



Testimony of Aqueelah Winston, Interim Chief of Intake, Assessment and Operational Capacity at the New York City Department of Homeless Services

**Before the New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare Hearing
March 9, 2026**

Good afternoon.

My name is Aqueelah Winston and I serve as the Interim Chief of Intake, Assessment, and Operational Capacity at the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS). I am accompanied today by my colleagues Nirah Johnson, Assistant Commissioner, Director Health and Homeless Services Integration, DHS, Rebecca Chew, Chief Program Officer, Human Resources Administration (HRA), and Cassandra White, Deputy Commissioner, Street Homelessness Solutions Division within DHS – as the breadth of this hearing encompasses the work of both agencies (DHS and HRA) within the Department of Social Services (DSS).

I would like to thank Committee Chair Hudson, the members of the Committee on General Welfare and the bill sponsors for holding today’s hearing and inviting us to speak.

We will speak to each of the introductions being heard today in turn. We would like to brief the Council on existing work being done by DHS and to highlight important considerations and concerns we believe the sponsors, members of the Committee on General Welfare, the broader Council, and stakeholders should keep in mind in assessing and amending these introductions.

Introduction 139

Introduction 139, sponsored by Council Member Cabán, would require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide confirmation notice in hard copy or electronically to applicants of public assistance regarding their benefits interview. The notice would include (at minimum) a confirmation number, the date, time and location of the interview, or the agency phone number from which the interview was conducted, if the interview was via telephone.

We recently provided testimony regarding this legislation during the General Welfare Committee Hearing on December 3rd, when it was last noticed by the Council as Introduction 1430 of 2025, and we’re happy to speak on it again today.

We support providing applicants with the information they need as they proceed through the benefits application process.

If I may briefly review the current process for interviewing for Cash Assistance (CA) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) application and recertification interviews; the process proceeds along two tracks. One track is for linked CA and SNAP applications and recertifications and the other track is exclusively CA applications.

For CA and SNAP applications and recertifications, the process is as follows:

- The client submits an application or recertification and calls for an on-demand interview.
- At the end of the interview, the system automatically generates the *interview kept* status notification and the interview receipt (form FIA-1173).
- The *interview kept* status notification is available on Access HRA for SNAP immediately.
- The interview receipt (form FIA-1173) is placed in the print-to-mail queue to be mailed and is also electronically added to the case file for both SNAP and CA.
- The interview receipt (FIA-1173) is physically mailed within 1 to 5 business days
- The interview receipt (form FIA-1173) is available on Access HRA when it has completed the print-to-mail queue.
- Once mailed, the document becomes available in One Viewer and Access HRA.

For CA application and recertification interviews, the interview status is not currently available online. We would have to build the functionality to add interview status to our system.

For Cash Assistance, our assessment thus far is that ninety days for implementation would not be sufficient to make adjustments to information technology (IT) systems to implement the change this proposal requires.

DSS has tried to implement a version of what this bill would require with form FIA-1173 which confirms certain contact with HRA, and includes relevant data points as the client name, case number, and a description of the type of contact.

We would like to have further discussion with the Council about the scope of programs covered, and also suggest revisions to the data points required under the legislation – which are at variance with current operations.

Introduction 232

Introduction 232, sponsored by Council Member Hudson, would reduce the required housing history from two years to one year in order for families with children to demonstrate their eligibility for entry into the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system. It would additionally require DHS staff to upload all documents relevant to an applicant's housing history to a digital case record and communicate with an applicant about any missing documents through electronic methods. This bill would give families with children at least thirty days in temporary shelter pending a determination of their eligibility for shelter, subject to the approval of the State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. This bill would also require DHS to create an informational pamphlet listing examples of documents that could demonstrate proof of housing

history and ensure that such pamphlet is posted online and distributed to families with children at the PATH intake center.

We support efforts to enhance services to families with children households and to streamline their efforts to apply and obtain temporary housing assistance (THA).

As drafted, this bill presents potential concerns and may trigger a significant increase in the costs of providing THA. The bill is proposing a change to the THA application and eligibility determination processes that are standardized by state regulation and New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) policy. As the bill recognizes, THA is extensively regulated by the OTDA. For that reason, DSS is concerned about alterations to eligibility requirements.

By promising “at least 30 days” of conditional emergency THA, there is concern that we are risking increased length of stays for households that are ultimately deemed ineligible for THA, and regardless of when DHS completes an eligibility determination. New York State does not reimburse NYC for THA provided to a household that is ultimately deemed ineligible. Currently, DHS is generally able to make eligibility determinations within 15 days (exceptions to this occur under various circumstances, including when a household is not cooperating with the evidentiary requirements). The 15-day duration limit allows DHS to budget temporary shelter not reimbursed by the State in a somewhat predictable way.

The two-year housing history requirement – which was the result of extensive negotiations and compromises between OTDA and advocates – helps DHS strike a delicate balance between creating a predictable cost structure for DHS while also helping the families who need it most. Note that the two-year housing history requirement also provides DHS both a more holistic understanding of clients' circumstances and the opportunity to afford families with children family mediation services encompassing a two-year housing history time period. Family mediation serves as a crucial tool that assists families avoid shelter altogether; we want to avoid unintentionally reducing family mediation's capacity to assist clients in finding an alternative to shelter.

Overall, reducing the housing history requirement and extending the duration of emergency placement will extend the timeframe of emergency housing for households regardless of their eligibility for THA. Shelter capacity across the City would need to be increased for families with children as a result of this bill.

Fiscally, initial estimates note that reducing the required housing history from two years to one year would cost close to \$169 million per year. The extension of conditional emergency THA from 15 days to 30 days would be over \$7 million per year.

DHS currently publishes pertinent information on its publicly accessible website about acceptable evidence for proving housing history and the eligibility determination process. Producing paper pamphlets containing the same information would incur publication and translation costs. However, the agency is supportive of the Council's proposal to ensure that information is available to ensure applicants are informed about the process.

The bill requirement to create a digital case record system that is accessible to DHS applicants and clients via a secure website and applications for phones and mobile devices has a costly impact, in building out a client-facing digital case record system, and in regular IT maintenance. Further, the bill does not account for the time required to plan, design and/or alter existing systems, test, and launch the digital case record functionality the bill requires.

Given these considerations, we do not believe this bill proposes an advisable course of action at this time.

Preconsidered Introduction 1352

Preconsidered Introduction 1352, sponsored by Council Member Abreu, would require the Commissioner of Homeless Services, in consultation with relevant New York City agency heads, to develop informational materials directed to hospitals pertaining to a Code Blue or Code Red alert. The materials would include information on agency resources during these alerts for individuals experiencing homelessness, recommended hospital procedures during these alerts, and contact information of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and other relevant agencies. The Commissioner would have to conduct outreach to provide hospitals with the materials for distribution to patients. The bill would also require the Commissioner to make best efforts to coordinate with hospitals during these alerts to identify discharged patients experiencing homelessness, assess what DHS resources they need, and make the resources available to them. Examples of DHS resources include direction and transportation to shelters and warming and cooling centers.

We are strongly in support of all efforts to engage our unsheltered neighbors and help keep them safe, especially during the extreme weather conditions that lead to Code Red and Code Blue alerts. DHS has had a long-standing partnership with NYC hospitals to mutually engage in care coordination activities for purposes of assisting individuals who have been in or require DHS shelter.

In the run up to the Code Blue and Code Red Seasons, an agency communication is sent to all local hospitals via the Greater New York Hospital Association and NYC Health and Hospitals central office, which provides a reminder about the impending “code blue” season. Additionally, the DSS Chief Medical Officer sends a letter to local hospitals highlighting the impending “code blue” season and the role for hospitals in such season. The communication asks that hospitals cooperate in allowing unsheltered individuals to stay in emergency waiting rooms (or other designated areas) to the extent possible, without being registered, unless they present with a medical need or ask to see a medical provider. DHS also consistently reminds hospitals not to discharge patients during code blue without having a DHS placement.

Regardless of season, DSS has long-standing guidance (the Institutional Referral Procedure) on hospital discharge, which is applicable at all times. This guidance was developed in close collaboration with the Greater New York Hospital Association, NYC Health and Hospitals, and private hospitals. Hospitals have been trained on the procedure and refer over 4,000 individuals a year who are either new to DHS, or who have not been in DHS shelter for over

a year. Hospitals are well aware of this procedure and DHS communicates frequently with hospitals regarding this procedure and individuals referred via the procedure and provides reminders and training.

In order to further support hospitals, DHS has also created a dedicated “hospital to shelter referral line” which is shared on the institutional referral form. DHS has greatly enhanced this referral program in recent years to ensure that clients are linked to care prior to discharge, including to Safe Options Support (SOS) Teams, mobile mental health teams and NYC Health and Hospitals safety net clinics, and has implemented a fast-track program for the most complex clients to enter the most appropriate shelter for their needs. DHS also works with hospitals on diversion efforts to help clients with a recent housing history to return to their housing.

The referral process includes the completion and submission of the institutional referral form to DHS, via encrypted email. The form includes pertinent demographic and clinical information, as well as the patient’s written consent to be referred to a DHS site. The patient’s consent is a crucial component of the referral process – it is what allows DHS to engage in care coordination in the first place.

DHS reviews these documents within 24hrs (48hrs if the referral is from a nursing home). As part of the Procedure, DHS first determines if the patient is medically appropriate for shelter - based on their physical and mental health characteristics, their ability to perform their ADLs, (activities of daily living) and available resources to serve the patient’s needs. Second, DHS works with the hospital to identify a placement option within the system which meets the client’s needs and, where possible, preferences. The vast majority of referrals are medically appropriate for shelter. We encourage hospitals to provide transportation and/or accompaniment for the most complex clients.

An important note here is that the Code Blue communication covers clients seen in the emergency department or admitted and being discharged. The formal institutional referral process only applies to persons admitted to the hospital. DHS’s main objective, as always, is to assist the most vulnerable New Yorkers in accessing shelter and services. We, along with our partners at NYC Health and Hospitals, do all that is possible under the law to offer homeless individuals accessing hospitals, a way to connect to services and housing, and begin to transition into permanent housing.

At DHS, we are always willing to implement new ideas and procedures which would further assist our Clients in moving along the trajectory towards permanent housing. As such, we are eager to have further discussion with the sponsor and Council about the contours of this bill.

Preconsidered Introduction 1353

Preconsidered Introduction 1353, sponsored by Council Member Abreu, would require the Commissioner of Homeless Services to make best efforts to coordinate with hospitals to make available supplies to patients experiencing homelessness, upon their discharge from the hospitals. The supplies during a Code Blue alert would include a mylar thermal blanket, a set of hand

warmers, a winter hat, and a pair of gloves. The supplies during a Code Red alert would include a mylar thermal blanket, a reusable water bottle filled with cold water, cooling wipes, and a bandana.

At DHS, we believe the best outcomes for our street homeless clients are achieved through connecting clients to housing and services. As discussed above, DHS has a robust institutional referral procedure designed to allow clients to seamlessly transition from their hospital bed to a shelter or safe haven bed. As also noted above, however, hospitals are only able to contact DHS about patients who are experiencing homelessness if the Client consents to such contact. This limitation does lead to concerns about how DHS would be able to implement this bill.

If NYC Health and Hospitals contacts us about a patient who is experiencing unsheltered homelessness, we would do everything possible to connect that client with a bed. If the client does not allow NYC Health and Hospitals to contact us, we would not have a way to connect the client to a bed and also could not hand out the supplies mandated in the bill.

The second concern has to deal with the volume of supplies we would need to give NYC Health and Hospitals and how we would track such supplies. We could give NYC Health and Hospitals fifty hand warmers, gloves, hats and blankets, but we don't know if they room to store such items, how they would track the items being handed out, and how they would prevent the items from going astray.

In light of these limitations, and the fact that NYC Health and Hospitals also hands out client clothing and warm weather gear, it might be best to continue working in coordination to attain the goals of this legislation. That being said, we would be happy to continue having conversations with the sponsor and the council at large regarding how to meet the goals of this bill.

Preconsidered Introduction 0008

Preconsidered Introduction 0008, sponsored by Council Member Restler, would require the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to create a mobile application available to DHS staff and contractors that do street outreach work, that allows real-time tracking and reporting of all engagement with street homeless individuals. This bill would also require DHS to report to the council quarterly, the total number of unsheltered homeless persons, disaggregated by the location where they were first engaged by staff; the total number of unsheltered homeless persons who accepted services during the reporting period, disaggregated by the type of service; and the aggregate number of engagements that resulted in temporary placements or permanent housing.

For several years, DHS has been working to improve the digital case management systems for the unhoused population so that DHS outreach staff and contracted providers performing outreach services can enter, save, and access data and information in real time about the unhoused population.

The initial planning for the creation of a mobile app—essentially an upgrade to the current StreetSmart application — is already underway. StreetSmart is the database system of record used by DHS and contracted outreach providers for the street homeless population. It captures engagement and interaction data, and follow-up notes on unsheltered individuals encountered in streets and subways. Once information is entered in StreetSmart and a record is created, it becomes available to all DHS staff and contracted providers who have StreetSmart access.

DSS is supportive of efforts to improve and enhance case management systems and data collection practices, so that we can better analyze and report on needs and trends for the unhoused population. We would like to work further with the Council to ensure there is alignment between what the bill would require DHS to do and what data DHS can actually collect, produce and report on, and explain the technical implications of this bill.

We appreciate the opportunity to testify today and welcome any questions that you may have.

Thank you.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

**Testimony of Win for the New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare Oversight Hearing
March 9, 2026**

Thank you to Chair Hudson and the esteemed members of the Committee on General Welfare for the chance to submit testimony on behalf of Win. My name is Chris Mann, and I am the Assistant Vice President of Policy and Advocacy at Win, the largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness in New York City. We operate 16 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Each night, nearly 7,000 people call Win “home,” including 3,600 children.

Reforming the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing Office (PATH) intake and assessment center is a top policy priority for Win clients. Win families report that the process of applying for shelter at PATH—the housing history requirement in particular—is confusing and grueling, with many families being found ineligible for shelter the first time they apply. Of the 2,239 families who entered a Win family shelter in FY25, 43% had two or more entries within the fiscal year, with one client reapplying at PATH 20 times.

