

Mamdani's "COGE" commission to prepare deeper cuts to New York City social programs and regulations

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On Thursday, Mayor Zohran Mamdani announced the formation of a Committee on Government Efficiency (COGE) to examine the New York City Charter for efficiencies: that is, to search for ways in which social programs can be cut.

"The Commission on Government Efficiency will take a hard look at how City government functions and identify the reforms we need to deliver faster, smarter and more effectively for working people," Mamdani told the media.

The Charter is essentially New York City's constitution. It defines what authority belongs to the mayor and other officials and what to the City Council; laws, timelines and mandatory minimum rules for city reserve funds; the multi-step public review process required to build housing, change zoning laws or approve major infrastructure; and the scope, duties and enforcement powers of every city department.

The Charter does not control funding but does dictate the operational rules that heavily control, protect or limit social spending. For example, the Charter legally mandates the existence of agencies like the Department of Social Services and the Human Resources Administration, which a mayor cannot simply abolish to save money. The Charter also sets the exact legal procedures for how the city buys goods and hires outside nonprofits to run homeless shelters, daycare centers and after-school programs.

The Charter can be amended only through public meetings and referenda decided by New York City voters.

There is little doubt that a review of the Charter will not seek to improve the lives of working-class New Yorkers, but rather play a central role in the destruction of social programs that millions depend on. A review will clear the way for the even more untrammelled enrichment of the Wall Street and real estate oligarchy.

Mamdani, a member of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), has already broken his campaign promises of even minor reforms, such as free buses. He has allied himself with right-wing Democratic New York Governor Kathy Hochul in shelving a wealth tax, kept on billionaire heiress Jessica Tisch

as police commissioner, met with President Donald Trump in the White House, supported Long Island Rail Road strikebreaking, appointed former Biden strike suppressor Julie Su as deputy mayor for economic justice, and continued to cooperate with ICE.

The very acronym of the committee, COGE, is a warning to workers. It is meant to echo the infamous DOGE (Department of Government Efficiency) run by Elon Musk, the world's richest man, which drove the layoff of hundreds of thousands of federal workers during the first months of the second Trump administration.

Mamdani announced that he was appointing Patrick Gaspard, a top official in the Obama White House, as chair of COGE. Gaspard is a former Democratic National Committee executive director, former Obama administration ambassador and longtime Democratic Party operative. The choice of Gaspard as chair of COGE represents a further step in Mamdani's integration into the Democratic Party, which represents the oligarchy.

His appointment of Ann Cheng as executive director of COGE is also significant. She has served directly under Hochul as director of strategic initiatives, and coordinated with the state legislature and Hochul to allow Mamdani to close the budget gap. It is likely that she left this position late last month specifically to work in COGE.

"Government efficiency" is itself a ruling-class buzzword of long standing. "Efficiency," in the framework Mamdani has adopted, means lower costs to the political-economic establishment—fewer agency staff, less environmental review, less labor protection, less community input, less democratic accountability for capital. COGE will exclude limitations on Wall Street tax subsidies, real-estate industry exemptions that produce the affordability crisis, and executive compensation at city-affiliated entities.

The COGE initiative is part of a deepening collaboration with Hochul and the Democratic Party leadership to permanently reduce spending in the city, as was shown last month when Mamdani announced that the city budget, as contained in his

executive proposal, had been balanced.

This action followed an announcement from Hochul that the state would provide \$3 billion in immediate aid to the city and close a revenue gap that had been estimated at \$5.4 billion, the city's largest deficit since the Great Depression. On May 27, the state passed its own \$269 billion budget that contains much of this aid to the city.

To meet Mamdani's citywide savings initiative, agencies appointed chief savings officers who identified over \$300 million in vacancy reductions. This means thousands of empty city jobs are being permanently erased from the books. For existing city workers, this translates to heavier workloads, severe burnout and fewer teammates, rather than direct layoffs.

A large portion of the savings (\$2.3 billion over two years) will come from Mamdani's decision to delay payments to municipal pension funds. This proposal from the self-professed socialist is a major attack on city workers who plan to retire in the coming decades. It would leave the pension funds in a weaker position in the event of a stock market crash, a disaster that is distinctly possible, given the current economic turmoil. Delaying payments to the pension funds would also open the door to future benefit cuts, which would be carried out under the pretext of fiscal necessity.

The mayor also has refused to expand the City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) in the budget, thus breaking a campaign promise. CityFHEPS is a housing voucher program that helps eligible tenants pay rent for five years. The expansion, which the City Council passed in 2023, would have extended eligibility to people with low incomes and those facing eviction. Mamdani is now following the example of his widely hated predecessor as mayor, Eric Adams, who also refused to expand the program.

Some small but critical city agencies such as the NYC Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) will see cuts. One of CCHR's most critical daily operations is running "undercover testing" to catch landlords and real estate brokers who illegally discriminate against low-income tenants utilizing housing vouchers.

The budget also assumes that the city can save money by delaying the reduction of class sizes at the city's schools. As a candidate, Mamdani said that the mandate to reduce class sizes "will transform our students' ability to learn" and should not be subject to negotiation. This proposal, which would save the city \$508 million, however, has not been approved by the state legislature, as was expected, and will be voted on later.

The proposed city budget does not raise taxes or use the city's rainy-day funds to pay for operating expenses, according to Mamdani. It does, however, use \$1.35 billion of the city's reserve funds.

Mamdani is also inheriting savings of \$1.3 billion in city worker healthcare costs from the Municipal Labor Committee (MLC). This assembly of city union bureaucrats decided last year to switch medical plans for in-service workers after failing

to put city retirees on the cut-rate Medicare Advantage supplements to Medicare.

Many teachers, firefighters and sanitation workers feel that MLC leadership acted behind closed doors, sacrificing the quality of active workers' healthcare—especially vital mental health networks—to pay for a multibillion-dollar budget deficit they didn't create. Although this was done before Mamdani was in office, it is a part of the collaboration with the union bureaucrats that the Democratic Party depends on so heavily.

The state legislature, at the behest of Hochul, however, is providing the largest portion of funding to close the city budget gap: about \$3 billion in financial assistance spread across the current and upcoming fiscal years. As with other state aid, this is a temporary grant and can be easily revoked in the next budget cycle if the state's revenue drops, particularly in the event of a recession.

The balancing of the budget is the product of the DSA mayor's cooperation with the right-wing Hochul, and there can be little doubt that the COGE endeavor to permanently reduce city expenses is a part of this reactionary alliance.

To maintain this alliance, Mamdani withheld any criticism of Hochul for her refusal to increase taxes by 2 percent on millionaires and by 4 percent on corporations. Mamdani threatened to raise city property taxes by 9.5 percent if Albany did not approve this plan, which he knew it would not. The prospect of higher property taxes provoked outrage from working class and middle-class homeowners, as well as small businesses in the city, who would bear the brunt of these new taxes.

The state legislature has now implemented Hochul's new *pied-à-terre* tax on second homes valued at over \$5 million. Officials estimate that the tax will generate a mere \$500 million, and possibly less. Its political purpose is far less to raise revenue than for Hochul to provide political cover to Mamdani and the DSA.

Mamdani and Hochul—who represents the Democratic Party leadership—collaborated to avoid, for the moment, mass layoffs and cuts to social programs in the city. At the same time, they sought to avoid any infringement on the wealth of the handful of ultra-high-net-worth individuals who dominate the economy of New York. The budget has bought time for Mamdani and Hochul to use COGE to implement much sharper attacks on the working class.



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