

NJFAN:  
National Jobs For All Network

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December 10, 2021

Mayor-Elect Eric Adams  
c/o Office of Brooklyn Borough President  
200 Joralemon Street  
Brooklyn, NY 11201

Dear Mayor-Elect Eric Adams:

On behalf of the National Jobs for All Network (NJFAN), we wish to congratulate you on your victory in the election for Mayor. We admire your willingness to lead New York City during a period of severe climate and economic challenges.

We urge you to develop a much more assertive role for city government than you've outlined in your campaign's proposals (100+ Steps Forward and Eric's Economic Plan). A freeze in government hiring seems counterproductive in the face of the recent catastrophic flooding and other problems, including public safety, mental health, and homelessness. In past periods of hiring freezes, such as the city's fiscal crisis in 1975, difficulties in predicting where retirements occurred damaged some agencies' performance for over a decade. Why make city government dysfunctional at a time when key staff and institutional knowledge are needed?

Our major concern is that New York City has the highest unemployment rate among the nation's ten largest cities. Three years' ago, pre-pandemic, NJFAN helped draft legislation to be introduced into the NYC Council by Public Advocate Letitia James to create over 150,000 jobs that would have launched aggressive climate abatement efforts and community programs. It would have also expanded the effectiveness of city agencies in providing after-school activities, skills training, and community and arts programs.

There is ample documentation to disprove the assertion in *Eric's Economic Plan* (pages 5 and 6) that "the biggest problem is not lack of jobs, it's the lack of access to jobs." On the contrary, the Community Service Society found that the problem of joblessness is particularly acute for low-income New Yorkers, who rank the lack of jobs just below Covid among their major concerns (*The Unheard Third*). The New School Center for New York City Affairs' latest *Covid-19 Economic Update* (October 21<sup>st</sup>) reports that joblessness in New York City is "dramatically greater here than at the national level – in fact, nearly eight times greater than in the U.S. overall." Most of the City's loss of 485,000 jobs has been experienced by people of color. While community skills mapping and improved job posting may be marginally helpful, these efforts amount to a cruel game of musical chairs -- in the absence of an actual increase in the City's number of jobs. Training does not create jobs. We urge you to focus on job creation.

NJFAN has some additional comments on your economic agenda:

- While we strongly support Hire Local provisions (also known as “Community Hiring”) in contracting and capital-funded projects as well as providing M/WBE special consideration for city contracting, there needs to be careful monitoring and penalties/claw backs for failure to meet agreed upon targets for jobs and wages.
- We strongly oppose the state initiative to subsidize wages in the restaurant industry for several reasons. The NYS Department of Labor has failed to enforce minimum wage standards. This lack of monitoring subject’s restaurant wage subsidies to fraud and abuse. Secondly, restaurants tend to go bankrupt or change ownership with ease, so penalties and claw backs to recapture misused subsidies are not viable options.
- We question whether tax relief to the private sector (including small businesses) is sufficient to encourage them to increase wages and staffing levels. Far more generous European wage subsidies to businesses during Covid-19 lockdowns have resulted in better job retention rates and prevented business bankruptcies, but they have not provided sufficient funds to increase staffing and wage levels. It is of interest that EU economies are not improving at the rate of the United States’ economy. We commend you for trying to help small businesses by improving city services, but city fines and taxes may not be a significant source of small business bankruptcies. We urge you to commission a university study group of real estate and tax professionals to investigate the impact of high retail leases on small businesses in the boroughs outside of Manhattan. In September 2020, the Center for an Urban Future reported on pre-pandemic business growth by different racial and ethnic groups and found that Hispanic-owned businesses have decreased, particularly in the Bronx, compared to Hispanic-owned businesses in the rest of the nation. Generous tax breaks to real estate owners for empty storefronts may be counterproductive in that they provide no incentive to offer affordable leases.

Another area where we believe that city tax relief will be insufficient is your proposal to help nearly a million New Yorkers who are unbanked or underbanked, resulting in further depletion of their limited incomes by check cashing or payday lending services. Ironically, access to banks can lead to further exploitation of low-income New Yorkers. *Forbes* reports that last year, nationally, banks charged mostly low-income clients \$12.4 billion in overdraft fees. What is needed is a public bank which would be possible if the NY Public Banking Act passes the NYS Legislature. Public banks are common around the world, and several of them are leading efforts to combat climate change through loan-program incentives. Alternatively, Senators Edward Markey and Kirsten Gillibrand have introduced separate bills to restore U. S. Postal Service retail banking.

- The return of urban agriculture is an exciting proposition, but we urge that it be limited to high-density vertical farming. In the past, low-density gardens and farms have been proposed as a way to eliminate manufacturing and low-income communities. In addition, city government should run its own pilot programs before contracting with larger agricultural firms or farming collectives.
- Your objective of making New York City beautiful has our full support, but once again we believe that providing performance and studio space and creating murals is not

enough. From 1935 to 1943, the federal government ran its own community art centers throughout the country to support over 10,000 visual artists and photographers and, during the 1930s, a four-year theater project to support another 10,000 individuals in all facets of live production. In New York City, the need to diversify the cultural workforce is as important as diversifying construction crews.

We want to briefly describe two concerns related to the climate crisis that were absent in your campaign materials:

Hunts Point Cooperative Market: We know from news reports that you visited European cities with functioning sea walls in order to begin capital projects in New York City to prevent flooding of the financial district and other below-sea-level areas in all five boroughs. We urge you to develop catastrophic planning for the wholesale food center on the banks of the Hudson River. Stores that purchase food at Hunts Point serve 25 million customers in the Tri-State area. Flooding of the market or access roads to the market could make food scarce throughout this region.

Cross Harbor Freight Program (CHFP): Congressperson Jerrold Nadler has pointed out that New York is the only major city in the world not connected to its national freight network. This means that city streets and highways are always congested with truck traffic and exhaust fumes. The possibility of sporadic shortages of fuel over the next decade makes it urgent that CHFP proceeds so that Brooklyn and Queens are connected to the national freight network. It should be noted that during 9/11 and Hurricane Sandy flooding, freight trains were the only surface transportation system that continued to function in our region. It is projected that from 28,000 to 41,000 jobs will be directly and indirectly created once the city is connected to the national freight network.

In closing, we extend our hopes that you will be a successful Mayor in the mold of Fiorello LaGuardia, who harnessed the federal New Deal resources to create hundreds of parks, schools, roads, libraries, wastewater treatment projects and public housing. We hope the Build Back Better program will inspire you to create bold plans to save our city by the sea and the lives of over eight million residents who live here.

Kind regards,

*Gertrude Goldberg*

Gertrude Schaffner Goldberg, Chair, National Jobs for All Network

*Franklin Roosevelt*

Franklin D. Roosevelt, III, Advisory Committee, National Jobs for All Network

*Noreen Connell*

Noreen Connell, Executive Committee, National Jobs for All Network

cc:

NYC Comptroller-Elect Brad Lander

NYC Public Advocate Jumaane Williams

U.S. Congressman Jerrold Nadler

U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand