

# STATE OF THE BOROUGH 2023

*(as prepared for delivery)*

## **INTRODUCTION**

How we feeling, Queens?!

I know it's early but I'm going to need more energy than that.

HOW WE FEELING, QUEENS?! ARE WE READY TO BUILD OR WHAT?!

Thank you all for being here. And thank you to the incredible Queens Theatre for hosting us today.

To my partners in government who spoke earlier and to those in the crowd — including my fellow BPs — it's an honor to call each of you a colleague and a friend.

Let's give it up one more time for my sister, Council Speaker Adrienne Adams! Thank you for your introduction and your bold leadership.

To our performers who brought the funk, thank you for being a part of this program.

To our sponsors — JetBlue, Delta, the Port Authority and Resorts World — thank you for making today possible.

To Reframe the World, the production company that made that awesome video from earlier, I appreciate you.

To my family, especially Tameeka Richards, the First Lady of Queens, watching you grow into this role over the last year has been a joy. I'm so grateful to be doing all of this work by your side.

For everyone wondering where D3 is, the First Lady said he couldn't skip school like his dad used to do when he was a kid.

And to my staff, the greatest team of public servants I could have ever asked for, thank you!

### **Claire Shulman**

Last year, I ended my State of the Borough by talking about one of my heroes — the late Claire Shulman, for whom this very theater is named for. But this year, I want to start this speech by lifting up her memory.

One way I've done that is by allocating more than \$2 million to renovate this room because anything named after Claire in this county should be as top-of-the-line as she was.

Claire left us three years ago, but her legacy is still very much alive in this room and in everything we do as a borough.

That's because Claire was a builder.

She believed in shovels in the ground. But she also believed in building communities.

She believed in building a bright future big enough for all of us to share.

Claire, if you can hear us from up there, thank you for giving me the blueprint.

You were there with me from the beginning, and I hope you're proud of all that my office — our office — has done in the last two and a half years.

Because I know I'm proud of how we've put our money where our mouth is.

I'm talking more than \$127 million in capital investment across Queens in just two years.

That includes \$22 million for our schools, \$19 million for our cultural groups, \$18 million for our hospitals, \$16 million for our libraries, another \$16 million for our parks, \$10 million for our CUNY colleges.

Y'all know how the saying goes — Queens get the money!

### **Building a Future**

In this office, we are hell bent on building our borough back better than ever before.

And that's what we're here to talk about today. Building.

Last year, in my first in-person State of the Borough, I laid out a vision for putting Queens back on track as we emerged from the carnage of COVID-19.

And in just the last 10 months, all of us, **together**, have made incredible progress across the board.

Years from now, when our kids and grandkids look back on this period of rebirth for New York City, they will know exactly where its renaissance began.

Because that future they will enjoy is being built before our eyes.

The city they will inherit is one where equity rules the day...

Where diversity is embraced...

Where upward mobility isn't contingent on your ZIP code...

That, my friends, is what's being Built in Queens.

## **HEALTHCARE**

Queens is more than just the heartbeat of our city. The World's Borough is the pulse of our planet.

But that pulse came close to flat-lining a few years ago, as COVID-19 ravaged every one of our communities.

We're still here today, literally and figuratively, because of the service and sacrifice of our healthcare heroes.

That's why I'm proud to stand with NYSNA and support our nurses. It's not good enough to bang pots and pans. How about we give them the guarantee of fair pay and safe working conditions too?

And that's why I'm proud to have allocated nearly \$19 million to our Queens hospitals since I took office.

We're talking about new MRI and ultrasound machines at Jamaica Hospital.

A new 22-bed ICU at Mount Sinai.

A new operating room suite and NICU at Elmhurst Hospital.

State of the art equipment at Queens Hospital and St. John's Episcopal,

My top priority as Borough President is the health of our families and communities.

My commitment to our hospitals, the staff who work there and the patients who seek care is iron clad.

And to all our hospital CEOs out there in the audience, my wallet will always be open.

