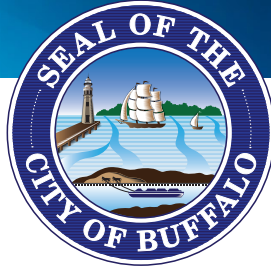


# MAYOR BYRON W. BROWN'S 2023 STATE OF THE CITY ADDRESS



## ADDRESS AS PREPARED · MAY 1, 2023

Good afternoon.

Family. Friends. Elected officials. Special guests. Residents of Buffalo.

Welcome!

And thank you, Damar Hamlin, for narrating that powerful video about Buffalo's resilience.

Damar Hamlin is a symbol of resilience.

An athlete who met his challenge head on. And embraced the changes necessary to move him forward.

Let's give him a round of applause.

Before I start, I would like to recognize a couple of individuals who are leaving city government who have served their districts well – council president Darius Pridgen and Common Councilmember Ulysses Wingo.

I also want to thank city staff – including many of my commissioners and directors. Let's give them a round of applause.

I would also like to recognize community businessman and philanthropist Russell Salvatore. He just celebrated his 90th birthday. He sure knows how to party! Russell, I look forward to attending your birthday parties for many, many years to come!

Today, I stand here as your mayor. Humble. Hopeful. And honored to be with you.

That we are here together in this grand ballroom at The Statler is yet another testament to Buffalo's resilience.

It was 100 years ago. ON THIS VERY DAY. The Statler opened its doors.

Back in 1923, Buffalo's population was more than a half-million people and growing.

For decades, this was Buffalo's place to be.

A social center for generations of residents. Attracting presidents. Movie stars. Even Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Junior.

But as with life, things changed. Population decreased. The building aged and this property was at risk of being demolished.

Thank God for Buffalo's history of resilience, and ability to change.

The Statler reopening is a victory for the city of Buffalo. Please join me in recognizing Developer Douglas Jemal for believing in this building and the project started by The Late Marc Croce.

From challenge to change – we have become stronger because of everything we have faced and the positive changes made.

As we were going through the pandemic, the State of our City was improving.

Then...

On 5/14 – a white supremacist traveled to East Buffalo and shot and killed ten precious people and wounded three others.

His expressed intent was to kill as many Black people as possible.

Every time I make that statement, I feel anger and sadness. Like many of you.

Not a day goes by, when my wife Michelle and I don't think about 5/14 and the impact it has had on our friends, neighbors, and our community.

In the days that followed, I heard your cries. Your frustrations. Your prayers for real change.

I spent the summer trying to raise awareness about the need to end gun violence.

Our challenges continued with a historic November snowstorm that claimed the life of City Housing Inspector Mike Muscarella. Followed by a once-in-a-generation blizzard that tragically resulted in the deaths of city residents.

Then, 2023 arrived bringing with it more challenges. Our grief intensified with the tragic deaths of Buffalo Firefighter Jason Arno and city employee Rhondesia Belton.

Today's State of the City address won't be as usual. It can't be.

You need to see the complete picture of where Buffalo stands in the wake of what we've endured and where we're headed.

That's why this afternoon, my annual speech will focus on investing in our people and will include highlights from four different city budgets. These budgets will serve as our financial blueprints for our city's transformation.

THE STATE OF THE CITY OF BUFFALO IS FOCUSED AND PREPARED FOR POSITIVE CHANGE.

We ARE at a critical point in time. Buffalo's faith-based community call it a "sacred juncture". A special moment

when ALL OF US should pause and reflect on healing and moving forward together as a community.

My proposed City Budget continues my ongoing commitment to fiscal responsibility. We will continue to make investments in core areas, including affordable housing, public safety, and infrastructure. Most importantly we are investing in our people, and the people who need it most.

Today I'm announcing a historic one-time bill forgiveness program – this program will help thousands of struggling low-income homeowners become current on past due water, sewer, and tax bills.

This \$30 million investment includes funding set aside by Governor Kathy Hochul to help East Buffalo homeowners become current.

I'm also taking it one step further – to help ease some of the stress put on residents during the pandemic I have directed my departments of assessment, taxation, and law to not hold a foreclosure auction this year. This will give struggling homeowners extra time to recover financially.

Our growing city - has growing needs.

In order to keep up with rising costs, to maintain our ability to provide essential services --- my recommended City budget includes a tax increase of 3.8 percent. For a home assessed at \$100 thousand dollars, you'll be paying an additional \$46 a year.

I'm also recommending an increase in the Garbage User Fee between \$7 and \$22 depending on the size of your tote.

The increase we are proposing to the user fee is needed to address higher fuel costs and equipment repairs. This will make our sanitation operations self-sufficient. Even with these increases, we are still lower in cost than other upstate cities and surrounding suburbs.

An honest conversation about equity is critical to the health of our city and our region.

As the region's center, Buffalo is the hub for cultural institutions and destinations such as Shea's, Kleinhan's, the Albright Knox Gundlach Museum, KeyBank Center, Sahlen Field, the Museum of Science, the Buffalo History Museum, the Ralph C. Wilson Children's Museum, the Buffalo Zoo, and the Buffalo Naval Park.

Buffalo also has the greatest concentration of hospitals, colleges, and county, state, and federal government facilities.

Many of these regional assets are enjoyed or utilized more by people living outside the city of Buffalo and ALL OF THEM are OFF the tax rolls.

City taxpayers have done their part supporting these institutions by funding capital improvements to the buildings, maintaining the transportation infrastructure that supports them, and importantly ensuring public safety. The success of city investment is evident by the growing number of people visiting these facilities.

What Buffalo invests supporting these facilities, takes away from what city government CAN invest in its neighborhoods, many of which were historically disadvantaged by a lack of investment.

