



**Testimony of Erin Dalton, Commissioner
New York City Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare
Department of Social Services Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026**

Good morning. I want to thank Chairperson Hudson and the members of the General Welfare Committee for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify about the Department of Social Services' (DSS) Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Preliminary Budget.

My name is Erin Dalton, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services. DSS is made up of both the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), so accordingly I am also joined by my colleagues, HRA Administrator Scott French and DHS Interim Administrator Christine Fellini, as well as DSS Chief Program Performance and Financial Officer, Richard Johns and DSS Chief Strategy Officer Chris Gonzalez. Collectively we represent the approximately 14,000 hardworking staff who dedicate their lives to supporting New Yorkers living at or below the poverty line.

Before I begin, I would like to share my excitement and gratitude in assuming the position as Commissioner of DSS. In my former post as Director of Allegheny County, Pennsylvania's Department of Human Services, I was laser focused on strengthening families and communities through the broad network of community-based programs that prevent harm and address critical needs in housing and homelessness, senior services, child welfare, behavioral health, and developmental supports. I look forward to working in partnership with Speaker Menin, Chair Hudson, and the rest of the City Council to deliver vital benefits and services to the City's most vulnerable populations.

Today I will provide an overview of the FY27 preliminary budgets for both agencies, and highlight the programs and services supported by those resources.

DSS is the largest local government social services agency in the country, comprised of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). The consolidated management structure and the shared mission of DSS, HRA and DHS provides an integrated continuum of client services to approximately 3 million New Yorkers every day. Our efforts to create a path to financial and social sustainability for low-income New Yorkers are rooted in the following three pillars: 1) Streamlining Access to Social Services; 2) Addressing Homelessness and Housing Instability; and 3) Creating Economic Stability. We will refer back to these three pillars throughout our testimony.

I will begin by providing an overview of the DSS/HRA and DHS FY27 preliminary budgets.

DSS/HRA is dedicated to fighting poverty and income inequality, providing essential benefits including cash assistance, nutrition and food programs, public health insurance, employment and transportation services, as well as access to housing, homelessness prevention and emergency assistance. DSS/HRA helps more than three million New Yorkers annually through the administration of more than 15 major public benefit programs, with a budgeted headcount of approximately 12,500.

The FY26 budget for DSS/HRA is \$14.2 billion, including \$11.3 billion in City funds. The majority (over 70%) of the HRA City funds budget is earmarked for benefits that the City administers on behalf of New York State. Almost 98% of the DSS/HRA City funded budget provides direct benefits and support to New Yorkers including: 1) Cash Assistance (CA) benefits for which benefit levels and eligibility rules are set by State law and regulation; and 2) Medicaid which includes homecare, managed care, mental health, substance use services, and hospital care and is also administered by the State. The City pays a portion of Medicaid costs out of City funds representing 56% of the DSS/HRA city funded budget. DSS/HRA sends these funds directly to the State to be used along with other State and federal funds to pay medical providers and managed care plans; and 3) of the remainder, 16% goes to Public Assistance, 17% to rental assistance and homeless prevention, 2% for Administration, 3% for legal services, and 2% for HIV/Aids Services Administration (HASA), and 1% each for Employment Services, the Community Food Connection (CFC), and Domestic Violence Services (DVS). HRA also administers the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) for 1.7M clients. These

federally funded benefits (about \$5 billion a year) do not flow through our budget, but they represent another critical benefit that HRA is mandated to provide. DSS/HRA also administers another over \$50 billion in state and federal funds supporting NYC Medicaid clients which are not part of the City budget. Also note that the DSS budget for administration covers shared services for both HRA and DHS.

Now I will provide an overview of the DHS budget. DHS is committed to providing safe temporary shelter, connecting New Yorkers experiencing homelessness to permanent housing, and addressing unsheltered homelessness. DHS has an FY26 budget of \$4.4 billion, of which \$3.5 billion is City funds. The agency has a headcount of approximately 2,200; and with its not-for-profit partners, it is the largest municipal organization dedicated to addressing homelessness in the United States. Almost 97% of the DHS budget supports shelter for families, individuals, and services for the unsheltered, including outreach and low-barrier beds. The DHS budget is broken out as follows in FY26: \$1.39 billion for adult shelter (43%); \$1.27 billion for family shelter (39%); \$456 million for street outreach services (14%); and the remaining 4% is for general administration.

In the FY27 Preliminary Budget, this Administration is continuing to make investments in our critical programs with over \$3.1 billion added in baselined funding, including for the CityFHEPS rental assistance program, cash assistance, DHS shelters, food assistance programs, Affordable Housing Services (AHS), additional services to support New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness, and support for our non-profit providers.

As I have highlighted in my testimony, DSS, HRA and DHS budgets are significantly reliant on federal dollars, but more importantly the 3 million people we serve receive significant benefits from the federal government.

Enacted in July of 2025, the federal budget reconciliation bill known as H.R.1 significantly changed both SNAP and Medicaid in ways that will directly affect New York City residents who rely on these programs to meet basic needs. The law expands work requirements for SNAP and Medicaid, increases administrative reporting requirements, and reduces federal funding while shifting more costs to states. As a result, many eligible individuals may lose access to food assistance or health coverage due to stricter eligibility rules or paperwork barriers rather than changes in income or need. For a city like New York, where millions rely on SNAP to afford groceries and depend on Medicaid for health care, these changes will

increase food insecurity, lead to loss of health coverage, and place additional strain on local safety-net providers such as hospitals, community health centers, and food banks.

Under H.R.1, the definition of Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWDs) in SNAP expanded from ages 18–54 to ages 18–64 and now applies to adults without a child under age 14 (previously under 18). The law also removed several exemptions, including for veterans, people experiencing homelessness, and young adults who aged out of foster care. ABAWDs must complete at least 80 hours per month of work, job training, or volunteer activity to receive SNAP for more than three months in a three-year period.

New York had a statewide waiver from ABAWD time limits for many years, but that waiver expired February 28, 2026. The new rules took effect March 1, 2026, when ABAWDs in NYC began needing to meet the 80-hour monthly work requirement. The three-month time-limit clock began in March 2026, meaning individuals who do not meet the requirement could start losing SNAP benefits in June 2026 after using their three allowable months.

Since the passage of H.R.1, DSS-HRA have embarked on an aggressive outreach campaign to raise awareness of the impending impact of these new ABAWD rules on SNAP recipients in NYC. Along with repeated direct outreach to the almost 120,000 identified ABAWD clients, we have conducted dozens of information seminars and trainings to community organizations and partners including elected officials. We have also amplified awareness through a variety of public media outlets to ensure clients have ample opportunity to connect with us to mitigate any impacts of the new eligibility criteria on SNAP recipients. If you or anyone you know is a SNAP recipient and has not yet engaged with HRA, please encourage them to connect with us immediately through AccessHRA.

Turning to Cash Assistance in the preliminary budget, the FY26 budget for Cash Assistance is \$2.76 billion to support a caseload of 595,000 recipients through June 2025. HRA issued emergency rent payments to over 52,000 households in FY25. Along with SNAP and CA, DSS/HRA continues to support New Yorkers with other key benefits including, but certainly not limited to, Medicaid, Fair Fares, and HEAP.

With regard to Medicaid, I cannot stress enough that automatic Medicaid extensions have ended. Clients must recertify in order to keep their health insurance. We are working to ensure that everyone who remains eligible for Medicaid receives ongoing benefits. Please continue to remind all your eligible constituents to renew.

In collaboration with the Council, we expanded Fair Fares eligibility to 150% FPL in 2025. There are currently 389,400 New Yorkers enrolled in the Fair Fares program. Please continue to encourage eligible New Yorkers to submit for benefits as soon as possible.

With regard to HEAP, DSS continues its collaboration with the State, to provide heating and cooling benefits to New Yorkers. In 2025 over 900,000 New York City households received HEAP heating and/or cooling benefits.

Keeping New Yorkers in their homes, moving families and individuals out of shelter, and helping these households remain stably housed are all primary goals for the agency, and I now want to talk about our progress in these areas.

First, I would like to provide a quick update on our DHS shelter population. As of March 6th, the overall DHS census was 85,471. Of the 85K, approximately 55,000 (almost 65%) are families made up of children (29,922) and their adult parents and caregivers (25,670) and children make up 35% (or more than one third) of all the people in shelter. The remaining population are made up of single adult men (18,224) single adult women (7,001), and adult families (4,906).

In New York City, 97% of people experiencing homelessness are sheltered, but that remaining 3% is an area of particular focus. DSS-DHS continues to aggressively expand low-barrier bed capacity, which are shelter types targeted to those experiencing unsheltered homelessness (Safe Havens and stabilization beds). As of March 2026, DHS has a total of 4,290 low barrier beds online. 300 of which Mayor Mamdani accelerated to be available during the recent cold snap. We expect an additional 350 safe haven beds to come online before the end of the year.

In conjunction with these low barrier bed contributions, on February 18, Mayor Mamdani announced a revised unhoused encampment response policy that shifts primary responsibility for encampment engagement for those experiencing unsheltered homelessness from NYPD to the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Under the new protocol, DHS is now the lead agency responsible for issuing notices, conducting outreach, and offering placements, with DSNY conducting cleanings after a seven-day notice period and NYPD present only as needed for safety support.

The policy emphasizes daily outreach during the seven-day notice period, with DHS teams returning consistently to offer shelter placements, Safe Haven beds, and connections to services. The Administration has committed approximately \$30 million in baseline funding for DHS outreach expansion and \$11.9 million for NYC Health + Hospitals to support increased street medicine and behavioral health engagement. This includes 66 additional DHS staff (primarily outreach workers), expanded Street Health Outreach & Wellness (SHOW) units, and an additional Bridge to Home site for individuals with serious mental illness.

DSS remains committed to connecting New Yorkers to permanent housing and keeping them stably housed. DSS has seen record breaking increases in the number of permanent housing placements. In CY25 nearly 17,000 households comprised of nearly 36,000 New Yorkers were able to obtain permanent housing or stay in their homes using CityFHEPS vouchers, reflecting a 17% increase year over year. Through our Homebase homelessness prevention services, in CY25, more than 20,000 households (~52,000 New Yorkers) remained in their homes, and more than 13,000 households (~33,000 New Yorkers) received aftercare services from Homebase to help them stay stably-housed.

Now for the 3rd pillar, creating economic stability. We recognize that more and more New Yorkers rely on our City's resources to make ends meet. In addition to the public benefits, rental assistance and other essential resources we offer to help people get back on their feet, DSS-HRA career services and other supports enable New Yorkers to secure steady income and live sustainable lives.

A good-paying job is a key component to a stable, economically independent life, and DSS-HRA offers a wide array of career services programs to help low-income New Yorkers find and obtain a career that works for them. In FY25, the agency's career services program continued to raise the bar, helping nearly 22,000 low-income New Yorkers obtain employment in Fiscal Year 2025 (FY25) an increase of over 170% compared to FY24 and the most since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, nearly 10,500 public benefits recipients were connected to employment through DSS-HRA's BusinessLink HireNYC program, a 28% increase over the prior fiscal year and a new record for the program.

The PINCC program, which advances training, education & job placements enrolled 2,442 individuals in construction and industrial training, with 1,330 completions thus far. We have also placed 1,089 individuals to jobs, of which over 900 were unionized positions.

Going forward, we continue to invest in our career services programming. The Pathways for Access to Careers and Employment (PACE) contracts began October 2025 using the centralized "no wrong door" program model with locations throughout the boroughs. The programs: (1) Streamline and minimize travel burdens, maximize access to all employment and support services, and foster stronger client/staff relationships; (2) Establish an in-demand occupation & sector focused approach that connects clients to skilled professions that offer family sustaining wages; (3) Utilize labor market data to assist clients in gaining marketable skills for success and advancement in their careers; and (4) Streamline processes for vendors by offering a hybrid approach to engaging clients.

I will close by underlining our ongoing commitment to break down government silos and improve access to services. The challenges DSS-HRA-DHS works to confront bridge across agencies, and further, bridge across jurisdictional boundaries. Overcoming these challenges goes to the heart of creating the kind of caring, compassionate communities we seek to live in.

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

Thank you.



Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026

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Good morning, Chair Hudson and the other members of the Committee on General Welfare. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the preliminary budget. My name is Maria Ruiz Diaz, and I am an Aftercare Specialist at Anthos|Home. We are a nonprofit that helps New Yorkers with housing vouchers move out of shelter and into permanent housing as quickly as possible. We are a member of the Family Homelessness Coalition, Homeless Services United, and the Homes Can't Wait Coalition.

Today, I'd like to speak about how we can move people out of shelter and into homes faster—and help them stay housed long-term. At Anthos|Home, we see both the severity of the homelessness crisis and the impact of targeted housing solutions and process changes. New York City has the opportunity—and the obligation—to better serve its most vulnerable residents, both by reallocating existing funds to more effectively address the crisis and by streamlining the housing voucher process.

Funding for Housing Navigation and Stability Support

Win's report "More than a Moral Choice" shows that the cost of housing a family in shelter costs 35% more than moving them into permanent housing with CityFHEPS. As they write, prioritizing moving people into permanent homes is not just a moral imperative, but the only fiscally responsible path forward.

At the same time, though CityFHEPS is an invaluable resource, many eligible households cannot use it due to discrimination, bureaucracy, and other challenges. A 2024 report from the Office of the New York State Comptroller estimates that only 21% of households with shopping letters get their voucher approved.

Families need additional support to navigate the housing process, as Anthos|Home's program model has demonstrated. We provide housing navigation services and at least one year of housing stability services post-move in to ensure people are housed for the long-term. To date, we've moved more than 1,100 New Yorkers into permanent homes, have engaged over 600 property providers, and maintained 100% housing stability.

We urge the City to provide designated funding for Housing Navigators for CityFHEPS voucher holders. Funding would allow housing navigators to not only support voucher holders through the voucher process, but it would also allow those navigators to engage more landlords in the CityFHEPS program by covering common costs like necessary pre-inspection repairs, keeping units available through the voucher process, and providing process support.

In conjunction with funding for Housing Navigators, we urge the City to provide designated funding for at least one year of stability services for moved-in CityFHEPS households. Housing stability support helps tenants understand their obligations, properly recertify vouchers, maintain cash assistance, and navigate income adjustments. These services are equally important for landlords, particularly when voucher payments are delayed, tenants accrue arrears, or conflicts arise. Strong stability support reduces housing instability, encourages greater landlord participation, and increases housing supply.

By providing targeted funding that fills in gaps in the CityFHEPS process, the City can move more New Yorkers into permanent homes, engage more property providers, reduce shelter returns, and save the city money.

