



TESTIMONY

TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

GENERAL WELFARE COMMITTEE

HEARING ON THE LINC PROGRAM

BY STEVEN BANKS

COMMISSIONER

NEW YORK CITY HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION

JANUARY 21, 2015

My name is Steven Banks and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Human Resources Administration.

I would like to thank the City Council's General Welfare Committee and Chair Stephen Levin for giving us this opportunity to testify today about HRA's efforts to address homelessness prevention in New York City in general and the Living in Communities or LINC program in particular.

My colleague Department of Homeless Services Commissioner Gilbert Taylor has already given an overview of the LINC program, which is a joint effort of DHS and HRA.

I would just like to add one important point that has particular resonance for me personally. In my prior position, along with the Mayor when he was the Public Advocate, I fought to prevent the abrupt end of the prior Administration's Advantage rental assistance program. Unfortunately for both the affected families and landlords, I lost that court case by a 4 – 3 vote in the New York Court of Appeals. Landlords remember the summary termination of Advantage and the serious challenges it created for them.

That is why the de Blasio Administration worked very hard to design the LINC program based on lessons learned from prior rental assistance programs like Housing Stability Plus and Advantage and by listening to challenges faced by landlords and brokers. For example, consider these contrasts between Advantage and LINC:

- Under Advantage, once a family moved into an apartment, the City offered no follow-up services.
 - Under LINC, there are intensive aftercare services for families with children (many of them starting from the time that the client enters shelter) that will continue through the length of the program.
- Under Advantage, it was not clear whom landlords could call when there was a problem.
 - Under LINC, we have a central HRA hotline with trained staff to address landlords' concerns.
- Under Advantage, if a family was sanctioned or was no longer on public assistance, the rental assistance automatically stopped being paid and the landlord was left on his or her own to deal with the issue.
 - Under LINC, cases of LINC families are monitored in order to conduct a thorough review and provide necessary assistance to that family to remedy the situation.
- Under Advantage, if a tenant did not pay her or his portion of the rent, there was no assistance offered to the landlord.
 - Under LINC, first, there is ongoing aftercare and continuous services provided to the families, all geared towards helping them maintain their employment and rental assistance, and meet their responsibilities.
 - Second, every effort will be made by HRA to assist and pay any rent arrears if necessary.

- And third, there is a \$3,000 special fund that each landlord can access throughout the duration of the individual apartment lease if no other City funds are available to address the problem.
- Under Advantage, a main requirement was that a family be on public assistance.
 - Under LINC, there are targeted populations that have to meet very specific criteria – employment, domestic violence survivor status, multi-system involvement. Each family that is offered a LINC certificate is carefully screened by DHS and HRA.
- Under Advantage, the program was for only one or at most two years.
 - Under LINC there is an annual renewal process of up to five years to provide sufficient time for most families to achieve self-sufficiency. For those few who may not be able to do so within five years, we will evaluate their needs on a case-by-case basis to prevent loss of housing and reentry into the shelter system.
- Under Advantage, the program set maximum rent levels below the levels set by the New York City Housing Authority for the Section 8 program.
 - Under LINC we have discretion to pay rent levels up to the Section 8 levels and in November we exercised our discretion to do so.

In sum, we have worked hard to learn the lessons of past problems and design a program that will work for both landlords and our clients.

Landlords are a key to the success of the LINC program and our efforts to reduce homelessness. And we have made a major effort to reach out to landlords to encourage them to participate. HRA and DHS have conducted outreach to landlords, management companies, and brokers in a variety of ways. For example, HRA sent a mailing to more than 70,000 landlords and management companies that currently receive rent payments from HRA informing them about LINC and the special enhancements for landlords. The landlords and management companies that are already housing HRA clients were also invited to a special forum with the HRA Commissioner. Both DHS and HRA have held a series of landlord and broker meetings at which participants voiced questions, concerns, and ideas about the LINC programs. The Rent Stabilization Association also provided an opportunity for Commissioner Taylor and me to describe the LINC program and address questions from RSA members at a RSA forum in December at the New York County Lawyers' Association. In addition, Commissioner Taylor and I regularly make personal calls to the largest landlords and management companies that currently work with the City, outlining the benefits of the LINC programs and offering to expedite rentals through the leasing process. Moreover, the Department of Housing Preservation and Development and Commissioner Vicki Been have been key partners in reaching out to landlords and management companies to encourage them to participate in the LINC program.

We also welcome any assistance members of the Council can provide in encouraging landlords to participate in LINC.

Commissioner Taylor described the basics of the LINC programs. I will provide additional details about LINC III, which is aimed at domestic violence survivors in HRA domestic violence shelters.

Services for Survivors of Domestic Violence

The HRA Domestic Violence shelter system is the largest of its kind in the country. It includes 44 confidential emergency shelter facilities throughout all five boroughs of New York City with a total bed capacity of 2,228 beds, which can accommodate approximately 800 families, and seven Transitional Housing Tier II shelters, which have 243 units for clients. In FY 2014, the HRA domestic violence system served 11,105 individuals, which included 3,877 adults and 6,784 children in families as well as 444 singles.

Emergency domestic violence shelters provide temporary housing and supportive services for up to 180 days in a safe environment for survivors of domestic violence and their families. This 180-day time limit is set forth in a New York State regulation.

Previously, after 180 days in an emergency shelter, families were either able to leave shelter with available continuing non-residential support services, move to HRA Transitional Tier II housing or, if they still needed to be in a shelter, obtain shelter from the Department of Homeless Services. However, using the new LINC program, instead of sending families from HRA shelters to DHS shelters, we are working to move these families with children into a permanent home.

Implemented in September, the LINC rental assistance program helps families move from temporary, emergency shelter back to the community as quickly as possible by paying a portion of their rent for up to five years, if they continue to qualify. There are now five LINC programs, with one, LINC III, specifically designated for domestic violence survivors in both DHS and HRA shelters. It is aimed at survivors who have been in the HRA shelters for the longest periods to avoid having to transfer families from the HRA system to the DHS system when the 180-day regulatory time limit is reached. Almost half of the total LINC rental assistance program this year, 1,900 slots out of nearly 4,000, is set aside for families who are survivors of domestic violence.

LINC III is designated for survivors on public assistance, who constitute approximately 85% of domestic violence survivors in our HRA shelters. Those who are working and in HRA shelters the longest may also qualify for the other LINC programs on a case-by-case basis as we proceed with the implementation of this new rental assistance initiative. Therefore, survivors can access more than just the 1,900 slots in LINC III.

In addition to the LINC rental assistance program, as we have reported previously to the Council in testimony regarding HRA's reform initiatives, HRA, DHS and the New York City Housing Authority have worked together to streamline the NYCHA application process for families in the HRA and DHS shelters who have been certified by HRA's No Violence Again (NoVA) staff as survivors of domestic violence. Previously, even though HRA had determined that such families

were survivors, they were required to obtain duplicative additional documentation to obtain the N1 NYCHA domestic violence priority. As a result, very few families in the HRA and DHS shelters were able to receive the N1 NYCHA priority. This process has now been reformed so that HRA's certification is sufficient.

HRA, DHS and NYCHA have identified the families in the HRA and DHS shelters whom HRA has certified as domestic violence survivors and who have pending NYCHA applications. These families are being designated as N1 priorities. NYCHA, DHS, and HRA are now working together on an allocation of apartments for domestic violence survivors. This new priority process for certified survivors of domestic violence in HRA and DHS shelters will continue on an ongoing basis, with the number of families moving into NYCHA apartments with the N1 priority each year dependent on available apartments.

Homelessness Prevention Programs

In addition to the LINC program, which is aimed at moving families out of shelter, the de Blasio Administration is working very hard to assist families at risk of eviction and thereby prevent homelessness and entry to the shelter system.

To bring together all of HRA's resources dedicated to this important mission and to make sure that homelessness prevention is a priority, we created HRA's Homelessness Prevention Administration, headed by Chief Homelessness Prevention Officer Bruce Jordan.

Let me just take a minute to talk about Bruce. He started as a caseworker almost 26 years ago. He has been doing homelessness prevention work for 20 years. As such, he brings an impressive depth of knowledge and passion to this work. And he represents the strong commitment we have to preventing and reducing homelessness.

The creation of the new Homelessness Prevention Administration is a substantial expansion of HRA's prevention services.

HRA has a citywide Homelessness Diversion Program with specialized Homelessness Diversion Units (HDUs) located in 40 Job Centers. The Homelessness Diversion Units constitute an innovative, focused effort at maintaining permanent housing for families and individuals at risk of eviction, both to avoid their entry into the City's emergency shelter system and to enable them to maintain stable housing in their communities. HRA's Homelessness Diversion Program includes specialized staff in teams located in all of HRA's Job Centers citywide and in the Department of Homeless Services' intake facilities in the Bronx and Manhattan, where families and individuals facing homelessness seek shelter.

The Homelessness Diversion Program operates in conjunction with a centralized emergency Rental Assistance Unit (RAU) that resolves tens of thousands of emergency rental assistance requests a year out of a central office with staff located in each of the seven Housing Courts in all five boroughs. Homelessness Diversion and Rental Assistance have been supported by a Landlord Ombudsman Services Unit (LOSU) that provides services to landlords with specific

inquiries as well as selective assistance with emergency rent check processing and a Call Center that responds to inquiries from staff, clients and landlords.

In 2014, with the de Blasio Administration's support for and commitment to homelessness prevention, affordable housing, and reducing income inequality, HRA reorganized its homelessness prevention efforts with the creation of the Homelessness Prevention Administration. The existing Homelessness Diversion Programs, Rental Assistance Unit, and Landlord Ombudsman Services Unit continue to be critical components of HRA's homelessness prevention efforts, with their effectiveness and reach augmented by the enhancements and new initiatives described below. Other program areas – the Legal Assistance Initiatives Unit, the Early Intervention Outreach Team (EIOT), and the Rental Assistance Program – have been added as part of a new, more comprehensive homelessness prevention effort.

Here is how we have expanded our efforts.

Homelessness Diversion Units (HDUs) are located at all HRA Job Centers throughout the City and at DHS' PATH facility for families with children, the DHS East 30th Street intake center for single adult males and adult families, and the DHS women's shelter intake center in the Bronx. The mission of these teams is to provide services to maintain families and individuals in permanent housing and avoid placement in the City's emergency shelter system.

Our new initiatives in this area include the following:

- The Diversion Units at PATH and the other DHS shelter intake facilities have now begun taking public assistance applications from families and individuals referred by DHS. This process is expediting public assistance benefits for these clients and helps families and individuals avert shelter entry.
- As part of their efforts to help families and individuals applying for shelter to return to or find housing in the community as an alternative to shelter, these Diversion Units are now utilizing new diversion tools that include financial short-term support for diverted families and individuals in the community and expanded short-term assistance for families and individuals who are able to find affordable housing.

The Rental Assistance Unit (RAU) serves as a "safety net" to prevent families and individuals from becoming homeless. The Rental Assistance staff reviews requests for emergency rental assistance received from the Diversion Units and in many cases from regular HRA Center staff and community advocates.

In addition to its centralized operation, Rental Assistance staff members have been out-stationed at the City Housing Courts located in all five boroughs and at the Harlem Community Justice Center and the Red Hook Community Justice Center.

Rental Assistance Housing Court services are targeted to households that are eligible for cash public assistance, Food Stamps or Medicaid, or that are under 200% of the federal poverty

limit (FPL) for families with children or under 125% of FPL for single adults and adult families. HRA has discretion to grant exceptions to policy where these levels are exceeded and the case is otherwise eligible.

New initiatives in this area include the following:

- First, in exercising its discretion in evaluating emergency rental assistance requests, the HRA Rental Assistance Unit considers all available means to prevent homelessness on a case-by-case basis. This approach is especially important for particularly vulnerable groups of clients such as senior citizens, persons with disabilities, Adult Protective Services (APS) cases, families with children under the age of 18, NYCHA residents, Section 8 tenants, and families with a history of homelessness. For example, a vulnerable family may not have the money to pay rent the next month. But that family may be able to demonstrate the ability to obtain employment, third party assistance, a roommate, or other help in order to show that they have the capacity to pay the rent after the crisis is averted. Rather than pay the substantial costs of emergency shelter after an eviction, it makes far more sense to pay the arrears in such cases in order to preserve permanent housing and avert the trauma of homelessness.
- As Commissioner Taylor described, HRA is now deploying on-site staff at Homebase offices around the City. HRA staffing at Homebase offices facilitates coordination and referrals from Homebase to the Rental Assistance Unit and expedites the approval of emergency rental assistance requests from Homebase clients as well as interaction with Job Centers to help solve client public assistance case issues that may be obstacles to preventing an eviction. Rental Assistance staff is now stationed at three Homebase offices (two in the Bronx and one in Brooklyn) and by the end of 2015 the staff will be deployed in up to 13 offices.
- The HRA Rental Assistance Unit will shortly have staff located at the NYCHA administrative hearing offices at 250 Broadway in Manhattan. This will facilitate and expedite review of NYCHA referrals of applicants for rental assistance who are scheduled for an immediate NYCHA Chronic Rent Delinquency (CRD) tenancy termination hearing. For referred tenants, the hearing will be adjourned for 30 days to allow for Rental Assistance Unit review and possible resolution of the delinquency hearing process. Rental Assistance Unit staff will also work with these NYCHA residents to help develop strategies to prevent a recurrence of rent delinquency.
- At its Housing Court offices and Homebase locations, in addition to evaluating requests for emergency rental assistance, Rental Assistance Unit staff can now take

public assistance applications, which, among other benefits, expedites the granting of emergency rental assistance.

- HRA recently created the Central Rent Processing Unit to centrally process, issue and deliver Rental Assistance Unit-approved emergency rental assistance grants. The new process has resulted in overall faster and more efficient rent arrears check delivery, which has enhanced HRA's ability, working with community advocates and other agencies in many cases, to prevent evictions and homelessness.
- A newly developed Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) process is now used by HRA's Central Rent Processing Unit and Family Independence Administration to transmit approved emergency rental assistance payments to NYCHA. Expansion of the use of EFT to large private landlords is now under development. This more efficient and expeditious rent payment delivery system further enhances HRA's homelessness prevention efforts.

The Early Intervention Outreach Team (EIOT) is the Homelessness Prevention Administration's newly-created central office early intervention outreach unit whose mission is outreach to families and individuals in need of legal assistance or emergency rental assistance. The Team's work is currently based on early warning referrals from Housing Court judges, with "early warning" referrals soon to be added for NYCHA tenant arrears cases and NYCHA Section 8 eviction actions, as well as Adult Protective Services referrals and referrals from New York City marshals. The Outreach Team makes referrals for tenant counsel to legal services organizations in accordance with contractual allocations set by HRA's Legal Assistance Initiatives Unit.

The Rental Assistance Program is a new Homelessness Prevention Administration program designed specifically to help implement the new LINC initiative. HRA operates LINC in collaboration with DHS. The Rental Assistance Program manages the leasing and ongoing payment and administration of the Living in Communities rental assistance programs for homeless families and individuals. The unit runs clearance checks and schedules Department of Housing Preservation and Development inspections to ensure that LINC apartments are safe and appropriate for LINC tenants. After overseeing the LINC lease signing, the unit updates the LINC tenant's public benefits information, ensures that LINC payments go out in a timely manner, and oversees the annual renewal of the LINC rental assistance. Staff also addresses requests for information and services from LINC landlords, tenants, and community advocates.

The Landlord Ombudsman Services Unit (LOSU) was established to address the needs and concerns of landlords and management companies that provide permanent housing for families and individuals receiving public assistance. Solving these problems early can prevent eviction actions and protect the tenancies of HRA clients in affordable housing. Originally, the Unit's main function was to deal with mailed shelter allowance checks returned by the post office and the correction and change of landlord addresses. The Unit's role has now greatly expanded. The Unit's check processing division now expedites most move-outs from the shelter system in

conjunction with DHS, including relocation to HPD programs, NYCHA, Section 8 apartments, and private apartments through, among other programs, the “emergency one-shot deal” and ongoing rental assistance programs and the LINC program.

The Legal Assistance Initiatives Unit manages HRA’s legal assistance programs. The provision of civil legal assistance is part of HRA’s overall effort to address poverty and prevent homelessness. The Legal Assistance Initiatives Unit is a new Homelessness Prevention Administration program, following the consolidation at HRA of the City’s civil legal services contracts with legal services organizations. Referrals to legal services organizations under this program serve a critical homelessness prevention need for families and individuals at risk of eviction who require legal assistance to address their housing crises.

For Fiscal Year 2015, the Mayor consolidated all of the civil legal assistance programs in the City’s baseline budget at the Human Resources Administration. This consolidation has been implemented to enhance the coordination and effectiveness of these important programs.

The Legal Assistance Initiatives Unit administers these civil legal services programs and the \$18.8 million in associated funding that have been consolidated at HRA:

- \$13.5 million for anti-eviction legal services, which represents an increase of \$7.1 million above the previous funding levels as part of the Mayor’s new initiatives to prevent homelessness that were announced during this fiscal year.
- \$5.3 million for legal assistance for immigrants, including legal services for survivors of domestic violence, immigrant workers, and immigrant City residents with legal needs involving citizenship and permanent residency.

As part of the budget agreement between the Mayor and the City Council, \$17.625 million in discretionary funding has also been added to the City budget for this year for these programs at HRA that are also administered by the Legal Assistance Initiatives Unit:

- \$11.725 million for civil legal services, including citywide civil legal services, legal services for low-income workers, legal assistance to obtain unemployment insurance benefits and federal disability benefits, legal services for survivors of domestic violence, legal services for veterans, and anti-eviction and SRO housing legal services.
- \$1 million for additional legal assistance to address the surge in unaccompanied minors who have come to New York City, ensuring that the due process rights of this vulnerable population are protected and children in New York City have access to counsel while receiving assistance with social, medical, and mental health services.

- \$4.9 million for a unique Family Unity Project to keep immigrant families together and avert deportation.

In combination, these programs prioritize providing civil legal assistance in core matters involving the “essentials of life” – legal problems in the areas of:

- housing (including evictions, foreclosures, and homelessness);
- family matters (including domestic violence, children, and family stability);
- access to health care and education; and
- subsistence income (including employment wages, disability and other basic benefits, and consumer debts).

Overall, these HRA civil legal services programs emphasize the provision of preventive legal assistance that can avert or reduce the need for litigation, as well as the need for the provision of comprehensive services that require a seasoned, well-trained civil legal services staff able to address often complex, interrelated legal matters.

In sum, HRA operates an extensive homelessness prevention program as part of the overall City effort to alleviate homelessness.

Thank you again for including us in this hearing and we welcome your questions.

Department of Homeless Services Hearing Testimony

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare *Oversight – Homelessness and the Implementation of the LINC Program* Wednesday, January 21, 2015, 1:00 p.m.

Introduction:

Good afternoon Chairman Levin and members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare. My name is Gilbert Taylor and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS). I'm here today with Commissioner Steve Banks of the Human Resources Administration. Thank you for the opportunity to testify this afternoon. In today's testimony, I will discuss the major drivers of homelessness, DHS' prevention efforts, and detail the development and implementation of the Living in Communities rental assistance program, also known as LINC.

Overview:

New York City is facing pronounced economic inequality. Due to low wages and lack of affordable housing, the cost of living has increased. Approximately 46-percent of New Yorkers live near poverty and approximately 22-percent of New Yorkers live below the poverty line. One-in-three New Yorkers work low-wage jobs. Working full-time at a minimum wage earns a salary of less than \$20,000 a year. Over 75-percent of low-income households spent one-third of their income on rent; with 47-percent spending over half their income on rent.

The reality of this income inequality manifests itself in the City's shelter system, which currently houses approximately 58,000 individuals. When faced with drivers such as eviction, domestic violence, or overcrowding, individuals and families are unable to afford the basic cost of living. As a result, the number of individuals and families entering shelter continues to exceed the number exiting. The average length of stay in shelter is 412 days for families with children, 536 days for adult families, and 329 days for single adults.

Homelessness Prevention Efforts:

As part of our strategic plan to reduce homelessness in New York City, our agency's initial focus is on prevention. DHS strives to prevent homelessness whenever possible, and believes that shelter should be the last resort. The Homebase Prevention Program is the cornerstone of our agency's efforts to prevent homelessness. Last year, DHS doubled its prevention efforts after obtaining a \$20 million investment in Homebase. The total funding of this program is now \$42 million, from a combination of State, City, and federal funds. At the beginning of this administration, we had 14 Homebase offices. The investment enabled us to add nine additional locations, for a total of 23 offices throughout the five boroughs.

The Homebase Program is nationally-recognized and proven to help families remain stably housed and remain out of shelter. Last year, Homebase served over 12,000 households. Of those served, 95-percent were able to remain stably housed in the community and avoided entering shelter. The recent expansion will allow the program to serve 20,000 households annually. Homebase

interventions have cut shelter applications nearly in half and reduced the number of days spent in shelter by 70-percent.

Homebase is a five-borough network of neighborhood-based services. The program's offices are located in communities where DHS sees the largest numbers of shelter entrants. Homebase provides customized assistance for individuals and families such as eviction prevention, landlord mediation, and short-term emergency funding to prevent evictions and address rent arrears. It also provides financial counseling, and assistance in obtaining employment and public benefits. Legal services are also available in collaboration with the City's Human Resources Administration (HRA), which is now out-stationing staff directly in the Homebase locations to enhance prevention services. These services include anti-eviction legal services and rent assistance for struggling families.

Exits to Permanent Housing:

Though our initial focus is on prevention, once individuals and families have entered shelter our challenge is to connect them to permanent housing. Since the beginning of this administration there has been unprecedented collaboration and coordination between DHS, the Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD), and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to address the issues of homelessness. This partnership has allowed us to transition families to permanent housing through NYCHA, HPD Section 8, and to create the LINC rental assistance program.

DHS in collaboration with NYCHA has already housed over 1,000 families in public housing during the first half of Fiscal Year 2015. During the second six months, we are already moving forward with the next 750 families. With HPD Section 8 vouchers, DHS expects to exit 400 families with children and 100 adult families from shelter this year.

Since the Advantage Program ended, there have been extremely limited subsidy programs and resources available to assist families to exit shelter. At the beginning of this Administration in early 2014, we recognized that rental assistance could be a valuable tool and worked with the State to create a program to meet these needs. This led to the creation of the Living in Communities (LINC) rental assistance program.

Living in Communities (LINC) Programs:

The City launched LINC I, II, and III in September 2014. The program's goal is to assist nearly 4,000 families per year to achieve housing permanency outside of the DHS and HRA systems. LINC is designed for families who have been in shelter the longest. LINC-certified families may pay some percentage of their income towards rent, and receive financial rental assistance and aftercare services. LINC certification is renewable each year for up to five years.

LINC I is targeted towards working families in the DHS shelter system and can also accommodate some working families in the HRA system. LINC I families will pay 30-percent of their income toward rent. A member of the family must work at least 35 hours per week, and have been employed for at least 90 days before certification. The family must also have an Active or

Single Issue Public Assistance case, and not exceed 200-percent of the federal poverty line. LINC I will assist 1,101 families to move to housing permanency annually.

LINC I families will receive aftercare services first from DHS' Homebase Prevention and thereafter from HRA's revamped employment program. The program model will center on the following three components: initial assessment and career advancement, financial counseling, and individualized coaching and case management. The employment program will also provide ongoing client engagement; referrals for social supports; job retention, replacement, and advancement; and training.

LINC II is targeted towards families with recurring shelter stays. LINC II families will pay 30-percent of their income toward rent. Eligible families are required to have experienced two or more previous shelter stays of 30 days or more, with at least one of those prior stays having been within the past five years. LINC II families must have some income (whether earned or unearned), be eligible for Public Assistance in the community, and have an Active or Single Issue Public Assistance case. LINC II will initially assist 950 families to move to housing permanency.

The LINC II aftercare component will also focus on prevention, which is of particular importance since these families are chronic shelter stayers. The services will adhere to the "Home to Stay" program model, which relies on the practice of Critical Time Intervention (CTI) to engage families through intensive case management. CTI is an evidence-based practice proven to assist vulnerable populations to make successful transitions in a specific amount of time: generally nine months divided into three phases. The practice focuses on developing and strengthening each client's long-term ties with formal and informal community supports. The program will also include budgeting assistance and regular check-ins to ensure that the family maintains stable housing.

LINC III is for domestic violence survivors in DHS shelters or in HRA Domestic Violence shelters. Eligible families are certified by HRA as domestic violence survivors. They also should be eligible for Public Assistance in the community and have an Active or Single Issue Public Assistance case. Unlike LINC I and LINC II, a LINC III family's contribution is a calculation of their shelter allowance and existing income. LINC III will assist 1,000 families in DHS shelters and 900 families in HRA shelters to move to housing permanency this year.

My colleague, Commissioner Steve Banks, will also discuss LINC III and the aftercare services for the same in his testimony.

Recognizing the need to support single adults and adult families to exit to permanent housing, DHS introduced two additional LINC programs in late December 2014. LINC IV will assist 1,100 elderly and medically frail singles or adult families to move to housing permanency. LINC V will assist 1,000 working singles or adult families to move to housing permanency. Similar to the other programs, LINC IV and V clients will pay 30-percent of their income toward rent. Clients are eligible on the basis of being in a DHS shelter for single adults or adult families, or DHS safe haven or drop-in centers; an Active or Single Issue Public Assistance case; and a household income that does not exceed 200-percent of the federal poverty line. LINC IV is renewable for as long as assistance is required, and those eligible must have a member of the household age 60 or above. LINC V individuals must have been working for at least 30 days to be eligible for the program and can receive assistance for up to five years.

LINC rental assistance programs are funded with a combination of City, State and Federal funds. The State committed \$40 million over four years for LINC I and the City is, at minimum, matching this amount. The LINC II program is being funded with savings derived from reductions to the Agency's shelter system. The total annual allocation for LINC II is approximately \$15 million, with the source of funding being a mix of City, State, and federal revenue. LINC III, IV, and V are all funded with City Tax Levy dollars.

Implementation of LINC:

In order to ensure the success of LINC, we have focused on learning from past experiences with similar programs. We have made a number of enhancements intended to support our clients and those who decide to host them as tenants. We have been collaborating with landlords and brokers, whose partnership is an essential component in ensuring placements for our clients. In October 2014, we issued two incentives for the LINC program, a landlord lease signing bonus and a Special Supplemental Assistance Fund. These program enhancements will provide bonuses to landlords for signing LINC leases and additional protections in the event of rent arrears or apartment damage. We also raised LINC maximum rent levels to match Section 8 rent levels.

Conclusion:

We are appreciative that our collaboration with the State and HRA allowed the LINC Program to come to fruition. However, the LINC program is still in its early stages. We still have a long way to go and anticipate accomplishing a great deal with these programs. More work must be done to reduce our census and LINC is a significant tool that we will use to do so.

These programs are not "one-size fits all," but rather are tailored approaches to support the different populations that we serve. We truly believe that this will be an effective pathway to permanency for our clients. There have been hundreds of LINC placements to date, and we are committed to reaching the projected number of shelter exits in our first year. To achieve our annual goals, we need the support of the Council and housing providers to ensure that our families are able to transition to permanent housing. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on such an important issue and bringing attention to the LINC program.



FOR THE RECORD

Testimony Prepared by

Sally Greenspan

For the General Welfare Committee

Oversight Hearing - Homelessness and the

Implementation of the Living in Communities (LINC) Program

January 21, 2015

On behalf of

Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

On behalf of Enterprise Community Partners, Inc. I would like to thank Chair Levin and the members of the City Council's Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to submit testimony for the Oversight Hearing on Homelessness and the Implementation of the Living in Communities (LINC) Program.

At Enterprise, we understand that our city's homelessness crisis is caused primarily by a shortage of housing that is affordable to the lowest-income New Yorkers. We work to create and preserve affordable housing connected to opportunity for low-income individuals and families. And we believe that the solution to homelessness is safe, quality housing that families can afford and that is connected to the services and community supports that all families need to be successful. Since 1987, we have created or preserved more than 44,000 affordable homes for 114,000 New Yorkers and invested \$2.5 billion in equity, grants, and loans to community development projects.

We also have a specific focus on reducing family homelessness. To this end, we recently launched a pilot program called Come Home NYC. City data shows that approximately 2,000 families entering the homeless shelter system per year have sufficient income to pay rent in the city's subsidized affordable housing stock. Come Home NYC connects these homeless families to homes in existing affordable housing developments. The program has three main components: matching families to available units through hands on assistance from Enterprise; connecting families to services through a partnership with the Single Stop program; and financial insurance to cover potential costs to landlords such as unpaid rent, damages to units, and legal fees in order to incentivize housing formerly homeless households.

We are just getting started with Come Home NYC, and already we have placed five homeless families in quality affordable housing units that they can truly afford. We have 23 affordable

housing landlords that have signed on to participate and we expect to house at least 100 families in the first year with more to come as we scale the program.

But some families need a bit more financial assistance to help them make the transition from homelessness into stable housing. Enterprise stood with our fellow homelessness and affordable housing advocates last spring to call for a new local rent subsidy program for New York City. We commend the City Council, the Administration, and your counterparts at the state in rolling out LINC I-V to help thousands of homeless individuals and families move out of shelter and into permanent housing. We believe these programs along with other initiatives, such as NYCHA priority and permanent supportive housing development, can help dramatically reduce the city's homelessness crisis, and we are committed to working closely with all of our partners to help these programs be successful.

Based on our experience in designing and implementing the Come Home NYC program and our research on national best practices in rent subsidies, we believe that there are three major components that can help ensure the city's LINC programs are successful.

First, homeless families receiving rental subsidies are most likely to thrive post subsidy if they receive thoughtful, quality services designed to help them be financially stable and housing stable. Through our conversations with partners around the country and in NYC, we learned that the best short-term rent subsidy programs have robust case management, and especially strong employment services (where relevant). Having a well thought out and rigorous service component will also help create landlord confidence in LINC and increase the number of vouchers accepted by responsible landlords. LINC currently offers some connection to services. It should be clarified what levels of services are provided and whether they are sufficient to ensure that families will be successful once the program ends.

Second, some families will stabilize with short-term subsidies and attain the level of income necessary to sustain rent on their own after the length of the subsidy. However, some families will need a higher level of support or a longer-term solution. One of the key findings from short term rent subsidy programs around the country is that it can often be difficult to predict in advance which families will thrive and which will need additional support. The LINC program should include opportunities throughout the course of the program to determine if participants are truly in need of connection to permanent subsidies or supportive housing, and those resources should be available. And all families should have an exit plan so that they step down from support instead of a cliff after the subsidy ends.

Third, to increase the likelihood that landlords will accept LINC vouchers, there must be assurance that funding is secured and reliable. The fact that vouchers are renewable subject to funding availability does not instill confidence in the program. A guarantee that funds will be made available for the life of the voucher, which is five years, will be critical to ensuring its successful uptake.

Of course, there is no one-size-fits-all solution to homelessness. Some families, such as those eligible for Come Home NYC, need simply a connection to affordable housing and light services. Others need a rental subsidy like LINC and more regular service support to help them build a bridge out of homelessness. Some households have permanent disabilities or barriers to employment that mean a permanent housing benefit such as NYCHA or Section 8 is needed. And some families with more significant barriers to housing, such as severe mental illness or chronic addiction, will require permanent supportive housing.

Because of this, we commend the Administration and the City Council for rolling out a suite of tools to help meet the varying needs of homeless families and individuals. But in order to most efficiently use the many housing resources now available, and to connect families to the most beneficial housing option, New York City needs a Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS). We have seen firsthand through the implementation of Come Home NYC that assessing families for their housing needs and connecting them to the appropriate housing resource is challenging. CAPS allows each homeless household to be assessed for their needs and matched to the most appropriate type of housing resource. Developing a CAPS program in NYC will not happen overnight, but communities around the country are achieving great success in this area, and many partners including Enterprise stand ready to help the City in this important work.

Enterprise is proud of the many positive steps that New York City has taken to address the homelessness crisis, but there is still much work to do. We look forward to continued work with the Administration, the Council, and our partners in the affordable housing and homelessness sectors to solve this challenge.

Thank you, again, for the opportunity to submit these comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

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Testimony of
Coalition for the Homeless
and
The Legal Aid Society

on

**Homelessness and the Implementation of the Living in Communities (LINC)
Rental Assistance Programs**

Presented before

The New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare

Mary Brosnahan
President & CEO
Gabriela Sandoval Requena
Policy Analyst
Coalition for the Homeless

Joshua Goldfein
Staff Attorney
Homeless Rights Project
The Legal Aid Society

January 21, 2015

Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society welcome this opportunity to testify before the New York City Council on the record-high number of homeless individuals, families, and children sleeping in City shelters, and the implementation of "The Living in Communities (LINC) Rental Assistance Programs." We also welcome this opportunity to highlight the need for more permanent housing resources targeted to homeless families and individuals.

About the Coalition and The Legal Aid Society

Coalition for the Homeless: The Coalition, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people including the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates eleven direct-services programs that offer vital services to our homeless, at-risk, and low-income neighbors – which also demonstrate replicable, effective, long-term solutions. These programs include supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS, job-training for homeless and formerly-homeless women, rental assistance to help working homeless people move into private-market apartments, and permanent housing for formerly-homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program provide hundreds of homeless children with a critical respite each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributes more than 900 nutritious meals each night of the year to homeless and hungry New Yorkers. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with daily necessities, such as food, clothing, and transportation – as well as eviction prevention assistance, client advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits.

The Coalition also represents homeless men and women as plaintiffs in Callahan v. Carey and Eldredge v. Koch. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan through which it was agreed that, "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter." The Eldredge case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The Callahan consent decree and the Eldredge case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults.

The Legal Aid Society: The Legal Aid Society, the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform.

Operating from 26 locations in New York City with a full-time staff of more than 1,800 and an annual caseload of more than 300,000 individual cases and legal matters each year, the Society handles more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload of 300,000 individual cases and legal matters, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits some two million low-income families and individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the Callahan and Eldredge cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the McCain/Boston litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to homeless families.

A Step Forward to Address Historic Homelessness Crisis in New York City

New York City's homeless population is currently at all-time-record levels. There are more than 60,000 homeless New Yorkers, including 14,519 families with 25,640 children and 12,325 single adults, sleeping each night in the municipal homeless shelter system, administered by the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS), as of November 2014. These are the highest numbers since the City began keeping records three decades ago, and the largest number of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness each night since the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Additionally, more than 1,000 families, including 1,600 children, sleep each night in the City's domestic violence shelter system, administered by the New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA).

In 2014 the de Blasio administration unveiled its plans to provide permanent housing assistance to help homeless families and individuals move from the shelter system to their own homes. The City's plan represents a significant step forward in at last addressing the major cause of soaring homelessness in New York City, as well as the most glaring policy failure of the previous administration: The Bloomberg administration's disastrous elimination of permanent housing aid designed to help homeless New Yorkers leave shelters and remain stably housed.

The de Blasio administration's plan proposes moving 5,200 homeless families from shelters to permanent housing by the fall of 2015. Some 4,000 families would be helped by the Living in Communities (LINC) rental assistance programs, which provide up to five years of rent subsidy and are targeted to homeless survivors of domestic violence, working homeless families and families with multiple episodes of homelessness. The remaining 1,200 homeless families would be provided New York City Housing Authority public housing apartments or other federal housing programs.

In December, the administration rightfully decided to expand the LINC program to include homeless single men and women. The plan would assist 2,100 homeless adults, including seniors and working shelter residents.

While the City's plan is a significant step forward in addressing record family homelessness, there are some unfortunate weaknesses in the plan. The most notable flaw is the small number of NYCHA public housing units allocated to homeless families: only 750 units per year, less than 13 percent of NYCHA vacancies each year and fewer even than were offered by the Giuliani administration. We have long advocated that at least 2,500 public housing apartments be allocated to homeless families each year, a recommendation that has been echoed by dozens

of New York City Council members and other advocates and equivalent to the number provided in the best years of the Bloomberg administration. The Housing Authority currently allocates most of its vacant apartments without any inquiry to the housing needs of the applicant family, and could make many more of these apartments available to homeless families through existing needs-based waiting-list priorities.

Mayor de Blasio's current plan is a major step forward in addressing the historic homelessness crisis in New York City. Yet, there is much more that must be done.

Recommended Improvements to the LINC Programs

For the LINC program to be successful at actually reducing the number of homeless families, greater efforts must be made at the "front door" of the shelter system to prevent evictions and homelessness. For example, the inclusion of a provision to address victims of domestic violence in the LINC program should be replicated in the FEPS program, as should the higher subsidy levels, which now more closely reflect the real cost of securing housing in the private market in New York City. Now more than ever, it is clearly going to be less expensive and less of an administrative burden to avoid housing families in the shelter system than it is to re-house them, even with the LINC program in place.

Following are changes that would significantly improve the LINC rental assistance programs. We believe these changes will help assist more families and better ensure the housing stability of formerly-homeless families who secure permanent housing using these programs.

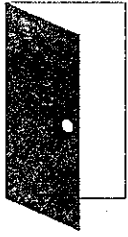
1. In general terms, while the five-year duration of the LINC programs targeting homeless families provide is a significant improvement over the deeply flawed Advantage program, there are likely to be some families who will continue to need rental assistance beyond five years. We recommend that the rule be revised to provide a good-cause waiver allowing families to receive rental assistance after five years upon demonstration of ongoing need.
2. The working requirement of 35 hours/week per household is extremely unrealistic and burdensome for working homeless families. Low-wage workers almost never control the number of hours that they work – their employers do. And many employers of low-wage workers systematically maintain employees' work hours at less than 35 hours/week. Indeed, City data from the flawed Work Advantage program found that the typical participant in that program worked 30 hours or less per week. This provision should be revised to require that participants work a more realistic number of hours per week, such as at least 20 hours/week.
3. The earned income requirement excludes the significant number of homeless families with multiple shelter stays who are receiving public assistance benefits but are not employed and do not receive other public benefits like Supplemental Security Income. Also, some recipients may be too disabled to work but also ineligible for federal disability benefits while they wait a mandatory period to file for citizenship. The rule should be revised to include public assistance-recipient families.
4. All LINC programs should account for the bureaucratic errors, which often result in public assistance recipients wrongfully losing their benefits. The LINC program should be revised to reflect the efforts public assistance recipients make to restore benefits that are erroneously suspended or terminated.

