



Community
Service
Society



May 11, 2023

Hon. Eric L. Adams
Mayor

Via email

Dear Mayor Adams:

We write for the one million New Yorkers living in near poverty and struggling to afford subway and bus, and paratransit fares, soon likely to approach \$3 per ride. Five years ago, the City created the nation's largest low-income transit fare discount program – Fair Fares. But with its eligibility threshold set at the federal poverty line, Fair Fares is not living up to its potential. Just like Speaker Adams declared in her State of the City address, it is time to expand eligibility for Fair Fares to 200% of the federal poverty line, investing \$142 million to accommodate families earning up to \$60,000 annually (for a family of four). There is a moral responsibility to make this essential program available to hundreds of thousands of low-income working families, particularly as inflation continues unabated and costs are rising sharply across the board.

Fair Fares was adopted in FY19 with an allocation of \$106 million. The program was phased in for all New York adults at or below the federal poverty line by January 2020. The pandemic budget cut funding significantly. While enrollment in the program has risen steadily, reaching over 280,000 New Yorkers at this time, the program has not exhausted its funding because such a low eligibility threshold limits utilization. Even half a fare is often too much to bear for families earning below \$30,000 each year, often forcing them to choose between showing up for a medical appointment or attending a training program.

After two years of inflation, in which wages have not kept pace with prices, much less with rent and utilities, the fare will likely rise yet again. With fare enforcement efforts redoubled in the past year, riders face stiff financial and often legal consequences if they cannot pay. We have an obligation to provide relief for those who must commute every day and who are keeping New York City going – nearly half of whom struggle to afford the fare.

While there are many costs the City cannot control, with a multibillion dollar surplus, your ability to support working families in paying the transit fare is robust and you should exercise it. We respectfully urge you to negotiate a budget that raises the eligibility threshold for Fair Fares to 200% of the federal poverty line.

Sincerely,



Adhikaar
African Communities Together
Arab American Association of New York
Brooklyn Defender Services
Carroll Gardens Association
Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc.
City Harvest
Coalition for the Homeless
Community Service Society of New York
Community Voices Heard
Cross Street Community of NYC
Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation
Drive Change
Exalt
Forestdale, Inc
Jacob A. Riis Neighborhood Settlement
Jews For Racial & Economic Justice
Judson Memorial Church
India Home, Inc
La Colmena
Make the Road New York
Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty
Mixteca, Inc
National Domestic Workers Alliance
Natural Resources Defense Council
New Immigrant Community Empowerment (NICE)
New Settlement - Community Action for Safe Apartments
NYC Environmental Justice Alliance (NYC-EJA)
New York Immigration Coalition
New York League of Conservation Voters
New York Lawyers for the Public Interest

NYC Coalition for Domestic Work
New York Working Families Party (WFP)
NYPIRG Straphangers Campaign
Open Plans
Permanent Citizens Advisory Committee to the MTA (PCAC)
Queens Defenders
Red Hook Initiative
Reinvent Albany
Regional Plan Association
Riders Alliance
Ridgewood Presbyterian Church
Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union (RWDSU)
Sunrise Movement NYC
Stone Circle Theatre
Street Vendor Project
StreetsPAC
Strong Economy For All Coalition
Theatre of the Oppressed NYC
Transportation Alternatives
Urban Upbound