Low or No-Cost Process Changes

There are also opportunities for immediate and impactful low or no-cost changes to the voucher process. These include:

1. Streamlining the CityFHEPS Voucher Package

A complete CityFHEPS voucher package is often over 100 pages when it is submitted, and the DHS review checklist includes more than 100 criteria for approval. By streamlining the voucher package compilation and review process to eliminate duplicative and unnecessary checks, the City can significantly speed moves out of shelter and into homes.

2. Simplify the CityFHEPS Rebudgeting Process

Rebudgeting is triggered when household income changes by more than \$100 between any time during a household's housing search (in other words, between the shopping letter issuance and voucher package approval). Many voucher holders have variable income, making rebudgeting frequent and burdensome. During these delays, other time-sensitive documents often expire, further compounding the slowdown.

Issuing the household share letter at the time of voucher package submission and allowing income eligibility to remain valid for one year would eliminate countless headaches, roadblocks, and resubmissions for voucher holders.

3. Allow CBOs to Inspect All Apartments

DSS is required to inspect all ground floor and first floor units, basements, attics, and SRO units. As a result, wait times for inspection scheduling are significantly longer for these units than all other units, which Community Based Organizations currently have

the authority to inspect. By delegating authority to inspect these units to CBOs, the City can reduce inspection-related delays, speed housing placements, and reduce the workload of DSS staff.

Together, these solutions will help more people move out of shelter and into permanent homes more efficiently, and at a lower cost.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



Testimony before the New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026

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Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and the other members of the Committee on General Welfare. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the preliminary budget. My name is Shanaya Ramsey, I've been a New Yorker for over 40 years and am a mother to three children, and a special needs mom. I am also a member of the Anthos | Home Speakers Bureau – a program helping community members with lived experience of housing insecurity and homelessness to share their stories and advocate for change.

I am here today to speak about my housing journey, and advocate for change in the CityFHEPS process.

I lived in my apartment for over 14 years. It wasn't the best neighborhood, and there was a lot of uncertainty due to new management, but it was my home. During COVID, the bathroom ceiling began breaking apart. I called the super for help, but no one came. When the bathroom ceiling fell in, our apartment was deemed unsafe and that's when we entered the shelter system.

I found myself with \$17, two garbage bags, and three kids in front of NYC's Department of Homeless Services.

My son has special needs. I gave them my son's doctor's notes, which said we needed to stay in the Bronx for his medical care, but we were placed in a shelter in Brooklyn where I didn't know anyone. I reached out to the mayor for help, but no help came. By the grace of God, someone called me. I got transferred to a family shelter in the Bronx. I got sent back to DHS, and then I had to start the process all over in the Bronx. It was another nail-biting moment. I had to tell my kids not to unpack while we waited for certainty.

Over nine months, I lived in three different shelters. This whole time, I had a housing voucher. I had that voucher for years and couldn't find an apartment on my own. I was told by Homebase one time that they didn't want to hear my crocodile tears. My genuine tears were met without sympathy. I was told I was going to be out of the shelter within two months, since I already had my voucher.

I tried to make the best of it, until I was told I was going to get an ACS case because my kids couldn't go to school. That lit a fire in me. I looked for an apartment on my own. I spent hundreds of dollars on application fees and credit checks and had no apartment to show for it. Every day I was in the shelter, I asked myself, "Why am I still here?"

But then, a case worker at the shelter told me about Anthos|Home. They explained about the program, and I couldn't believe it. After so many months, I had completely given up, but then Anthos came to my rescue. I looked at an apartment with Anthos, and fell in love with the second apartment I saw. I thought to myself, "This is my home, and my children's home." I thought there would be a lot of competition, but that's not how the Anthos|Home program works. The apartments that I saw with Anthos were reserved for voucher holders – reducing the competition. Even then, I didn't believe it was real until I signed my lease. I didn't tell my daughters we were moving until moving day, because there had been so many times where it didn't work out.

The support didn't end at move-in day. Anthos|Home set my family up with essential furniture, like beds. We had a safe and comfortable place to sleep from day one. For the first year, a

housing support specialist checked-in with me every month to make sure that I knew my rights as a tenant, and that I could renew my voucher and lease on my own after the first year.

When people get their vouchers, they should be referred to Anthos|Home. It would prevent getting scammed, and prevent months of wasting time trying to navigate the system alone.

Anthos|Home is the glue filling gaps between valuable resources from the city, like housing vouchers, and homes. City agencies expect you to be calm through the process, but when your welfare is on the line it's hard. After the current system failed families so many times, people don't believe me when I tell them about a program like Anthos|Home.

Without a program like Anthos|Home or the work they do advocating for their participants, I believe I'd still be in a shelter, or somewhere I really wouldn't want to be. Even though CityFHEPS is an invaluable resource, many families like mine can't use it due to discrimination and bureaucracy. Families need additional support to navigate the housing process, as Anthos|Home's program model has demonstrated. Their extra support and advocacy makes all the difference.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.



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**TESTIMONY OF THE ARAB AMERICAN FAMILY SUPPORT CENTER BEFORE
THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE
March 17, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Reham Bader, and I am the Director of Community Health and Wellbeing at the Arab-American Family Support Center, known as AAFSC.

AAFSC serves roughly 20,000 New Yorkers each year, and our staff speaks more than 20 languages. Over 70 percent of our clients were born outside the United States, many from historically underserved communities. Our work centers on families by helping them stabilize during challenging times, maintain stability, and ultimately thrive.

Today, I would like to highlight the importance of the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program, or MCCAP, and the Access Health NYC initiative. Both programs are critical lifelines for New Yorkers navigating the complexity of the health care system, particularly low-income residents, immigrants, people of color, individuals with limited English proficiency, and those living with chronic health conditions.

Through MCCAP, community-based organizations help residents understand their health coverage options, resolve problems with health plans, appeal insurance denials, access prescription drugs and specialty care, and address cost-of-care challenges. For many families, this support is the difference between having meaningful access to care and going without the services they need.

Access Health NYC is a citywide initiative that funds 37 community-based organizations across all five boroughs to provide education, outreach, and direct assistance to New Yorkers seeking health coverage.

At AAFSC, we help immigrant and refugee families enroll in health insurance and SNAP to address urgent health and food security needs. Our team includes the only two Arabic-speaking certified health navigators in New York State, filling a critical linguistic gap in the health care system. As a result, our services are in extremely high demand. In 2025 alone, our team helped enroll 992 community members in SNAP and supported 3,320 clients in securing health insurance coverage.

This work is especially important in the current policy environment. Many of the families we serve are navigating frequent policy changes, confusing notices, and complex eligibility requirements. The confusion surrounding these rapid changes is profound. Families often receive notices they struggle to understand, particularly those with limited English proficiency. Misinformation spreads quickly within communities about who remains eligible and what documentation is required. Constant policy shifts create a moving target that even experienced navigators must work hard to track.

For immigrant families already navigating language barriers, cultural differences, and fears about immigration consequences, this complicated system can make accessing essential benefits nearly impossible without trusted, community-based support.

Programs like MCCAP and Access Health NYC ensure that New Yorkers are not left to navigate this system alone. By investing in community-based organizations with deep cultural and linguistic ties to the communities they serve, the City can ensure that all residents are able to access the health coverage and services they need to stay healthy.

To continue meeting the growing demand for these services, we respectfully request:

- Maintaining \$2 million in funding for the Managed Care Consumer Assistance Program, or MCCAP.
- Increasing funding for the Access Health NYC initiative to \$4.5 million.
- \$115,355 in Access Health NYC initiative funding for AAFSC.
- \$144,645 in MCCAP initiative funding for AAFSC.

These investments will ensure that trusted community-based organizations can continue providing critical health navigation and benefits enrollment support to the communities that need it most.

Thank you for your time and for your continued commitment to ensuring that all New Yorkers can access the health care and benefits they deserve.



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TESTIMONY OF:

**Anna Arkin-Gallagher, Associate Director
Civil Justice Practice**

BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES

Presented before

**The New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
Preliminary Budget Hearing**

March 17, 2026

My name is Anna Arkin-Gallagher. I am the Associate Director of the Civil Justice Practice at Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). BDS is a public defense office whose mission is to provide outstanding representation and advocacy free of cost to people facing loss of freedom, family separation and other serious legal harms by the government. For 30 years, BDS has worked, in and out of court, to protect and uphold the rights of individuals and to change laws and systems that perpetuate injustice and inequality. I thank the City Council Committee on General Welfare, and in particular Chair Hudson, for this opportunity to testify about our work and the importance of funding for indigent civil legal service providers in New York City.

We represent over 40,000 people each year across Brooklyn and now Queens who are accused of a crime, facing the removal of their children to the foster system, or challenging deportation. Our staff consists of specialized attorneys, social workers, investigators, paralegals and administrative staff who are experts in their individual fields. BDS also provides a wide range of additional services for our clients, including civil legal advocacy, assistance with educational needs of our clients or their children, housing and benefits advocacy, as well as immigration advice and representation.

Our Work

Tens of thousands of residents in Brooklyn and Queens, the vast majority of whom are low-income people of color, are affected by the criminal, family, and immigration legal systems each year. Involvement in these legal systems creates severe hardship for individuals, families and communities due to the disruption and instability that follows. A person's ability to maintain housing and employment can be disrupted by a criminal, ACS or immigration case and parents and children are often separated as a result of incarceration, removal to the foster system, or

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immigrant detention or deportation. Unfortunately, only a fraction of families can access the type of legal services that can address some of these collateral hardships. Traditional civil legal services often do not handle complex, interrelated cases that stem from criminal, family court and immigration matters.

BDS' Civil Justice Practice (CJP) was created with the goal of providing wraparound services that address the complex collateral legal issues that stem from criminal, family and immigration court involvement and assisting clients and families whose unique legal issues, caused or exacerbated by these systems, require specialized knowledge to address. Through legal advocacy in court and at various agencies, we assist people in remaining in their homes, maintaining their public benefits, staying in school, keeping their jobs, and protecting their consumer rights. In order to achieve these ends, we practice in almost all of New York City's courts at every level from trial to appeals.

The individuals and families we connect with through our assigned counsel practices are statistically more likely to have legal services needs than the general population. When these issues arise, our clients turn to BDS, a trusted advocate and resource, for help; but this need is outpacing capacity. Additional support for our civil justice program will allow us to serve people most in need of comprehensive legal assistance, while minimizing administrative costs and the likelihood of duplication of services. Working with a client base that is already pre-screened for financial eligibility, and already engaged with our office, means we can focus on helping our clients rather than outreach, screening, and intake; just as importantly, this model allows us to intervene when answers to today's legal questions can be preemptive solutions to tomorrow's legal problems.

Due to our unique approach, early intervention capability, and interdisciplinary expertise, our civil practice's modest funding has had an outsized impact by successfully preserving housing and jobs, facilitating access to benefits, and addressing education and employment issues that keep families together and strengthen communities for thousands of Brooklyn families. With the help of the City Council, we have assisted our clients in over 5,000 cases and issues in the past year in overcoming the countless barriers between vulnerable New Yorkers and the services they desperately need; resolving many problems before the need for full representation in court arises.

Rapid Response and Prevention of Filing

BDS' unique civil legal model means we are able to help the people we serve resolve issues, and obtain meaningful outcomes, weeks or months before an issue escalates to the level that would easily fit into a traditional legal services intake. As an example, we routinely avoid or address public benefits issues for families whose children are temporarily removed from their care; ensuring their budget for rental assistance and housing vouchers remains unaffected despite a temporary change in household size. Without our intervention, children are routinely removed from their parent's HRA budgets without notice resulting in rent not being paid and nonpayment proceedings being filed, often before the family is even made aware of the issue. In these cases, unpaid rent would continue to accumulate, often unbeknownst to the tenant, until a nonpayment

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proceeding is filed. From there, the family is forced to wait until they are in court to speak to a right to counsel provider who will not be familiar with common repercussions caused by foster system involvement.

While this client would be eligible for a right to counsel provider, or the case would be eligible for funding through our Anti-Harassment Tenant Protection (AHTP) contract if we were to begin representation only after a nonpayment case is filed, we are prioritizing resolving these issues preemptively and avoiding the need for more costly representation and litigation.

When litigation cannot be avoided, our expertise in representing clients with family policing system involvement allows us to provide superior representation and resolve these interdisciplinary issues a right to counsel provider may be unaware of. BDS' model allows timely provision of legal services to someone who would otherwise need to wait until they are in court to meet with an attorney, and hope that the right to counsel provider has the capacity to take their case, all while navigating protracted family court appearances and family separation.

We appreciate the Council's commitment to right to counsel and ensuring anyone facing eviction is provided with an attorney. We are not funded under the RTC model, and see our mission as providing parallel civil legal services to people with complex criminal, family, or immigration court involvement. With the Council's support, we are able to offer rapid response, early intervention, and legal representation to people with multi-system involvement.

Speaker's Initiative: Civil Justice Practice

We are grateful for the generous Speaker's Initiative funding to support our clients through the work of our civil justice practice, and we are requesting \$350,000 to continue this critical work.

Funding through the Speaker's Initiative is essential to our ability to focus on client needs and the most efficient time and manner for resolving a legal issue. As a result of this support, we have been able to expand our resources and find new ways to connect with clients and address needs we know are statistically likely to arise based on their contact with the criminal, family and immigration legal systems. Some highlights include:

- **Education Legal Services for Families with ACS Involvement:** Our Civil Justice Practice identified a particular need for education legal services for our Family Defense clients and their children. Recognizing the impact this assistance can have both directly on ensuring children receive the educational services to which they are entitled, but also on ensuring improved outcomes in Article 10 cases, we have been able to expand our civil legal services support to assist parents with pending and recently completed family court matters.

Attorneys provide an array of advocacy services to help our clients understand the special education process, obtain appropriate special education plans for their children, and initiate due process proceedings to secure appropriate prospective and compensatory relief. We also make sure that parents whose children have been placed in the foster system are able to exercise their rights to stay involved in their children's education.

Brooklyn ^(BDS) Defenders

- **Employment Legal Services:** Support from the Speaker's Initiative has allowed our Civil Justice Practice to expand employment representation to enforce our clients' right to work free from employment discrimination, to be paid justly for their work, and to access employment benefits such as paid and unpaid leave and unemployment insurance. We help secure employment prospects and mitigate loss of employment due to criminal cases, absences due to court appearances and other related consequences, and enforce our client's rights under New York City's Fair Chance Act when they have been discriminated against; providing accountability for employers violating the law and pursuing meaningful settlements for our clients.