Expand Permanent Housing Resources for Families and Children in Shelters

Looking forward, here are the essential steps that the City must take to allocate more permanent housing resources to homeless families and individuals:

1. Allocate at least 2,500 NYCHA public housing apartments annually to families in shelters. The City should increase the allocation of NYCHA public housing apartments for homeless families and families residing in domestic violence shelters to 2,500 apartments/year, consistent with the best years of the Bloomberg administration.
2. Restore HRA's ability to access the priority referral code for NYCHA apartments. The City should restore HRA to the roster of City agencies empowered to designate families with the N-0 priority code for NYCHA public housing. This is one immediate step the de Blasio administration can make so that families in the domestic violence shelter system can be once again given the best and quickest access to the stable housing they deserve.
3. Reform NYCHA admissions policies. The City should eliminate the Giuliani-Bloomberg "Working Family Preference" to ensure that preference is given to families on the basis of need, rather than the current policy, which for most vacancies does not take housing need into consideration. NYCHA could fill a far greater number of its vacancies with shelter residents who work, but are still poor and trapped in shelters. In addition, NYCHA should address longstanding bureaucratic barriers that make it difficult for domestic violence survivors to access public housing through the N-1 priority code.
4. Negotiate a new City-State agreement to create permanent supportive housing. As recommended by broad coalition of community groups and leaders who launched the Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing, the Mayor and Governor should sign an agreement to create 30,000 units of supportive housing over the next decade.
5. Convert "cluster-site" shelter units back to permanent housing by using rent subsidies, as well as aggressive building code-enforcement, so families that wish to stay in the units they already reside may secure leases. This would significantly reduce family homelessness and phase out this wasteful program.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony. And, as always, we look forward to working with the committee and the City Council in the coming months and years on efforts to reduce New York City's homeless population.

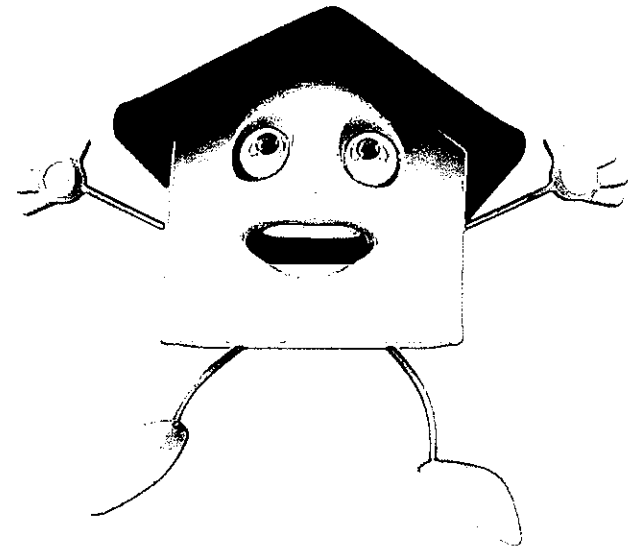


coalition
for the
homeless

The Mosholu Squad wants Permanent Housing

The Mosholu Squad is a group of homeless families living in cluster-site shelters in New York City.

These families are fighting to obtain **permanent housing** by organizing, advocating, and meeting with elected officials. Here is a list of its members with their addresses, phone numbers, and ages of their children.



Mosholu Squad Members

#	NAME	C	ADDRESS	CITY	ZIP CODE	CELLPHONE	HOME	FAMILY MEMBERS AND AGES	EMAIL
1	Bolivar Serrano	2	1466 Grand Concourse 3F	Bronx	10457	917.805.6726	347.297.2195	Miguel Serrano Lopez (11) George Serrano Lopez (17) Yadira Lopez (43) Bolivar Serrano (53)	
2	Carlina Bowles	4	710 E 243rd Street, 4H	Bronx	10470	718.290.0645		Damian Bowles (30) Caliyah Bowles (9) Destiny Bowles (7) Princela Davian Bowles (5) Chance Bowles (1)	CarlinaBowles24@gmail.com
3	Carol Byrd	4	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 3B	Bronx	10467	646.201.1443		Thomas (15) Tyleeyah (12) Tempest (5) Tessence (1month)	carolbyrd96@gmail.com
4	Cynthia Rosa	2	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 4B	Bronx	10467	917.280.9611		(14) (5) (40) (41)	rosa.cynthia86@yahoo.com
5	Dana Hollis	12	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 2A	Bronx	10467	347.520.3525		(47) (28) (23) (21) (19) (18) (17) (14) (13) (11) (8) (7) (4)	danahollis28@yahoo.com
6	Diana Cruz	2	17 W Mosholu Parkway N	Bronx	10467	646.530.7987		Isaiah Austin (19) Kianna Lawrence (16)	dianacruz477@gmail.com
7	Indra Moreno	4	17 W Mosholu Parkway N	Bronx	10467	347.859.9491		Indra Moreno (33) Robert Smith (31) Julius Rosado (11) Deven Moreno (9) Leeland Smith (3) Haley Smith (2)	IndraMoreno1@gmail.com
8	Jessica Perez	3	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 5D	Bronx	10467	347.499.9732		Eric (32) Fabiola (11) Yandiel (9) Tanayris (7)	p.jessie64@yahoo.com
9	Katrina Redish	3	17 W Mosholu Parkway N	Bronx	10467	347.313.7113		Alyana Randolph (19) J'Quan (15) Jada Roundtree (11)	katrinaredish1@gmail.com

10	Lassana	3	708 White Plains Road 243	Bronx		646.418.0318		(18) (14) (3)	
11	Lillian Velazques	1	3001 Briggs Avenue 2C	Bronx	10458	646.226.3978		Tatyana M. Ortega (11) Lillian Velazques (51) Martin Ortega (45)	MsLilly63@aol.com
12	Margarita Colon	5	17 W Mosholu Parkway N, 1G	Bronx	10467	347.339.8425		(36) (30) (12) (6) (4) (3) (4months)	marggiecolon@yahoo.com
13	Maria Conde	3	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 1D	Bronx	10467	347.485.5654		Catherine Conde (10) Alize Guzman (5) Justin Guzman (1)	
14	Octavia Watson	4	740 E 243rd Street, 5C	Bronx	10470	718.753.5820		Jacob Watson (10) Ronald Whetstone (7) Nazir Whetstone (4) Elijah Whetstone (3)	
15	Patrice Cogdell	2	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 1A	Bronx	10467	917.870.5142		Derrell Owens (37) Derrel Owens Jr. (6) Zianne Owens (1)	pcogdell@gmail.com
16	Patricia Geronimo	2	19 W Mosholu Parkway N	Bronx	10467	917.741.2250		Anthony Cruz (30) Patricia Geronimo (28) Yoniel Geronimo (7) Yessenia Geronimo (2)	Pgeronimo48@gmail.com
17	Rafael Rodriguez & Marta Gutierrez	1	740 E 243rd Street, 2D	Bronx	10470	347.319.0142 347.319.6001		Brandon Joshua Martinez (17) (62) (61)	
18	Stephanie Bloodsaw	3	220 E 197th Street, 2M	Bronx	10458	718.541.2327		Ashanti Bailey (18) Jahleel Bailey (16) Kamali Bailey (13)	stephaniebloodsaw@yahoo.com
19	Toqeer Hayat	4	19 W Mosholu Parkway N	Bronx	10467	718.600.0438		Toqeer (52) Lisma (45) Ali (10) Hassan (8) Hadeed (6) Aira (13)	
20	Toye Warren	4	17 W Mosholu Parkway N	Bronx	10467	347.908.7250		(13) (11) (6) (5months) (32)	toyewarren30@yahoo.com
21	Valeria Olivares	3	19 W Mosholu Parkway N, 5B	Bronx	10467	347.898.9891		Luz (21) Katherine (18) Deloyne (14)	



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**Testimony of Christy Parque, Executive Director
Homeless Services United, Inc.
NYC Council General Welfare Hearing
LINC- Living in Communities Housing Subsidy**

January 21, 2015

My name is Christy Parque, and I am the Executive Director of Homeless Services United (HSU). HSU is a coalition of over 50 non-profit agencies serving homeless and at-risk adults and families in New York City. HSU provides advocacy, information, and training to member agencies to expand their capacity to deliver high-quality services. HSU advocates for expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers.

Homeless Service United's member agencies operate hundreds of programs including shelters, drop-in centers, food pantries, Home Base, and outreach and prevention services. Each day, HSU member programs work with thousands of homeless families and individuals, preventing shelter entry whenever possible through counseling, legal services, and public benefits assistance among many other supports. Our member agencies provide high quality and compassionate emergency shelter to nearly 25,000 homeless New Yorkers nightly. There are a multitude of underlying societal problems which contribute to someone's housing instability. Our clients confront high housing costs, difficulty finding work, mental and physical illness, substance abuse, and domestic violence and are particularly vulnerable during financially hard times such as these.

HSU, as the organization that represents the non-profit homeless shelter organizations, has great interest in policy changes that impact homeless services delivery to our clients and to ensuring that our missions, staff, and programs are providing the most compassionate, effective, and efficient services to transform lives from homelessness to being stably housed.

LINC

Overall we would like to commend the City and the State for their commitment to create a new housing subsidy as a path home for the over ¹60,000 homeless New Yorkers who spent last night in shelter. In particular, HRA and DHS have shown great wisdom and leadership in the flexibility and design of these new subsidies. From modifying rent levels more in alignment with Section 8 rents, to expanding eligibility to single adults and those with disabilities shows there has been a clearly concerted effort to make these programs succeed for both the tenants and landlords.

Although uptake of the program has been slow to start, we do not feel this is wholly indicative of a completely flawed program. That being said, and me being an advocate, I would be remiss if I did not take the opportunity to make a few key suggestions for program improvement:

¹ <https://data.cityofnewyork.us/Social-Services/DHS-Daily-Report/k46n-sa2m>

- As my colleagues at Legal Aid and the Coalition for the Homeless have testified in the past, we support the **creation of a good-cause waiver** in the likelihood that there will be households at the end of five years that will need continued rental assistance for an additional duration of time.
- For working families in LINC 1, there should be flexibility about the number of hours worked. Currently the requirement of 35 hours per week of unsubsidized employment is unrealistic as most of our clients are low-wage hourly and shift workers and at the mercy of their employers to provider stable schedules.
- **Renewal requirements should be as flexible as possible.** Due diligence of a well implemented, clearly defined process must be undertaken before any household is denied a renewal in any of the LINC programs. For the organizations that will be providing aftercare services, we must provide them with sufficient time to work with the households and city agencies to ensure every effort was made to protect the housing situation of the tenant.
- One of the keys to the success of this program will be its flexibility, refinement, and periodic evaluation. We encourage DHS and HRA to **create frequent opportunities for key stakeholders like advocacy organizations, providers, tenants and landlords to participate in a constructive dialogue and participatory evaluation of LINC to ensure the most successful program.**

The creation of a well thought out and flexible subsidy is just one of the solutions necessary to solve record high level of homelessness.

- We must continue to create permanent housing opportunities and encourage the City and NYCHA to expand the units available to homeless households exiting shelter.
- We also support a broad expansion of the NNYN supportive housing program and eagerly await the news from the Governor's State of the State about expansion of this successful program.

NON-PROFITS AND STAFF AS A RESOURCE AND ASSET

Although as I have previously stated, there has been a slow uptake of the LINC program, this should not come as surprise as the City and my members have extensive history with the creation and implementation of rental subsidy programs, including most recently the Advantage programs. It is a reasonable expectation that from new policy creation to full implementation there will be a lag due to bridging knowledge gaps and the need to promote it. Additionally, the many iterations and termination of the Advantage subsidy has created a lack of confidence in LINC by shelter residents, and landlords and brokers. However, the slow uptake is not a reflection of the efforts of my members and shelter staff overall to engage clients in the LINC process. They work diligently every day with clients to identify available apartment units and connect with landlords and brokers in their communities. The true key to success of the LINC programs will be supporting the staff and shelters who work compassionately with the City's most needy.

New York City is fortunate to have a broad network of experienced non-profit professionals who know how to solve the City's homeless crisis. Given the tools and sufficient resources, we can work together with our government partners to develop real and permanent housing solutions. **Our greatest assets are our staff and we must honor and support their work by providing them a living wage. Most of our workers have not had an increase in their wages in six years.**

From a recent survey of our members we learned

- The vast majority of our workers who interface with homeless shelter and program participants fall within 50% AMI (Area Median Income), which means they would qualify for very low or low income housing were it available to them, not unlike the very people they are serving.