Because you should never have to leave this borough to get the highest quality healthcare in the world.

### **H+H in Far Rockaway**

But it's not enough to just empower the facilities that already exist. We have to expand into communities where healthcare access is more a dream than reality.

Queens has seen hospital after hospital close over the years, and I'll put it to you this way.

We have 1 million more residents than the Bronx, but the same amount of hospital beds

In Rockaway, where the population grew by 8 percent over the last decade, we have just 1 hospital for 125,000 people.

For a decade, I've been fighting to bring Health and Hospitals to Far Rockaway

And finally, just a few weeks ago, Health and Hospitals approved the terms of a 32-year lease to operate a Gotham Health clinic in Rockaway Village.

We're talking about a \$30 million dollar clinic that will offer high-quality primary and preventative care in a community that has been starved of service for far too long.

It's no accident that Far Rockaway families experience heart disease, diabetes and other conditions at higher rates than elsewhere in Queens.

That is what systemic disinvestment looks like. But we're flipping the system on its head.

Because in Queens, we know healthcare is a human right.

### **BetterHelp**

None of us are perfect, though. 20 years in public service have taken a toll on me. Believe it or not, I actually had hair once.

But I can't stand here and talk to you about working for others if I'm not working on myself.

That is why I, Donovan Richards, the Queens Borough President, a Black man from Southeast Queens, am in therapy.

I've struggled. I won't lie.

And coming out of this pandemic, there are thousands, if not millions, of people in this borough who are struggling too.

But therapy changed my life. I know it's changed Deputy Borough President Ebony Young's life. It's personal to me and to Tameeka.

That's why one of the proudest moments of our administration has been providing \$2 million in free mental health services to Queens residents.

Distributed through 10 community-based organizations from across Queens, this funding helped connect more than 120 of our neighbors with free therapy sessions. And we've heard from so many of them about how life-changing it has been.

To our Deputy BP, and our First Lady, thank you for your leadership in this space.

And to anyone out there struggling, especially in communities of color where mental health is stigmatized: We see you. We hear you. You are not alone.

### **Gender Justice**

This past year has been a painful one for the women of Queens, as well. Three weeks after I gave this speech in 2022, our extremist Supreme Court stole the fundamental right to body autonomy from half our nation's population.

The shame of that decision will forever stain this country, but we will never let it determine abortion access in Queens.

So we united.

We marched.

We pressured the state to pass laws guaranteeing the right to abortion care.

And my office is doubling down on our gender justice work in Queens County by hosting a Women's Health Fair and domestic violence resource fairs.

By helping break the cycle of period poverty with our wildly successful period product drive last month — thank you, LIJ Forest Hills for your partnership.

Building in Queens is about so much more than physical construction.

It's about building a society where women have the fundamental right to choose. Where our trans neighbors can get the gender affirming care they need and can feel safe on our streets.

It may not feel like it, with all that's come out of Washington. But in this borough, we're getting there, brick by brick.

## **HOUSING**

### **Affordable housing wins**

Speaking of bricks, we've been laying a lot of them lately. Half of all housing production in the city last year happened right here in Queens, and we're just getting started.

After creating nearly 10,000 units of affordable housing while in the City Council, I've signed off on more than 4,600 units of affordable housing as BP.

But we're not talking about units that are years away from coming online.

We're talking about welcoming families to their new homes today.

### **Rockaway Development**

Down on the Peninsula, residents have been moving into Rockaway Village for weeks.

1,700 units of affordable housing, including 217 fully furnished units set aside for homeless families. An on-site supermarket. AND the Gotham Health clinic.

Up next, 2,000 units of affordable and supportive housing at Edgemere Commons.

On top of that, we've got 500 more units with home ownership opportunities and a community land trust in the pipeline with Resilient Edgemere. Thank you, Councilmember Selvena Brooks-Powers for your partnership in getting it done.