To prove their eligibility for shelter, families must demonstrate their last two years of housing history, to allow PATH staff to divert them from the shelter system by uncovering alternative housing options to shelter that families either concealed or were not aware of. However, paper documentation requirements can be insurmountable for families in housing crisis, who may be fleeing from domestic violence situations that included the intentional theft of their critical documents. Families may have lost or not received documents because of lockouts, street homelessness, or other types of displacement. Difficulty with proving eligibility under the two-year housing history requirement means that many clients remain in the shelter system under “conditional” status for months at a time, reapplying and returning to PATH every 10 days. On average, it took 41 days after a family’s first entry at Win to be found eligible for shelter: four times the length of time it should take. One client in FY25 even waited 314 days after their first entry to be found eligible for shelter. Reducing the housing history requirement to one year—consistent with the shelter application process for adult families— would ease pressure on families in a deeply traumatic moment in their lives.

Being found eligible for shelter is essential to being eligible for rental assistance subsidies, like CityFHEPS, which help families move out of shelter and stabilize. In other words, repeated denials needlessly prolong the length of time a family spends in shelter. We urge the City Council to pass Intro 232, sponsored by Chair Hudson, to reduce the housing history requirement from two years to one year and expedite clients’ pathway to stable housing. We also urge the Council to go further and pass accompanying legislation to allow families to attest to their housing history and to create a virtual shelter intake process.



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TESTIMONY OF:

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Civil Justice Practice**

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before

**The New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare Oversight Hearing**

March 9, 2026

My name is Tamara Holliday, and I am a Supervising Attorney in the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. I want to thank the Committee on General Welfare and Chair Hudson for inviting us to testify today about legislation that will improve access to public benefits for New Yorkers.

For 30 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. BDS represents thousands of people in Brooklyn and Queens each year who are accused of a crime, facing the removal of their children to the foster system, or challenging deportation. Our staff consists of specialized attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals, and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields. BDS also provides a wide range of additional services for our clients, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing, and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

BDS' Civil Justice Practice (CJP) aims to reduce the civil collateral consequences for the people we serve who are involved with the criminal, family, or immigration legal systems. Our practice combats housing instability in a variety of ways: we defend people from eviction in housing court and provide proactive relocation assistance and public benefits advocacy. Our team works with clients and their families to prevent the loss of housing, public benefits, or personal property due to a legal case or investigation. Through legal advocacy in court and at various agencies, CJP helps people remain in their homes, maintain their public benefits, stay in school, keep their jobs, and protect their consumer rights. One of our primary services is to provide the people we

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represent with support when their public benefits are terminated, or applications for essential benefits are denied. Our attorneys and advocates provide advice and eligibility screenings, accompany people to HRA offices, and provide representation to people challenging HRA's denial of benefits in administrative hearings and state court appeals.

Legislation

BDS strongly supports Int. 232-2026, which would reduce the burden of providing proof of housing on families with children who are entering the shelter system. Currently, families applying for shelter are required to submit proof of the prior two years of their housing history for review. In order to be eligible for family shelter, a family must have a complete two-year history of the places they lived, with no gaps allowed in the documentation. For a family experiencing housing instability, this documentation can be difficult to obtain, especially if they have a long history of not having permanent housing. The housing history requires not only where families stayed—including temporary housing situations like staying with family members or friends—but also documentation that demonstrates that the prior housing is no longer suitable for the family. This requires attestations stating that the family can no longer stay in prior arrangements. In some cases, we have seen that after a family is evicted, they must find temporary places to stay for a month or two while they attempt to obtain the information needed to apply for shelter. This is an incredibly challenging burden for families with children who are often traveling across the city to appointments, schools and jobs, often carrying important belongings where they go for lack of safe storage.

In February 2022, NYC Comptroller's Audit of PATH Intake confirmed that 42% of the 46,200 family shelter applications were denied without adequately investigating housing history.¹ This includes cases where DHS was unable to confirm all the placements listed in the family's two-year housing history in the 10-day period that families are temporarily placed in the shelter while they await a decision on their shelter eligibility.

Currently, the conditional placement while DHS reviews the family's housing history is 10 days, and with the passage of this proposed legislation, that period could be extended to 30 days. For a family with children, a 10-day placement does not give the family time to adjust to their placement before they are potentially removed and required to either start the process over again or moved to a different borough or other part of their current borough, causing unnecessary disruptions with the children living in the shelter. This also requires families to return to PATH intake to reapply for a shelter placement. Extending the placement to 30 days would also benefit DHS, in that they would have more time to investigate the family's housing history and work with the family to determine whether they can stay in one of the placements listed in their housing history. It is feasible to ascertain that an additional 20 days would allow DHS to more

¹ <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/newsroom/comptroller-lander-releases-review-of-nyc-shelter-system-focusing-on-both-pathways-in-pathways-out>.



thoroughly investigate a family’s housing history, to where they can even speak with the family in more depth to determine if shelter is truly their only alternative. This would allow for less denial based on DHS’ ability to investigate every placement.

BDS also supports Int. 139-2026, which would require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide written confirmation of a public benefits interview. Currently, when people complete an interview for public benefits with the Department of Social Services, either in person or over the phone, they do not receive any documentation confirming the interview was completed. Oftentimes, we see that public benefits applications are rejected for failure to complete the eligibility interview—even when the interview did happen. Without proof or documentation of the interview, there is no way to challenge the DSS denial. Providing applicants with a written confirmation of an interview will help mediate this common challenge.

Conclusion

We are grateful to the Committee on General Welfare for holding this hearing legislation that seeks to reduce barriers to public benefits. We welcome any opportunity to work with this committee to ensure that all New Yorkers can receive timely access to the public benefits and services to which they are entitled.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Kathleen McKenna, Senior Policy Social Worker, at kmckenna@bds.org.



TESTIMONY

Submitted to the

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

on the subject of Int 232-2026

March 9, 2026

Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare, we are the [Family Homelessness Coalition](#) (FHC) — a membership body with expertise covering all facets of New York City’s (NYC) systems of care and advancement from shelter to permanent affordable housing to community-based services to child advocacy to workforce to education to families who have lost housing and navigated the complex safety net systems of New York City. We promote child and family well-being when shelter is unavoidable and advocate for the creation of additional permanent housing resources for homeless children and their families.

We write to you today to express our strong support of Int. 232-2026 (Council Members Hudson and Louis), a bill that would make the challenging process of accessing the Department of Homeless Services family shelters, easier for families in need of shelter.

The reforms that this bill aims to implement, closely align with the Family Homelessness Coalition’s policy priorities on reforming shelter intake for families who are declaring themselves in need of family shelter. These families, during a moment of crisis with no access to housing, face an over burdensome intake process. The design and demands of the intake process lead to a high number of initial denials for shelter for families who are eventually determined eligible. The City processes that are intended to confirm a family’s need for shelter during a time of housing insecurity is having the unintended consequence of often uprooting and needlessly lengthen families’ time spent in housing insecurity. The FHC believes the system should be re-formed to shorten the time a family experiences housing insecurity and supports the reforms that Int 232 proposes towards that goal.

Specifically, the FHC commends the Council Members for their proposal that “a family with children shall not be required to furnish evidence demonstrating more than 1 year of housing history to apply for temporary housing assistance.” The current status of demonstrating 2 years of housing history contributes to nearly 60% of families initially being denied eligibility, despite many of those families being determined eligible eventually.