We know that many New Yorkers are struggling to make ends meet. According to the recently released 2014 "Self-Sufficiency Standard Report", a study that establishes the income necessary to be economically independent in each of New York City's neighborhoods, "nearly 2 out of 5 (42%) households do not meet basic self-sufficiency needs like food, shelter, and healthcare. Additionally, 83% of those households have one member who goes to work every day, and 94% of households below the Self-Sufficiency Standard in New York **do not receive Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF).**" **These struggling New Yorkers include our dedicated and big hearted staff.**

- Costs of operating programs have increased while budgets have not. Utility costs for shelters have risen between 8-25% annually, and Health Insurance increases of 5-20% annually are not uncommon.
- Shelter contracts and budgets have not increased, resulting in tight budgets and preventing shelters from increasing wages, which has a negative impact on staff retention for experienced staff and recruitment.
- Increasing need for shelter capacity has not yielded increased resources for staffing and new needs to keep buildings in tip top shape. Our porters and maintenance workers who maintain our buildings are now required to do more with less and unfortunately are largely low wage earners despite their key role. The workers are the eyes and ears of the buildings 24 hours a day, seven days a week, yet earn on average about \$13 an hour.
- We must create reasonable caseloads and provide sufficient time and resources to staff to adequately serve their clients. The dramatic demand for shelter services means increased workloads for case managers and housing specialists. They are responsible for the success of the LINC programs, yet have unrealistic caseloads, often times exceeding 1:25 for case managers and 1:50 for housing specialists.
- As I testified in last year's preliminary FY15 budget hearing, our sector is still recovering from the recession and six years of poorly thought out performance incentive plans disguised as PEGS that drained millions of dollars in funding from the shelter budgets. Shelters do not have the resources to keep up with the demand for services, to maintain their facilities, and adequately compensate their current staff or recruit new ones.

If we are to see a successful LINC program, we must ensure that all components and stakeholders of the program are supported to do their part. This includes reasonable and achievable program requirements and guidelines for participants, accountability and reasonable compensation for landlords and brokers, and **fair and adequate resources and supports for the staff who are the linchpin between the homeless clients and the landlords.**

We call upon the City to honor its commitment to these heroes by providing them with salaries that reflect their level of professionalism, effort, and hard work, as well as provide them with regular COLA's.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for your time and commitment to addressing the needs and concerns of homeless and at-risk New Yorkers and those who serve them. Homeless Services United looks forward to working with you to realize solutions that will allow our members' vital programs to continue to provide our neediest New Yorkers with services that support and motivate them to thrive in the future.

² <http://www.wric.com/story/27573564/new-report-42-of-new-york-households-dont-meet-basic-self-sufficiency-standards>



Testimony of

Elizabeth Hoffman
Policy Associate for Housing and Homelessness
Citizens' Committee for Children

Before the

New York City Council
General Welfare Committee

Oversight Hearing:

Homelessness and the Implementation on the Living in Communities Program

January 21, 2015

Good afternoon. My name is Elizabeth Hoffman and I am the Policy Associate for Housing and Homelessness at Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC). CCC is a 71-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization dedicated to ensuring every New York child is healthy, housed, educated and safe.

I would first like to thank Chair Levin and the members of the General Welfare Committee for holding this important hearing. We are grateful for the City Council's interest in helping homeless families and adults, and welcome the opportunity to testify about the new Living in Communities (LINC) Program.

CCC is very pleased that one of the first measures the de Blasio administration took when entering office was to secure state funding for a new rental assistance program and then put the program into place. We believe rental assistance programs are a critical tool in New York City to help families and children exit shelter to permanent and affordable housing. Similarly, we appreciate the Council's attention to the implementation of the LINC program.

I. Record Number of Children Living in Shelter

Today's hearing comes at a time when homelessness has reached unprecedented levels in New York City, with more children living in shelters than ever before. As of January 8, 2015, there were 12,122 families living in the DHS shelter system, including 24,951 children.¹ This is compared to January 2014 when there were 22,210² children living in shelter and 20,480³ in January 2013. This is a 21% increase in just 2 years.

Additionally, families with children are living in shelters for increasingly longer periods of time: the average length of stay for families was 375 days in Fiscal Year 2013, compared to 427 days in Fiscal Year 2014.⁴

Rental assistance programs have proven to be an effective way to enable homeless families to move out of shelter and into affordable housing. With record numbers of families and children living in shelter for longer periods of time it was clear New York City needed a rental assistance program for homeless families. CCC is grateful to the Governor and Mayor for coming to an agreement and providing funding to support the creation of a vital rental assistance program in New York City, now called the Living in Communities Program.

II. Living in Communities (LINC) Program

The Living in Communities (LINC) Rental Assistance Program launched in September 2014 as a collaboration between the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Human Resources

¹ New York City Department of Homeless Services, Daily Report, Jan. 8, 2015. Available at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>.

² New York City Department of Homeless Services Local Law 37 Report. Available at: http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/temporary_housing_report.pdf.

³ *Id.*

⁴ New York City Mayor's Management Report, Department of Homeless Services. Available at: <http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/mmr2014/dhs.pdf>.

Administration (HRA). The program is designed to provide rental assistance and supportive services to eligible families in order to help them exit the shelter system and move into affordable housing.

LINC was created to target specific homeless populations including working families, families who have been in shelter multiple times, and victims of domestic violence. More recently, two more categories were created for homeless seniors and working singles and adult families.

LINC I is for working families with a demonstrated work history for at least 90 days. The household must be working a combined total of at least 35 hours per week. There are 1,100 LINC I subsidies available annually.

LINC II is for families with multiple shelter stays. Families must have been in either a DHS or an HRA shelter two or more times and be eligible for public assistance in their community. There are 950 LINC II subsidies available annually.

LINC III is for domestic violence survivors. Families must be in the DHS or HRA shelter system, be certified by HRA as a survivor of domestic violence and be eligible for public assistance in the community. Annually, there are 1,000 LINC III subsidies available through DHS and 900 subsidies available through HRA.

LINC IV is for single or adult families with at least one family member age 60 or above. The family must be in a DHS shelter for single or adult families, or a DHS safe haven or drop in center.

LINC V is for working single adult families. The family must currently be in a DHS shelter, safe haven or drop in center. At least one member of the family must be working for at least 30 days before certification.

Eligibility for LINC is pre-determined and participants receive a certification letter indicating which LINC program they qualify for. There are a limited number of LINC subsidies available annually in each of the five LINC programs. All LINC programs target families based on their length of stay in shelter meaning families and adults who have been in shelter the longest will be found eligible first if they meet all other programmatic criteria as well. Participants also must be in shelter for a minimum of 90 days; in the LINC III program for domestic violence victims, time in an HRA DV shelter counts towards the minimum length of stay.

In all five LINC programs, clients must contribute 30 percent of their income (earned or unearned) toward rent and the remainder is subsidized by the City and paid directly to the landlord. Unearned income can include Supplement Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability (SSD). All households also must have an active or single issue public assistance case.

LINC programs are renewable annually for up to five years and are designed to help support families so they remain stably housed. Homebase after care services are provided to all clients, as well as additional services based on the LINC program type.

For example, LINC I clients, who are working families, receive after care services through HRA's Back to Work program to help them increase their earnings. LINC II clients, who have

been in shelter multiple times, receive supportive services through an evidenced-based model proven to assist vulnerable populations in making successful transitions by providing an array of supportive social services. These supports are put in place to help families remain in their housing and help them on their path to self-sufficiency.

While landlords were initially hesitant, leading to a slow start for the LINC program which launched just four months ago in September 2014, families are now starting to leave shelter to the LINC program. DHS put a number of incentives in place to help interest landlords including increasing rent levels to Section 8 rates and providing \$1,000 signing bonuses. Since these incentives have been put in place, more and more clients have been able to successfully move from shelter into apartments. In fact according to DHS, at least 50 families left shelter through LINC in December.

We thank the administration for its efforts to improve landlord participation in LINC and we are optimistic that LINC combined with the NYCHA preference for homeless families will soon lead to a decrease in the homeless shelter census.

III. Recommendations

With the number of New York City's homeless children at an all-time high, it is important that we continue to grow LINC and ensure an increasing number of families can leave shelter for affordable housing. In order to achieve our goal of safely reducing the number of children and families in shelter, CCC respectfully submits the following recommendations:

1. Secure additional funding for annual rent increases

In order to ensure that families are able to stay in their apartments after the initial year of the program, it is essential for LINC to be able to keep up with increasing rents. Currently, DHS does not have the money in its budget to account for annual rent increases. If rents increase annually in the apartments rented by LINC clients (as rents typically do), and the LINC budget is unable to meet the increased rental rate, and families are unable to pay the full rent, the families could end up returning to the shelter system. To prevent this, additional funding needs to be secured to meet the needs of increasing rents in the out-years of LINC as landlords in New York City typically increase rent annually and families will not be able to endure this increase on their own.

CCC stands committed to working with the Administration and the City Council to advocate for additional state funds as they are needed.

2. Increase program funding to ensure capacity

CCC is grateful that the City recognizes the importance of a rental assistance program; however, we believe the program should be increased to be able to serve more families and children annually. Currently, funding allows for 4,000 families to be placed annually through LINC I, II and III. While this is a very good start, we hope that in the future there will not need to be caps on the annual number of families who can take advantage of the program. In addition, there needs to be more funding for the program in the out-years because as thousands of families leave annually with the ability to renew for up to 5 years, there will be significantly more families in the program each

year until the 5th year when costs should leave off (aside for accounting for rent increases as discussed in recommendation #2.)

3. Create an additional program to help more families

All LINC programs require a 30 percent contribution of earned or unearned income towards rent, that families are eligible for public assistance, and that the household have an active or single issue public assistance case. Clearly, not all families in shelter will be able to meet these program requirements. Some of these families may qualify for supportive housing. However, those who do not qualify for LINC or supportive housing and do not receive disability benefits need an opportunity to exit the shelter system. In order to ensure that all families with children have a path out of shelter, we believe additional strategies need to be explored for these families.

4. Ensure access to social services

Families in the shelter system typically have a myriad of challenges to overcome in addition to housing. These issues often can be what led to housing instability in the first place. With an average stay of 427 days, many families in shelter have had the most housing stability of their lives while in the shelter system. Thus, the move out of shelter can create stress for families as they adjust to being independent. In order to ensure that families in LINC remain safely and stably housed it is essential that families receive supportive services, in addition to their housing assistance. In addition, supportive services should be available to families even when their subsidy ends in order to help families remain permanently housed. Services should include, but not be limited to case management, access to child care, and health and mental health services.

In conclusion, CCC looks forward to working with the administration and the City Council on reducing family homelessness in New York City. Thank you for this opportunity to testify. CCC appreciates the City Council's interest in this very critical issue.



moving victims of violence from crisis to confidence

Testimony of
Michael Polenberg, Vice President, Government Affairs
Safe Horizon, Inc.

**Oversight: Homelessness and the Implementation of the Living in
Communities (LINC) Program**

General Welfare Committee
Hon. Stephen Levin, Chair

New York City Council

January 21, 2015

Introduction

Thank you, Chairman Levin and members of the Committee, for the opportunity to testify before you today on Safe Horizon's experience with the City's Living in Communities (LINC) Housing Program. My name is Michael Polenberg and I am Vice President for Government Affairs for Safe Horizon, the nation's leading victim assistance organization and New York City's largest provider of services to victims of crime and abuse, their families and communities. Safe Horizon creates hope and opportunities for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers each year whose lives are touched by violence.

We are grateful the City Council is taking a look at this important issue, and asking for feedback from victim advocacy organizations like Safe Horizon. I would like to share with you our experience to date with the LINC Housing Program, a few examples of our success in moving survivors of domestic violence and their families out of shelter and into housing, and some of the challenges we face as we seek to expand our placement numbers in the weeks and months ahead. We would also like to offer a recommendation that will extend these subsidies to homeless youth.

Background

Like many of our colleagues here today, Safe Horizon asked the incoming de Blasio Administration to create meaningful subsidies to help move homeless New Yorkers – including survivors of domestic violence and other crimes – into safe, affordable housing. We did so because we saw what happens when there are no Federal, State or local subsidies to help transition our clients to safety and stability. Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Shelter Program

operates six emergency shelters and two Tier II shelters that together offer over 700 beds to vulnerable New Yorkers each night. But with no subsidy in place and a very long waiting list for public housing, far too many clients were forced to make extremely difficult choices when their short-term stay in emergency shelter ended – either return to their abuser or to an address known to the abuser, or become homeless and enter the municipal shelter system operated by the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). When the de Blasio Administration announced the creation of new housing subsidies this past summer, it became apparent that survivors of domestic violence in our shelters would finally have a viable path to safe, affordable housing.

Success Stories

To date, Safe Horizon has helped 21 families from our Tier II and emergency shelters sign lease agreements and move into housing through the LINC subsidy. Eight additional LINC-approved families have been approved for apartments by landlords and are just waiting for their application packets to be approved by the Human Resources Administration (HRA). While we count each of these placements as a profound success, we are continuing to look at ways to build on our accomplishments. Furthermore, we anticipate that the rate at which we are able to connect our clients to apartments will increase in the weeks and months ahead as word gets out about the viability of the LINC Housing Program. Here are just a few stories that help illustrate why this subsidy is so desperately needed and such a welcome improvement.

Ms. C* is a single mother from India. She comes from a family with a proud tradition of valuing and pursuing higher education. While living in India, she married her husband who initially took good care of her. They soon had a baby and proceeded to live as a happy family.

