

**Testimony from NYC Chief Equity Officer and Mayor's Office of Equity
and Racial Justice Commissioner Sideya Sherman**

***The State of Black New York and the Racial Equity Planning Process*
Committee on Civil and Human Rights | Thursday, February 20, 2025 – 10:00AM**

Chair Williams, members of the Committees on Civil and Human Rights, distinguished members of the City Council, and the public: Good morning. I am Sideya Sherman, New York City's Chief Equity Officer and Commissioner of the New York City Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial Justice (MOERJ). Thank you for the opportunity to join you today to discuss the State of Black New York and provide an update on the citywide racial equity planning process.

As we near the conclusion of Black History Month, it's a fitting moment to reflect on the remarkable progress made by Black people in our nation and city. Black history is American history. The Black communities' centuries-long struggle for freedom and opportunity is fundamental to our country's evolution -- steadily guiding us toward realizing our democratic ideals. I am honored to serve as NYC's First Chief Equity Officer, carrying forward the legacy of those who came before me to ensure that our city is a place of opportunity and access for all.

Since our last update to the Council, our team has been hard at work advancing the NYC racial justice charter amendments. These historic measures, now embedded in our city charter, give us a clear mission: transform government systems and structures to foster racial equity and justice across New York City.

Since launching our office in late 2023, we have worked to stand up our operations while spearheading the citywide racial equity planning process and other crucial work. This work is of the utmost importance to us, and we have dedicated the past year to rallying city government behind it and engaging the Administration at all levels. Our efforts are unprecedented in scale and ambition. To meet the moment, our team has worked hand-in-hand with over 40 city agencies and 250 staff, conducting full-day training sessions, providing one-on-one technical assistance sessions, and offering ongoing guidance to help agencies develop, refine, and complete preliminary racial equity plans. This measurable plan, which is in its final stages, is designed to drive change across four key areas: budget, programs and policy, contracting, and personnel. By aligning these areas with our unwavering commitment to racial equity, we are setting the stage for transformative, long-lasting change. As we prepare to issue the preliminary citywide racial equity plan in the coming days, we look forward to feedback from the Council, our colleagues at the Commission on Racial Equity, and the public.

While we advance our forward-looking racial equity planning efforts, we also remain focused on developing programs and initiatives that meet the needs of New Yorkers today. Black New Yorkers have made great strides in our city, but we continue to confront health, economic, and other inequities that can limit opportunities for advancement. Through our NYC Young Men's Initiative (YMI) and NYC Her Future (NHF) offices, we are laser-focused on addressing these issues with innovative programs for young people across our city.

YMI has long prioritized educational attainment, launching successful programs such as NYC Men's Teach, the CUNY Fatherhood Academy, and NEON Works, which provide education, career training, and credentialing to young people, ranging from those who are the most disconnected from school and work to those completing college and pursuing advanced degrees. YMI also has emphasized literacy, understanding that not only do we want our students to graduate, but we want to ensure they have the literacy skills they need to succeed. Through initiatives like Sound Partners, QuickReads, and Raising Readers, we collaborate with over 42 schools to support literacy through family-focused programming, yielding positive results in enhancing students' abilities to decode words and read more accurately.

NYC Her Future, our new companion office to YMI, has made swift progress since its inception last spring, engaging young people through community-based events, developing new training and career exploration programs, and rolling out targeted initiatives like our doula training program, which directly contributes to our city's effort to address the crucial issue of Black maternal health. Last year, we proudly partnered with the NYU McSilver Institute to co-host a legislative breakfast on this topic -- convening New York City and State elected officials alongside leaders in academia, healthcare, and maternal health advocates to identify root causes and collaboratively pursue solutions. We thank the Council for their partnership in addressing this vital issue.

The persistent racial wealth gap continues to hinder the progress of Black New Yorkers. Addressing this issue requires access to quality jobs, financial stability, and the asset accumulation necessary for true economic security. From day one, this Administration has been focused on affordability, prioritizing affordable housing, jobs, and putting money back in the pockets of New Yorkers. We are particularly proud of our partnership with NYC Kids Rise and NYC Public Schools on the citywide expansion of the Save for College program. Right now, over 280,000 students have NYC Scholarship accounts with \$42 million invested towards their higher education or career training goals. What's most exciting about this effort is that our city now has the infrastructure to invest collectively – government, private sector, and community – in the future of our students. Our office is also focused on advancing place-based strategies, recently partnering with NYCHA to invest in a series of programs that support entrepreneurship, career training, and asset-building for Bronx-based public housing residents.

We are committed to continuing to expand our programmatic efforts, but we acknowledge that programming alone cannot address systemic inequities. This is why our work on the citywide racial equity plan and other structural reform efforts remains central to our mission. As we advance the racial justice charter amendments, we are also collaborating with our colleagues across the government to implement new anti-racism training requirements. Additionally, we are proud to support implementation of the recently passed Local Law 92, which calls for the city to study reparations and the legacy of slavery. I want to commend you, Chair Williams, and the Council for your leadership in advancing this groundbreaking work through last year's "Juneteenth Legislative Package." We look forward to staying engaged with the Committee as this work progresses.

Thank you again for your commitment to creating a fair, just, and equitable city. We share your vision and dedication to building a future where all New Yorkers can thrive. We welcome any questions you may have.