The FHC also supports increasing the guidance for families applying for shelter as intended by the bill’s proposed “informational pamphlet.” Many initial eligibility denials result from lack of clarity regarding paperwork requirements.



The FHC supports the increased digital access to case records for the purpose of reducing the waiting time for shelter eligibility determinations, however, we urge that such systems should be targeted to expediting reviews by City agencies and reducing the burden on families. To that end, it is critical that any new systems integrate with current systems, do not result in duplication, and do not require redundant work on the part of families seeking shelter or the providers supporting them.

In addition to the reforms proposed in Int 232, the FHC believes that in order to reform the shelter intake process, families that have received one eligibility denial should be allowed to self-attest to their housing history [given that it will have already been provided in the family's original application and families who have received two eligibility denials should be allowed to reapply from their current temporary shelter placement, holding their bed/room placement during the processing of their reapplication and conducting this reapplication via the phone.

We thank the Committee for its attention to and consideration of these comments.

The Family Homelessness Coalition¹

¹ Steering Committee Members: *Advocates For Children, Barrier Free Living, Camba, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Coalition for the Homeless, CSH, Enterprise Community Partners, Family Action Board, Terra Linda Housing Services, Henry Street Settlement, Homeless Services United, Homes for the Homeless, New Destiny Housing, Riseboro, Safe Horizon, Sanctuary For Families, Settlement Housing Fund, Volunteers of America-Greater New York, WIN*



Testimony of FPWA

**Presented to:
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Chair Crystal Hudson
March 9, 2026**

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We are grateful to the Council Committee on General Welfare for holding this hearing and to Chair Crystal Hudson and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of FPWA (Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies).

FPWA is a leading anti-poverty, social policy, and advocacy organization dedicated to strengthening human services organizations and faith institutions and advancing economic security and justice for all New Yorkers. Since 1922, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need. We work to dismantle the structural and systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being, and we strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

We are providing this testimony in support of the proposed legislation (Int. No. 139), sponsored by Council Members Cabán, Hudson, Hanif, and Louis, which would require the Department of Social Services to provide a benefits interview confirmation notice. We also wish to highlight other issues related to the eligibility and recertification interview processes that we have learned about in our research and from hearing directly from New Yorkers who receive cash assistance.

In 2024, FPWA co-founded the National True Cost of Living Coalition. In partnership with Community Service Society of New York, FPWA commissioned the Urban Institute to develop a first-in-the-nation True Cost of Economic Security (TCES) measure, which provides a comprehensive view of households' costs and resources detailed at the county level.¹ This research revealed that across the nation, 52 percent of people—and 62 percent of the residents of New York City²—are economically insecure, meaning they do not have the resources necessary to meet this comprehensive set of regular household costs, set aside savings both for future planning and for short-term emergencies, and manage debt. In certain areas and for certain demographic groups, that number is even higher. For instance, 72 percent of families with children in New York City—and an unconscionable 91 percent of single-parent households across the City—fall below the TCES, with New Yorkers of color disproportionately experiencing economic

¹ Acs, G., Dehry, I., Giannarelli, L., & Todd, M. (2024). *Measuring the True Cost of Economic Security: What does it take to thrive, not just survive, in the US today?* Urban Institute. <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/Measuring-the-True-Cost-of-Economic-Security.pdf>

Using county-level data, the TCES offers a robust look at the costs families face today, measuring average costs for food, clothing, housing, health care, childcare, transportation, post-secondary education, debt service, and additional miscellaneous costs. In addition, the measure calculates the resources that individuals and families have to meet these costs, including labor earnings and self-employment income, some types of passive investment income, pensions and retirement income, government social insurance and public assistance programs like Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), as well as employer-provided healthcare contributions. Unique to this measure, the TCES includes a 10 percent savings threshold in the costs criteria that allows households to cover unexpected expenses and plan for the future.

² FPWA. (2025). *True Cost of Economic Security: Policy implications for New York City*. https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/True-Cost-of-Economic-Security_Policy-Implications-for-New-York-City_9.29.25-1.pdf

insecurity.³ More, economic mobility has declined⁴ and wages have stagnated,⁵ leaving economic security out of reach for most New Yorkers.

New Yorkers who are experiencing deep economic insecurity, those furthest from the TCES, are unable to meet their daily needs without critical government supports, such as cash assistance (also referred to as public assistance, temporary assistance, or welfare) and the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). And it is these programs that are now under direct attack from the current federal administration, further exacerbating the cost-of-living crisis in our city. The deep cuts to these programs are ripping away vital support from those already facing the most extreme economic insecurity, and the city must step up to help all eligible New Yorkers access these critical income supports.

Over the past several years, we have conducted research to better understand the challenges New Yorkers face in accessing benefits and identify ways to address administrative barriers. FPWA's 2024 report, *Rewriting the Story*, shares findings from a series of in-depth interviews that we conducted with New Yorkers who receive cash assistance that sheds light on some of these barriers.⁶ The New Yorkers we interviewed spoke about how they struggle to get by on cash assistance and often go without basic needs, which is why we continue to advocate on the state level for a significant increase in the grant. But participants also spoke about how the program, while vital, is notoriously difficult to access, and they provided extensive accounts of a myriad of access and retention barriers they have experienced. Among the barriers they spoke about were the benefits eligibility and recertification interview processes, which remain a main reason why New Yorkers lose or are denied access to cash assistance. From our research and hearing directly from New Yorkers who receive cash assistance, we know the importance of mitigating issues related to interview process. For this reason, we strongly support the proposed legislation (Int. No. 139), which would require the Department of Social Services to provide a benefits interview confirmation notice, a proposal that we recommended in our 2024 report.

New Yorkers Face Persistent Barriers to Access Public Benefits

Each year, tens of thousands of New Yorkers are denied access to benefits due to administrative barriers related to the application and recertification processes. In the cash assistance program, for example, these procedurally driven denials and case closures are consistently the main reason individuals are denied or lose cash assistance, demonstrating that these processes are overly burdensome for those seeking assistance. From July 2024 to June 2025, New York State denied 340,109 applications (67.8 percent of all denials) due to reasons related to the application process (i.e., "failure to comply with application

³ FPWA. (2025). *True Cost of Economic Security: Policy implications for New York City*. https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/True-Cost-of-Economic-Security_Policy-Implications-for-New-York-City_9.29.25-1.pdf

⁴ Isaacs, J. B. (2016). *International comparisons of economic mobility*. The Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/02_economic_mobility_sawhill_ch3.pdf

⁵ DeSilver, D. (2018). *For most U.S. workers, real wages have barely budged in decades*. Pew Research Center. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2018/08/07/for-most-us-workers-real-wages-have-barely-budged-for-decades/>

⁶ FPWA. (2024). *Rewriting the Story: Lived experiences of New Yorkers receiving cash assistance*. https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FPWA-Cash-Assistance-Story-Collection-Series_10.21.2024_3.52_PM-1.pdf

requirements, such as failure to appear for interviews or failure to provide documentation”) and closed more than 142,911 cases due to reasons associated with the recertification process (i.e., “failure to comply with program requirements not related to employment such as failure to recertify”), representing 49.7 percent of all cases closed.⁷ These barriers are a significant issue in New York City, especially as it relates to the benefits interview process. City data from Fiscal Year 2024 shows that more than 108,000 cases were denied because the applicant was unable to complete the eligibility interview, representing the largest category of all cases denied. This data shows that many New Yorkers also faced challenges with the interview during the recertification process, as more than 23,000 cases were closed for not completing the recertification interview.⁸ (This represents a significant increase from FY23, during which more than 84,000 cases were denied because the applicant was unable to complete the eligibility interview and another nearly 9,000 cases were closed for not completing the recertification interview.)

