

Politics

Local advocates ask Gillibrand about education, gun violence, health at Bronx town hall



By Aliya Schneider

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BronxWorks employee Cheyla Perez was among local advocates who asked U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand questions at a town hall at Hostos Community College on Monday.

Photos Aliya Schneider

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Local advocates asked U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand about how the Bronx will be remembered on the federal level, citing a variety of issues, from education to gun violence and health care at a town hall on Monday at Hostos Community College in the South Bronx.

Bronxites had the opportunity to submit questions — which were chosen at random — to ask the federal lawmaker about issues most important to them. Various elected officials sat in the audience, also listening to locals' concerns.

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Three BronxWorks employees had a turn at the mic, all focusing on education — one of the various services the local nonprofit provides. College advisor Elsie Hammond asked about improving college accessibility and retention with increasing tuition costs.



Senator Kirsten Gillibrand answered Bronxites' questions at a town hall on Monday.

Gillibrand, a Democrat, said she is pushing for free college education in exchange for working in public services like education or health, like New York Gov. Kathy Hochul's initiative to pay CUNY or SUNY tuition for 1,000 health care workers and the upcoming federal Cyber Academy, which will cover college



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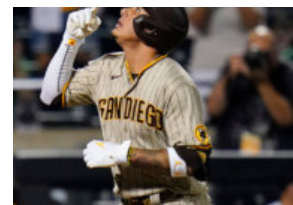


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tuition for 1,000 individuals who commit to working in the cyber field for the U.S. government for five years.

The senator said public schools should be considered critical infrastructure and get more federal resources to extend their reach beyond the student body, with evening work training and English language learner classes — BronxWorks employee Cheyla Perez said immigrants come to the organization looking to learn how to read and write, but they don't offer the service.

As the conversation shifted to gun violence, the theme of opportunities for Bronxites persisted.

Awilda Cordero, president of the South Bronx nonprofit Emergency Rights who said her nephew was shot and killed by a 17-year-old, asked about gun violence among young men in the Bronx.

On top of various gun control initiatives, Gillibrand said boys need better access to quality after-school and summer programs, like camp, job training, internships and jobs to keep them busy.



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Awilda Cordero, who described herself as a long-time local activist, asked the senator about gun violence.

“So that the day they’re born, they’re told, ‘You’re going to be something someday. You’re going to have your own business and you’re going to create jobs in this community, and you’re going to be the top dog because you’re going to be the one that solves the problem,’” she said. “They need to know from day one that they have a future.”

Brie Maltz, a mental health social practitioner at nonprofit Fountain House Bronx, which works with people with serious mental health issues, said there are high rates of psychiatric



hospitalizations in the South Bronx, yet the area is considered a mental health care desert. She also asked about supportive affordable housing amid rampant homelessness in the city.

Gillibrand said that recently passed gun legislation has billions of dollars for intervention programs for people who could fall through the cracks because of their mental health struggles, urging the nonprofit to apply.

Calling homelessness an “outrage,” the federal lawmaker said more money has to be directed to affordable housing. But also, local officials should push for a certification program to ensure housing fits livable standards, as well as more transparency of where housing funds are directed.

“We have no transparency,” she said.
“And so it’s a problem every year, it never ends and it makes me so angry. Because families without housing, how are those kids going to succeed?”

A local Bronxite who said he is a member of Fountain House asked about the cost of medication and Gillibrand said Senate Democrats are working to put caps on the price of prescription medications, which she hopes will pass in the next week or two.



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Aliya Schneider is a digital editor for the Bronx Times. She is a reporter and photojournalist who loves asking hard questions to get answers and capturing moments that may otherwise go unseen. Aliya has worked as a journalist in New York and Vermont since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and graduated Barnard College of Columbia University in May 2020. When she's not reading, writing, researching or taking photos, she is probably showing photos of her cat to anyone who will look.



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