Ms. C continued with her education and eventually obtained a Master's Degree in a field she enjoyed working in. Her husband meanwhile decided he wanted to relocate the family to America for business. After the relocation their marriage began to fall apart, with the husband becoming abusive, controlling and demanding while isolating her at his family's home. Fearing for her safety, Ms. C. sought shelter with Safe Horizon. She tried to find work but found it difficult to use the degree she earned in India. She enrolled in a program that provided her with skills needed for our workforce while also providing her with a stipend so she could begin a savings account. Recently, Ms. C received a LINC certification from HRA, and we worked with her to find a suitable apartment. Thanks to this subsidy and the work of the Safe Horizon shelter staff, Ms. C. and her daughter are now living in housing in a neighborhood where they feel safe.

Ms. D* lived in a beautiful home with her husband who is in the military. After their son was born with physical defects and developmental delays, Ms. D. and her husband agreed she would be a stay-at-home mom. However, it wasn't long before her husband became abusive. With no financial or family resources, Ms. D. decided to leave her marriage and enter a domestic violence shelter. While in shelter, her son received much-needed therapies and surgeries and has been a frequent visitor to the Emergency Room due to complications. Because of her son's health conditions and the amount of services he was receiving, it was very difficult for Ms. D to find work in order to save for housing. Fortunately, Ms. D qualified for a LINC III certificate, and with the help of Safe Horizon shelter staff, she and her son are now living in safe housing.

** - Not their real names.*

Challenges

In addition to our successes, we -- like many of our colleagues here today -- have encountered a few challenges as we strive to connect our clients to apartments through the LINC Housing Program.

One of the biggest challenges is the legacy of the Advantage housing subsidy, and specifically the concern from the real estate community that fluctuations in public policy priorities could leave them in lease agreements with tenants who no longer had the means to pay the rent. At the request of our partners at HRA, Safe Horizon convened a meeting late last year with providers, landlords, brokers and the City to discuss the LINC subsidy and how it will work. Several members of the real estate community noted that they had felt "burned" by Advantage and wanted to know how this subsidy would be different. Commissioner Banks explained the mechanics of LINC and the aftercare services that would be put in place to help tenants upon the expiration of their subsidy, but clearly there is more work that needs to be done to disinvest landlords and brokers across the city from the notion that LINC will suffer the same fate as Advantage.

Another challenge will be fighting the perception among landlords that households on public assistance placed through the LINC III subsidy will somehow be less desirable than those for example placed through LINC I (for working households). While we will work with legal advocates to try and ensure our clients do not face income discrimination, we know that landlords may nevertheless seek to reserve their units for tenants who they see as more stable.

The sad truth is that all of us who provide shelter – for survivors of domestic violence or for homeless families and individuals -- are all very much competing with one another to place our residents in the same limited pool of affordable housing.

Homeless Youth

Finally, I would like to urge the City to allow homeless youth who reside in shelters overseen by the City's Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) to be eligible for the LINC Housing Program.

Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides a range of services to homeless youth who face violence and exploitation on the streets. Unfortunately, the city's single homeless youth have been overwhelmingly left out of these new LINC housing resources. The vast majority of residents in the DYCD-administered youth shelter continuum are age 18-20, and many of these young people are capable of living independently but simply can't afford to do so. Unfortunately, the LINC programs are not available to young adults in the DYCD youth shelters, leaving them with no access to a rental subsidy. Many of these young people, if not most of them, will transition from chronic youth homelessness into chronic adult homelessness and will face a significant decline in life chances. This could be prevented with access to a rental subsidy and the housing that results from this basic support.

For those single homeless youth who suffer from disabilities such as serious mental illness, and who subsist via SSI or local-disability income through HRA's WeCARE program, the LINC subsidies are similarly unavailable. Of the five LINC programs, only LINC V is

available to single adults without a senior in the household. It is also only available to those in DHS facilities for the longest periods, inherently putting chronically homeless young adults at an institutional disadvantage. Further, LINC V access precludes our most vulnerable young adults – those who have aged out of youth shelters, are chronically homeless and whose disability prevents them from working. Until very recently our drop-in centers would have had a good shot at placing these individuals in supportive housing. But new policy changes are creating additional barriers to this avenue to housing as well.

Finally, Safe Horizon is grateful to the leadership of HRA for being responsive to our concerns and for continuing to champion the housing needs of our clients. We trust that as this initiative gains steam, it will hopefully be easier to impress upon landlords the viability of the LINC subsidies.

Thank you again for allowing us to testify here today, and I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Testimony of the New York City Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Service Providers by Nathaniel Fields, Co-Chair

New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare

Oversight: LINC Rental Assistance Program

January 21, 2015

Good afternoon Committee Chair and Committee members, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. Nathaniel Fields, the Co-Chair of the New York City Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Service Providers ("the Coalition") and is the President of the Urban Resource Institute, a 35 year old nonprofit organization dedicated to providing quality, compassionate and innovative client-centered services to victims of domestic violence and other vulnerable populations so that they may lead the safest and fullest lives possible. Judith Kahan is the CEO of the Center Against Domestic Violence, the oldest domestic violence shelter provider in the state, and the other Co-Chair of the Coalition. Together, we offer this testimony on behalf of the Coalition, an organization representing all of NYC's licensed nonprofit domestic violence shelter providers, which serve thousands of abused adults and children every year.

Thank you for holding this hearing today about the Living in Communities (LINC) Rental Assistance Program, and allowing us to testify about how the program is impacting domestic violence victims. We recognize that LINC is a vital housing resource to help our families move out of shelter and into permanent housing, and we applaud the City for dedicating funding to this effort and for including victims of domestic violence, a group that comprises about 30% of NYC's homeless families. This is something the advocacy community had long asked for and we are excited to have this important resource at our disposal.

It should be noted that HRA has been extraordinarily responsive to concerns raised by domestic violence service providers. The agency successfully advocated for a version of the LINC program for persons fleeing domestic violence – LINC III, and it has made itself available in unprecedented ways to ensure the success of the LINC initiative. High level HRA officials have personally attended meetings with the Coalition to make sure advocates, including housing specialists, understand the program well and are prepared to assist shelter residents to move to permanent housing. HRA staff is hosting weekly phone calls with providers to monitor the progress of the rollout and troubleshoot challenges as they arise. HRA has met with leadership of domestic violence service providers and attended networking receptions with shelters and landlord partners to help persuade them to rent to domestic violence shelter residents. HRA has also been responsive to concerns about access to LINC I by releasing a limited number of certifications to working families in domestic violence shelters. This is something we are grateful for and hope to see this access

expanded.

We would like to thank HRA for making necessary programmatic adjustments and communicating these changes effectively and assisting the community with getting up to speed so we can take advantage of the resources that are available. Nevertheless, the program has been challenging for our clients, primarily due to the limited affordable housing stock in NYC. While the program is still in its infancy and policies are changing in real time in response to concerns and questions raised about the structure of the program, LINC will not be successful as a meaningful housing option to many families unless the City works directly with landlords and identifies affordable apartments that our clients can rent at the LINC rental levels. Apartment vacancy rates in NYC have dropped at alarming rates. In 2011, NYC's vacancy rate was around 3%. Housing costs in NYC keep climbing – the reasons why are complex and interrelated. While advocates understand that there are no simple solutions, we also feel that the City is in the best position to develop an inventory of appropriate housing stock for families to transition to affordable, safe permanent housing. Although HRA has made efforts to assist domestic violence service providers to find landlords with apartments, we hope to see this effort expanded and sustained. We urge City Council to do whatever possible to aid the City in its efforts to continue the LINC Rental Assistance Program and make it truly available to those in need.

Sincerely,



Judith Kahan
Co-chair
Coalition of Domestic
Violence Residential
Providers



Nathaniel Fields, LMSW
Co-chair
Coalition of Domestic Violence
Residential Providers



January 21, 2015

Ted McCourtney
Director, Sarah Burke House
Sanctuary for Families
Secretary, NYC Coalition of DV Residential Providers

Testimony
to the
City Council
Committee on General Welfare

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. My name is Ted McCourtney. I work for Sanctuary for Families as the Director of Sarah Burke House, our transitional domestic violence shelter in the Bronx. Sanctuary for Families is a nonprofit agency dedicated exclusively to serving domestic violence and sex trafficking victims and their children. I am also a member of the steering committee of the New York City Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Providers, a coalition that includes all of the organizations providing domestic violence shelter in New York City.

I am here today to speak in support of the LINC housing program.

Admirably, New York City devotes considerable resources to supporting a robust domestic violence shelter network. We encourage women to escape dangerous relationships. We offer them safe, confidential shelter, where they and their children have access to extensive clinical services. Our shelters provide families the opportunity to begin putting their lives back together again, and clients that enter our shelters make significant progress toward stability and self-sufficiency during their time with us. However, much of this stability is destroyed if there are not safe housing options available to them at the end of their shelter stay.

After the demise of the Advantage housing program in 2011, our clients were left without viable housing options, and at the conclusion of their shelter stay, they often faced an impossible decision - become homeless again or return to a dangerous situation.

Thankfully, this is no longer the case for our clients at Sarah Burke House. With the implementation of the LINC program, our clients again have a pathway to safety and stability after their stay in shelter.

When the LINC program was introduced in September, I was pleased housing assistance would finally be available to our clients. However, I, along with many of my colleagues in the DV community, also had a number of concerns about the program. Clients in DV shelters were only able to access LINC III, which requires an open public assistance case. As a result, the subsidy was not available to any of our working clients, who typically constitute 35 - 45% of our clients at Sarah Burke House. In addition, to remain eligible, clients who moved into LINC III apartments would not be able to work during the five year duration of the subsidy. Finally, I was concerned that the subsidy amounts were too low to cover suitable housing in New York City.

These concerns were brought to city officials, including Human Resources Administration Commissioner Banks, and have now been addressed. LINC I has been made available to clients in DV shelters, allowing our employed clients to now access housing assistance. The LINC III program has been modified to permit, on a case by case basis, clients to maintain their housing subsidy if they gain employment while in their apartments. And the subsidy levels offered through LINC have been raised to Section 8 levels, allowing our clients to access adequate housing options.

I realize that thus far, LINC placement rates have been relatively low. However, I think this was to be expected with the implementation of a new program. Familiarizing brokers and landlords with the program, and addressing their concerns, is an ongoing process. And the process of linking clients to apartments has always been a time consuming endeavor. Locating an apartment, completing paperwork, undergoing a credit check, waiting for the landlord to complete paperwork, waiting for an apartment to be prepped for inspection, passing the inspection, and signing the lease is a complicated process. I can see momentum around this housing program building, both at Sarah Burke House and other domestic violence shelters, and I am confident that placement rates will continue to climb.

In previous years, when housing programs were available to our clients, Sarah Burke House regularly placed 70 to 100 families each year into safe, permanent housing. In 2013, without these housing supports, we were only able to place 18 families into permanent housing – in the entire year.

Since September, when LINC was introduced, we have transitioned 20 families out of Sarah Burke House and into permanent housing. And, pending the results of two apartment inspections, I am expecting to move at least 18 clients out of Sarah Burke House and into permanent housing in a six week period. I have worked at three different domestic violence shelters in New York City over the past 13 years, and I have never seen clients moving into permanent housing at a rate this high.

The LINC program has proven to be a tremendous resource for our families in shelter – allowing them to maintain stability, and to continue to build on the progress they have made in shelter, as they transition back into the community.

Ted McCourtney
Director, Sarah Burke House
Sanctuary for Families
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new destiny
housing

**Testimony of New Destiny Housing Corporation
New York City Council's Committee on General Welfare**

Oversight: LINC Rental Assistance Program

January 21, 2015

Good afternoon, my name is Catherine Trapani and I am the HousingLink Director at New Destiny Housing Corporation, a 20 year old nonprofit organization dedicated to the long term safety and stability of survivors of domestic violence and others at risk of homelessness. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

New Destiny is the only nonprofit in the City exclusively focused on the permanent housing needs of survivors of domestic violence. This is a group that makes up a large and growing segment of the City's homeless families; the IBO recently documented that domestic violence was the second highest generator of family homelessness after "evictions."

New Destiny owns and manages a portfolio of affordable housing which includes set-asides for homeless victims of domestic violence. At our permanent housing, we offer voluntary services to all of our tenants designed to help them remain stable and safe.

In addition, since New Destiny cannot meet the housing needs of all homeless victims of abuse, we operate citywide service programs such as HousingLink and Project HOME designed to assist victims of abuse to access other types of affordable, public and subsidized housing as well as to educate the public on the outstanding housing needs of abuse victims.

Our testimony today is informed by our experiences as a nonprofit landlord participating in the LINC III program.

INTRODUCTION

Since the demise of the Advantage rental subsidy program, HRA domestic violence emergency shelter residents, most of whom cannot afford New York City rents, have had great difficulty finding permanent housing at the end of their shelter stay which is limited to six months by state mandate. The overwhelming majority of victims have historically been forced to leave shelter still homeless and at risk of continued domestic violence.