Many of the New Yorkers we spoke with reported that the interview process was a significant barrier for them. For example, one participant, who is a mom to a 5-year-old daughter, started receiving cash assistance because she became homeless while she was pregnant and needed help affording basic needs. Her case was closed due to administrative errors related to her recertification and the interview:

“They messed up my case last year in December. They claimed I didn’t do my recertification, but I did it in October...and the person that did the interview call with me...forgot to put it in the system. So, I had to do it again...and then they still closed my case.”

As a result of the state’s error, she and her daughter went without benefits for about a month and a half, during which time they struggled to afford food and other essentials. Another participant reported that when she applied for cash assistance, she ended up having to do a second eligibility interview. She said the whole process was “like a test” where she felt like she was purposefully being given “the runaround.” Another participant we interviewed reported extensive challenges with the recertification process, and at the time we spoke with him, he had not received his benefits from the previous month, despite having done *three* interviews. If Int-0139 were enacted, these individuals would have received confirmation within 24 hours of their interviews, and failing to receive such notice would have alerted them to follow up with their case manager to obtain confirmation. They also would have had the opportunity to rectify any issues earlier in the process, which may have prevented them from losing benefits or having to repeat steps in the process.

In addition to supporting the proposed legislation, we also want to call attention to other issues related to the eligibility and recertification interviews that we have learned about in our work. As mentioned in the accounts from cash assistance recipients above, New Yorkers frequently report that they participate in their eligibility or recertification interview, but that the case worker who conducted their interview did

⁷New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (2025). *2025 Legislative Report on Public Assistance*. <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/legislative-report/2025-Legislative-Report.pdf>

⁸New York City Human Resources Administration. *Local Laws 168 and 170 Reports*. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/news/local-laws-168-170-reports.page>

not document it. Without documentation proving that they completed the interview, applicants/recipients are left without recourse. In addition to this, individuals we interviewed reported general confusion about the interview process overall, such as not knowing how to complete the interview. In 2022, the Human Resources Administration (HRA) implemented an on-demand telephone interview feature where applicants call and wait on the line for a staff member. However, individuals we interviewed who used this feature reported that they were put on hold for lengthy amounts of time, some reporting three to five hours. Thus, we encourage the Council to consider how to address these issues more broadly to ensure that the interview process does not continue to impose such a significant barrier for New Yorkers in need.

The interview is just one part of the long, burdensome application and recertification processes. Interview participants shared extensive accounts about this, but in general, they demonstrate that the cash assistance program is administered in a way that reflects the program's history: it is punitive, confusing, and designed to deter people from seeking assistance.

Participants we interviewed consistently reported that during the application process, they were often told that they did not submit paperwork or that it was "lost," even though they had a record of submitting it. Participants also reported challenges with the recertification process, such as not knowing when to recertify and not receiving notice, and many have been cut off from cash assistance as a result. Several participants reported that they lost benefits because of some processing error, such as a caseworker not entering their recertification into the system. Participants reported going without food or other essentials or turning to local food pantries or nonprofit organizations when their benefits were cut off. As one participant stated plainly: "They make it so hard [to access cash assistance]. It makes it easier for you to walk away."

The other access and retention barriers that came up repeatedly in our interviews are:

- **Long Wait Times:** Participants reported that they frequently wait hours, sometimes the entire day, while applying or recertifying in person or visiting an office to resolve an issue. One participant said she has had to take time off from work several times to resolve various issues, and she added that maintaining cash assistance "is like an actual job." This was also reflected in a survey we conducted, where 68 percent of respondents reported waiting three or more hours during their most recent visit to their social services office, with 42 percent waiting five or more hours. Participants also reported long hold times on the phone. One participant, who was a victim of benefits skimming and had her benefits stolen, said she counted that she spent 30 hours on the phone trying to resolve the issue.
- **Poor Communication and Inconsistent Information About Program Requirements:** Many participants reported instances where they could not reach anyone at HRA or their local social services office to resolve an issue. Participants also reported receiving incorrect or conflicting information from staff about program rules and application/recertification requirements.
- **Disrespect and Negative Experiences with Staff:** Participants reported being treated poorly by staff while applying, recertifying, or resolving issues with their cases, and they described the

experience of going to a Benefits Access Center as “uncomfortable,” “intimidating,” even “humiliating.”

Finally, it is also important to consider the lived reality of New Yorkers who are trying to access benefits and the reasons why individuals turn to these programs in the first place. In an analysis by the Urban Institute, participants, many of whom were from New York, reported that they turned to cash assistance after some life-altering event or circumstance, like a job loss, the birth of a child, or the ending of a relationship.⁹ Participants consistently shared similar stories in our interviews. For example, one participant came to cash assistance for the first time after her relationship with her child’s father ended. Suddenly a single parent, she was unable to afford child care. Another participant came to the program after the birth of her child, who has a disability and required intensive care. A few others lost their jobs or experienced a loss such as a death in their family. Homelessness and health issues (i.e., injury, illness, and physical and mental health issues) were among the most common reasons why people turned to the program. Another participant, who is a new mom, applied after her partner was severely injured in an accident and was unable to work. Another participant had been working as a firefighter until he was diagnosed with cancer and needed to undergo several surgeries, after which he needed additional financial support.

Given that individuals and families are turning to benefits programs during particularly stressful moments in their lives, it is critical that the application and recertification processes are designed to be as simple and transparent as possible. These administrative hurdles can exacerbate existing stress or trauma that applicants and recipients are already experiencing and lead to eligible New Yorkers losing out on necessary benefits. Thus, making these processes more efficient is not only advantageous from an administrative perspective, but it will also ensure a level of dignity and empathy for those seeking assistance.

The Proposed Legislation Would Improve Access to and Retention of Public Benefits

The proposed legislation (Int. No. 139) would require the Department of Social Services (DSS) to provide a benefits interview confirmation notice no later than 24 hours after conducting an eligibility or recertification interview with an applicant for cash assistance, emergency assistance (as such term is defined in subdivision a of section 21-150), or SNAP benefits. DSS would be required to provide applicants, either in hard copy or electronically, with a confirmation notice that would include, at a minimum, a confirmation number, the date and time of the interview, the location of the interview, the phone number from which the applicant received a phone call, if the interview was conducted via telephone, and any other relevant information regarding the interview. While this change may seem simple, we recommended it in our 2024 report because applicants and recipients of cash assistance, as well as many advocates we spoke with, recounted numerous instances in which staff neglected to log the completion of eligibility or recertification interviews, and the applicant never received a formal confirmation, resulting

⁹ Anderson, T., Coffey, A., Daly, H., Hahn, H., Maag, E., & Werner, K. (2022). *Balancing at the Edge of the Cliff: Experiences and Calculations of Benefit Cliffs, Plateaus, and Trade-Offs*. Urban Institute. https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/105321/balancing-at-the-edge-of-the-cliff_0.pdf

in New Yorkers being wrongly denied benefits or recipients having their cases erroneously closed at recertification. Providing a confirmation notice will make the process more transparent, and mitigating any confusion regarding the interview may help ensure that thousands of income-eligible New Yorkers are not unfairly denied benefits. This may also save DSS time processing applications and reduce related administrative costs, and it may also help reduce costs associated with program churn.