For example, Ms. A had worked for many years as a home health aide when she was arrested for the first time. She was initially suspended from her home health aide position, because the employer erroneously believed they were required to suspend her. An employment attorney wrote an advocacy letter on Ms. A's behalf informing the employer of their responsibilities under the New York City Fair Chance Act, pointing out Ms. A's long and spotless employment history at the agency, and including letters in support and other mitigating information. Due to this advocacy, the employer lifted Ms. A's suspension, and she was able to continue earning an income to support her family while fighting her criminal case. Her criminal case was later dismissed. Without our intervention, the loss of income and potential long-term loss of employment could have had cascading impact on Ms. A and her family.

- **Affordable Housing and Relocation Assistance:** Our relocation assistance program, existing at the intersection of legal and social services, is another recent expansion. Created to meet an identified need of the people we represent, BDS employs an affordable housing specialist who provides support and relocation assistance to families seeking to use FHEPS, CityFHEPS, Section 8 and other vouchers and programs to access affordable housing; whether this need is necessitated by eviction proceedings, unsafe living situations identified through our criminal court representation, or court mandated change in living situation required through family court representation.

While our attorneys focus on eviction prevention, for some, the primary need is assistance finding affordable housing. There are thousands of New York City families with vouchers in hand still living in shelters, or being evicted, unable to navigate the program or a housing search on their own. BDS' affordable housing specialist works with clients to overcome many of the hurdles that make this process so difficult; we assist with onerous applications that require detailed information our clients do not always have access to, collaborate on strategy to increase the chance a client will get housing, and have developed connections and partnerships with housing providers and landlords to match clients to suitable vacancies.

Despite the success of our integrated civil legal services model, this work remains largely unfunded despite multiple efforts to expand our city and state contracts to allow us to provide civil representation to more of BDS' clients from our criminal, family and immigration practices.



Immigrant Opportunity Initiative: Legal Assistance for System-Involved Immigrants

BDS' Immigrant Community Action Project (ICAP) provides a broad range of immigration legal services and continuity of immigration representation to low-income individuals and families from across all five boroughs, including people who are current or former clients of BDS' public defense services and their families. Funding from the New York City Council allows BDS to provide essential legal services to immigrant clients and families facing unprecedented challenges as they navigate a complex and increasingly hostile immigration system, both through direct immigration remedies and by overcoming legal barriers that need to be resolved before immigration relief is possible.

Our ICAP attorneys, BIA-accredited representatives, social workers, and support staff represent people in non-detained removal proceedings and applications for immigration benefits, including family-based applications for lawful permanent status, fear-based applications, U & T visas, Special Juvenile Immigrant Status (SIJS), DACA renewal, deferred action for labor-based claims, employment authorization applications, and other immigration remedies. Our staff provides representation for affirmative applications such as green card renewals, petitions for other family members, citizenship, orders of supervision, and employment authorization applications.

ICAP staff specialize in complex immigration legal matters and meet immigrant clients' unique needs through interdisciplinary representation, social work services and community education. Responding to recent trends in immigration enforcement and shifting policies, we are providing more rapid response consultations and screenings as well as individualized risk assessments to clients and families justifiably concerned about any contact with current immigration systems. Drawing upon the expertise of BDS' criminal, family, and civil legal practice areas, ICAP staff are uniquely qualified to represent immigrants that find themselves at the intersection of immigration, criminal, family court, and other legal systems.

In addition to supporting clients in need of direct immigration remedies, ICAP social workers and advocates help clients navigate complicated systems to access essential benefits and services. Many of our clients are living with mental illness and struggle to find access to free or affordable mental health care. Immigrant New Yorkers are more likely to face employment discrimination and may lack requisite documentation to work, obtain public assistance benefits, or access shelter and stable affordable housing.

We ask that the Council support our IOI ask of \$200,000 to expand our ability to provide these essential services. This funding will allow BDS to provide essential legal services to immigrant clients pursuing direct immigration remedies and overcoming legal barriers that need to be resolved before immigration relief is possible.

¹ <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/01/30/deferred-action-immigrant-workers-work-permits-dhs/>



Conclusion

We are grateful to the New York City Council for its generous support of BDS and the clients we represent across Brooklyn and Queens. Our staff works diligently to protect the rights of the people in our communities every day, but the need for our services is more critical than ever. BDS' requested funding will ensure we can continue to provide quality legal services to New Yorkers facing dire consequences—incarceration, family separation, deportation, homelessness, school suspension and job termination. We thank the City Council for the opportunity to testify today and ask for your support of our Speaker's Initiative and Immigrant Opportunities Initiative requests in the FY27 budget.

If you have any questions or concerns, please reach out to Anya Mukarji-Connolly, Managing Director of Policy & Advocacy at amukarjiconnolly@bds.org.



**Testimony of Chelsea Rose
Policy & Advocacy Manager
Care For the Homeless**

**Provided to the New York City Council
General Welfare Committee
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026**

I would like to thank the General Welfare Committee Chair Hudson, and all committee members for the opportunity to submit testimony on the urgent need to strengthen and expand programs that facilitate pathways to permanent housing.

Care For the Homeless has over 40 years of experience providing medical and behavioral health services exclusively to people experiencing homelessness in New York City. We are a nationally recognized nonprofit that unites health care, shelter, and social services in one coordinated, innovative model of care. Through this integrated approach we deliver comprehensive, compassionate services that improve health outcomes and create pathways to stability. In addition to our direct service work, we advocate for policies that expand access to housing, health care, and supportive services ensuring that individual care and public policy work together to create lasting change for our city's most vulnerable neighbors.

Every day, our direct service providers see firsthand how deeply housing and health are intertwined. Stable housing is one of the most powerful interventions we have to improve health outcomes, support recovery from chronic illness, and allow individuals and families to rebuild stability in their lives.

For these reasons, Care For the Homeless strongly supports strengthening and expanding programs that facilitate pathways to permanent housing.

The Scale of the Housing and Homelessness Crisis

New York City continues to experience a severe homelessness crisis. On March 10, 2026, The Department of Homeless Services' daily census reports 85,129 people sleeping in the city's main shelter system, including 55,516 adults and 29,613 children.ⁱ Federal data tells a similar story. In the 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR), The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban

Development (HUD) identified New York as one of the states with the highest levels of homelessness in the country and noted that New York City continued to experience significant increases in unhoused populations.ⁱⁱ

At the same time, the demand for emergency shelter continues to increase with budget investments reaching record levels. As a shelter provider, we understand the need to invest in the emergency services needed to provide shelter for individuals and families. However, we also advocate for expanding the interventions that both prevent and end homelessness. When the city helps households avoid shelter entry or move more quickly into permanent housing, it reduces trauma, improves health and stability, and eases pressure on an already overburdened shelter system. Rental assistance programs like CityFHEPS are among the City's most important tools to accomplish both goals.

The Impact of CityFHEPS

CityFHEPS has become a critical pathway to housing for thousands of New Yorkers.

In Fiscal Year 2024 alone, approximately 13,400 households successfully leased apartments using a CityFHEPS voucher, and there are now roughly 52,000 households currently receiving assistance through the program.ⁱⁱⁱ City-funded rental programs account for a significant share of shelter exits. According to a NYC Comptroller Report from December 2025, more than half of families leaving shelter do so with the help of a rental voucher, most commonly CityFHEPS.^{iv}

These numbers underscore what providers and advocates have long known: housing vouchers are an important tool in providing stability to households. Research consistently shows that rental assistance is one of the most effective tools for helping people exit homelessness and remain stably housed. A national randomized study conducted by HUD found that families experiencing homelessness who received long-term vouchers were significantly more likely to remain stably housed compared with those who received only short-term assistance or no subsidy.^v

Data from New York City's Department of Homeless Services shows that clients who exit shelter with a rental subsidy have significantly lower rates of returning to shelter than those who leave without one. A review of housing placements found that more than one in five single adults who exited shelter without a subsidy returned to shelter within one year, while returns among households receiving rental subsidies were under 5 percent for single adults and under 1 percent for families with children.^{vi} Further, New York City's past experience further underscores the importance of rental assistance. After the state eliminated funding for the Advantage rental voucher in 2011, the city's shelter population rose by approximately 35 percent within two years.^{vii}

These findings highlight an important reality: when households leave shelter without a housing subsidy, they face a much higher risk of housing instability and returning to shelter. Expanding and strengthening rental assistance programs like CityFHEPS is therefore essential not only to help people exit homelessness, but to ensure that those exits are sustainable.

Recognizing the scale of the housing crisis, the City Council passed legislation to expand CityFHEPS eligibility and ensure more New Yorkers can access rental assistance before entering shelter.

This approach reflects an important shift in how we address homelessness. Instead of relying primarily on emergency shelter after a housing crisis has already occurred, expanding CityFHEPS allows the city to stabilize households earlier and prevent homelessness before it begins. Analyses from the New York City Comptroller's Office estimate that expanding rental assistance could help save significant resources over time by preventing shelter entry and reducing rehousing costs.^{viii}

As the City continues discussions about implementation of the expansion legislation, we urge the administration to ensure the program reaches the households who need it most.

Administrative Barriers in the Current Program

While CityFHEPS is an essential housing tool, providers continue to see administrative barriers that slow placements and sometimes cause individuals to lose housing opportunities. Our housing specialists work closely with clients navigating the CityFHEPS process. In a housing market as competitive as New York City's, even short administrative delays can mean losing an apartment and extending a client's stay in the shelter system.

New York State oversight findings have documented significant delays in the CityFHEPS process. A recent audit found that in sampled cases, households waited an average of nearly 10 months between receiving a shopping letter and successfully exiting shelter into permanent housing.^{ix} These delays highlight the need for operational improvements that allow the program to function more effectively.

Our housing specialists outlined the most common challenges below.

- Delays when vouchers require re-budgeting or updates
- Inconsistencies between CARES system data and voucher documentation
- Difficulty correcting errors on vouchers through HRA
- Slow response times on housing packets and inquiries
- Shopping letters not being automatically issued to eligible clients, including older adults

These issues are often administrative rather than policy-driven, but they can significantly slow the housing placement process. Improving the day-to-day functioning of the program would allow CityFHEPS to help even more households secure housing more quickly.

Recommendations to Strengthen the CityFHEPS Program

To ensure CityFHEPS operates as an effective tool to address homelessness, Care For the Homeless urges the City Council to pursue administrative improvements. Below are recommended improvements that reflect input from both the Homes Can't Wait Coalition and housing providers working directly with clients navigating the CityFHEPS program.

1. Improve Communication and Transparency: Applicants should receive timely and accurate notices at each stage of the CityFHEPS process, identifying any required documentation or actions needed to move forward.
2. Increase HRA Staffing to Expedite Processing of CityFHEPS Applications and Respond to Inquiries from Community Based Partners and Voucher Holders: Providers across the city report that HRA responses are often delayed by one to two months. These delays slow application processing and significantly increase the likelihood that households will lose available housing opportunities.
3. Allow Legal Service Providers to Submit Applications: Legal services organizations should be able to submit CityFHEPS applications and stay requests directly to HRA to prevent unnecessary evictions.
4. Improve Payment Systems: Transition voucher payments to direct deposit or electronic payment systems similar to Section 8, which would streamline payments to landlords.
5. Automate Voucher Updates: Automatically regenerate shopping letters when re-budgets are submitted through HOME so that voucher amounts remain accurate without requiring lengthy processing delays.
6. Improve System Integration Between CARES and Shopping Letters: Ensure that income and household information entered into CARES automatically updates CityFHEPS shopping letters. Real-time system integration is needed, so vouchers consistently reflect current client data without requiring multiple interventions.
7. Automatically Issue Vouchers to Eligible Older Adults: Ensure individuals aged 60 and older receiving Public Assistance automatically receive CityFHEPS shopping letters as required by policy.
8. Create a Clear and Standardized Voucher Correction Process at HRA: Establish a clear and consistent process within HRA for correcting voucher errors and resolving documentation issues. A dedicated CITYFHEPS support unit would improve efficiency and accountability.

Address Source of Income Discrimination

Another major obstacle to obtaining permanent housing is source of income (SOI) discrimination (discrimination based on how a person's rent is paid such as cash, voucher, etc). SOI discrimination takes many forms, from the blatantly illegal "no vouchers accepted," to more pernicious and subtle forms of discrimination, such as minimum income and credit score requirements. Regardless of the tactic, all SOI discrimination keeps people unstably housed and prevents people from finding desperately needed stable housing.

We urge the members of the General Welfare Committee as well as the City Council to support The MOVE Act that includes a packet of six bills designed to disincentivize SOI discrimination.

The bills are the following:

- Intro 266: Bans credit checks and minimum income requirements for voucher holders.
- Intro 265: Increases fines for discrimination in housing.
- Intro 268: Adds SOI to the Certificate of No Harassment Program.
- Intro 269: Publicly lists SOI discrimination findings.
- Intro 267: Creates standards for transparency in tenant screening criteria.
- Intro 264: Increases fines for violations of the New York City Commission on Human Rights orders.

Conclusion

New York City is facing an unprecedented housing crisis, and the scale of the challenge requires bold and effective solutions. CityFHEPS is one of the most powerful tools the city has to help individuals and families move from shelter into stable housing and to prevent homelessness before it occurs.

By implementing the CityFHEPS expansion and addressing the administrative barriers that providers and clients face every day, the City can ensure this program functions as the effective housing solution it was designed to be.

At the same time, fighting source of income discrimination is an essential policy consideration to ensure that voucher holders can fully access the rental market without encountering arbitrary and discriminatory barriers.

If you have any questions, please reach out to Nathalie Interiano, ninteriano@cfhnyc.org

Notes

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- ⁱ New York City Department of Homeless Services. (2026, March 13). *Daily report: DHS shelter census*. New York City Department of Social Services.
- ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2024, December). *The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report (AHAR) to Congress: Part 1—Point-in-time estimates of homelessness*.
- ⁱⁱⁱ New York City Council Committee on General Welfare. (2025, January 27). *Statistics on CityFHEPS voucher usage for permanent housing. City Meetings NYC*.
- ^{iv} Office of the New York City Comptroller. (2025, December 15). *Annual state of the city's economy and finances 2025*.
- ^v U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Office of Policy Development and Research. (n.d.). *The Family Options Study*.
- ^{vi} Office of the New York City Comptroller. (2023, August 17). *Review of the New York City Department of Homeless Services' programs and services* (Report No. MD22-105S).
- ^{vii} Chadha, J. (2025, June 23). *Spike in homelessness followed Cuomo's move to cut off voucher funds as governor*. Politico.
- ^{viii} Office of the New York City Comptroller. (2025, December 15). *Annual state of the city's economy and finances 2025*.
- ^{ix} Office of the New York State Comptroller, Division of State Government Accountability. (2024, October 30). *Administration of the CityFHEPS program for Department of Homeless Services shelter residents (Audit Report 2023-N-1)*.

