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EXPERTS, GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS KICK OFF POLICY-FOCUSED EQUITY CONVERSATION SERIES

Led by Council Member Nantasha Williams, the three roundtable discussions seek to produce real solutions to the ongoing equity crises in New York City

(NEW YORK) – Leading academics, practitioners, subject-matter experts, and New York City government officials will gather Thursday for the first in an unprecedented series of intensive invite-only roundtables focused on addressing equity issues within education, mental health, and the justice system.

The roundtable events are conceived of and convened by Council Member Nantasha Williams in partnership with the NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research; the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at NYU Steinhardt; the Research Alliance for New York City Schools at NYU Steinhardt; the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law; and with support from the Vera Institute of Justice. Each roundtable is designed to transcend a mere discussion of problems, using the dialogues to generate a series of policy recommendations for city government. These recommendations, set to be unveiled following the series, will offer concrete strategies to effectively address persistent equity gaps in each focus area, in substantive and measurable ways.

“Our historic women-majority and most diverse City Council has been laser-focused on advancing solutions with equity as a core guiding principle,” said **Speaker Adrienne Adams**. “Supporting our immigrant students, expanding mental health support for our city's youth, and employing effective alternatives to incarceration that improve public safety and advance closure of Rikers must be priorities for our city. I thank Council Member Williams, NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research, and other partners for leading these discussions to explore what local policymakers can do to

confront these issues. I look forward to reviewing the recommendations from this important series of roundtables.”

Council Member Nantasha Williams said, “As we embark on this transformative initiative, uniting experts, government officials, and passionate advocates, I am excitedly anticipating the upcoming roundtables. In discussions on education, mental health, and justice, we are not just identifying problems but actively crafting solutions. These policy recommendations aim to redefine equity in our city, leaving a legacy of lasting change for New Yorkers. Together, let our collective efforts inspire meaningful progress and pave the way for a more equitable future.”

“Communities across New York City have borne the consequences of steadily rising poverty and inequality. At NYU McSilver, we have found through our research that the most acute challenges for these constituencies occur within the educational, mental health, and criminal justice systems,” said **Rose Pierre-Louis, Executive Director of the NYU McSilver Institute**. “As a city we have the capacity to do more than simply diagnose problems; it is our obligation to identify and eradicate these systemic challenges. We appreciate the vision of Council Member Nantasha Williams, who has been the catalyst for ensuring the focus of these convenings remains solutions-oriented and policy-driven, and look forward to engaging with roundtable participants, stakeholders, and members of the City Council.”

“Sustainable and impactful change happens when diverse minds come together, united in their commitment to shared goals. We are pleased to join the upcoming roundtable discussions and collaborate with community members, institutions, organizations, and fellow government leaders on tangible strategies to tackle inequities,” said **NYC Chief Equity Officer and NYC Mayor’s Office of Equity & Racial Justice Commissioner Sideya Sherman**. “We commend Council Member Williams and the program partners for facilitating this crucial cross-sector dialogue and eagerly look forward to the new ideas, synergies, and partnerships that will emerge.”

“Advancing racial equity is a discipline of practice normalizing conversations on race, and racism and organizing to enact the change we want to see in our city,” **New York City Commission on Racial Equity Executive Director and Chair Linda Tigani**. “Racial Equity action is most effective and saves lives when the policy centers communities struggling against ongoing inequity and disinvestment across systems. We are honored to join NYC City Council, the NYC Mayor’s Office of Equity and Racial Justice, Research Alliance for New York City Schools, and Vera Institute in the roundtable discussions that will champion an equitable city for all.”

The first roundtable will focus on education issues, specifically newcomer immigrant and asylum seeker youth in New York City public schools. The roundtable is led by **Dr. Fabienne Doucet, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at NYU Steinhardt**; and **Dr. Cheri Fancsali, Executive Director of The Research Alliance for New York City Schools at NYU Steinhardt**.

The panel of experts include top academics in New York City focused on researching and analyzing some of the most pressing educational issues facing New Yorkers. They are joined by leading education practitioners and thought leaders working to address issues facing immigrant communities and communities of color. **New York City Council Committee on Education Chair Council Member Rita Joseph** will also be in attendance, as will members of the Mayor's Office of Equity & Racial Justice and the New York City Commission on Racial Equity.

“Equity in education for our most vulnerable students has been elusive for far too long,” said **Dr. Doucet**. “This Roundtable presents a phenomenal opportunity to bring together policymakers, practitioners, advocates, and scholars to exchange ideas from their various worlds of experience. More importantly, participants will work together to identify actionable steps toward a more just educational system that serves all students regardless of race, ethnicity, national origin, linguistic proficiency, or other dimensions of identity.”

“The complex issues and challenges confronting newcomers in NYC will require a comprehensive, multi-sector response. This roundtable discussion is a critical first step in having the type of interdisciplinary conversations, centered on both rigorous nonpartisan evidence and lived experiences, that can effectively inform policy and practice,” **Dr. Fancsali** said.