Conclusion

Thank you for your time and your attention to these critical issues. Int. No. 139 will bring us closer to a system in which all those in economic crisis can receive the benefits to which they are entitled. As the federal government is increasing barriers to these critical programs, it is more important than ever that the city step up and do everything within its power to fulfill its responsibility to care for New Yorkers facing deep economic insecurity, and improving access to public benefits is one important way the city can do this. FPWA looks forward to working with members of the City Council to advance this important legislation.

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group on
Int 0139-2026, Int 0232-2026, T2026-1352, T2026-1353 and T2026-0008

Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

March 9, 2026

Chair Hudson, Council Members, and staff, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the New York City Council on the oversight of NYC's Code Blue operations. My name is Graham Horn, and I am a Coordinating Attorney with the Shelter and Economic Stability Project in the Public Benefits Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group (“NYLAG”).

NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers experiencing poverty or in crisis combat economic, racial, and social injustices. We address emerging and urgent needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, financial empowerment, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community partnerships. We aim to disrupt systemic racism by serving clients, whose legal and financial crises are often rooted in racial inequality.

The Shelter and Economic Stability Project at NYLAG provides free legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access public shelter in New York City, and those having trouble accessing or maintaining Public Assistance and SNAP (food stamp) benefits. We work to ensure that every New Yorker has a safe place to sleep by offering legal advice and representation throughout each step of the shelter application process, assist and advocate for clients who are already in shelter as they navigate the transfer process, and seek adequate facility conditions and resources for their needs. We also represent clients at Administrative Fair Hearings, conduct advocacy with the Department of Social

Services (“DSS”), Benefits Access Centers and SNAP centers, and bring impact litigation to ensure that our clients are obtaining and maintaining an adequate level of shelter and benefits.

All of my clients interact with the Department of Social Services regularly and routinely engage in eligibility and recertification processes for public benefits and access to homeless shelter. Based on my experiences working with them, I appreciate the opportunity to offer the following comments.

I. Int 0139-2026

Int 0139-2026, requiring confirmation notices after the DSS eligibility benefits interview, would provide greater transparency and clarity to clients in the midst of benefits applications (including emergency assistance and applications needed to apply for other rental assistance programs). Far too often, NYLAG clients report waiting hours on the phone for an interview; sometimes only to learn that the interview had already occurred, and sometimes having to repeat the interview because it did not register in the system. A system that automatically generates these confirmations will aid in Fair Hearing advocacy as well, to the extent that it creates explicit documentary evidence of the public benefits eligibility interviews.

Moreover, standardized confirmation notices would help reduce administrative errors, missed deadlines, and unnecessary denials and closures. By ensuring that applicants receive clear, timely, and comprehensive documentation of their interviews, the City can help prevent lapses in SNAP and cash assistance and reduce the burden on both clients and Agency staff, who must otherwise spend time resolving disputes or completing additional interviews. This bill promotes accountability, reinforces due process protections, and supports more efficient and client-centered benefits administration.

II. Int 0232-2026

NYLAG strongly supports all of the changes that Int 0232-2026 would make to the eligibility process for family shelter that would make it easier to traverse. In New York City, the application process for family shelter is extremely onerous. Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) policy requires that, in order to prove eligibility for family shelter, families must provide a “complete, accurate and verifiable housing history” in the form of documentary evidence or third-party witness collateral contact, including for periods of street homelessness, for the two years leading up to the application (notably, families without children only have to provide one year). If the household does not have such documentary evidence, or if the third-party witness collateral contacts provided do not answer the phone within 10 days, then the family is found ineligible for shelter for “not cooperating.” This happens even when the family has otherwise cooperated fully with the process and has done everything in their power to connect DHS with documentary evidence and third-party witness collateral contacts. And most applications for family shelter are found ineligible. In August of 2025, 12% of families with children who were found eligible for shelter had previously submitted 4 or more applications. And in that same month, only 37% of applications for family shelter were deemed eligible.

Once the family is found “ineligible,” they must reapply for shelter. DHS policy dictates that after a family has been deemed ineligible one time, if they receive the notice of ineligibility in time, they may stay at their placement and reapply over the phone. But after the second finding of ineligibility, the family must start the application process over from the beginning. This means a household is forced to pack up their belongings, leave their shelter placement, and return to the DHS intake site to reapply. Applicant families must miss work while reapplying and may have to keep their children home from daycare and school for fear of not being done with the reapplication quickly enough to pick them up on time. After reapplying,

the families may be sent to new temporary shelter placements, making it almost impossible for them to plan commutes to work, school, and daycare. Reapplying for shelter entails restarting the process from the beginning by having the family return to the intake site and spend another 10-20 hours completing a new application for shelter, typically identical to the prior application, submitting many of the same documents again, and then waiting on-site for a new temporary shelter placement. This happens frequently to NYLAG clients, and, for some families, this occurs every 15 days for months before DHS can verify their housing history. Critically, such families are ineligible for programs that would assist them in transitioning to permanent housing, including access to rental subsidies like CityFHEPS. Without this assistance, families are unlikely to ever gain the means to obtain stable housing. Instead, they continue being reliant on DHS shelters, reapplying repeatedly as their children are moved from placement to placement.

Int 0232-2026 is an important step in the right direction. Reducing required housing history from two years to one year for families with children would significantly decrease the documentation burden homeless families have. Requiring DHS staff to upload all documents relevant to an applicant's housing history to a digital case record would remove the burden of families having to repeatedly resubmit the same documents over and over again. Communicating with applicants about any missing documents through electronic methods will keep applicants in the loop and allow them to proactively address application deficiencies prior to a finding of ineligibility. Giving families with children at least thirty days in temporary shelter pending a determination of their eligibility will increase stability for homeless families and allow applicants more time to track down the documentation necessary. Finally, an informational pamphlet listing examples of documents that could demonstrate proof of housing

history will aid families in obtaining the correct documentation. NYLAG supports all of these measures.

However, in our opinion, families should not have to prove housing history in order to be eligible because families who desperately need shelter are often turning to the shelter system as their last and only option. In fact, single adults do not have to go through the same onerous eligibility determinations to prove that they are actually homeless; families should not either. If there must be eligibility investigations, DHS should perform them in a different way by assisting the applicant in obtaining necessary documentation and allowing attestation as proof of homelessness to be enough. If these occurred, the process would be much more efficient, and it would allow eligible homeless families to obtain shelter and stability more expeditiously. And of course, all reapplications for family shelter should be permitted to be submitted over the phone (as was the case during Covid) so that the family could remain stably placed.

A family experiencing homelessness who is found ineligible for shelter will continue being homeless. A family found eligible for DHS shelter, on the other hand, is then connected to the shelter's housing assistance resources and becomes eligible for rental subsidies such as CityFHEPS, which then actually propels that family out of shelter and into stable housing.