CATHOLIC COMMUNITY RELATIONS COUNCIL

191 Joralemon Street, 2nd Floor, Brooklyn, NY 11201

**Testimony of Joseph Rosenberg, Executive Director
Catholic Community Relations Council
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
March 17, 2026**

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson, and members of the Committee on General Welfare. I am Joseph Rosenberg, the Executive Director of Catholic Community Relations Council (“CCRC”) representing the Archdiocese of New York and the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens on local legislative and policy issues.

One of the major challenges our City faces is feeding the rapidly increasing number of hungry New Yorkers. We thank the Council for recognizing this growing crisis and in creating the \$15 million “Feeding Our Communities” program in FY’26. This funding is appreciated and essential, but additional money is desperately needed. We therefore request that the program’s budget be increased to \$25 million for FY’27 with \$2 million each allocated to our coalition of 4 nonprofit human service providers – Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of NY, Catholic Charities of the Diocese of Brooklyn and Queens, the Met Council on Jewish Poverty, and the Hispanic Federation.

Community Food Connection is another valuable program that assists over 700 food pantries City wide, and we urge it to be baselined in the FY’27 budget in the amount of \$100 million.

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York and Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens have been providing shelter, food, and other essential services to New Yorkers for more than one century. Combined, we operate over 80 food pantries throughout the 5 boroughs and serve more than 18 million meals annually. We have faced many challenges assisting New Yorkers over the last 100 years, but we are currently confronting a hunger and food insufficiency crisis. This is due to the rising poverty rate of New Yorkers, the dramatic increase in rents, the large percentage of households who are rent burdened and paying over 50% of their income on rent, and even more significantly, the unprecedented and continuing federal attacks on programs that protect our clients. Two of these are the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP).

SNAP provides essential funding to address food insecurity for vulnerable Americans. The Congressional reduction of \$186 billion from the program contained in last summer’s budget bill is particularly troubling and will have significant consequences by increasing the number of Americans facing hunger on a daily basis. Not only does this make it more difficult for households to meet their basic food needs, but it would also lead to broader economic and health challenges, such as an increase in medical issues and hospitalizations. A similar situation exists with the Emergency Food and Shelter Program (EFSP), a crucial federal food resource. This program was placed on “hold” by the federal government in 2025 and was ultimately terminated. As a result, both Catholic Charities have sustained a funding loss of over \$900,000 each, a challenging blow to our ability to supply our food pantries and feed our clients. In short, the financial resources of all nonprofit human service providers who provide food to New Yorkers are becoming increasingly strained at a time when the number of hungry residents continues to climb.

We have seen the number of people at food pantries increase significantly. We are not just feeding more working families, seniors, and children. Recent clients include college students, recent college graduates who are either unemployed or underemployed, youth aging out of foster care and new migrants, many of them with infants.

New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli's April 2025 report on the cost of living reveals that one of nine households in New York are affected by food insecurity. This is defined as "the inability at times to acquire adequate food for one or more household members due to a lack of resources." That adds up to over 1.3 million NYC residents going hungry.

Our City faces daunting challenges but one of the most important priorities for all of us is to ensure that New Yorkers do not go hungry. We therefore call for the City Council to increase the Feeding our Communities program funding to \$25 million with \$8 million being allocated to our coalition of four nonprofit providers who serve millions of meals to hungry New Yorkers annually, and in baselining the Community Food Connection program in the amount of \$100 million.

Thank you.



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innovatingjustice.org

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The **Center for Justice Innovation** is a non-profit organization that seeks to transform the policies and practices of the justice system to make it fair, effective, and humane. The Center operates the following sites throughout New York City.

- Family
- Criminal
- Community Development
- Civil/Housing

Click on the name of any program to learn more.

STATEN ISLAND

1. Staten Island Justice Center

MANHATTAN

2. Harlem Community Justice Center
3. Headquarters
4. Manhattan Justice Opportunities
5. Midtown Community Court

MULTI-BOROUGH

6. Legal Hand (Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens)

BRONX

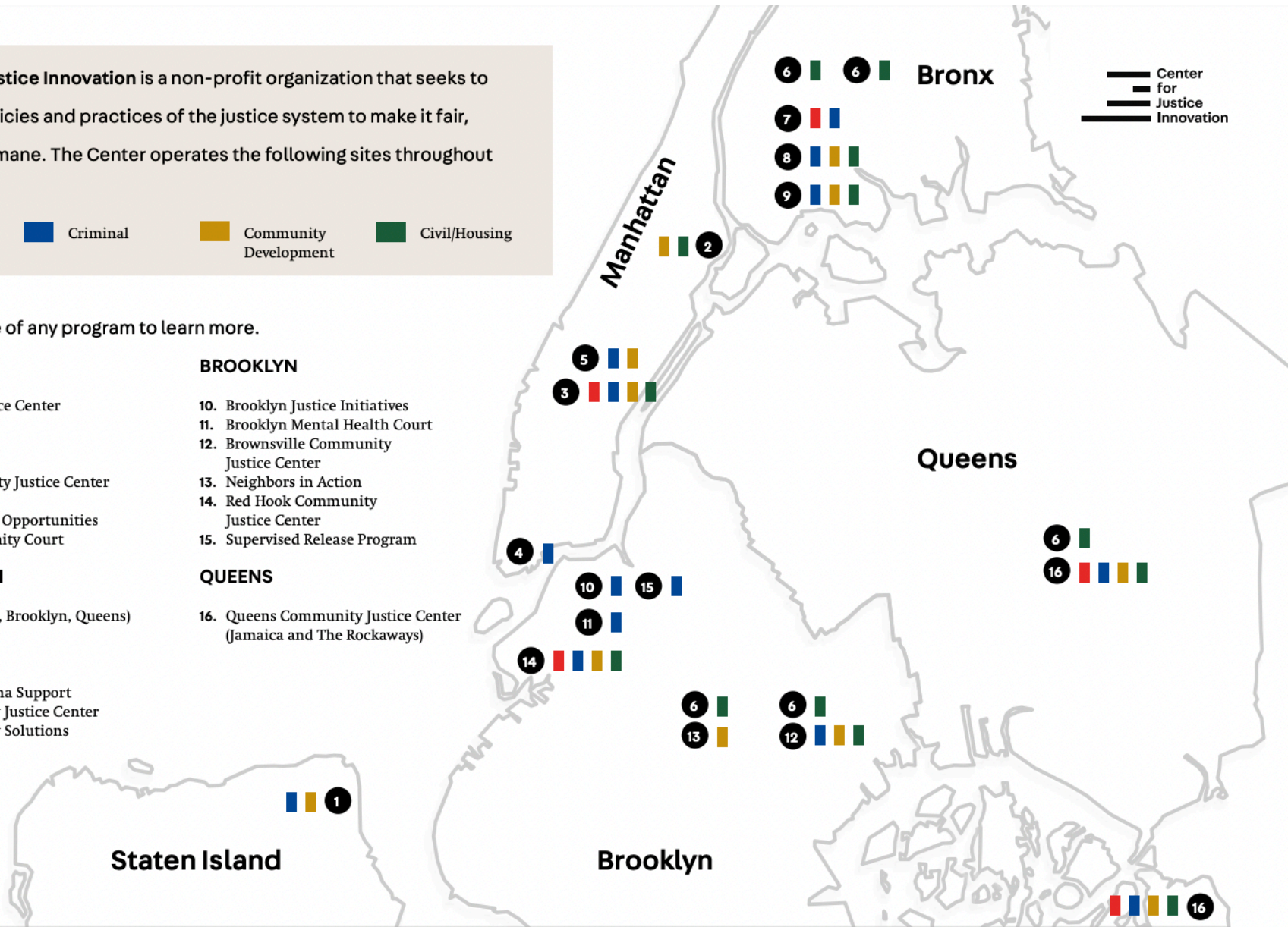
7. Bronx Child Trauma Support
8. Bronx Community Justice Center
9. Bronx Community Solutions

BROOKLYN

10. Brooklyn Justice Initiatives
11. Brooklyn Mental Health Court
12. Brownsville Community Justice Center
13. Neighbors in Action
14. Red Hook Community Justice Center
15. Supervised Release Program

QUEENS

16. Queens Community Justice Center (Jamaica and The Rockaways)



Citywide

- Access to Justice
- Alternatives to Incarceration
- Driver Accountability Program
- Gender and Family Justice
- Neighborhood Safety Initiatives
- Parent Support Program
- Project Reset
- Restorative Justice Practices
- RISE Project
- Strong Starts Court Initiative
- Youth Action Institute
- Youth Impact

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**Center for Justice Innovation
New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
March 17, 2026**

Good morning Chair Hudson and esteemed members of the Committee on General Welfare. My name is Hailey Nolasco, and I serve as the Senior Director of Government Relations at the Center for Justice Innovation (the Center). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

As New York City confronts significant fiscal challenges, including rising costs across shelter systems, social services, and other mandated programs, it is increasingly important that the City invest in strategies that help New Yorkers resolve problems earlier—before they escalate into crises that place greater strain on public systems. The Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget reflects how much of the City’s spending is now dedicated to responding to urgent needs after they occur. To manage these pressures effectively, the City must also sustain investments in programs that stabilize individuals and families upstream, preventing homelessness and costly involvement with emergency services or the justice system.

Today, I would like to highlight several programs that advance these goals and request the Council’s continued support to sustain and expand their impact.

Community Justice Centers

The Center for Justice Innovation’s Community Justice Centers, including the Harlem, Midtown, and Red Hook Community Justice Centers discussed in more detail below, reflect a model of problem-solving justice that recognizes that public safety challenges are often tied to unmet social and economic needs. Operating across all five boroughs, these community-based centers provide wraparound services such as housing support, mental health and substance use services, workforce development, youth programming, and connections to benefits and other community-based resources alongside court and legal assistance. By helping people address the underlying challenges that may bring them into contact with the justice system and connecting them to services before issues deepen, Community Justice Centers promote stability, strengthen communities, and increase public safety.

Harlem Community Justice Center: Housing Resource Center

The Harlem Community Justice Center’s Housing Help Center provides critical housing stabilization services to residents of East and Central Harlem, helping individuals and families resolve housing issues, prevent eviction, and maintain safe and affordable homes. Since opening

in 2000, the Justice Center has worked to advance fairness and equity in housing, community health, and access to justice for Harlem residents.

The Housing Help Center assists tenants facing eviction, unsafe housing conditions, or housing-related legal challenges by helping them navigate Housing Court processes, prepare and file court documents, and access rental assistance, legal counsel, and supportive services. In 2025, the Help Center recorded nearly 3,000 visits and served 893 unique individuals and families, including many who accessed the court system through the Virtual Court Access Network (VCAN) to participate in hearings remotely.

A central focus of the program is maintaining housing affordability, particularly for residents of New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments. In 2025, the Help Center helped 361 NYCHA residents complete required lease recertifications, ensuring accurate rent calculations and preventing arrears or lease violations that could lead to eviction. The program also offers financial empowerment workshops to help residents build budgeting, credit, and savings skills that support long-term housing stability.

The Help Center also works to ensure safe and habitable housing conditions. Staff assist tenants experiencing hazardous repair issues such as mold, lead hazards, and other unsafe living conditions by coordinating with landlords, property managers, and repair professionals. When necessary, the program helps tenants file Housing Part (HP) actions in court to compel landlords to correct violations. In 2025, the Help Center supported 101 households in filing HP actions and assisted hundreds more by advocating for repairs and resolving housing conditions before they escalated.

Eviction prevention is another key component of the program's work. The Help Center supports tenants facing rent arrears by helping them file responses in Housing Court, access emergency rental assistance, and get connected to legal services. In 2025, the program assisted 125 households responding to eviction cases through VCAN and helped 151 households apply for HRA One-Shot Deal emergency rental assistance to prevent displacement.

The program also prioritizes services for vulnerable populations, including community elders, people with disabilities, and residents facing language barriers. In 2025, 426 older adults visited the Help Center, with staff providing home visits, assistance with repair requests and reasonable accommodations, and referrals to services such as Meals-on-Wheels and Adult Protective Services. The program also helps residents access virtual court proceedings, reducing barriers for those with mobility limitations or caregiving responsibilities.

With continued City Council funding, the Housing Help Center will expand outreach and services to underserved Harlem residents, strengthen eviction prevention efforts, increase access to virtual court tools, and host tenant education workshops in partnership with local organizations. These investments will help more households maintain safe, stable housing while ensuring equitable access to justice and housing resources in Upper Manhattan.

Midtown Community Justice Center: Community First

The Midtown Community Justice Center's Community First program serves community members experiencing varying levels of housing insecurity and homelessness in the Times Square area. The program also serves participants facing housing insecurity from across the Midtown Community Justice Center's programs, including the Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court, Emerging Adult Court, Arraignment Part (AP6), and Project Reset. While New York City is service-rich, the field often operates in silos, creating a disjointed system of care for the most vulnerable populations. Often, those who need support live under the radar until a

moment of crisis like an arrest or an emergency room visit forces a response. As a pre-crisis intervention, Community First seeks to facilitate continuity of destigmatizing and client-centered care for some of the city's most disconnected residents through mobile case management, street outreach, and assistance for court-involved and diversion participants.

Community First's Community Navigators share lived experience with participants, offering peer support to help clients achieve self-identified goals such as obtaining transitional or permanent housing, substance use treatment, mental and physical health care, identification, financial benefits, employment, and legal assistance. The model differs from existing street outreach initiatives by focusing on building trusting relationships and meeting community members "where they're at" before making linkages to longer-term services provided by community-based organizations in the Midtown Community Justice Center's network. The time spent building trust with community members in need results in those individuals confidently engaging in critical services with greater chances for long-term success. Since launching in 2021, the Community Navigator team has engaged 1,649 individuals in more than 5,064 interactions through the end of 2025.¹ With continued City Council support, Midtown Community Justice Center will seek to expand Community First to partner with the NYPD, and the City's new Department of Community Safety, to provide an alternative response to quality-of-life concerns in Midtown.

Community Justice Connect

Community Justice Connect works to close the civil justice gap by providing free legal information, resources, and referrals to New Yorkers who do not have access to legal representation. Rather than waiting until a legal crisis reaches the courts, the program trains community volunteers to proactively help their neighbors understand civil legal issues, navigate forms and processes, and connect to legal services when needed.

