

Midtown BIDs band together to advocate for crime prevention

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Leaders from seven Midtown business-improvement districts have formed a coalition to support Gov. Kathy Hochul and Mayor Eric Adams in their tough-on-crime approach and push concrete policies that address quality-of-life concerns in Manhattan.

The seven BIDs—the East Midtown Partnership, the Fifth Avenue Association, the Garment District Alliance, the Grand Central Partnership, the Hudson Yards Hell’s Kitchen Alliance, the Madison Avenue BID and the Times Square Alliance—formed the coalition to lobby Hochul and Albany Democrats during state budget negotiations.

The coalition wanted multiple amendments added to the 2019 bail-reform law, notably granting judges more discretion to assess the public-safety risk a defendant presents to society when considering whether to grant bail. The coalition also requested increased funding for supportive housing to shelter mentally ill and homeless people.

With some wins in the budget, including \$25 billion toward affordable housing construction and preservation, the coalition is turning its attention to other policies that state and city officials could implement to combat what they call serious public-safety challenges.

“We created this coalition to advocate for resolving the problems of social disorder,” said Barbara Blair, president of the Garment District Alliance. “We need an all-in response for this.”

The coalition released a policy document in March that focuses on five concrete areas where elected officials can focus their attention: increased supportive [housing for the homeless](#); adequately funded city and state services for the mentally ill; discharge planning and job training for the formerly incarcerated; judicial system reforms that give district attorneys and judges more discretion on charging and sentencing; and increased state and city funding to promote tourism, notably partnering with CUNY and SUNY to create a tourism jobs pipeline.

“We need all the city agencies to work together and be held accountable for meaningful measures of success,” said Tom Harris, president of the Times Square Alliance.

The coalition emphasized the role their neighborhoods play in the makeup of the city. They hold major transportation hubs such as the Port Authority, Penn Station and Grand Central Station, and many of their streets are where tourists and New Yorkers go for shopping, entertainment and dining.

“We’re the gateway to New York City,” Blair said. “We need to make sure New York is presented in the best possible way so that it’s a safe and rewarding experience.”

Immediate resources

The Garment District has been plagued by heroin use and open-needle use, according to Blair. Coordinated commercial retail theft is the main problem along Madison Avenue, said Matthew Bauer, president of the Madison Avenue BID. Harris noted the increase in [violent crimes in Times Square](#) and the perception of danger.

“It’s not hard to see the deterioration that’s taken place in the last two years,” said Rob Byrnes, president of the East Midtown Partnership.

The BIDs are pushing for specific pieces of state legislation. Byrnes cited Manhattan Sen. Brad Hoylman’s bill that allows for longer stays in mental health facilities, to be funded by federal dollars; Harris pointed to Bronx Sen. Jamaal Bailey’s bill that facilitates a coordinated and supervised release of formerly incarcerated people.

“What we’re really looking for is a significant and dramatic ramping up of programs that help people that are in desperate need of mental health solutions,” Blair said. “The drug-addicted, the emotionally compromised, they’ve sort of been abandoned to the streets of New York because we don’t have an infrastructure for assisting these people.”

The coalition praised Adams’ approach to placing more police officers on the city’s subways and streets and for using police officers

and city outreach workers to **dismantle homeless encampments**, which proliferated around Midtown West, Blair said.

“There’s definitely been an increase since the beginning of January here on Madison Avenue by the 19th Precinct,” Bauer said. “The Police Department here has definitely responded to the issue and has put the resources to bear.”

New solutions

The coalition says the city and state can follow its lead on how to approach quality-of-life challenges.

The Times Square Alliance last year formed Community First, a partnership with the Midtown Community Court and two nonprofits: Breaking Ground and Fountain House. The goal of Community First is to proactively deliver social services to people living on the street and connect them to job training and placement.

Harris said the initiative has lowered street homelessness in Times Square—from an average of 31 people per day to sometimes fewer than five.

“We need to find a way to expand that type of program throughout the city,” he said. “We’re looking for more programs like that, and we need the state to fund it and the city to coordinate the funding.”

Blair said she is laser-focused on ensuring stabilization beds—which provide extended treatment for the mentally ill—become available immediately for the city’s homeless population. Hochul in February announced funding of \$12.5 million for 500 additional supportive housing beds.

“If these beds are three years out, that’s a problem,” Blair said. “We really need the city and state to react as quickly as they can. One thing we learned during the pandemic is when the government needs to, they can turn on a dime.”

There have been nine murders committed in Midtown South since the start of the year. Burglaries are up 47%, robberies are up 71% and grand larceny is up 75% from last year, per NYPD data.