III. T2026-1352 and T2026-1353

NYLAG also supports T2026-1352, which mandates coordination between hospitals and DHS to provide information and outreach services to people experiencing street homelessness when they are being discharged from the hospital during extreme weather events. This bill is complemented by T2026-1353, which mandates that DHS make best efforts to provide people experiencing homelessness with cold weather gear during extreme cold events and cooling gear

during extreme heat events. Both of these policies take a harm reduction approach toward those sleeping outside, rather than a punitive one. Moreover, they provide people with the kind of help they actually want. Many of NYLAG's clients say they would be more likely to engage with outreach workers if the workers were able to provide them with gear to stay warm in the cold months, cool in the hot months, as well as snacks and hot drinks. This plan should be extended to all DHS and contracted outreach partners.

IV.T2026-0008

T2026-0008 is an excellent first step to examine the efficacy of outreach services and to help outreach workers engage with clients. Our clients are often very wary of interacting with outreach workers, in part because every time they meet a new worker they have to start over and share their life story again. If outreach workers could quickly access a client's file, they would have information about what a client needs and have a foundation for building a relationship.

We are also very supportive of increased oversight of outreach efforts as the majority of our clients report having no interest in interacting with outreach. Monitoring these efforts will likely provide important information about how to improve them and make outreach more appealing to people experiencing street homelessness.

We thank the Committee on General Welfare for the work you have done to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers, and for taking this opportunity to continue to improve the conditions for our clients. We hope we can continue to be a resource for you going forward.

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group

3/10/26

URI Testimony – Committee on General Welfare

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Brandon Lloyd, and I am the Director of Government Affairs for the Urban Resource Institute. URI is the largest provider of domestic violence shelter services in the nation and a leading provider of transitional housing and for families across New York City. Every day, we create pathways to safety, stability, and healing for survivors of domestic violence and families in crisis.

I would also like to thank Council Members Hudson and Louis for their continued leadership and partnership on behalf of our residents of their districts. URI is proud to operate shelters in both of their communities, and we deeply appreciate their ongoing support for the families and pets we serve.

On any given night, URI has the capacity to provide safe, stable housing to nearly 4,000 individuals at one of our 24 shelter locations. We also provide residents with access to comprehensive wraparound services, including case management, housing placement support, and education services for children to help families stabilize and move toward permanent housing

URI strongly supports Intro 232, which would improve the process by which families with children are assessed and referred for temporary housing assistance. Families who arrive at the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center are often in the midst of profound crisis. Many are fleeing domestic violence, unsafe living conditions, or sudden housing instability. In these moments, bureaucratic barriers can prolong trauma and delay access to safety.

Intro 232 takes meaningful steps to remove those barriers while maintaining program integrity. By reducing the required housing history from two years to one year, the bill recognizes the reality that families in crisis may not have access to extensive documentation, especially when leaving unsafe homes. It also ensures that families with children can remain in temporary shelter for at least thirty days while their eligibility is assessed, providing critical stability during a period of uncertainty.

The bill's requirement that the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) maintain digital case records and notify applicants electronically about missing documentation is another significant improvement. Clear communication and accessible records can prevent unnecessary delays, reduce repeated intake visits, and allow families to better navigate a complex system at a time when they are already under immense stress.

For families experiencing housing instability regardless of the reason, time matters. Every additional day spent navigating unclear procedures or gathering documentation can mean prolonged exposure to danger or homelessness. The uncertainty is particularly challenging for children, who make up 60% of the people in our shelters. Intro 232 represents a practical, compassionate reform that will make the system

more transparent, more efficient, and more responsive to the realities families face when seeking shelter.

Urban Resource Institute is proud to support this legislation, and we respectfully urge the Council to pass Intro 232 to ensure families with children can access emergency housing quickly and with dignity.

NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE | TESTIMONY 3/9/26

Introduction and Thanks

My name is Catherine Trapani, Assistant Vice President of Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY), one of the largest housing and homeless services providers in NYC. I would like to thank Chair Hudson and members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today about the legislative initiatives being heard this afternoon.

About Us

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. Our programs include DHS and HRA DV emergency shelters and transitional housing, and we are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline. VOA-GNY also operates Street to Home, an innovative housing first program, that link unsheltered homeless New Yorkers directly from street outreach teams to permanent housing, completely by-passing the shelter system.

VOA-GNY is a member of the Human Services Council (HSC), Homeless Services United (HSU), The Supportive Housing Network of New York, and the Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC).

Introduction 0139-2026

VOA-GNY supports this legislation which would provide applicants with a receipt documenting the completion of their public benefits interview. This confirmation of the interview will help our clients and tenants have official documentation to successfully challenge erroneous benefits denials for failure to complete an HRA interview.

Introduction 0232-2026

VOA-GNY supports this legislation to reform the shelter intake and assessment process. Many of the families staying in our DHS shelters struggle with repeated 10-day “conditional” stays that do not afford sufficient time to establish eligibility forcing families to cycle through intake unable to move forward on a path to stability. A family that encounters issues with verifying previous homelessness typically is found ineligible 3 times or more. Each time a family is found ineligible, a family has to request a fair hearing or reapply for shelter. Staff resources are diverted to supporting

eligibility applications instead of helping families plan for their future. Shortening the homeless history requirement to one year and, moving to a 30-day time frame for the assessment period will allow shelter staff and DHS intake workers the time needed to work with families to produce necessary eligibility documentation. This change reduces unreasonable burdens on households who have been forced to move around and may be unable to produce documents from over one year ago while also ensuring sufficient time for a thorough review that will render repeat applications unnecessary.

T2026-1352 and T2026-1353

VOA-GNY supports both of these pre-considered introductions. Hospitals are a critical safety net resource for unsheltered homeless New Yorkers and can often be a source of trusted support. However, too often, care coordination, resources and support after the initial emergency medical condition is stabilized, are lacking. By ensuring that hospitals are guiding patients to appropriate safety net services during emergencies and equipping them with basic supplies that can protect them during such emergencies, lives can be saved.

T2026-0008

VOA-GNY supports the intent of this pre-considered introduction but believes the Council could take the effort even further to ensure truly seamless information sharing between homeless outreach teams that can improve the client experience and outcomes. DHS outreach teams use the digital platform StreetSmart to capture client information – this is largely considered to be the system of record. Some other outreach teams have read-only access to StreetSmart, other teams have no access at all. Data is not updated in real time so at no point during a shift does everyone working with an individual have a full picture of efforts to help them on any given day. The best way to solve for this issue would be to streamline outreach efforts and reduce redundant/duplicative services so clients can get more comprehensive care. Barring that, if several different agencies feel they have a role to play in street outreach, they should be talking to each other in real time and sharing information to reduce stress on clients while also improving outcomes.

Currently, StreetSmart engagement information is only put in by staff at the end of the shift leaving information gaps for other teams interacting with that same individual even when access to the system is granted. In many cases, there is no access at all leaving some outreach workers completely in the dark regarding their peers' efforts to support their client.

Example of current gaps in street-facing coordination with StreetSmart:

- Steve gets engaged at 8AM today by a DHS Outreach provider, who updates StreetSmart at end of their shift (e.g., 4PM)
- Steve also gets engaged at 10AM by OMH SOS team who looks in StreetSmart and sees his last engagement was a week ago because DHS Outreach didn't update his file yet.