My Administration has been focused on righting these historic wrongs.

Our residents, many of whom cannot even afford the region's cultural institutions located in Buffalo, are entitled to the same level of government services enjoyed in neighboring municipalities.

It is time for more to be done to assist city taxpayers with these regional assets.

We need greater financial equity.

Let's support our shared institutions and overcome our region's legacy of underinvesting in Buffalo's neighborhoods. It's time to INCREASE THE SHARE of sales tax that Buffalo receives.

I'm also calling on the state of New York to change the Aid Incentives to Municipalities program to return to revenue sharing for municipalities.

For Buffalo and municipalities across the state, AIM funding has remained flat for the last 12 years. Revenue sharing would provide predictable annual revenue increases for New York state municipalities -- particularly upstate municipalities who face extreme financial challenges from rising expenses.

The city of Buffalo is doing its part to close the racial wealth gap. City hall is one of the largest employers in Western New York. In the years since I took office, diversity in our city workforce has increased by 45 percent. People of color are now over 40 percent of the city workforce. The city of Buffalo government better reflects the diversity of our city. I have done this government wide --- from entry level positions to executive level positions. I'm once again, calling on employers from across the region to do the same.

My goal is to reduce unemployment of Buffalo residents, and more than that, help residents attain -- living wage, family sustaining jobs.

One of our strategies to accomplish this is to expand workforce training programs in the city of buffalo. That's why today I am announcing Learn to Earn Buffalo, which will expand workforce training programs in our city for youth and adults. Through this program we're awarding funds to Say Yes, SEIU 1199, and a collaboration between Villa Maria College and Bitwise. We will again partner with the Buffalo Board of Education to provide funding for youth ages 14 and up that have to attend summer school.

The money awarded to these organizations will equip our residents with the skills they need to earn higher wages and secure promotions. These awards are only the beginning of this initiative aimed at ensuring the wealth and well-being of our residents.

Another top priority for me is affordable housing. In the face of rapidly rising rents and home costs, we will not slow down on our work to create high-quality affordable housing. We embrace the opportunity to provide affordable housing to our residents and we are doing MORE than our fair share for the region as the only municipality with a goal and demonstrated commitment of ensuring that 40% of its housing units are permanently affordable.

Since 2006, I've strategically committed \$56 million for affordable housing projects, that leveraged \$695 million in development, creating 3,665 new housing units for residents, older adults, and veterans.

The Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority's Marine Drive, Commodore Perry, and Shaffer Village are each poised for major change. One of the most ambitious redevelopment undertakings in Buffalo's history. In the months to come, we will see major progress on all three projects. When complete, this unprecedented public-private investment in affordable housing will top one billion dollars.

Last year, we saw a high rate of development.

In East and West Buffalo alone, there was over \$300 million in investment. In collaboration with minority developers, we are bringing new investment to many East Buffalo neighborhoods including Jefferson Avenue.

I'm also proud to announce a \$1 million award to the African American Cultural Center reconstruction project. The new building will be an anchor for Buffalo's black community and a destination that will attract people from across the region.

In addition to investing in our youth and residents, we must continue to ensure the quality of life in our neighborhoods.

Public safety is the foundation for a strong community.

Overall violent crime is down 11 percent this year. Homicides are down 50 percent and shooting incidents are down 28 percent. As part of our effort to maintain staffing levels in the Buffalo Police Department we are currently offering the Buffalo Police Exam.

Members of the Buffalo Fire Department are also some of our bravest front-line workers.

This year, the city will buy 11 new pieces of equipment including a ladder truck and a pumper truck.

We're also adding to our department of public works fleet.

This will include 24 pieces of snow fighting equipment and a Vehicle Rook which is a tool that can be used to safely move stranded vehicles.

We've also earmarked one million dollars toward the cost for emergency snow removal contractors.

In addition, we're moving forward with plans for a state-of-the-art Department of Public Works Campus and Resiliency Center. Thank you, to Governor Kathy Hochul again for her commitment of 10 million dollars.

I also want to again thank all of our front-line workers, who worked tirelessly through the pandemic. My administration has set aside \$11 million dollars for a one-time hazard pay allocation.

In neighborhoods citywide, we will invest over \$12.5 million to repave streets and almost \$8 million on new sidewalks.

Also, to protect the health of our children and families, we've included a \$10 million investment to replace old lead lines. In the last five years, we've replaced more than 1 thousand lead lines throughout our city.

More improvements are heading to city parks and park facilities as well.

Some of the improvements include new sports facilities at Emerson Park and Kingsley Park; a sports complex at Shoshone Park and improvements to JFK Park, and Okell Park.

The new investment projects bring my administration's total investment in parks to more than \$91 million since 2006.

As I conclude, I want to go back to where I started.

We're just days away from the one-year remembrance of 5/14.

No one is looking forward to this somber milestone, but it's important to remember.

I want to thank County Executive Mark Poloncarz for his support during that painful time.

I am grateful to the members of my "5/14 Remembrance Committee" who have been working closely with the families, survivors, and our community on respectful ways to reflect on May 14th.

I want to thank Co-Chairs Eunice Lewin, SUNY Trustee and Dr. Michael Edbauer, president of Highmark for leading this effort.

Also, I would like to publicly invite ALL residents to take part in our panel discussions, community gatherings and healing services, that will begin on Friday, May 12th.

You'll find the schedule of events on the back of your program.

From challenge to change.

Buffalo is a resilient city.

We have much to be proud of and our greatest asset is our people.

Let me use the words of Damar Hamlin, when he said,

"I've been beating statistics my whole life."

Our community has, too.

This is our time. Let's continue to stand together and move our great city forward.

Thank you all for your support. Your trust. And your partnership.

May God bless you.

And may God bless the great city of Buffalo.

Thank you.

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