After that is Arverne East, one of the most revolutionary projects in city history:

More than 1,300 units of affordable housing, including units for formerly homeless residents, a 35-acre beachside nature preserve and 180,000 square feet of commercial and retail space.

My favorite part? With the use of innovative geothermal technology, Arverne East is going to be the first net-zero community in the entire city.

That's what's being Built in Queens — communities on the front lines of clean energy, community empowerment and the correction of systemic injustice.

### **Creedmoor**

The Rockaways serve as a blueprint for the rest of the city to follow when we talk about community development. And it's a blueprint we're utilizing across Queens.

This February, we launched a series of community workshops with Empire State Development to begin the process of redeveloping the Creedmoor campus.

And I salute the people of Eastern Queens for coming to the table and helping us craft a plan — something previous leaders have tried and failed to do for decades.

These 50 vacant acres of state-owned land give us opportunities for affordable housing, new school construction, neighborhood retail, open spaces, performance venues and so much more. We're making our own blueprint for what community development should look like going forward.

And at the end of the day, Creedmoor represents a transformative opportunity to make a meaningful impact on the lives of Eastern Queens residents.

### **Willets Point**

The same is true up at Willets Point, where a true rebirth is coming before us, starting with a brand new soccer stadium for New York City Football Club.

Queens is The World's Borough, and with the World Cup coming to the area in 2026, it only makes sense that we play The World's Game on a professional level.

That's what we'll be doing once the stadium opens in 2027, creating thousands of new jobs in the process.

But the stat on the scoreboard that I care most about is 2,500 — that's the number of affordable housing units being built at Willets Point, making it the city's largest 100 percent affordable housing project in 40 years. Thank you Mayor Adams and Councilmember Francisco Moya for your leadership here.

The GOALLL has always been to make Queens a true live-work-play destination. And with additional investments in state-of-the-art infrastructure, union jobs, and local retail, it's impossible to overstate the influence of Willets Point's transformation.

Communities like Corona and Flushing — which have suffered from decades of disinvestment — must benefit the most from this project, and I'm going to hold everyone's feet to the fire to make sure that happens.

But the resurgence of Willets Point leaves no doubt that both soccer champions and entire communities can, and will, be Built in Queens.

Hopefully we can include World Series champions in that too when the Mets bring the trophy home to Queens!

### **Innovation QNS**

Over in Western Queens, it's been a hell of a year. I'm guessing some of you might have heard of a project called Innovation QNS, right? You have if you're on Twitter.

With all the controversy aside, let me tell you what we won for Astoria.

In a community where the average cost of rent for a 2-bedroom apartment is over \$3,000 a month, more than 1,400 homes — 45 percent of the project's units — will be permanently affordable.

And of those 1,400 units, 500 of them will be available for less than \$1,000 a month.

Think about that. In a community like Astoria, where housing prices are higher than almost anywhere else in the borough, we're giving 500 hard-working families a high-quality home for a third of what they would pay if they lived anywhere else in that area.

### **Sunnyside Yards/Anable Basin**

But we're not stopping there in Western Queens. It's time to think even bolder.

The Sunnyside Yards plan has been dormant for far too long. To my partners in government, let's get this project off the ground immediately.

It's the same thing with a ton of other parcels across Western Queens, including at Anable Basin. There's more than two dozen acres of land waiting to be developed in the wake of Amazon's withdrawal, but seemingly no urgency to actually do so. Why?

Department of City Planning, I know you're listening. And you know I'm tired of seeing potential just sitting out there, untapped.

I'm ready to see some shovels in the ground.

### **Jamaica Neighborhood Planning Study**

One place where a community's potential is coming to pass, however, is Jamaica.

From launching the Downtown Jamaica Improvement Council with Councilmember Nantasha Williams last spring to opening multiple new housing developments, the progress we've made thus far has been remarkable.

Working with DOT, I'm proud to say we're investing \$55 million to give Jamaica's streets a facelift. But we're not satisfied. We need a blueprint to meet this transformational moment in time for this community.