Community Justice Connect currently operates out of storefront sites in Crown Heights, the South Bronx, and Jamaica, Queens; but it will soon co-locate within our Community Justice Centers for enhanced accessibility. Last year, Community Justice Connect saw more than 4,200 visits, trained 122 volunteers, and hosted 215 workshops on topics such as housing, public benefits, and consumer protections.² Housing issues are among the most common concerns, with volunteers helping residents understand housing court processes, address repairs, and preserve stable housing.

City Council funding will support continued volunteer training and enrichment across all three sites, including legal education, professional development workshops, and career readiness support. These investments will strengthen volunteers' ability to provide high-quality assistance to their communities while also building their own skills and employment opportunities. By expanding access to trusted legal information and community-based support, Community Justice Connect helps New Yorkers resolve problems earlier, strengthens community capacity, and prevents civil legal issues from becoming destabilizing crises.

Strong Starts Court Initiative

¹ Center for Justice Innovation. (2026). Justice Center Application database. [Data file].

² Center for Justice Innovation. (2026). Justice Center Application and Reset referral database. [Data file].

The Strong Starts Court Initiative is informed by the same principles that motivate the Center’s housing justice work. The courts system, whether civil, criminal, or family, can often feel confusing and inaccessible. At the Center, we work to make proceedings more transparent and approachable. This gives participants a greater sense of involvement, autonomy, and ownership over the outcomes. Housing stability also plays a crucial role in Family Court proceedings. Poor housing conditions can be the basis of a child welfare complaint. Once in court, housing instability can have a significant impact on custody outcomes. Responding to the overlapping needs present in Housing and Family Court, the Center developed the Strong Starts Court Initiative.

The Strong Starts Court Initiative is a Family Court-based program that provides specialized, two-generational support to infants, toddlers, and their families involved in child protection proceedings. Serving children from birth to age three—the most critical period of early development—the initiative works with families whose cases are before the New York City Family Court following allegations of abuse or neglect filed by the Administration for Children’s Services.

Strong Starts addresses a significant gap within the child welfare system by integrating expertise in infant development and infant mental health directly into court processes. Through comprehensive clinical assessments, ongoing consultation, and coordinated service planning, the program helps judges, attorneys, and caseworkers make developmentally informed decisions that promote safe parenting, strengthen caregiver-child relationships, and reduce harmful disruptions such as placement instability or prolonged separation.

First piloted in the Bronx in 2015 and now operating across all five boroughs and additional counties, Strong Starts connects families to high-quality, targeted services while fostering collaboration among courts, child welfare agencies, and providers. Evaluations of the program have demonstrated an increased rate of family preservation, greater efficiency in case resolution, enhanced family well-being, and a reduced likelihood of future abuse or neglect petitions.³ In addition, Strong Starts strengthens systemwide practice by training legal professionals in early childhood development, extending its impact beyond participating families. City Council funding will allow the Strong Starts Court Initiative to reach more families, strengthen early intervention, and improve outcomes for some of the City’s most vulnerable children during a critical period of development.

Conclusion

The programs highlighted today share a common goal: helping New Yorkers access services, stabilize their lives, and resolve challenges before they escalate into crises that require far more intensive and costly responses. Whether by expanding access to civil legal information, preventing eviction, supporting young families involved in the child welfare system, or connecting people experiencing housing insecurity to services before an arrest or emergency room visit occurs, these initiatives strengthen community stability while helping the City manage growing social service demands.

At a time when the City is working to address significant fiscal pressures, investments in prevention, housing stability, and community-based support represent a practical and

³ Sharlein, J. (2021, August). Helping the Youngest Start Life Strong: A Mixed Methods Evaluation of the Strong Starts Court Initiative. https://www.innovatingjustice.org/sites/default/files/media/document/2021/SSCI_eval_full_report_FINAL4.pdf

cost-effective strategy. By sustaining funding for these programs, the Council can help ensure that New Yorkers receive the support they need earlier, reducing reliance on emergency systems while promoting long-term well-being for individuals, families, and communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify and for your continued partnership in strengthening services that help New Yorkers remain safely housed, connected to care, and supported in their communities.



520 Eighth Avenue
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Courtney Bryan, Chief Executive Officer

innovatingjustice.org

Center for Justice Innovation FY27 Proposals

- **#2156900 - Center for Justice Innovation General Funds - \$750,000**

Innovative Criminal Justice Programs (Renewal); Speaker's Initiative

Description: This is an application to support the continuation of the Center for Justice Innovation's innovative criminal justice responses, community-based public safety initiatives, and access to justice programs across all five boroughs in New York City. City Council's support allows us to serve tens of thousands of New Yorkers with mental health services, family development, youth empowerment, workforce development, and housing, legal, and employment resource services. Our goal continues to be improving safety, reducing incarceration, expanding access to community resources, and enhancing public trust in government to make New York City stronger, fairer, and safer for all. With expanded funding, the Center will be able to make deeper investments in housing justice: a key priority area that underpins our efforts at large to build community justice.

#2239645 - Harlem Housing Help Center - \$50,000

Community Housing Preservation Strategies (New)

Description: The Harlem Community Justice Center's Housing Help Center seeks funding from the Community Housing Preservation Strategies Initiative to empower tenants of Central and East Harlem to obtain critical home repairs, preserve affordability, prevent evictions, and find justice and fair treatment in housing court.

#2239906 - Community Justice Connect Crown Heights - \$20,000

Member Item (New)

Description: Community Justice Connect (formerly known as Legal Hand) aims to narrow the civil justice gap by offering legal information and resources to Crown Heights residents who do not have access to legal representation, or who are facing civil issues that have not yet escalated into crises that require court intervention. Community Justice Connect uses a model in which volunteers, including students and retired professionals,

who primarily reside in Crown Heights, receive in-depth training, resources, and ongoing support from on-site managers, associates, and an attorney. This empowers them to provide their neighbors with free access to legal information and assistance. City Council funding will allow Community Justice Connect to continue and broaden its volunteer enrichment opportunities, providing professional skill development workshops, training sessions, and access to tailored resources to its volunteers, thereby fostering a stronger community justice network.

- **#2197911 - Community Justice Connect Queens - \$20,000**

Member Item (New)

Description: Community Justice Connect (formerly known as Legal Hand) aims to narrow the civil justice gap by offering legal information and resources to Queens residents who do not have access to legal representation, or who are facing civil issues that have not yet escalated into crises that require court intervention. Community Justice Connect uses a model in which volunteers, including students and retired professionals, who primarily reside in Queens, receive in-depth training, resources, and ongoing support from on-site managers, associates, and an attorney. This empowers them to provide their neighbors with free access to legal information and assistance. City Council funding will allow Community Justice Connect to continue and broaden its volunteer enrichment opportunities, providing professional skill development workshops, training sessions, and access to tailored resources to its volunteers, thereby fostering a stronger community justice network.

- **#2243502 - Community Justice Connect Bronx - \$20,000**

Member Item (New)

Description: Community Justice Connect (formerly known as Legal Hand) aims to narrow the civil justice gap by offering legal information and resources to Bronx residents who do not have access to legal representation, or who are facing civil issues that have not yet escalated into crises that require court intervention. Community Justice Connect uses a model in which volunteers, including students and retired professionals, who primarily reside in the South Bronx, receive in-depth training, resources, and ongoing support from on-site managers, associates, and an attorney. This empowers them to provide their neighbors with free access to legal information and assistance. City Council funding will allow Community Justice Connect to implement a Volunteer Enrichment Program at its Bronx site, providing professional skill development workshops, training sessions, and access to tailored resources to its volunteers, thereby fostering a stronger community justice network.

- **#2246404 - Strong Starts Court Initiative - \$100,000**

Children Under Five (New)

Description: The Center for Justice Innovation seeks funding to build the capacity of the successful Strong Starts Court Initiative to meet the needs of infants, toddlers, and their families throughout New York City and help build a sustainable program not entirely dependent on private foundation support. The Strong Starts Court Initiative is a Family-Court-based project; it employs a two-generational approach to provide specialized supports for infants, toddlers and their families who have child protection cases, and it works to educate court-based professionals in an approach focused on early child development that will transform the traditional family court response to this extremely vulnerable population.

- **#2243623 - Community First - \$60,000**

Community Safety and Victim Services (Renewal)

Description: This funding would ensure continuity of Midtown Community Justice Center's (MCJC's) Community First program, which serves community members experiencing varying levels of housing insecurity and homelessness in the Times Square area. The program likewise serves housing insecure participants from across MCJC's programs, including the Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court, Emerging Adult Court, Community Court, and Project Reset. While New York City is service-rich, the field often operates in silos, creating a disjointed system of care for the most vulnerable populations. Often, those who need support exist under the radar until a moment of crisis like an arrest or an emergency room visit forces a response. As a pre-crisis intervention, Community First seeks to facilitate continuity of destigmatizing and client-centered care for some of the city's most disconnected residents through mobile case management, street outreach, and assistance for court-involved and diversion participants. Community First's Community Navigators share lived experience with participants, offering peer support to help clients achieve participant-identified goals such as obtaining transitional and permanent housing, substance use treatment, mental and physical health care, identification, financial benefits, employment, and legal assistance. MCJC requests funding to support the Community First program through City Council's Community Safety and Victim Services Initiative.

- **#2243711 - Community Justice - \$19,000**

Boroughwide Needs (Renewal)

Description: The Midtown Community Justice Center (MCJC) is seeking support for its Community Justice Initiative from the City Council Manhattan Borough Delegation. The project will consist of three main components that will address identified needs and have lasting impact on the community and its residents: 1) Coalition Building; 2) Community Events & Outreach; and 3) Streamlined Case Management Services. Support from the Manhattan Borough Delegation will allow MCJC to bolster and expand operations of initiatives launched in response to community needs such as the Youth Advisory Board. Support from the Manhattan Borough Delegation will ultimately allow MCJC to extend its impact beyond our physical building to provide supports to residents on the ground in communities across Manhattan and foster formal feedback loops from community members regardless of justice system involvement. The Community Justice Initiative allows MCJC to offer services to people in our local communities outside of the courtroom and criminal justice system, and act as a trusted partner and convener in neighborhood enhancement efforts.

- **#2243746 - Community First - \$40,000**

Speaker's Initiative (New)

Description: This funding would ensure continuity of Midtown Community Justice Center's (MCJC's) Community First program, which serves community members experiencing varying levels of housing insecurity and homelessness in the Times Square area. The program likewise serves housing insecure participants from across MCJC's programs, including the Manhattan Misdemeanor Mental Health Court, Emerging Adult Court, Arraignment Part (AP6), and Project Reset. While New York City is service-rich, the field often operates in silos, creating a disjointed system of care for the most vulnerable populations. Often, those who need support exist under the radar until a moment of crisis like an arrest or an emergency room visit forces a response. As a pre-crisis intervention, Community First seeks to facilitate continuity of destigmatizing and client-centered care for some of the city's most disconnected residents through mobile case management, street outreach, and assistance for court-involved and diversion participants. Community First's Community Navigators share lived experience with participants, offering peer support to help clients achieve participant-identified goals such as obtaining transitional and permanent housing, substance use treatment, mental and physical health care, identification, financial benefits, employment, and legal assistance. MCJC requests funding to support the Community First program through City Council's Speaker's Initiative. In FY27, MCJC will seek to expand Community First to partner with the NYPD, and the City's new Department of Community Safety to provide an alternative response to quality-of-life concerns in Midtown.



DARCEL D. CLARK

THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
BRONX COUNTY

March 9, 2026

Speaker Julie Menin
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Menin and Members of City Council:

On behalf of the Bronx District Attorney's Office, I am pleased to write this letter in support of key Center for Justice Innovation (formerly, Center for Court Innovation) FY27 City Council Applications. Funding will expand:

- pre-arraignment early diversion options;
- mental health supports;
- restorative justice programming;
- human trafficking survivor leadership initiatives at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence; and
- innovative pilot programs that address pressing needs in communities within the Bronx.

These programs will enable the Bronx to move towards our shared vision of reducing unnecessary and harmful involvement in the legal system wherever possible and allow us to build public safety through sustainable community-driven solutions.

For the past several years, the City Council has supported the Bronx with **\$710,000** to invest in early system diversion, which includes **Project Reset**, the Center's citywide pre-arraignment diversion model and same day at arraignments programming that re-directs New Yorkers with misdemeanor arrests from the court system. Project Reset Bronx includes borough-wide restorative justice circles to aid in diversion. This has offered relief from the collateral consequence's participants might otherwise experience if arraigned for low-level crimes. We support the Center in continuing to partner with the Council to implement the next generation of early system diversions for the Bronx to continue to lead the City in scaled restorative justice-based interventions. In 2025, Bronx Assist was launched, a promising pre-arraignment diversion program for certain Desk Appearance Ticket (DAT) arrests which is being piloted in the 44th Precinct with support from a two-year federal grant. CJI has demonstrated a willingness to partner on this project and has shown a willingness to see it succeed.

Thanks to meaningful changes in the treatment of trafficking victims in the justice system, the Center's **Bronx Human Trafficking Intervention Court (HTIC)** referrals continue to decline. **Project Healing and Empowerment through Advocacy and Leadership** (Project

HEAL) is a survivor leadership and peer support initiative for human trafficking survivors. Additionally, we support the Center's RISE Project which is used in Family Court and provides community-based intimate partner violence prevention services in communities most impacted by gun violence.

Since 2010, **Bronx Community Solutions (BCS)** has assisted all individuals ordered by court mandate to complete a screening and assessment, DWI treatment, and enrollment in the **Driver Accountability Program**. This initiative began at the request of the judiciary, who noted that participants were having difficulty navigating the complicated network of private providers of these statutorily mandated services.

Finally, we support continuation of the Center's **Innovative Core Funding** which addresses the immediate needs of all borough residents by piloting novel and effective approaches to anti-gun violence, victim services, and mental health services with diversion.

The Center has a long and documented history of conducting original research and operating direct service programs in the Bronx. Their mission to promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities aligns with my Office's vision. Together we can reimagine a fairer and more holistic approach to justice. We can do this by reducing incarceration as well as by building substantial and meaningful community-based support. I encourage the City Council to consider funding each of the Center's programs which will ultimately enhance fairness, accountability, and safety for the people of the Bronx.

Sincerely,



Darcel Clark



OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY
RICHMOND COUNTY

MICHAEL E. MCMAHON
DISTRICT ATTORNEY

March 3, 2026

Speaker Julie Menin
New York City Council
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Re: Support for Center for Justice Innovation Fiscal Year 2027 Initiatives

Dear Speaker Menin and Members of the New York City Council:

I am pleased to offer my strong support for the Center for Justice Innovation's Fiscal Year 2027 funding request to expand alternatives to incarceration, provide enhanced mental health supports, develop early diversion programming at the intersection of intimate partner violence and gun violence, strengthen restorative reentry options for individuals and their families, expand pre-court eviction prevention initiatives, and pilot innovative programs that address pressing community needs across New York City. These initiatives represent thoughtful, evidence-based approaches that reduce unnecessary and harmful involvement in the justice system while advancing public safety through sustainable, community-driven solutions.

