



**Volunteers  
of America®**  
GREATER NEW YORK

# **TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEE ON CHILDREN AND YOUTH PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARINGS MARCH 19, 2026**

## Introduction and Thanks

My name is Anisee Alves-Willis, Program Director for Youth Build, Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Stevens and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

## About Us

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's oldest and largest human service providers, founded 130 years ago and serving more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester and thousands more via our Operation Backpack® initiative. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline. At VOA-GNY, housing is just the start of what we do. While we are known as a provider of shelter and housing, our wealth building services are core to our work. By assisting New Yorkers with education and training programs that help them build careers, we can interrupt the cycle of homelessness before it starts and set young people on a path to economic stability and security.

## Testimony:

Thank you to Chair Stevens and Members of the Committee on Children and Youth for your unwavering leadership and commitment to all New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty, and for your unquestioning dedication to nonprofit providers like VOA-GNY who have answered the city's call to help our neighbors stabilize and thrive within our communities.

VOA-GNY's YouthBuild program located in Washington Heights serves young people ages 17 to 24 who are out of school and out of work, supporting them in completing their education and accessing pathways to employment in high-demand sectors.

We are proud members of the NYC YouthBuild Collaborative and write to strongly support the continuation of YouthBuild funding and to urge the Council to:

**Restore the NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million, consistent with FY23 levels.**

At VOA-GNY YouthBuild our program focuses on sustainable career pathways in construction for young adults ages 17-24. We currently serve 66 young people annually from Washington Heights, Tremont, Highbridge, Morris Heights and Mott Haven, including youth from Council Districts 8, 10, 14, 15, 16 and 17.

Our participants face significant barriers, including housing instability, food insecurity, justice system involvement, and limited access to educational opportunities. Despite this, our young people demonstrate resilience and strong commitment to building better futures.

Over the past year, our program has:

Supported 23 young people in earning their GED or advancing academically

Helped participants earn 33 industry-recognized credentials

Placed 6 graduates into employment, with wages ranging from [\$21–\$25/hour]

One of our recent graduates, NC, exemplifies what determination and hard work can achieve. Enrolled in January 2025, she earned her NCCER Core certification, OSHA 30, and 10-Hour Site Safety Training by April, followed by her GED in November 2025. By January 2026, she had secured full-time employment with VOA-GNY.

Beyond her own accomplishments, NC became a pillar of support for her peers — tutoring classmates, sharing study strategies, and lifting spirits when others felt discouraged. She has truly transformed her hardships into strength, and we couldn't be more proud of everything she has achieved.

This is the impact of YouthBuild.

Our model is intensive and high-touch, combining education, workforce training, leadership development, and wraparound services. This level of support is essential for young people who have been disconnected from traditional systems.

City Council funding allows us to provide stipends, deliver hands-on training, and offer the case management necessary for young people to succeed.

Without restored funding, programs like ours will face difficult decisions about reducing services or limiting enrollment. With it, we can continue to expand access and deepen our

impact.

We respectfully urge the Council to restore NYC YouthBuild Initiative funding to \$2.1 million in the FY27 budget.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment to New York City's young people.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Anisee Alves-Willis. For more information, please contact me at [aalves-willis@voa-gny.org](mailto:aalves-willis@voa-gny.org).