So today, I'm calling on City Planning to launch a Jamaica Neighborhood Planning Study.

Jamaica is already a key business district and a critical transit hub. But we haven't even scratched the surface of this community's potential.

So in the months ahead, let's take a holistic, community-led look at how to make Jamaica the premiere live, work and play neighborhood in the city.

Much like we are at Creedmoor, this is a community that is crying out for more affordable housing, capital investments in infrastructure, good jobs, open space, school seats and more.

This is personal to me. I am a son of Jamaica, Queens.

And if there's one thing I want to accomplish while in office, it's giving back to the very community that shaped me.

Now is not the time to talk.

Now is not the time for NIMBYism.

In a housing crisis, you must move with the urgency of now.

And that's what we're doing in Queens. We're not talking, we're BUILDING.



## **NYCHA**

We aren't going to talk our way out of the NYCHA crisis either.

I was there with the residents of Carleton Manor who didn't have hot water for weeks in the dead of winter last year.

I met a woman at the Astoria Houses in December who was using her open oven to heat her apartment.

That same tour, I met an elderly woman who had no floor tiles and was walking on asbestos. I had to throw out my shoes when I left. But my shoes can be replaced. Her health can't.

Our public housing families are just like you and me. They work hard and sacrifice in order to put food on the table. They're our city workers who keep our borough running.

They deserve to be treated with dignity and respect by the city they love, not treated like throwaways.

That's why I created a working group of NYCHA tenant associations to hear directly from residents about what's happening on the ground.

That's why we've held NYCHA town halls and resource fairs across the borough.

And that's why I will continue to hold NYCHA's feet to the fire every single day. Because the state of our public housing developments are beyond unacceptable.

I'm done with our public housing families being left to the proverbial wolves.

It's about damn time we fully fund NYCHA, AND ensure NYCHA families can access ERAP.

## **Homeless/Asylum Seekers**

But unfortunately, NYCHA families are not the only ones who have been left to languish.

Tonight, more than 71,000 people will go to sleep in a city homeless shelter, including more than 23,000 children.

That includes thousands of asylum seeking brothers and sisters, who have come to this country in search of a better life.

So while tiny, evil men like Greg Abbott and Ron DeSantis use asylum seekers as political pawns, Queens will open its arms, not turn our backs, to anyone seeking refuge here.

That's who we are as The World's Borough. That's who I am, as the proud son of a Jamaican immigrant.

But it's not just enough to say how much we welcome them. We have to actually show it with our actions. And my friends, just watching our homeless population grow and grow is the opposite of taking action.

Each and every one of us in this room needs to act, and act now.

From developers to City Planning to elected officials and beyond, we all have a part to play in righting this horrific wrong.

So let's get to building. Not for our profits or our politics, but for our people.

Because everyone deserves a fighting chance at a bright future in The World's Borough.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE**

### **Intro**

But those brighter futures are nothing more than unattainable dreams if the tangible and societal infrastructure to support those futures don't exist.

What good is a home without a foundation or a car without tires?

### **LaGuardia Airport**

And what good is a brand-new, \$8 billion airport like LaGuardia without effective ways to get to your gate?

America's first new airport in 25 years is essentially done, and if you haven't seen it yet, go book yourself a flight right now. The new LGA will truly blow you away.

\$8 billion dollars well spent, if you ask me. Especially when we're giving \$2 billion in contracts to MWBEs and \$800 million worth of contracts to Queens-based businesses. But again, how do we get people there?

Governor Hochul was right to pull the plug on the AirTrain proposal, but that doesn't mean we should sit on our hands.

So let's take a harder look at expanding our ferry network to LaGuardia, which would directly connect thousands of residents from the Bronx, Brooklyn and Manhattan to their gates.

Bus Rapid Transit would get folks from the Jackson Heights transit hub to LaGuardia in mere minutes too.

Hell, even extending the N train to the airport is worth another look in the long-term.