The Center for Justice Innovation has a long and well-documented history of conducting original research and implementing direct service programs that promote equality, dignity, and respect in communities across New York City, including Staten Island. These values closely align with the vision of the Richmond County District Attorney's Office. My office has proudly partnered with the Center in the development of the Staten Island Community Justice Center, an initiative designed to reduce crime and incarceration, strengthen community trust in the justice system, and promote safer, more equitable neighborhoods through community-driven public safety strategies, youth opportunity, and economic mobility initiatives.

To maintain existing operations while expanding programming, Justice Center staff will dedicate time and expertise to developing new initiatives, including designing data collection and evaluation strategies to measure program effectiveness and ensure accountability. Through this partnership, we continue to reimagine a more holistic and equitable approach to justice—one that emphasizes prevention, diversion, and meaningful community-based support alongside traditional court responses. Investment in the initiatives outlined above will allow this work to continue and expand its impact in Staten Island and throughout the city.

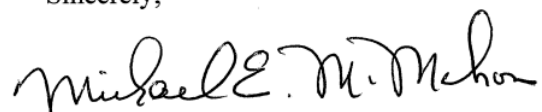
I also urge the Council to support **Youth Impact Staten Island**. Formerly known as Youth Court, Youth Impact is a dynamic youth leadership development program focused on peer mentorship, violence prevention, and restorative practices. The program works to keep young people engaged in school and out of the criminal legal system while fostering a youth-centered approach to community safety and healing. Through structured in-school partnerships and civic engagement opportunities, participants gain valuable skills in oral and written communication, facilitation, conflict resolution, and research. They also learn about the structure and impact of the justice system and receive training in community planning and organizing, empowering them to become leaders and advocates within their communities.

Continued investment is also critical to addressing the mental health needs of court-involved and at-risk youth. Individuals experiencing persistent and untreated mental illness must have access to culturally competent, trauma-informed mental health care. To address existing gaps in services for Staten Island youth, I urge the Council to continue and expand support for the Staten Island Justice Center's **Youth Wellness Initiative**. This program provides vital mental health services that promote healing and stability for young people involved in, or at risk of entering, the justice system. Importantly, the initiative also provides holistic support to families by offering resources and guidance to parents and caregivers of participating youth.

Finally, I support the continuation and expansion of the Center's **Driver Accountability Program**, which offers a constructive and restorative response to dangerous driving offenses. This program seeks to meaningfully change risky driving behavior among individuals charged with driving-related offenses in criminal court while promoting greater accountability and safer streets for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your consideration of this request as the Council makes important funding decisions on behalf of the City of New York. If you have any questions, please contact Agency Chief Contracting Officer and Grants Coordinator Dr. Lisa Sloan at (718) 556-7089 or by email at Lisa.Sloan@rcda.nyc.gov.

Sincerely,



Michael E. McMahon
District Attorney



New York City Council
City Preliminary Budget Hearing - General Welfare Committee
Testimony submitted by Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy
Tuesday, March 17, 2026

On behalf of Children's Aid, I would like to thank Chair Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary City budget.

For over 170 years, Children's Aid has been committed to ensuring that there are no boundaries to the aspirations of young people and no limits to their potential. By offering a comprehensive continuum of services throughout childhood, Children's Aid prepares young people to succeed at every level of education and every milestone of life. Today, nearly 2,000 dedicated full and part-time staff members serve nearly 50,000 children, youth, and families across more than 40 sites in New York City. Through our early childhood centers, community schools, community hubs, and health clinics, Children's Aid creates trusted, neighborhood-based spaces where families can access the full range of supports they need.

In addition to direct service delivery, Children's Aid engages in policy and advocacy at every level of government. Our policy priorities are shaped by what we know works for children and families and by the persistent barriers our staff encounter while serving the one in four New York City children living in poverty.

A thriving New York City requires a strong and dynamic ecosystem of programs that support children, youth, and families. The human services sector is essential to the City's social safety net, and organizations like Children's Aid are on the frontlines, partnering with government to ensure that communities remain resilient and empowered. As the City navigates ongoing fiscal uncertainty, we remain committed to caring for children and supporting families. Our work is critical, not just for today, but for building a stronger future for all New Yorkers.

Summary of FY27 Budget Recommendations

- **Response to the Loss of SNAP-Ed:** Coordinate a Citywide response to the elimination of SNAP-Ed by providing bridge funding of \$5 to \$7 million and align Human Resources Administration (HRA), the Mayor's Office of Food Policy (MOFP), New York City Public Schools, (NYCPS) and the Department of Health and Human Services (DOHMH) to mitigate nutrition-education gaps that increase reliance on the emergency food system.
- **Ensure access to SNAP benefits:** Fund staffing, training, and technology improvements within SNAP Operations and strengthen ACCESS HRA navigation through community-based partnerships.
- **Address human-services workforce and contracting stability:** Prioritize predictable baselines, timely contracting, and adequate indirect cost coverage to stabilize the nonprofit workforce delivering HRA-funded services.



I. Coordinating the City Response to the SNAP-Ed Funding Loss

Children's Aid's Go!Healthy program addresses food inequities and improves health outcomes for children and families in low- and moderate-income New York City communities. We engage families in nutrition education, healthy food access, culturally responsive activities, food resiliency, and gardening education. Our work examines food systems through a health equity lens, advancing food justice by providing education, leadership, and job opportunities. Each year, we serve over 3,000 individuals, including 1,665 participants in nutrition education. Go!Healthy tackles food insecurity in City Council districts 7, 8, 9, 10, 16, 17, 49, and 50 by providing access to affordable, fresh, and healthy foods. Since 2003, Go!Healthy has promoted wellness through programming such as nutrition education, culinary demonstrations, gardening, and food box distribution.

Notably, Go!Healthy's nutrition education is supported by federal SNAP-Ed funding, a long-standing and vital partner in ensuring these services reach communities with the greatest need. For three decades, SNAP-Ed has played a key role in advancing New York's public health and food access goals. In neighborhoods across the five boroughs, SNAP-Ed helps New Yorkers stretch their food dollars, navigate rising food costs, and make informed decisions about what they eat. Through partnerships with community-based organizations, schools, and local partners, SNAP-Ed delivers practical, culturally relevant education and connects New Yorkers of all ages to fresh, affordable foods in the communities where they live, work, and learn.

Despite the demonstrated importance of SNAP-Ed to preventive health efforts and its broad national success, the federal government eliminated this funding through H.R.1. As a result, New York City stands to lose not only a statewide network of educators, but also a deeply embedded set of programs operating in schools, community centers, food access hubs, and human-service providers across the city. Many providers have already begun terminating staff and winding down programming because the instability of SNAP-Ed's future makes it impossible to sustain operations or plan for upcoming program cycles. Without action, the City will see a rapid erosion of the infrastructure, partnerships, and neighborhood-level trust that has taken decades to build.

The scale of SNAP-Ed's impact is significant for New York families. In FY25, SNAP-Ed New York reached 1.845 million participants statewide and delivered more than 35,000 nutrition workshops, many of them in New York City schools, after-school programs, and community-based organizations. Participants also reported significant life changes, including 57% who improved fruit and vegetable intake, 57% who increased physical activity, and 58% who engaged in more price comparisons while food shopping. Overall, household food security improved by 25% after participating in SNAP-Ed programming.

These outcomes are especially important for New York City as more households struggle with high food prices, reduced SNAP benefits, and anticipated changes in Medicaid eligibility. Every



\$1 invested in SNAP-Ed saves up to \$9.54¹ in future healthcare costs—savings that directly benefit a City system already under strain. Losing SNAP-Ed programming now would increase demands on City-funded services, from emergency food programs to public hospitals, and would undermine the City’s own strategies around prevention, chronic disease reduction, and community health. SNAP-Ed is one of the most effective tools to provide families with the nutrition education, skills, and support needed to stretch limited food dollars and maintain healthy diets even as federal benefits decline.

At Children’s Aid, SNAP-Ed plays a central role in our work in the South Bronx, Harlem, Washington Heights, and the north shore of Staten Island, which host communities that consistently face some of the highest rates of food insecurity and nutrition-related health conditions in the City. SNAP-Ed enables Children’s Aid to offer steep discounts on locally grown fruits and vegetables, deliver interactive, evidence-based nutrition education workshops led by qualified nutritionists for youth and families, and operate school and community-based distribution sites where families can pick up both their children and fresh foods. This integrated model is only made possible through SNAP-Ed's funding. Without the City’s support, these programs will **fully cease operations by September 2026**.

We strongly support the inclusion of all affected providers in any City investment toward sustaining vital SNAP-Ed programming, and we recognize that many other organizations across the city are facing the same crisis. To help mitigate the immediate impact of the federal elimination, Children’s Aid has applied for \$200,000 in City discretionary funds to support this work. More broadly, we urge the City to act at scale:

- **Fund SNAP-Ed Continuation:** Establish City bridge funding of \$5 to \$7 million to continue SNAP-Ed operations through community-based providers, so families retain nutrition education and cost-saving skills, preventing avoidable strain on HRA programs.
- **Align HRA, MOFP, NYCPS, and DOHMH to mitigate nutrition-education gaps that are pushing more families to emergency food.**

II. Ensuring Access to SNAP Benefits

As federal law imposes stricter requirements and shifts costs to states and localities in the coming years, timely SNAP processing and adequate staffing are essential to prevent administrative case loss and ensure households access benefits without interruption. Prior General Welfare hearings have flagged benefits processing challenges and underscored the need for investment in HRA’s frontline eligibility workforce.

The FY27 Preliminary Budget includes \$6.4 million in FY27, \$6.6 million in FY28, \$6.7 million in FY29, and \$6.9 million in FY30 to support SNAP Eligibility Specialists, who are critical to

¹ University of Illinois Extension. (2023, June 13). Available at: [Creating healthier Illinoisans: SNAP-Ed generates up to \\$135 million in future benefits | Serving Calhoun, Cass, Greene, Morgan and Scott Counties | Illinois Extension | UIUC](#)



maintaining timely determinations and preventing backlogs for SNAP recipients. In addition, the budget baselines \$1.9 million for SNAP Trainers within HRA's Office of Policy, Procedure, and Training, which is essential to ensuring new and existing staff are prepared to implement evolving federal rules and meet rising administrative demands.

Continued improvements and community-based navigation through ACCESS HRA can further reduce incomplete applications, shorten processing times, and improve recertifications, especially as H.R.1's new eligibility rules increase administrative complexity for clients and staff alike.

Recommendations:

- **Fund staffing, training, and systems** in SNAP Operations to sustain processing timeliness and reduce backlogs amid federal changes, including continued investment in Eligibility Specialists and SNAP Trainers.
- **Expand ACCESS HRA navigation** and community-based partnerships to reduce incomplete applications and recertification losses.

III. Strengthening the Human Services Workforce and Sector Stability

New York's human-services providers are the operational backbone of the safety net. Persistent wage competition, recruiting challenges, and administrative delays threaten the continuity of services families rely on through HRA-funded programs. While this hearing focuses on HRA funding streams, we urge the Council and Administration to prioritize predictable baselines, timely contracting, and appropriate indirect cost coverage for City contracts that fund essential services across the human services sector. These steps reduce staff turnover, sustain quality, and prevent interruptions in services that keep families stable.

V. Closing

At a time of continued economic pressure and federal uncertainty, New York City cannot afford to retreat from its commitment to children and families. Children's Aid urges the Council and Administration to advance an FY27 budget that protects and strengthens HRA's core food security and benefits functions. These are not isolated line items. Together, they support children and families and help communities thrive.

Children's Aid sincerely thanks the Committee for its leadership and partnership. We welcome the opportunity to serve as a resource as budget negotiations move forward. Please feel free to contact Michelle Avila, Director of Public Policy, at mavila@childreusaidnyc.org with any questions regarding this testimony.



**Chinese-American Planning Council
Testimony Before the Committee on General Welfare
Chair, Council Member Crystal Hudson
March 17th, 2026**

Thank you Chair Hudson and members of the City Council for the opportunity to testify today. The mission of the Chinese-American Planning Council, Inc. (CPC) is to promote social and economic empowerment of Chinese American, immigrant, and low-income communities. CPC was founded in 1965 as a grassroots, community-based organization in response to the end of the Chinese Exclusion years and the passing of the Immigration Reform Act of 1965. Our services have expanded since our founding to include three key program areas: education, family support, and community and economic empowerment.

CPC is the largest Asian American social service organization in the U.S., providing vital resources to more than 80,000 people per year through more than 50 programs at over 30 sites across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Queens. CPC employs over 700 staff whose comprehensive services are linguistically accessible, culturally sensitive, and highly effective in reaching low-income and immigrant individuals and families. With the firm belief that social service can incite social change, CPC strives to empower our constituents as agents of social justice, with the overarching goal of advancing and transforming communities.

Expanding Fair Fares would be a critical step toward addressing transportation affordability. According to a [recent analysis](#) released by Community Service Society, PCAC, and the Riders Alliance, they found that expanding eligibility for the program to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level would make more than 2 million New Yorkers, approximately 30 percent of the city's population, eligible for half-price or fully free transit fares. Raising the threshold from the current 150 percent of the Federal Poverty Level would make more than 1 million additional New Yorkers eligible for reduced transit costs.

The impact of this expansion would be felt across the city. Twenty-four of the city's 51 Council districts would have more than 50,000 residents eligible for Fair Fares, and 37 districts would see more than 25 percent of their residents qualify. Council districts in the South and Central Bronx would have the highest share of residents eligible. Additionally, 19 Council districts would see more than 15,000 residents newly eligible if the threshold were raised to 300 percent of the Federal Poverty Level. For many of the community members we serve, affordable transit is essential to getting to work, accessing healthcare, attending school, and maintaining connections to essential services.

