White House Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, Tom Perez, to New York City to meet with Mayor Adams at City Hall to discuss the realities of the increasing costs to the City and the affect on its shelter system. In recent weeks, Mayor Adams and the Administration have attempted to curtail these increasing costs through a variety of controversial policies such as the imposing of a 60-day shelter stay limit for adult migrants, and a willingness to re-evaluate the City's right to shelter mandate, but the Mayor believes that ultimately, this is a crisis that needs to be solved with national policies and national resources.



The Board of Correction Sues the Department of Correction Over Rikers Transparency



On August 9, the New York City Board of Correction, the agency charged with ensuring that City correctional facilities meet minimum standards of confinement and correctional health, filed a lawsuit in Bronx State Supreme Court, seeking to restore their access to surveillance video from the city's jails.

At the top of the year, Department of Correction (DOC) Commissioner, Louis Molina, revoked the Board's remote access to security video in the City's jails, as well as access to hand-held video and body camera footage. This blockage comes at a time of intense scrutiny for the DOC, as concerns over inmate violence, staff absenteeism, and mounting deaths, continue to grow – particularly on Riker's Island.

In the lawsuit, the Board, of which the majority of members have also been calling for an outside authority to takeover the City's jails, claims that the DOC is not allowing them to use the tools that they need to adequately perform its functions. The Board maintains that video access, live or otherwise, is one of the most central means by which they can monitor the City's jails and confirm DOC's compliance of minimum standards. Video footage would also allow the Board to conduct independent investigations into incidents of violence, responses to medical emergencies, and potential DOC staff misconduct.

On the same day as the filing of the lawsuit, John Schemitsch, a lawyer for the City, highlighted data that showed progress in the number of violent incidents amongst detainees and uses of force by staff in a separate filing in federal court. The lawsuit also follows a recent tour of Riker's Island by members of the New York City Council's Common Sense Caucus. After the tour, the Caucus, which includes members Robert Holden, Inna Vernikov, Ari Kagan, Vickie Paladino, David Carr, Joseph Borelli, Joann Ariola, and Kalman Yeger, praised the improvements to cleanliness and amenities made since their previous visit in 2021.

On August 10, Federal District Court Judge, Laura Taylor Swain, heard arguments from prosecutors and lawyers for detainees who called for a federal receiver to assume control of the City's jails. While she stated that the City's efforts to curb violence and improve safety have not been enough, she ordered lawyers for detainees and the United States Attorney for the Southern District of New York Damian Williams office to file motions to hold the city in contempt of prior court orders and to make a case for the federal takeover by November 17, leaving control of the City's jails to the DOC for at least the next three months.

Briefs

Potential Strike Looming for Metro-North

As negotiations with Metro-North, operated by the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), and the Transport Workers Union of America (TWU) have stalled, the union and its members have become vocal in their resolve to strike.

The nearly 600 maintenance workers, car cleaners, and train inspectors represented by TWU Locals 2001 and 2055 have been without a contract for nearly 5 years. The negotiations, being handled through the National Mediation Board, have been hindered by the MTA's unwillingness to remove the opening clause from the collective agreement – a measure that would allow the MTA to unilaterally reopen the contract and make changes to any economic or health benefits post-negotiation.

The union has also expressed that Metro-North, which sees a daily ridership of over 200,000, was held together by its workers during the heights of the COVID-19 pandemic. They worked tirelessly to maintain the health and safety of Metro-North passengers and they are requesting a contract that reflects that work.

According to MTA Spokesperson, Michael Cortez “there is no imminent risk of a strike and to suggest otherwise is extremely misleading”. TWU believes otherwise. You can listen to John Samuelson, International President of TWU, explain the union's fight [here](#).

The Cost of Living in New York City Continues to Rise

As inflation and higher interest rates continue to push rental prices towards historic levels across New York City, New Yorkers can also expect to see a bump in costs in other parts of their lives beginning in August.

Beginning on August 20, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) will be increasing its fares for subway and bus rides from 2.75 to 2.90 (representing a 5% increase in fare). Additionally, Long Island Rail Road monthly and weekly tickets will see fare hikes of 4.5% (with some railroad ticket types increasing in price by as much as 10%).

In July, Con Edison also announced a new rate plan that is expected to raise electric bills by more than 9% beginning this month. The average Con Edison residential customer can expect to see their bill in August increase from July by around \$15. This is the first step in a three-year rate plan that will see monthly bills rise again in both January 2024 and January 2025. Con Edison's gas customers will also be seeing a comparable increase according to New York State's Public Service Commission.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Announces New Appointments

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos this week announced four appointments within DEC's Executive and Regional teams:

- **Suzanna Randall** was appointed as DEC's Chief Resiliency Officer. A new position, Randall will be overseeing the implementation of New York's Clean Water, Clean Air and Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act of 2022. She most recently served as the Deputy Director of Project Delivery for the Office of Resilient Homes and Communities.
- **Peter Reuben** was appointed as the first Director of DEC's Office of Indian Nation Affairs. Reuben most recently served as DEC's Regional Spills Supervisor in Western New York, working closely with Indian Nations for over a decade on environmental issues.
- **Dereeth Glance** was appointed as the Regional Director in Region 7 which includes Broome, Cayuga, Chenango, Cortland, Madison, Onondaga, Oswego, Tioga, and Tompkins counties. Glance has been serving as DEC's Deputy Commissioner for Environmental Remediation and Materials Management.
- **Cecilia Walsh** was appointed as DEC's Director of Media Relations, where she will spearhead DEC's Press Office and handle media relations with statewide and national outlets. She most recently served as Project Coordinator of the Cannabis Education and Employment Development Program for the New York State Department of Labor.

Coming Up

New York State *No Scheduled Hearings*

New York City *Thursday, August 17th*

Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, Council Chambers - City Hall, 10 a.m.
Oversight - Congestion Pricing and the MTA's Fiscal Future.

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