We can't be this innovative when it comes to building an airport, but then fail to innovate in terms of actually getting people there. Let's chat, MTA. You've got my number.

## **JFK Airport**

Down at JFK, the work being done to reimagine the most important airport in the world can be summed up in one word.

Magic.

If anyone knows how to win, it's five-time NBA champ Magic Johnson. And that's why he put his money where his mouth is last September, where we broke ground on a \$9.5 billion privately financed new Terminal One.

At that one facility alone, we're talking about 2.4 million square feet, 23 new gates and state of the art technology. My favorite part, though?

Countless local concession opportunities and more than 10,000 jobs, including 6,000 UNION construction jobs — because you better believe Queens is a union town. Shout out to our friends at 32BJ and Building Trades!

Terminal One will be done in 2026, but the new \$1.5 billion Terminal Four is a few months away from completion.

We wrapped up the \$400 million expansion of Terminal 8 last fall.

Less than two months ago, we broke ground on a \$4.2 billion new Terminal 6, where our hometown airline JetBlue will be rooted. Stop me if you've heard this before, but the best part? 4,000 more jobs, including 1,800 union construction jobs.

At the height of the pandemic, Queens' unemployment rate was 23 percent. When I took office, it was 12 percent. But today, we're down to just 5 percent.

And the airports will be a big reason why that number has and will continue to shrink in the months ahead.

All told, we're talking about thousands of jobs, billions of dollars in wages, countless local concession opportunities and the single biggest economic development project in Queens' history.

The impact of JFK's renaissance will reverberate throughout our borough for generations to come.

The big opportunities --- the bright futures --- that will be Built in Queens through the vessel of our airports will truly be endless.

It's been an honor to bring these projects to fruition alongside visionaries like Governor Hochul, Rick Cotton, and Congressman Greg Meeks, with whom I co-chair the JFK Advisory Board.

Whether you were swinging a hammer or hammering out a deal, thank you to everyone who worked to help this project take flight.

### **Vaughn College Aviation Program**

But it isn't enough to just rebuild our airports today. We have to connect our kids with the aviation jobs of tomorrow.

Introducing the Drone Pilot Pipeline, a five-course drone program at Vaughn College, where high school students can earn college credits and their drone pilot certificate.

An FAA grant currently covers the first four courses, while the students' high schools cover the fifth and the students themselves have to pay for the FAA's final test.

That's why starting next year, my office is going to be picking up the cost of the fifth course and the test for up to 25 students.

Under no circumstance will I let a \$525 class and a \$175 test keep our kids from an industry as high flying as aviation.

Because we believe money should never be an obstacle to education.

### **Tech Challenge / Tech Fair**

When I stood on this stage last spring, I asked how we could build a borough economy that lives on the cutting edge of innovation.

Boy, did our Deputy Borough President ever answer the call.

In partnership with the Queens Economic Development Corporation, we launched our first-ever Queens Tech and Innovation Challenge last October with one simple mission: Pitch your idea for a start-up, get funded and build that business here in Queens. And it's been a hit.

Dozens and dozens of applications received across categories like Urban Tech, Big Data and Artificial Intelligence.

21 online workshops held.

4 in-person networking sessions hosted.

And on Monday, we awarded 5 start-ups with \$20,000 in seed funding to help get their businesses off the ground. Because no one is going to build Queens into a tech hub for us --- we have to build it for ourselves.

But it's about more than just supporting those who are already in tech.

It's about breaking barriers to entry. It's about inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs, especially entrepreneurs of color, who are woefully underrepresented.

I wish all of you could have seen just how many bright, young Black and Brown New Yorkers we brought out to Greater Nexus in Jamaica this January. Because I'm still blown away.

Shout out to the Greater Jamaica Development Corporation for hosting all 600 of us, and for all the work they do in that space every day too.

From workforce training sessions to hiring stations, mentoring opportunities to tech workshops, I have never seen so much brilliance and so much energy in one room.