The domestic violence service and advocacy community has long asked for a rental subsidy for HRA shelter residents—comprised largely of women with children-- to help end this cycle of abuse and homelessness and we are grateful to HRA for

acknowledging this need by developing the LINC III subsidy program. This is an important tool for victims of domestic violence that serves families who are receiving public assistance. And, most of the families using the specialized HRA shelter system are PA-eligible.

In order for any rental assistance program to be successful, the support of the landlord community is essential. New Destiny owns and manages affordable housing and our mission is to provide safety and stability to survivors of domestic violence and others at risk of homelessness. As a mission driven landlord, we are on board to work with the City as it implements this program.

Our testimony today, which is based on our experience as an early user of LINC III, focuses on some concerns regarding the program and a few recommendations that we believe could strengthen it.

CONCERNS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

One Size Does Not Fit All. HRA and DHS have wisely developed several versions of LINC which are tailored to the needs of the users of the DHS family shelter system. LINC III, however, has been the only subsidy program currently available to the HRA shelter system used by victims of domestic violence. While LINC III, a public assistance based rental subsidy, is appropriate to the situation of most of the users of the HRA shelter system, it does not provide assistance to working families or to single individuals and seniors using the domestic violence shelter system. Recently that HRA began to release a limited number of LINC I vouchers to working families in domestic violence shelters. Other versions of LINC remain unavailable to families and individuals using HRA DV shelters. We applaud the administration for having begun to extend LINC I to DV shelter residents and encourage the continued and expanded access all versions of LINC to homeless persons using the DV shelter system.

From a landlords' viewpoint, LINC III's dependence on an open public assistance case is a concern over time. If a LINC III recipient becomes employed and their public assistance case closes, they could become solely responsible for their rental payments even though their new income may not be sufficient to support the rent payment.

The ability to transition to LINC I from LINC III would alleviate the landlord's concern about rent payment and eliminate the incentive for survivors who can and want to work to remain on public assistance.

Interagency Coordination. LINC is not the only tool the City has to reduce homelessness. A number of City agencies are bringing resources together—e.g., Section 8 and public housing—to create a holistic set of interventions from prevention to re-housing to aftercare to help reduce homelessness.

New Destiny's experience in renting up a recent project indicates that greater inter-agency cooperation would be helpful in maximizing the use of various subsidy programs to best serve homeless families with varying levels of need.

New Destiny was extremely fortunate to receive 7 project-based Section 8 certificates from HPD which we used for some of our units set aside for HRA shelter residents. At the same time that New Destiny was identifying tenants for the Section 8 units, HRA was distributing LINC III certificates to shelter residents. HPD, which appeared to have little information about LINC, determined that applicants with LINC III were ineligible for Section 8 units. New Destiny, meanwhile, often did not know which applicants had LINC III since our application process was well underway by the time certifications were issued for the program. We were trying to allocate units with project based subsidies to ensure that those most in need of long term subsidies were not displaced by those who might be able to successfully escape homelessness with a shorter term intervention. It was often when applicants were sent to Section 8 briefings at HPD that New Destiny learned that these applicants had LINC. Many were therefore turned away by HPD due to their LINC eligibility and New Destiny had to go back and either reassign units or work with HRA to rescind the LINC eligibility to ensure the applicant could be placed in a unit appropriate for their needs. The process was confusing for both applicants and New Destiny.

This lack of interagency coordination shows up in another way that affects landlords seeking to serve homeless domestic violence survivors from HRA's shelter system.

Although HPD's current administrative plan permits users of all City shelter systems eligible to apply for HPD's homeless housing resources, this aspect of the plan has never been implemented. A specific allocation of Section 8 certificates for homeless domestic violence survivors has never been identified nor has a referral protocol between HRA and HPD been developed. As a result, domestic violence shelter residents—and the landlords that seek to serve them--have been prevented from accessing these resources.

Greater interagency contact and coordination among HRA and HPD, including designating a specific allocation of Section 8 vouchers for HRA DV shelter residents and establishing interagency referral protocols would open up HPD resources to domestic violence survivors, help ensure that resources are appropriately allocated, and decrease confusion for landlords trying to house homeless families. To facilitate this coordination, the creation of an interagency taskforce on homelessness would be helpful.

Lease Signings. New Destiny had 5 LINC III applicants for one project in the Bronx. Lease signings were held at the Advent units in the income maintenance centers of the boroughs where applicants' shelters were located. As a result, New Destiny's Director of Property and Asset Management went to three different boroughs on five different days to sign leases. For New Destiny, as for most landlords, this is an inefficient use of time.

If landlords are taking 3 or more LINC III applicants for housing, they should be able to bundle the lease signings in the same borough on the same day.

We have heard that the administration is beginning to do this and are grateful to HRA for being open to listening to concerns from stakeholders and adjusting policy to improve the experience for landlords and tenants alike.

CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges associated with the implementation of LINC III, HRA has been extraordinarily responsive to New Destiny's questions and concerns. New Destiny's Rent-up Coordinator reports that her experience with the LINC III program has been exemplary. The Directors and staff at HRA's Emergency Intervention Services have been helpful and responsive. Apartment inspections, lease signings and check cutting and pick up have been handled efficiently. Staff has worked effectively with New Destiny to resolve problems quickly.

The LINC III initiative is promising but not without flaws. We look forward to continued communication with HRA to strengthen the program and are hopeful that some of the concerns we mentioned today will be addressed.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Contact:

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Name: Sherille Jonas

Title: Family Advocate

Testimony: Living in Communities program (LINC)

Date: January 21, 2015

As a family advocate we work with families from the East New York community in Brooklyn to maintain housing stability. We work 1:1 with individuals and families to avoid eviction. We walk them through the eviction process. We provide legal assistance, and referrals to programs that provide aide. We are currently evaluating clients for FEPS (Family Eviction Prevention Services) eligibility, processing the applications, and assisting our families with the housing search. Sometimes we have to help prepare clients for the shelter. We also address our client's employment, financial, and general well-being concerns. Our Families with school age children are referred to our Educational Rights Advocates to work out issues related to education.

My observations of the challenges and obstacles securing housing with the LINC subsidy:

1. Landlords:

- Lack information about the program and the burden for selling the program is on the client
- Previous bad experience with termination of the Advantage subsidy
- Worried about the future funding of the program and the eligibility status of the tenant

2. LINC guidelines are problematic:

- Clients only have three months to find an apartment which is not enough time especially in the winter months and holiday season from November thru January
- Program states clients may receive up four one-year renewals if they meet eligibility criteria
- Are we setting client's up with apartments they can't afford to eventually end up back in the shelter

3. Not a long term solution:

- Our families are underemployed working families they don't qualify for affordable housing because they can't meet the minimum annual income requirements
- Five years may seem generous but it's not when a family of four is only earning \$15,600
- What about our disabled head of households living off their disability benefits without additional earning potential
- These families need affordable housing units

Good afternoon my name is Sherille Jonas, I'm a family advocate with The Partnership for the Homeless Family Resource Center located in East New York, Brooklyn, and I'm here to share my experiences with the LINC subsidy program.

Ms. Cooper is a 51 year old African American mother of three living in a DHS shelter. The family was approved for the LINC program. Ms. Cooper keeps a log of the landlords and brokers she's contacted and landlords are reluctant to except the program because they don't trust it. Either they are not properly informed about the program or had negative experience when the Advantage subsidy program ended. Ms. Cooper is saddled with the burden of selling the program to landlords. She is at a lost for explanations when they asks what's going to happen in five years when the subsidy ends, tenants are no longer eligible, or the city stops paying. She only has three months to find an apartment, not enough time especially during the winter and holiday months. I understand the program is intended to alleviate current demands on the shelter system but are we setting these families up for failure when the program ends? Or will they to end up back in the shelter?

Our families are underemployed working families, disabled individuals, trying to live off their SSDI/SSI benefits with no income enhancing possibilities. They're barely scraping by. They don't qualify for affordable housing because they can't meet the minimum annual household incomes for their family sizes.

LINC is a temporary subsidy it is not a long-term solution we need to address the infrastructure the lack of housing for our underserved populations.



Organizing For Justice and Respect:

Don't Talk About Us: Talk WITH Us

PICTURE THE HOMELESS

Testimony before the New York City Council

Committee on General Welfare

Oversight: Homelessness and the Implementation of the Living in Communities (LINC) Program

Hearing on Res. No. 503 - Resolution calling upon the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A.2819, which would establish a hospitality gift fund for the homeless.

January 21st, 2015

Good afternoon my name is Lucinda Lewis and I am considered, by DHS's standards, chronically homeless. I was in three of their rental assistance programs and I am currently in a private family shelter. I am working and a member of DC 1707, local 253, and also a member of Picture the Homeless, an organization that fights for civil rights and permanent housing for homeless New Yorkers.

I would like to start talking about the LINC program. To me, this won't be a concrete, long-term program. Due to the similarities between LINC, HSP, and Advantage, we will see the same rate of recidivism as we saw when those two programs ended. I am a living testimony.

Due to the LINC program's temporary status, many landlords have shunned away from the program – they don't want anything to do with it. It is very embarrassing and time consuming to try and find a participating landlord, only to find that they reject you because you have a temporary subsidy. The children are suffering, too. They are wondering why they can't have a permanent home like their friends. Programs like Section 8 are concrete and permanent, so why does the City want to waste money on a temporary subsidy again?

If Mayor de Blasio wants to learn from the City's mistakes, he should ask homeless families and individuals what they need. My situation doesn't apply to the LINC program's criteria. I am not eligible to receive Temporary Assistance when I leave the shelter. I make too much for Food

Stamps and Cash Assistance, but you need Cash Assistance to be eligible for many of the LINC programs. I am also in a private shelter, and most of the programs require you to be in a DHS shelter. We need a program without a welfare component, one that reflects the current times. We need an effective, permanent rental voucher.

After reading the State's proposal on the Hospitality Gift Fund, Picture the Homeless members realize that this is not a permanent solution to homelessness. The proposed legislation would give grants and contracts to non-profit service providers, but it is not clear which non-profits would be chosen for eligibility. Many non-profits, for example, oversee homeless shelters but have an abysmal track record and treat people without respect or dignity. When Aguila gave families of 941 Intervale Avenue 24 hours' notice to leave, there was little to no accountability. What accountability will there be regarding the money in this hospitality fund?

Instead of using these funds in contracts or grants to nonprofits, homeless people need a permanent subsidy that is sustainable and flexible. Housing providers need to feel secure knowing that this subsidy won't run out and the apartment will be paid for. Even if an apartment is vacant, a permanent subsidy should be flexible so that homeless individuals and families can move in with ease.

I need an apartment so I can feel stable, so that my children can remain focused. They are living in fear of never know when we are going to be transferred. I don't need services, I need a home. With stable housing, homelessness will go down. In the past, case workers always threatened to transfer you or send you to NEXTSTEP if you didn't move out into your own apartment, and that's what happened to me. Instead of going to NEXTSTEP I moved into my own apartment while I was working. I couldn't afford the rent and ended up back in the shelter system. I have been in this shelter since March 2013.

If the City Council passes this resolution, we want to know where the funding is coming from, where it's going, and how it's being spent. There should be an oversight committee to hold people and agencies responsible. There must be a screening for all eligible nonprofits to ensure honesty and that bad behavior isn't rewarded.

Lastly, we urge the City Council to work with city and state agencies to match these funds in a Permanent Rental Subsidy Gift Fund. For many homeless people, we just need a small subsidy to get an apartment. But for some, a larger subsidy would be necessary. This would save the city money because people would be focused on bettering their lives and people would be out of shelters, which costs over \$3,000 a month. The last time I checked my budget letter, it cost about \$3,000 a month to put my family through the shelter system. We have been chronically homeless for 12 years. That has cost roughly \$432,000, enough to buy a house in the suburbs. But New York City is my home. I live and work here, and would like to stay.

We at Picture the Homeless fight for permanent housing, not shelters. We look forward to working with the city and state to ensure housing for all.



**Testimony for New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Public Hearing on Rental Subsidy Oversight
Wednesday, January 21, 2015
Jeff Foreman, CFH Director of Policy**

Good afternoon, Chairman Levin and Members of the City Council General Welfare Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I am Jeff Foreman, Policy Director of Care for the Homeless. We are a nonprofit organization operating more than 30 Federally Qualified Health Clinics (FQHCs) in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens. We also provide street medical assistance alongside city street outreach teams in some areas, are launching a mobile health clinic and operate a 200-bed shelter for medically frail and mentally ill women in the Bronx.

All our services are targeted exclusively to people experiencing homelessness in New York City.

Let me begin by expressing the gratitude of everyone at Care for the Homeless, as well as the many other advocates and the thousands of homeless men, women, children and families for the efforts of this committee, this Council and this city administration in confronting homelessness.