For these reasons, we believe it's time to unlock the full potential of the Fair Fares program with the following five program changes:

- **Expand Fair Fares to 300%** of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) (individual- \$46,950, four-person household- \$96,450). This would allow an estimated 2.1 million New Yorkers to participate in the program at 300% of the FPL.
Additional Cost beyond the FY26 baseline: ~\$125 - \$155 million



- **Fully free for households under 150%** of the FPL (individual- \$23,475, four-person household- \$48,225). This would allow for an estimated 1.3 million New Yorkers to have unlimited access to subway, bus, and paratransit service. **Additional Cost beyond the FY26 baseline: ~\$150 - \$175 million**
- **Expand Fair Fares with half-priced fares on MTA Express Buses and CityTickets** on the LIRR and Metro-North railroads within New York City, drastically reducing commute times for tens of thousands of New Yorkers in subway deserts.
- **Automatic Enrollment** of qualified households to improve the current enrollment rate. Currently, only around a third of eligible households are enrolled, a dismal amount. According to [independent research](#), automatic enrollment could boost program uptake by an additional 33%.
- **Close program loopholes**, such as on Access-a-Ride for qualifying seniors, who currently pay half fare as program participants until age 64 and then pay full fare at age 65.

Food security is another critical pillar of affordability. Every New Yorker deserves access to healthy and affordable food. However, we are increasingly seeing the consequences when federal nutrition programs fall short. Delays or reductions in Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program benefits have immediate and devastating impacts on families.

Recent federal cuts and changes to SNAP eligibility will affect more than 10,000 community members served by our organization. As a result, we are already seeing rising demand for food assistance and are preparing to expand emergency food distributions to meet the needs of our community. Community-based organizations like ours are often the first line of response when these gaps occur, but we cannot meet this growing need without stronger city investment in food security and nutrition programs. We are urging the City to include the following in the FY27 adopted budget:

- Invest **\$100 million** into the Community Food Connection program (CFC) for emergency meals to address high levels of food insecurity
- Invest **\$13 million** in NYC Services Civic Impact Fund, which funds nonprofits to expand their volunteer infrastructure, which in turn will help those newly subject to federal SNAP work or volunteer requirements.
- Combat older adult hunger by:
 - Investing **\$60 million** in congregate meals at Older Adult Centers, to account for steep increases in inflation over the last several years
 - Investing **\$27 million** to expand home-delivered meals to 7 days a week, in line with Intro 280 of 2026
- Maintain Council Discretionary funding at **\$8.26 million** for the Food Pantry Initiative, **\$2.134 million** for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative, and **\$1.5 million** for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative

Lastly, stable and affordable housing must remain a central focus of the city's affordability strategy. Programs like CityFHEPS are essential tools that help formerly homeless New Yorkers access and maintain permanent housing. However, our experience administering housing



services shows that the program must be strengthened to better support vulnerable populations, particularly seniors.

One community member we have worked closely with, whom we will refer to as KJ, illustrates the challenges many residents face. KJ was incarcerated in 1973 and released in 2001. Since then, he has struggled with unstable housing and has relied on a loose support network of friends and family, often cycling in and out of shelters. He currently lives in supportive housing at 64 Norfolk but has faced several health setbacks, including hospitalizations related to high blood pressure and diabetes.

During a CityFHEPS recertification, KJ's housing subsidy expired because his state identification had lapsed. At the same time, he was unaware that more than \$800 in late fees and legal charges had been sent to collections, and he had also fallen behind on a Con Edison bill. With assistance from his case manager at our organization, his housing subsidy was renewed, a payment plan for the utility bill was established, and his arrears are now being addressed through an HRA One-Shot Deal. While this intervention helped stabilize his housing, it also highlights how fragile housing stability can be when residents must navigate complex administrative systems.

Our program currently serves 28 units specifically set aside for seniors who have experienced long-term homelessness. Many of these residents are considered "long-term stayers," meaning they have spent years in the shelter system and often cycle in and out of shelters with persistent needs. The CityFHEPS program is structured around a five-year housing voucher, based on the assumption that recipients will eventually transition to independently managing their housing costs. However, this assumption does not reflect the realities faced by seniors who rely primarily on fixed incomes such as Social Security, Supplemental Security Income, or State Supplemental Payments.

In our experience, the five-year voucher period does not provide a sustainable pathway to long-term stability for these residents. Managing CityFHEPS cases often involves navigating missed payments, complex recertification processes, and difficulties ensuring clients can consistently contribute their share of rent. Without stronger support and more flexible policies, these administrative barriers can undermine housing stability for some of the city's most vulnerable residents.

Addressing New York City's affordability crisis requires strengthening the programs that allow residents to remain stably housed, access reliable transportation, and put food on the table. Expanding Fair Fares, investing in food security programs, and strengthening CityFHEPS would provide meaningful relief to the communities we serve and help ensure that all New Yorkers have the resources they need to live with stability and dignity.

Thank you so much for the opportunity to testify on issues that greatly impact our communities. If there are any questions or concerns, feel free to reach out to Ashley Chen, Policy & Research Manager at achen9@cpc-nyc.org.



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CityFHEPS Testimony: Cap Vouchers for a Sustainable Program

Submitted to the New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare

March 17, 2026

Ana Champeny, Vice President for Research, Citizens Budget Commission

Good morning. I am Ana Champeny, Vice President for Research at the Citizens Budget Commission (CBC), a nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank and watchdog that advocates for the smart fiscal, operational, and policy choices that will deliver a better future for all New Yorkers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the NYC Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget. Our report, [False Choice](#), presents our assessment and recommendations. CBC commends Mayor Mamdani for his more accurate and transparent budget that reflects the cost of current services, but finds the proposed budget risks the City's affordability, competitiveness, and preparedness for what may come.

Rather than raising taxes and raiding reserves, the City should scrutinize large programs and drill into agency budgets to eliminate wasteful spending and improve efficiency so government can deliver high-quality, essential services that remain affordable over time. To demonstrate what's possible, we present five actions that could save \$2.6 billion annually, including one I will discuss today—keeping the number of housing vouchers flat to restrain unaffordable spending growth without impacting current recipients.

To cut to the chase, capping the City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) program at the current number of vouchers would save \$330 million in fiscal year 2027 budget and \$3.0 billion over the five-year financial plan, without taking away vouchers from current recipients.

While the CityFHEPS rental housing voucher program is an important component to a comprehensive housing affordability strategy, it is on an unsustainable trajectory.

It is the nation's second largest voucher program, only behind NYCHA's Section 8 program, and is a radical outlier among locally funded voucher programs. Its cost has tripled in the last three years, from \$499 million in fiscal year 2023 to a projected \$1.7 billion this year. The Preliminary Budget projects that spending will increase 24 percent to \$2.2 billion next year and another 44 percent over the following three.

While increasing rents drive some of CityFHEPS cost growth, most of it stems from the growing number of vouchers. In just one year, from October 2024 to October 2025, the number of vouchers grew 30.5 percent—15,046 vouchers—bringing the number of vouchers to 64,439. The average monthly voucher cost to the City, the subsidy, grew 13.2 percent over that same period, from \$1,743 to \$1,973. The combined impact was a 47.7 percent increase in the monthly cost of CityFHEPs vouchers over just one year.

Over five years, the preliminary budget adds \$9.5 billion for CityFHEPS, on top of the previously budgeted \$3.1 billion. As proposed, the City would spend \$12.6 billion on CityFHEPS housing vouchers between fiscal years 2026 and 2030.

The City needs just two-thirds of the \$9.5 billion preliminary budget increase for CityFHEPS to cover baseline funding for current vouchers. The remaining one-third would fund new vouchers, allowing the CityFHEPS program to continue growing. Based on this spending trajectory, CBC estimates there will be more than 70,000 active vouchers at the end of fiscal year 2026 and more than 104,000 at the end of fiscal year 2029.

The City cannot voucher its way out of the homelessness crisis, and it isn't. Not only is the program fiscally unsustainable, but even as the number of city-funded vouchers has more than tripled, the number of households in shelters hasn't shrunk—in fact, excluding migrants and asylum seekers, it has increased by 21.5 percent.

Now is the time to cap the number of CityFHEPS vouchers at the current level. No one would lose a voucher. The City should certainly not pursue an unaffordable expansion that would explode costs even higher.

Turnover among current beneficiaries would allow the City to issue vouchers to some new households each year; priority should be given to those with the greatest need. This smart choice would save \$330 million in fiscal year 2027 and \$3.0 billion over the five-year financial plan.

But remember that this program would still cost more than \$2 billion a year in years where the City is facing budget gaps of \$7 billion; the City would need to offset CityFHEPS funding by restraining other low impact spending.

CityFHEPS can and should be part of the City's housing strategy, but the housing crisis can only be solved by leveraging State and federal housing subsidy programs and partnering with the private sector to increase housing production. Expanding CityFHEPS beyond current levels would compromise the City's ability to deliver core services and potentially jeopardize the viability of the program itself for current voucher holders.

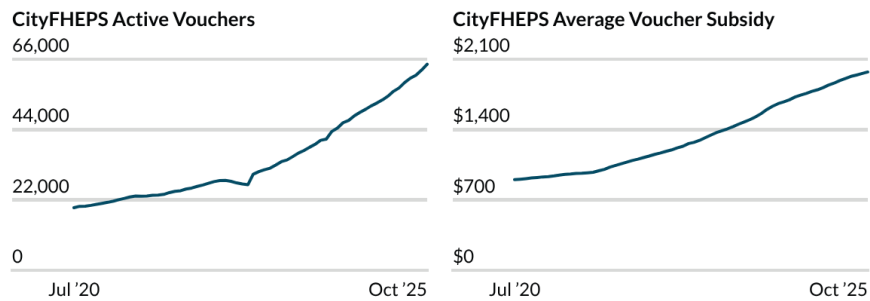
CityFHEPS Analysis

Rapid Growth

Created in 2018 to consolidate smaller existing rental support programs, CityFHEPS quickly grew into the second largest rental housing voucher program in the country. As of October 2025, CityFHEPS served 145,382 individuals in 64,439 households. (See Figure 1).

Since July 2020, the number of households with CityFHEPS vouchers has grown an average of 1.9 percent per month, while the average monthly subsidy grew 1.3 percent per month. Together, these drove the City's total monthly voucher cost to grow 3.2 percent per month—or 721.5 percent over 5 years and 4 months. (See Figures 1 and 2.)

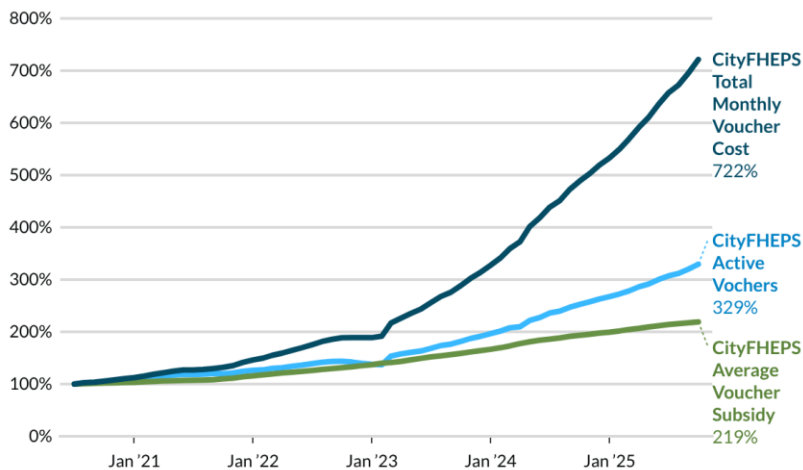
Figure 1: CityFHEPS Program Growth



Source: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, "Dynamic Mayor's Management Report" (accessed 3/14/2026).



Figure 2: Cumulative Monthly Percent Change in CityFHEPS since July 2020



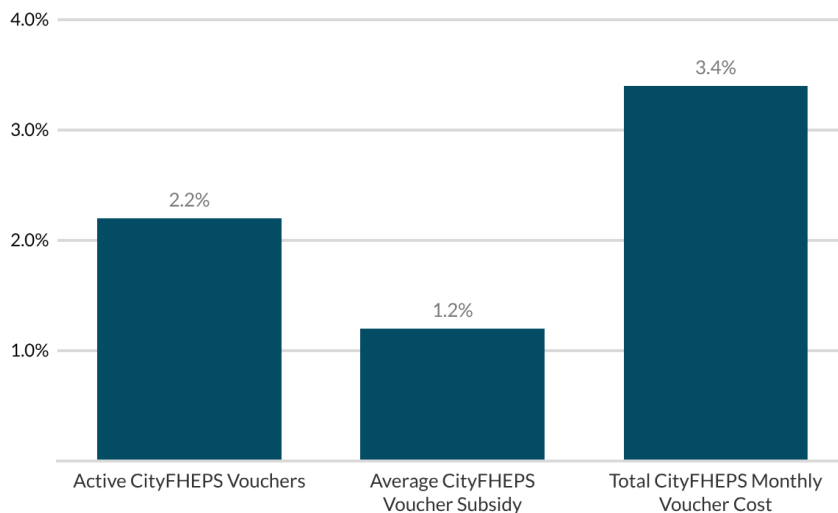
Note: Total Monthly Voucher Cost is number of vouchers times average voucher subsidy.

Source: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, "Dynamic Mayor's Management Report" (accessed 3/14/2026).



Growth has not slowed in recent years. The number of vouchers in use grew 2.2 percent per month in fiscal year 2025, a 30 percent annual increase. The average voucher cost increased by 1.2 percent per month. The combined effect was that total voucher costs grew 3.4 percent per month. (See Figure 3.)

Figure 3: FY 2025 Average Monthly Growth Rates



Note: Compound monthly growth rate between July 2024 and July 2025.

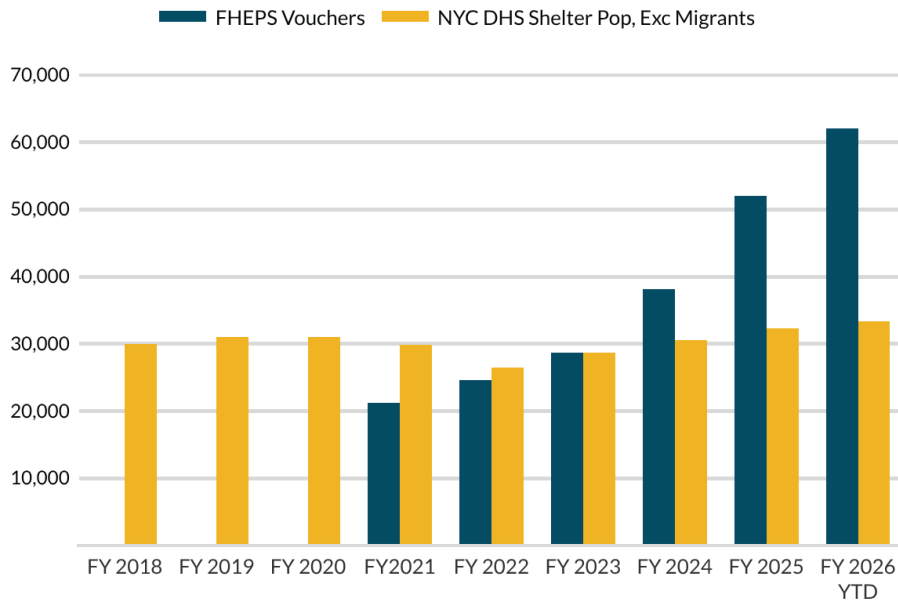
Source: City of New York, Mayor's Office of Operations, "Dynamic Mayor's Management Report" (accessed 3/14/2026).