But most of all, I had never been filled with so much hope.

We're changing the game here in Queens. Because I know for a fact that someone in the crowd that day is the next Steve Jobs or Bill Gates. Just not the next Elon Musk.

But what good are the jobs we create if you can't actually get to work quickly, efficiently and affordably?

### **CityTicket to Far Rockaway / Fair Fares**

You've all laughed when I say that it would take longer to get to Manhattan by train than Florida by plane. But it's no joke --- that's real life for hard-working Eastern Queens residents.

I get there's no bullet train to get people from Mott Avenue to Manhattan in 20 minutes. But we can at least make the trip easier on their wallets.

Now we're grateful to the governor and the MTA for expanding CityTicket earlier this year.

With that expansion, Queens residents only have to pay \$5 to take the Long Island Rail Road during off-peak hours. But last time I checked, Far Rockaway is part of Queens.

So why the hell are Far Rockaway residents the only ones being forced to pay \$12.50 for a ONE-WAY ticket into Manhattan?

Don't give me that BS about the train going through Nassau County. That is what systemic racism looks like.

\$5. Not \$12.50. What are we waiting for?

And I'll do you one better, how about \$2.50?

Let's bring the Fair Fares program to the LIRR while we're at it. You want more people to use mass transit? Make it more affordable. Let's get it done, MTA!

### **Interborough Express**

We need to make our transit system as efficient and innovative as possible too.

Enter the Interborough Express, Governor Hochul's proposed rail line between Jackson Heights, Queens and Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, which I endorsed, and — plug your ears, Mark Levine — will make Manhattan completely irrelevant.

I know my brother --- Brooklyn BP Antonio Reynoso --- agrees with me that this train would be a game-changer for both our boroughs.

For the first time, we can directly connect Elmhurst to East Flatbush, Ridgewood to Midwood and Juniper Park to Sunset Park.

The economic and employment opportunities we can create simultaneously on both sides of our border are endless.

Now that the MTA has chosen light rail as the mode of transportation, it's time to get shovels in the dirt.

### **Resiliency**

But while we're breaking ground all across the borough, we can't afford to lose sight of what we're actually digging up — Earth.

Of all the investments we're making, none are more important than the ones we are making in the health of the only home we will ever know.

That's why we're pouring millions into our parks, pushing for more Open Streets like 34th Avenue in Jackson Heights, creating groups like the College Point Task Force and investing \$2.5 billion into the infrastructure of Southeast Queens.

And that's why we launched Operation Urban Sustainability, our working group of environmentalists and climate leaders, last year:

To create a blueprint for a borough rooted in resiliency.

To transform the hellhole that is Rikers Island, which needed to close yesterday, into the city's next great renewable energy hub.

To help Queens lead in areas where New York has fallen woefully behind other major cities around the world.

### **Solar power**

Queens is doing just that when it comes to solar panel installation and solar energy production, an effort I was proud to lead in the City Council.

That's why you see solar panels on the roofs of LaGuardia Airport, Rockaway Village, Beach Green Dunes and other new developments.

The same goes for geothermal energy, which we've used successfully in Rockaway and need to bring boroughwide.

### **Queens Composting**

Speaking of boroughwide, ask the Department of Sanitation about its Queens composting program.

From just October to January, we collected an incredible 12.7 million pounds of organic waste boroughwide.

Community Board 12 alone collected 2.2 million pounds of waste, dispelling the myths that communities of color aren't interested in being part of the climate solution. Meanwhile, Boards 7, 9, 11 and 13 all broke the 1-million-pound mark too.

And now that the program is back from its winter pause, I want to see those numbers go even higher. And we should make this program mandatory.

So to Mayor Adams and Commissioner Jessica Tisch, let's get that done.

And let's take Queens' lead and get that citywide composting program done too — so we can literally say it was Built in Queens.

### **Army Corps**

All of these initiatives take time, however, and Mother Nature waits for no one.

