

New York socialist lawmakers, inspired by Mamdani's win, aim to seize on new session

The democratic socialists in the New York state Legislature are returning to Albany for the start of the new session with one fewer member but possibly more clout than ever.

Former state Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani's rise from socialist backbencher to mayor of the nation's largest city shocked political observers and thrust his affordability agenda into the spotlight. Mamdani's former colleagues say they're now trying to capitalize on the moment.

"I can feel the whole movement locking in," said state Sen. Jabari Brisport of Brooklyn. After years of talking about taxing the rich and universal child care, he said, "we are in a political moment where we can actually seize this opportunity and push really far on those fronts."

This session will test whether Mamdani and the handful of state lawmakers aligned with the Democratic Socialists of America can gain widespread support for their policies. Those include raising taxes on the state's highest earners to pay for priorities like universal child care and free buses, which Mamdani campaigned on delivering in New York City, even as they will require state-level backing.

The group of eight lawmakers, who are part of the DSA and collectively known as Albany's "socialists in office," makes up just a

tiny portion of the 213-member Legislature. They count their major [legislative victories](#) as passing clean energy investments and raising the minimum wage.

The coalition is supporting a [suite of bills](#) to raise billions of dollars in new revenue by taxing affluent New Yorkers and corporations. For example, the "Fair Share Act," sponsored by Assemblymember Phara Souffrant Forrest of Brooklyn, would add a 2% surcharge on people making over \$1 million in income a year.

Souffrant Forrest estimates the proposal could raise \$4 billion in new annual revenue.

"We have bills, we have tax ideas," she said in an interview. "It's really just finding out which one we can really work with, with the climate that we have currently."

Previous plans for taxing wealthy New Yorkers have been stymied at the state level. While both chambers of the Legislature have previously supported an income-tax hike, Gov. Kathy Hochul has called the issue a "[non-starter](#)." Business groups say higher taxes will cause high earners to leave the state.

But in recent weeks Hochul has [signaled](#) she may be open to increasing the state's corporate tax rate. Mamdani and the DSA-aligned lawmakers have [proposed](#) raising that rate, but Hochul has not specifically backed the bill.

One goal these legislators and the governor share is enacting a universal child care program. Mamdani made the promise of free child care a key focus of his mayoral campaign. Hochul pledged to "put our

state on a pathway to universal child care" as part of her State of the State address last year.

But the socialist lawmakers say they see a tough fight ahead.

"The need for child care is in the billions," Brisport said. That deficit grew larger this week when the Trump administration [froze \\$10 billion](#) in child care subsidies to Democratic-led states, including New York.

Brisport argues the only way to raise enough revenue is by increasing taxes on high earners and corporations.

"I know the governor has been hoping for a unicorn to come through and pay for it, but there is no other way out but to raise revenue," he said.

Mamdani's campaign volunteers have [pledged](#) to continue organizing to help the new mayor win support for the policies that have floundered in Albany for years. Brisport said that will take the form of mobilizing "hundreds if not thousands of New Yorkers to knock doors of thousands of other New Yorkers and get them to put pressure on their legislators and the governor to tax the rich for universal child care."

All but one of the DSA-aligned state lawmakers represent parts of New York City. Assemblymember Sarahana Shrestha, who represents the area around Kingston, said her mid-Hudson Valley district "is one of the most fired-up parts of the state" in terms of supporting progressive policies.

Shrestha, the first New York state legislator of Nepali origin, said her

election in 2022 is proof the DSA's messaging resonates across the state. "There was the same sort of scare tactics: socialist, DSA, not from here, etc.," she said. "None of that worked."

Assemblymember Emily Gallagher of Brooklyn, another member of the coalition, said she hopes Mamdani's election will encourage people to join their progressive movement.

"Because it is popular, and it will be effective, and we need all hands on deck," she said.