“As we embark on this crucial journey towards achieving equity in New York City regarding education, In collaboration with esteemed institutions and experts, these conversations hold the promise of not just identifying issues but crafting tangible solutions,” **Council Member Joseph** said. “It is through initiatives like these, addressing education, mental health, and the justice system; we can make significant strides towards a more equitable city. With this convening we have the unique opportunity to generate policy recommendations that will lead to substantive and measurable changes in our communities.”

“I am grateful to support and collaborate with my colleagues in the New York City Council, the Vera Institute, and New York University on the upcoming Education Equity Roundtable to discuss pressing issues surrounding public policy and the state of our youth,” **said Council Member Farah Louis**. “Through this initiative to bring academics and advocacy in our city’s educational settings to the forefront, I look forward to seeing how this critical conversation with experts, practitioners and stakeholders will contribute to the development of impactful policy recommendations. Together, we are working towards creating a more equitable and inclusive environment for the growth and benefit of our youth and future generations in our city.”

Council Member Althea Stevens said, “Through these in-depth roundtables, we will be able to strengthen and recognize our collective responsibility to confront systematic challenges that continue to harm our communities. It is through open dialogue and collaborative efforts that we can forge a path towards a more just, equitable, and compassionate for our young people, and generations to follow.”

Two additional roundtables are scheduled to be held in the coming weeks. The second, on Tuesday, January 16, will focus on outstanding mental health equity issues among youth. **Dr. James Rodriguez, Senior Director of Clinical Services at the NYU McSilver Institute**, will moderate the expert panel of leading academic and advocate voices from some of the most respected and venerable institutions in the city. In attendance will be **New York City Council Committee on Mental Health, Disability and Addiction Chair Council Member Linda Lee**.

“The youth mental health crisis is multi-faceted and our approach to addressing it must be equally multi-faceted,” said **Dr. Rodriguez**. Many children, youth and families are experiencing mental health conditions as a result of unexpected events like COVID-19 and social stressors like the climate crisis, racial violence and trauma and immigration challenges. And there are many young people with chronic and severe mental health conditions that existed before these stressors. The children’s mental health system is overwhelmed and requires creative solutions to address all these needs.”

Council Member Lee said, “As a social worker, I have seen how our city’s ongoing mental health crisis has affected some of our hardest hit and hardest-to-reach communities. In particular, students across the city have been especially impacted due to the aftermath of the pandemic and the stressors caused by remote learning and isolation. To adequately address equity gaps in mental healthcare that affect our young people, our city must work to implement evidence-based solutions that will provide appropriate care and supportive services to improve our communities. Thank you

Council Member Williams for convening these conversations with advocates, experts, and partners, that will help New York City address these challenges.”

“New York City is facing a serious mental health crisis, and it’s time to recognize that we can’t afford to ignore it any longer. We need to direct more resources and have open, honest dialogues to educate New Yorkers on how to address this pressing issue,” said **Council Member Eric Bottcher**. “Our collective well-being depends on taking real, tangible steps to support mental health, and we must act now to create a healthier, more compassionate city for all. I want to thank Council Member Nantasha Williams; the NYU McSilver Institute for Poverty Policy and Research; the Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools at NYU Steinhardt; the Research Alliance for New York City Schools at NYU Steinhardt; and the Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law.”

The third and final roundtable on Friday, January 26, will engage with equity issues within the criminal justice space, especially those related to New York’s parole system and NYC’s pre-trial detention regime, and ways to keep individuals and families from facing the negative impact of incarceration. **The Center on Race, Inequality, and the Law at NYU School of Law Executive Director Jason D. Williamson, Esq.**, will moderate a panel of seasoned justice reform advocates and academics. **New York City Council Member Lincoln Restler**, who sits on the Council’s Committee on Criminal Justice, will attend.

Executive Director Williamson said, “I am tremendously excited for this unique opportunity to engage with advocates, impacted community members, and policymakers to both identify the many challenges posed by the current parole and pretrial justice regimes in New York, particularly given their disproportionate impact on Black and brown communities, and work together to develop real policy strategies to make a difference in the lives of New Yorkers. I appreciate the vision and leadership demonstrated by Council Member Williams through this effort and look forward to supporting our collective work going forward.”

“I’m grateful to Council Member Nantasha Williams for her leadership in creating the Criminal Justice Equity Roundtable alongside NYU and the Vera Institute. Reimagining our criminal justice system requires all of us to come to the table to achieve true safety for New Yorkers,” said **Council Member Lincoln Restler**.

“The mounting burden of injustice in New York City’s jails is a defining inequity for our city, not only for the people who risk their lives on Rikers, but their families and

communities. Instead of putting billions of dollars into incarceration, we must further our commitment to evidence-based investments in equitable education, supportive services, and robust mental health care, among others, that keep all New Yorkers safe and help us thrive. We thank Councilmember Williams for bringing us together to discuss these pressing issues and mark a path forward,” said the **Vera Institute**.

Following these conversations, members of each roundtable will provide a report back on issues discussed and detailed recommendations on what steps local government can take to address major, ongoing equity concerns. These recommendations will be collected and made public as part of a blueprint to address the wide-ranging equity crisis in New York City.

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