Just asked South Queens families who were devastated by the nor'easter on December 23<sup>rd</sup>.

Streets on the ocean side of the peninsula did fine, thanks in part to the work of the Army Corps to build up our defenses along the beach.

But this time, it was bay-facing communities like Howard Beach and Hamilton Beach that were inundated.

And this is going to happen over and over, unless we act with the urgency of now.

The Army Corps of Engineers has a \$52 billion plan to build sea gates that would help flood-proof the region, including Jamaica Bay. But I have no interest in waiting until 2030 for work to start.

Let's expedite and get this going before the next Sandy or Ida strikes.

## **Investing in Our Kids**

At the end of the day, we do this work for more than just ourselves. We do it for our kids.

But for many of our young people, the threat of climate change is the farthest thing from their mind. And who could blame them?

For generations, our city has been setting kids of color up for failure through deliberate disinvestment. Overcrowded schools. No afterschool programming. No community centers.

I was one of those kids. I made it out, but a lot of my friends growing up in Southeast Queens didn't.

One of them was Darnell Patterson. He's been dead longer than he was alive — lost to the endless cycle of gun violence when we were just teenagers.

So in his name and the names of all our kids facing uncertain futures, it's time to shatter this mold into a million pieces.

## **School Funding**

First, we have to give our kids the highest-quality education possible. As I've toured schools across the borough over the last year, I've been horrified at how antiquated many of them are.

Our educators are doing their best, considering the circumstances. But it's time our schools reflected the urgency of this moment.

That's why I'm proud to have allocated more than \$22 million across more than 55 Queens schools during my time in office.

New STEM and computer labs.

Renovated libraries, auditoriums and playgrounds.

New hydroponic gardens at 9 different schools.

By the time I leave office, I want my school tours to be sources of pride, not pain. And I want students who walk those hallways to feel that same pride.

The same goes for our college campuses, because no one should have to leave Queens in search of higher education.

So over the past two years, we've pumped \$10 million into our CUNY schools.

We're talking about new training spaces for programs like nursing at LaGuardia Community College.



Renovating Queens College's food sciences lab.

A new outdoor track for York College and more.

Education is our key to competing on a global scale.

### **Civics in the Classroom / Youth and Young Adult Council**

But education goes far beyond textbooks and tests.

We need to teach our kids how to get involved in their communities and WHY it's important to be informed.

That's at the heart of our Civics in the Classroom initiative, which brings my office directly into our schools.

And that's at the heart of our new Youth and Young Adult Council, which we launched earlier this year.

### **Universal Afterschool**

It's not enough to just invest in them during school hours, though. We have to make sure they're not falling through the cracks once that bell rings at the end of the school day.

Less than half of New York City's schools offer free, city-funded afterschool programs. And coming out of this pandemic, it's never been more important to surround our students with the extra time and attention they deserve.

So let's give our parents some childcare flexibility. Let's give our kids a fighting chance at a fuller future, by keeping them in school and off the streets.

And let's do that by finally providing UNIVERSAL free afterschool programming for our young people.

Enough forcing parents to choose between their child's education and putting food on their table.

This would be the most holistic investment we could ever make, and it would make our communities safer.

Idle time is the devil's playground. So to City Hall and the City Council, let's get it done. Futures are at stake.

### **Roy Wilkins Park**

The same goes for funding new community centers, like the \$140 million new community center and two new pools coming to Roy Wilkins Park — thank you Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams for your partnership.

Like the \$5 million my office has allocated toward the expansion of the Variety Boys and Girls Club in Astoria, run by my brother Costa Constantinides.

Like the \$1.8 million we've put toward Make the Road's new community center or the \$1 million we've put toward Chhaya's new building.

These sites are more than just places to stay active and stay informed. They're down payments on our future and the kids who may soon stand on THIS stage and give THIS speech.

### **Library Funding**

The same is true for investments we make in our libraries, like the \$16 million in funding I've spread across 19 of our branches.