- SOS cannot input information into StreetSmart documenting their engagement/ case notes, so DHS providers are not automatically aware. SOS uses their own data system for NYS.
- Coordination between DHS providers and SOS is piecemeal, as some providers like BronxWorks and Breaking Ground operate both types of outreach but may have different catchment areas across their programs. The rest of DHS SHS and OMH SOS providers do not operate both types of outreach, so their staff need to be very intentional about communicating with other providers.
- Steve gets engaged at 2PM by a faith-based outreach team like the Bowery Mission, no access to StreetSmart.
 - Private outreach providers do not have a way to automatically document for the City that individuals are unsheltered to verify homelessness status for supportive housing applications, safe havens eligibility, etc., so a person may not be able to qualify for a voucher or access a safe haven if they're not "seen" by the right type of outreach.
- Steve is seen by a H+H SHOW mobile treatment van a day later.
 - H+H does not have access to StreetSmart, so if Steve is connected to care, they cannot update his file for DHS SHS providers working with him. Unless he discloses it when talking with DHS outreach (unsheltered individuals are not great personal historians), they would not be aware and not able to coordinate care.

And at the end of it, it looks like Steve was seen once in DHS StreetSmart, per the data even though he has been "helped" by four different outreach teams.

The proposed legislation would create a "Digital Platform" but, like the StreetSmart system, that platform would only be available to outreach workers, defined as "department staff or staff contracted by the department", i.e. DHS outreach. That would not solve "Steve's" problem of multiple helpers not having insight into what services are already being provided to him.

The legislation would be helpful to improve StreetSmart functionality by making it a mobile version available for DHS/contracted staff but because the language regarding ensuring the platform is integrated "in a manner that enables data sharing and longitudinal tracking of client outcomes over time" does not require the city to data share with other specific City or State agencies its utility will be limited. We would recommend the legislation be amended to require establishing MOUs with other government partners performing similar functions that extend real time access to both read and add to the case record across agencies.

Conclusion

Volunteers of America- Greater New York greatly appreciates the work of the Council and thanks you for your innovative ideas to improve the experience homeless New Yorkers have with City

services. By reducing barriers to access care and improving data sharing and coordination, the City will be better able to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Catherine Trapani. If you have any questions, please contact me at CTrapani@voa-gny.org



Joy. Power. Possibility.
101 Avenue D • New York, NY 10009
212-982-1633 • www.girlsclub.org

**Testimony from the Lower Eastside Girls Club
City Council FY 27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Committee on General Welfare
March 12, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Jenny Dembrow, and I am the Executive Director of the Lower Eastside Girls Club. I have been with the organization since its founding in 1996 — when there were three Boys Clubs on the Lower East Side and no Girls Club. We started in a basement, expanded to over two dozen community locations, and in 2013 moved into our current 35,000 square foot facility. In 2022, we launched the Center for Wellbeing & Happiness, extending our mission to reach all genders and generations. Over 30 years, through recessions, a pandemic, and shifting political landscapes, LESGC has connected young women and gender-expansive youth to healthy and successful futures filled with Joy, Power, and Possibility.

Today I want to highlight three critical ways the Lower Eastside Girls Club is advancing the general welfare of New Yorkers: **Food Security. Mental Wellbeing. And wraparound programming that serves both youth and older adults.** Each is essential and under threat.

Food Security: Critical Community Infrastructure

The Girls Club has championed food justice since our founding. That work is anchored today by our Weekly Community Food Pantry, which serves approximately 2,000 New Yorkers monthly — including an average of 755 older adults and 400 children. We maintain a waitlist of approximately 100 families, and as federal funding cuts reduce support for food assistance programs citywide, demand continues to grow.

In 2025, we transitioned to a hybrid client choice model, honoring the dignity and agency of every person we serve. We also launched a subsidized CSA farm share program in partnership with Norwich Meadows Farm, connecting over 80 SNAP-recipient families to free organic produce. Our Food Farmacy provides grab-and-go nutritious foods, and our nutrition and culinary classes address chronic conditions like diabetes and hypertension through culturally relevant food education. This comprehensive approach ensures that community members facing difficult choices between purchasing food and paying essential bills can maintain their health and dignity.

Mental Wellbeing: Integrated, Intergenerational Care

Mental wellbeing is woven throughout everything we do — for youth and adults alike.

For young people, our Wellness offerings include Restorative Circles focused on emotional awareness and peer connection, access to on-site counseling, and mindfulness programming that builds skills in emotional regulation and stress management. Across our STEAM, Arts, Media, and Civic Leadership programs, members develop confidence, purpose, and a solid sense of self. 95% of our youth members demonstrate measurable gains in key social-emotional capacities — outcomes that research consistently links to long-term health and well-being.

For older adults, our Center for Wellbeing & Happiness serves over 350 adults monthly, with seniors ages 62 and older as our single largest age group. Free movement classes, creative arts programming, nutrition education, and community support groups directly combat chronic loneliness and support mental health. What distinguishes our model is the depth and continuity of our support- not a single service, but an ecosystem of support that meets people where they are, across every stage of life.

Our Request

We are requesting \$1,090,000 in total City Council support in FY27 to sustain the full scope of our work.

This investment supports a proven model — 30 years of demonstrated impact — while addressing urgent and growing needs across food access, mental health, and community wellbeing. Through disciplined budgeting and careful stewardship, the Girls Club is projected to end FY26 with a balanced budget. Sustaining that momentum requires consistent public investment.

Community-based organizations like ours are not a supplement to the city's social safety net. We are foundational, providing integrated, culturally responsive services across generations. The return on this investment is measurable, proven, and urgently needed.

Thank you.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: AUGUSTAH WINSTON

Address: [REDACTED] Brooklyn NY 11256

I represent: NYC Department of Homeless Services

Address: 32 Beaver St, NY, NY 10004

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 232 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 3/9/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chris Mann

Address: 1 State St. Plaza NY, NY 10004

I represent: Win

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 232 Res. No. _____
 in favor in opposition

Date: 3/09/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brandon Lloyd

Address: 205 E 42nd Street, NY 10017

I represent: Urban Resource Institute

Address: 205 E 42nd Street, NY 10017



Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alison Wilkey

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for the Homeless

Address: 129 Fulton St.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joshua Goldstein

Address: [REDACTED] Mid NY 10013

I represent: Legal Aid Society + Coalition for the Homeless

Address: 129 Fulton St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lucy Carney

Address: 220 West 49th St New York, NY 10019

I represent: Encore Community Services

Address: 220 West 49th St New York, NY 10019

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cassandra White

Address: DHS

I represent: Deputy Commissioner,

Address: Street Homelessness Solutions

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aqueelah Winston

Address: DHS

I represent: Interim Chief of Intake, Assessment & Operational

Address: Capacity

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nirah Johnson

Address: DHS

I represent: Assistant Commissioner

Address: Health + Homeless Services Integration

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rebecca Chew

Address: HRA

I represent: Chief Program officer

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0232 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/9/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Graham Horn

Address: 100 Pearl St., 19 floor NY NY 10004

I represent: New York Legal Assistance Group

Address: _____

◆ Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms ◆

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Catherine Trapani

Address: _____

I represent: Volunteers of America - Greater New

Address: _____ York

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 139 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Julia Casey

Address: 40 Broad St. NY, NY 10004

I represent: FPWA

Address: _____

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