The numbers alone are daunting. As troubling as the numbers is the reality that each of those numbers represents a human being: more than 58,000 men, women and children – nearly 25,000 of them children– in DHS shelters; thousands more sheltered in HASA, domestic violence and other non-DHS shelters; and still thousands more on our streets. Sizing the scale of the solution to the scale of the crisis of homelessness in New York City must be our first concern.

It's an immense problem, but with innovative programs such as the Living in Communities Rental Assistance Program (LINC) we are moving in the right direction.

The term or length of the subsidy is also of critical importance. Most of the LINC programs are one year commitments with the possibility of up to four one-year extensions. The length of the subsidy raises many of the same concerns most advocates had with the old Advantage rental subsidy program with its short 2 year duration. We can learn from Advantage that 2 years is not a sufficient time limit.

In fact the most successful rental subsidy programs, like Section 8 vouchers or the currently highly successful Utah program that features a Section 8 like voucher, do not have a proscribed time limitation.

Longer is better. More flexible with no "hard" time limit is better still.

Another Advantage lesson is that any subsidy must be accompanied by a truly robust program of after care and supports. While Advantage was better than no subsidy, it wasn't really transitional as much as temporary. The reality of Advantage was a one or two year respite from shelter that sent half of its recipient families right back to shelter.

Clearly both this Council and this administration recognize an effective support program is crucial to stabilizing families or individuals in transition. This includes medical and mental health supports, addiction services, vocational and other training, financial management assistance and training, child care support and numerous other kinds of support. Ongoing development of support programs can best be accomplished by including consumers and their advocates in a meaningful way in developing these programs, vetting procedures and evaluating them.

Some families, with that kind of program, are capable of moving beyond a rental subsidy in five years; some in less than two years. Nonetheless, we urge you to consider what happens to families who can't afford unsubsidized housing at the end of a time limitation through no fault of their own. That outcome is unfortunate, but without more flexibility it will happen in some cases.

Consideration should be given, if there must be a set time limit, of an alternative for exceptional cases. Any time limit should include a process allowing for exemptions.

Thought must be given to those cases where people are disabled and will find it very difficult or impossible to maintain stable housing without a subsidy. Many of our clients are disabled and unable to work. In these cases a Section 8 type ongoing voucher is the most effective and efficient method to provide housing.

Transitioning people experiencing homelessness from shelter to housing without subsidy is a laudable goal, and for many families an achievable one. But it's not possible for everyone. In cases where it is not possible our guiding principles should be creating the best outcomes and being good stewards of public resources. Maintaining stable housing through subsidies when required is the right thing to do for those caught in homelessness; it produces better health, quality of life and community outcomes; and over time saves substantial public resources.

Finally, we ask that you consider those who might not easily fit in an eligibility guideline in the LINC programs. These programs, targeted primarily to families with a working adult, families with unearned income perhaps due to a disability, victims of domestic violence, or those over 60 years of age are absolutely laudable – we fully support each of them. But let's be mindful that in setting these eligibilities we, in some sense, are defining among a group of vulnerable and needy people who are the most deserving.

No one intends this, of course, as a definition of the undeserving. All are deserving of a second chance and the basic human right to decent housing. But in some sense marking one group as coming first does label others as less deserving. Like the scale issue, we must provide for all because we know with the proper commitment and resources we can end homelessness as we know it.

We also want to add our voice and support of Resolution 503 calling on the legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A. 2819. Introduced by Assembly Member Keith Wright, this legislation would establish a Hospitality Gift Fund for Homeless people and would create a funding mechanism to support nonprofit organizations in assisting our most vulnerable and most needy neighbors.

This legislation, along with the work this Committee has done and is doing to increase homelessness prevention programs, create housing opportunities for those in shelter through use of NYCHA public housing units and rental subsidies, and in promoting far more affordable housing for the lowest income

New Yorkers and supportive housing for those who need it – are all pieces of that better policy that can end modern day homelessness as we know it.

With the DHS shelter census near historic highs and rampant poverty and unaffordable housing issues in New York City, the need for delivery of services to homeless people and those at risk of homelessness has never been greater. Providing appropriate and adequate services to homeless men, women and children is the right thing to do. It promises far better outcomes for the individuals involved, for our neighborhoods and for our city.

What's more, anything we do to provide those appropriate and needed services, and ultimately to move people from homelessness to housing, will more than pay for itself in savings of public health, mental health and other public resources.

Why would we not want to create a fund to help, at whatever amount the voluntary fund can collect from hotel unit fees or from voluntary gifts and bequests, in the good works of our nonprofits to provide for our neighbors in need?

This is the right thing to do – thank you for promoting this truly needed and worthwhile legislation.

Again, I want to thank the Committee for allowing me to speak, and for your commitment to ensuring all New Yorker have a place to call home.

TESTIMONY ON LINC ROLLOUT
City Council's General Welfare Committee
1/21/15

By: Food First Family Project, Inc.

Good Morning. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. My name is Erin Feely-Nahem. I am the Executive Director of Food First Family Project, Inc., a non-profit agency incorporated in 1993 to provide emergency shelter to domestic violence survivors. I am also the Co-Chair of the NYC Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Providers' Housing Committee.

To understand the difficulties providers and their clients face while utilizing this subsidy, effectively, one must recognize the fact that in NYC affordable housing for the middle class is difficult to find, and for the working poor, or those on a subsidy, it is almost impossible. Today there is a housing emergency with less than a 5% vacancy rate in available housing. Where does that leave families who are working for little more than minimum wage, or who are public assistance?

With the strength of the market on the Landlords' side, no matter what HRA promises, or how tempting they make Landlord bonuses or

enhanced rents, the concerns that grew out of the City's decision to abandon the Advantage program remain, as well as the concerns that arise when considering the prospects available for viable employment for a tenant who has been on public assistance for a number of years, once the housing subsidy ends.

This past September, in an effort to reduce the escalating homeless population, HRA developed and rolled out the LINC initiative. Although this initiative's focus is primarily on housing the homeless within the DHS system, unfairly limiting access to the various LINC subsidies for Domestic Violence Survivors within the HRA shelter system, to their credit, HRA has designed and rolled out a version of the program, LINC III, for persons fleeing domestic violence, who have active public assistance cases.

Advocates recognize and acknowledge the tremendous efforts that HRA has made in creating and rolling out this initiative, which will allow a portion of the families who enter our system for safety, to leave with safe permanent housing.

Unfortunately though, there are other families within our shelter system as well who would benefit and be better served by the other versions of link,

including those designed for working families (LINC I) yet access to that version of the program is extremely limited. In addition, single individuals and seniors who are using the domestic violence shelter system to escape violence do not have access to the other LINC subsidies, unlike those in DHS who have access to LINC 1, LINC III, LINC IV and LINC V.

When looking at the success of the LINC initiative, in terms of the housing market, landlords might also find the versions where tenants are working and required to make meaningful rental contributions (LINC I) and versions that are not time limited (LINC IV and LINC V), more attractive than others (LINC III) which puts DV survivors at a competitive disadvantage when searching for housing. Many landlords prefer working tenants, compared to those who are reliant on public assistance.

Although HRA has made tremendous efforts towards reducing unnecessary sanctions, landlords may still remember the limited support they received in the past. Fueling this concern could also be the fact that if a LINC III participant becomes employed and their public assistance case is closed, they become responsible for their rental payments unless they are permitted to transition to LINC I or some other rental assistance

program. At this time, It is our understanding that it is not possible to transition from LINC III to LINC I if a tenant becomes employed after a lease is signed.

While we do understand that HRA will make every effort to help LINC III tenants remain stably housed using a suite of aftercare and eviction prevention programs sponsored by the agency, the uncertainty surrounding how these families will be able to handle the entire rent burden after a potentially short period of time is a concern.

Experience with rollout

Despite the challenges associated with the way the program is being targeted, it should be noted that HRA has been extraordinarily responsive to questions from DV providers making themselves available in unprecedented ways to ensure the success of the LINC initiative. High level HRA officials have personally attended meetings with the Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Service Providers' Housing Committee, is hosting weekly phone calls with providers to monitor the progress of the rollout and troubleshoot challenges as they arise. HRA has also met with leadership of DV service providers, attended networking receptions with shelters and landlord partners, and has been responsive to concerns

about access to LINC I by releasing a limited number of certifications to working families in DV shelters. This is something we are grateful for and hope to see this access expanded.

Potential Unintended Consequences

Initially, the program was targeted towards long term stayers in shelter focusing on the Tier II shelter system. This system is much smaller than the emergency shelter system such that beginning there was easier since it involved training a smaller number of staff on the program. An added benefit of doing it this way was to allow those who had been homeless the longest, to obtain housing first. While one can understand why the administration chose to do it this way there were some unintended consequences.

Commissioner Banks understands that no one seeking safety in the DV shelter system wants to remain homeless after the state funded maximum length of stay of 180 days expires. He instituted a policy where HRA agreed not to discharge families to DHS shelter solely because they reach the maximum amount of time allowed by the state. Instead, families are being held in shelter beyond the 180 day point until a more favorable

option can be found. This policy both reduces unnecessary and stressful transitions for families as well as relieves some pressure from the already overburdened DHS shelter system.

At the same time, because the LINC program began, and is still, concentrated in only 7 DV Tier II shelters, families in emergency DV shelters must wait until those in Tier II are successful with the LINC program before they are eligible for a viable housing option. The result is that fewer families are exiting the emergency DV shelter system and it is now at near capacity. This started to create bottlenecks in the shelter system where needy families in the community who need to flee domestic violence cannot access specialized DV emergency shelters due to lack of space and are forced to either seek refuge in the DHS shelter system which isn't equipped to meet their service needs or remain in dangerous situations until space becomes available. HRA has now started to provide certification to families within the emergency shelters as well, as clients reach and exceed the 180 day limit.

It is our hope that as the LINC program gains traction, vacancies will begin to come up in the Tier II shelter system allowing those in the DV

emergency system to move to more transitional settings and permanent housing alleviating the bottleneck and allowing those in crisis access to appropriate shelter. We hope that the City is monitoring the impact of these housing programs to ensure that this in fact occurs. If not, the City may wish to consider re-aligning resources to serve families in emergency DV shelters as well as those in DHS and DV Tier II shelters to create sufficient turnover in the DV emergency system to allow those who need to escape abuse access to appropriate shelter services.

This year, once again, DV survivors living within the HRA system, unlike families within the DHS shelter, are not eligible for any of the 500 HPD Section 8 vouchers available, nor for the Project based Section 8 apartments, offered to families within the DHS system. They are also excluded from the NO homeless priority preference for NYCHA, available to DHS families, placing them behind Working families and Homeless families within the DHS shelter.

If additional housing options did not become available for our population, it is possible that the current homeless re-housing policy will hamper efforts to combat domestic violence.

**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: 1/22/15

Name: Christy PARBUE (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 476 W. 33rd St. 6th Floor, NY 10001

I represent: Homeless Services United

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Judith Rubin (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 23 Chapel St

I represent: Center Grant Donette Rubin

Address: _____

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Liz Hoffman (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: CCC

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joshua Goldfern

Address: 199 Water St - NY NY 10038

I represent: Legal Aid Society w/ Coalition for Homeless

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Mary Broderick

Address: 129 Fulton St NY NY 10038

I represent: Coalition for the Homeless

Address: w/ Legal Aid Socy

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Stephanie Blood Saw

Address: 220 E 197th St Bronx

I represent: cluster site tenants

Address: with Coalition for Homeless

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

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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: JUDITH KAHAN

Address: 25 Chapel St. Brooklyn

I represent: Center Against Domestic Violence

Address: _____

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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: New Destiny Housing

Address: 12 W 37th, 7th Fl. NY, NY 10018

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Appearance Card

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

in favor - in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ted McCourtney

Address: _____

I represent: Sanctuary For Families

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Michael Potenberg
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Safe Horizon

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/2015

Name: NATHANIEL FIELDS
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: URBAN RESOURCE INSTITUTE

Address: 75 BROAD ST., NY, NY.

**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: 1-21-15

Name: Ted McCourtney
(PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Sanctuary for Families

Address: PO Box 1783, Bronx, NY 10451

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Appearance Card

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. oversight + Res. No. 0503
 in favor in opposition

Date: 1/21/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeff Foreman

Address: _____

I represent: Care for the Homeless

Address: _____

**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: Lucinda Lewis

Address: PO Box 581 Bronx NY 10459

I represent: Picture the Homeless

Address: 2427 Morris Avenue Bx NY 10468

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Appearance Card

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

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Bill Bisk

Address: 465 E. Tremont Ave Bronx, NY

I represent: Community Voices Heard

Address: 115 E 106 St Harlem NY

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 11/21/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SHERILLE JOOAS

Address: 610 WARREN AVE

I represent: PARTNERSHIP FOR THE HOMELESS FAMILY RESOURCES

Address: 100 PENNSYLVANIA AVE BKLYN NY 11207

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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: ERIN FEELY-NAHEM

Address: _____

I represent: FOOD FIRST, INC

Address: 165 CONOVER Bklyn, NY

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