In every corner of Queens, we'll be renovating, expanding and otherwise improving our aging libraries. And this includes you, Rego Park. We're pushing for your project to get off the ground.

But because I'm a biased Rockaway boy, the crown jewel of the Queens Library system is going to be the \$33 million new Far Rockaway branch.

I can't wait for all of you to see it when it opens in a few months.

### **Public Safety**

Of all the investments we've talked about today, they all fall under one umbrella.

They're all direct investments in public safety.

Look no further than Far Rockaway for proof.

We've been working for years to create new opportunities in that community. And it's no accident that the 101<sup>st</sup> Precinct was one of just two precincts in the entire city where crime fell in 2022.

This is proof that being more targeted and community-informed with our investments is what works, like our violence interrupters.

That's why I'm proud to have secured \$104 million for the new 116<sup>th</sup> Precinct in Rosedale, which we topped off last summer and is a few months from opening.

I'm proud because this project is one that was born from the community and leaders like Bess DeBetham. Southeast Queens was tired of the slow response times that come with having just one precinct for more than 350 miles of streets. That tells you even the cops themselves have been disinvested in.

But we've flipped the script.

Inside the precinct will be a brand new community center. Outside the precinct will be a beautiful new public plaza. And all together, we're bringing cops and community together in a way that's never been done before.

We're not anti-police. We're anti-police brutality.

We cannot criminalize our way out of crime and poverty. And we cannot have public safety without public trust and transparency.

### **Stopping Hate**

Regardless of how many precincts we build, there's one crime wave we can't enforce our way out of. And that's the scourge of hate.

I can't be the only one who's sick and tired of gathering on the steps of Borough Hall every time bigotry rears its ugly head.

So let's take our message to the masses.

Let's educate our children about the beauty of South Asian culture by finally making Diwali a holiday in our public school system.

Let's push back against anti-Semitism by building Queens' first Holocaust memorial at Borough Hall, which I'm partnering with the Queens Jewish Community Council to do.

We are 190 countries and 350 languages strong — we have the ability to show the whole world it's possible to live in peace.

That elusive goal of a society rooted in respect for one another isn't just a fantasy. It's a reality that's been Built in Queens.

We just need to embrace it, deepen it and weave it into every fabric of our being. Our diversity is our strength.

### **Community Boards**

One way to do that is by ensuring every level of government is truly representative of the communities it serves.

And that mission has been at the heart of how my office has gone about reforming our community boards.

We've appointed 320 new community board members over my time in office. And as we talk today, more people of color sit on our boards than ever before. More than half our new appointees are women. We've even put a few teenagers on our boards.

There's still more work to do. But to all our community board members, chairs and DMs here today, thank you for what you do.

## **Nonprofit Network**

And to our nonprofit leaders and volunteers in the room, thank you for your service to our borough!

You are why we created the first-ever Queens Nonprofit Network.

As of this spring, we've connected more than 200 Queens nonprofits with a total of \$500,000 in public and private dollars, so they can keep doing what they do best — building stronger, fairer futures for Queens families.

## **CONCLUSION**

At the end of the day, that's what all of this is about.

Building.

Not just for today, but for tomorrow.

Not just for our generation, but for the next one. And the one after that.

We build to last, and if we do it right, what we build will outlast every one of us.

Because that is the true measure of success — that is what legacies are made of.

I have a question for you, Queens.

What is our legacy? What are we building in this borough that our children will cherish long after our days are done?

I know what I want our legacy to be.

One of innovation, where there is no dream too big or idea too bold.

One of industry, where there is no better borough to build, hire or start a business.

One of investment, where there are no cracks to fall through --- only pathways to prosperity, no matter your race, religion or background

My friends, that is the legacy we are Building in Queens every single day.

THAT is the State of our Borough — limitless in its potential and endless in its opportunities.

Those who will inherit this borough deserve nothing less.

Thank you. God bless you, Queens. Now let's get back to work.