Shelter Census Holds Steady Despite CityFHEPS Growth

Despite claims that vouchers will relieve the shelter system, the inflow of households into shelter persists, even beyond the migrant crisis, and the shelter census remains above pre-COVID levels. (See Figure 4.) The number of households in shelter has grown over the last three fiscal years; it is 21.5 percent higher than fiscal year 2021. As of January 2026, [57,677](#) individuals were in DHS shelters, excluding asylum seekers, down slightly from 59,703 individuals in January 2020. The number of individuals in shelter is slightly below pre-COVID levels because there are fewer family households and more single adults in shelter now.

Figure 4: Number of Households in NYC Homeless Services Shelters or With CityFHEPS Voucher



Note: Annual average. FY 2026 is the average of the first four months of the fiscal year. NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter census excludes migrant and asylum-seeking households.

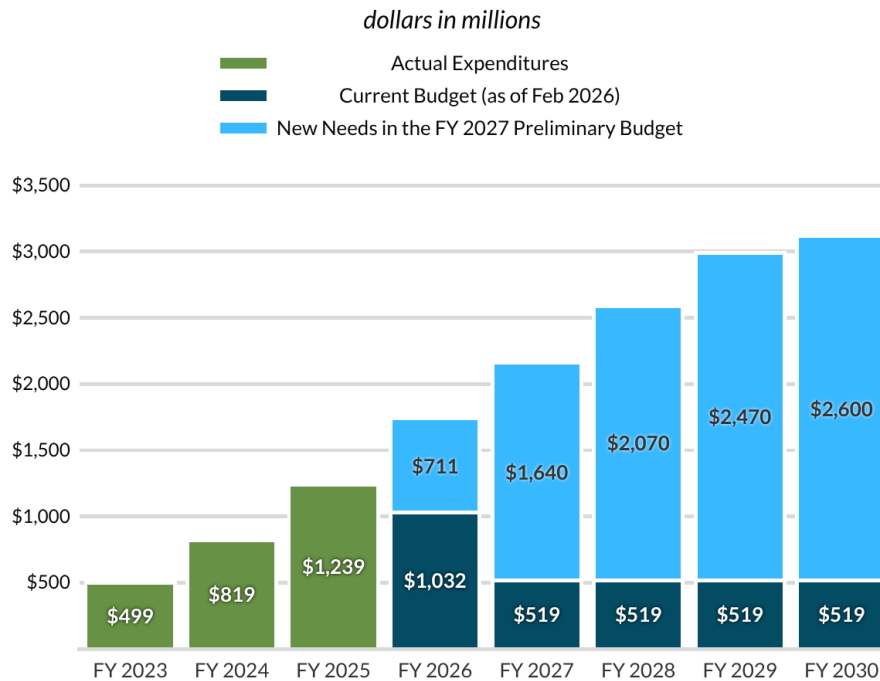
Source: CBC staff analysis of City of New York, *Mayor's Office of Operations, Mayor's Management Report for Fiscal Year 2025* (and fiscal year 2018 to 2024 editions), and *Preliminary Mayor's Management Report for Fiscal Year 2026*; and Office of the New York City Comptroller, "Asylum Seeker Census" (accessed March 14, 2026).



Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Funds CityFHEPS Growth

With the addition of \$9.5 billion in the Preliminary Budget, CityFHEPS is now budgeted to cost \$1.7 billion in fiscal year 2026 and reach \$3.1 billion in fiscal year 2030. (See Figure 4.) Of this amount, more than two-thirds (\$6.5 billion) would cover underbudgeting of the current program, while the remaining one-third (\$3.0 billion or 31.3 percent) would fund new vouchers.

Figure 5: Actual and Projected CityFHEPS Spending



Note: FY 2023 to FY 2026 include federal COVID aid used for CityFHEPS. Excludes FHEPS A and B. FY 2028 to FY 2030 assumed to have same baseline budget as FY 2027.

Source: Office of the New York City Comptroller, *Annual Comprehensive Financial Report for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 2025* (October 31, 2025), fiscal year 2023 and 2024 editions, and "Checkbook: Datafeeds: Budget" (accessed February 28, 2026); and City of New York, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2027 Budget: Reconciliation* (February 17, 2026), and *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2027 Budget: Departmental Estimates* (February 17, 2026).



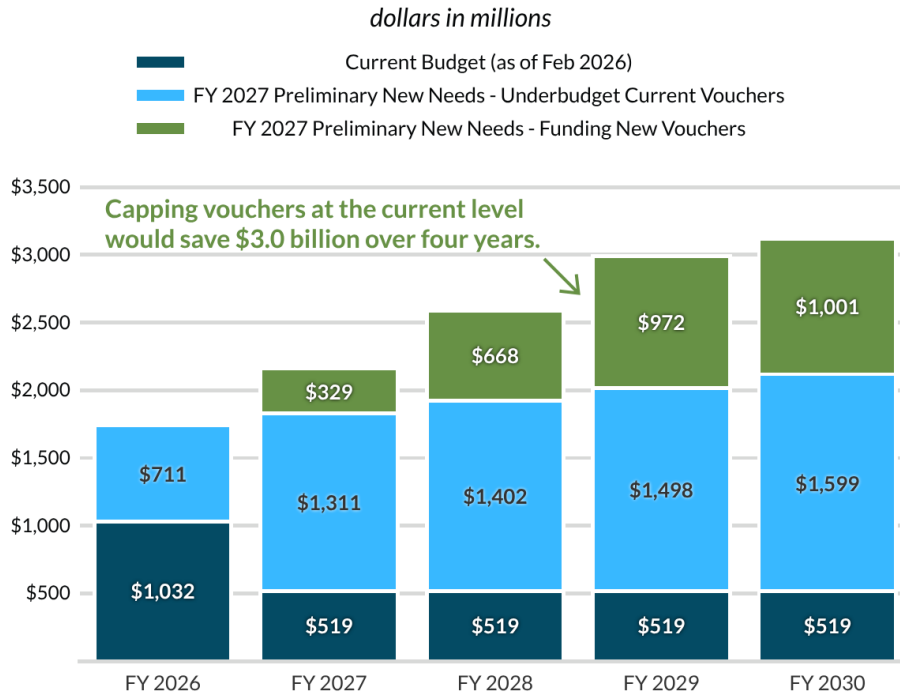
Two factors have fueled the rising cost of CityFHEPS: increasing placements and increasing rents and per-unit subsidies.

- **More Placements.** CityFHEPS is the City's primary tool to move homeless households from shelter to permanent housing. Under CityFHEPS's predecessor programs, in fiscal year 2018, the City provided assistance to 6,000 homeless households to help them move out of shelter and secure housing. In fiscal year 2025, the number of shelter move-outs subsidized under CityFHEPS increased 2.5 times to 15,382 households, or 86 percent of households that exited shelter. Other programs, such as placements into NYCHA units and Special One Time Assistance, are used less frequently.
- **Increasing Rent Limits.** Since 2023, CityFHEPS has subsidized apartments up to Section 8 rent levels. The current limit for 2-person households is \$2,762; as of November 2025, the average rent for a 2-person household with a CityFHEPS voucher was \$2,257, including both the tenant and City portions.

Preliminary Budget Assumes Number of Vouchers Grows

As noted, the preliminary budget not only corrects significant underbudgeting for current CityFHEPS vouchers but also adds funds to support additional CityFHEPS vouchers. Assuming 5 percent annual growth in rents, the average over the past two years, for existing vouchers, the City would need additional funds to pay for existing vouchers: \$1.3 billion in fiscal year 2027 growing to \$1.6 billion in fiscal year 2030—far more sustainable growth. Over five years, underbudgeting for the current program level is \$6.5 billion. Therefore, the remaining \$3.0 billion of added funding would pay for new vouchers. (See Figure 6.) Capping the number of CityFHEPS vouchers at current levels would save \$329 million in fiscal year 2027 and \$1.0 billion by fiscal year 2030.

Figure 6: FY 2027 Preliminary Budget New Needs for CityFHEPS: Current versus New Vouchers



Note: Current voucher estimate assumes 5 percent annual rent increase.

Source: Office of the New York City Comptroller, "Checkbook: Datafeeds: Budget" (accessed February 28, 2026); and City of New York, Mayor's Office of Management and Budget, *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2027 Budget: Reconciliation* (February 17, 2026), and *Preliminary Fiscal Year 2027 Budget: Departmental Estimates* (February 17, 2026).



City Council Expansion Would Drive Costs Up Even Further

Notably, the projected cost growth does not include the potential expansion of eligibility under City Council legislation. In [December 2025](#), the New York City Comptroller estimated that expanded eligibility would cost, net of avoided shelter spending, between \$5.7 billion and \$22.3 billion, over five years—a wide range that accounts for uncertainty around voucher uptake. If implemented in fiscal year 2027, the expansion would drive CityFHEPS costs in fiscal year 2030 to between \$4.7 billion and \$9.6 billion, possibly doubling the City’s fiscal year 2030 budget gap.

Testimony of Alice Bufkin, Caitlyn Passaretti, and Jenny Veloz
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council on the FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing General Welfare
March 17th, 2026

For over 80 years, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York (CCC) has been an independent voice for children advancing child and family well-being through research, advocacy, and civic engagement. With deep expertise in data, policy and child-serving systems, CCC champions proven solutions and mobilizes allies to secure reforms that improve child outcomes and promote equity. CCC drives systemic change to ensure every child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

Thank you, Chair Hudson and members of the City Council General Welfare Committee, for holding today's important hearing on the Mayor's FY27 Preliminary Budget. Below we uplift recommendations for how to improve the delivery of essential services for NYC families and children.

Address Family Homelessness

The current housing and shelter crisis calls for bold actions and enhanced funding to reduce housing instability for families with children. The most recent [CCC's Keeping Track of New York City's Children](#) data book revealed that in 2024, 29% of NYC renters pay at least half of their income towards rent, and nearly one in three renter households with children are living in overcrowded conditions. Additionally, there were more than 17,000 residential evictions in 2025, and nearly 34,000 children reside in the NYC shelter system.¹

CCC is co-convenor of the Family Homeless Coalition (FHC), a coalition comprised of 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, child advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience of housing instability and homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter. CCC supports [FHC's 2026 Policy Priorities](#). Below we uplift a number of the critical investments and policy changes necessary to prevent homelessness and support families struggling with housing instability.

Reform CityFHEPS Administration

The City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) is a critical rental assistance program that reduces and prevents homelessness in New York City. Since 2018, it has helped tens of thousands of individuals and families find and maintain housing. As vital as this tool has been for New Yorkers, significant administrative burdens create persistent barriers including time-consuming and burdensome application and approval processes. To address these barriers, CCC and FHC recommend the following reforms to the administration of CityFHEPS.

Recommendations:

- **Streamline the Voucher Process:** Certify income eligibility for CityFHEPS upfront at the shopping letter stage and allow eligibility for a year before a new shopping letter or a rebudgeting process is required, unless there's substantial change in income or at the voucher holder's request. Delegate voucher approval authority to community-based organizations (CBO) to alleviate burden for limited DSS staff. Allow CBO partners access to all relevant systems, such as Welfare Management System, to expedite the process on behalf of clients.
- **Address Inspection Rules:** Address inspection rules that require a unit from DHS to inspect certain units and delegate authority to inspect all units to community-based partners that currently handle voucher inspections for all other units.
- **Expand and Enhance Data Transparency:** Expand and enhance existing CityFHEPS data transparency requirements to more effectively identify solutions to challenges faced by voucher holders during processing and utilization of vouchers.

Restore Homebase to the Core of What it Does Well

Since the pandemic, Homebase providers have been saddled with huge administrative and capacity burden without necessary adjustments in funding and staffing levels to match the current demands of New Yorkers facing housing instability and the expanded scope of services expected from the City. As a result, wait times have increased for critical Homebase services. A shift in scope is needed to enable Homebase staff to focus on outreach and offering holistic support. To ensure that Homebase can return to providing its core services effectively and efficiently, CCC and FHC recommend the following:

Recommendations

- **Ensure sufficient resources:** The tremendous increase in caseload and ever-expanding set of responsibilities, paired with lack of adequate funding, have limited Homebase providers' ability to provide its critical services including eviction prevention, emergency rental assistance and benefits access. Homebase funding must be increased.
- **Ensure sufficient staffing:** Sufficiently staff HRA centers and training centers staff to minimize wait times and churning of New Yorkers at HRA Benefits Access Centers who are at risk of losing housing or lack public benefits or SNAP.
- **Dedicate Funding for Rental Assistance:** Create a separate RFP with dedicated funding for rental assistance processing to reduce strain on Homebase providers and expedite processing, ensuring families facing housing instability can access resources more easily.
- **Dedicate Funding for Aftercare Services:** Create a separate RFP with dedicated funding for aftercare services to ensure organizations can properly dedicate staff and tailored services, including support for recertification and income supports to resolve issues earlier.

Shelter Intake Reform

For families in need of family shelter, the intake process is overly burdensome and designed to produce overly high numbers of initial denials. Processes that are meant to confirm families' need for shelter have too many barriers, are often uprooting, and needlessly lengthen families' time spent in housing insecurity.

Recommendations:

Application Process Reform: The application process to prove homelessness takes 62 days on average. Methods of proving homelessness are difficult to achieve, and the reapplication process can be uprooting.

- Change the housing history requirement from 2 years to 1 year.
- Allow families to reapply from their current temporary shelter placement, holding their bed/room placement as their reapplication is processed.
- Allow reapplications over the phone.
- After 1 eligibility denial, allow a self-attestation to housing history.

Placements Near Schooling: Nearly 40% of families in shelter continue to be placed in a different borough from where their youngest child goes to school disrupting children's education.

- Ensure that shelter placements for families with children in school are within the same community school district or the same borough of the school of the youngest child.
- PATH staff should ask parent(s) if they are interested in a shelter transfer to be closer to their child's school and give written information on how to request a school-related shelter transfer.
- Ensure that a family's shelter placement request is reviewed within 7 days of the initial placement and again at 30 days. If a closer placement is available, shelter transfer should be offered as soon as possible.

Combat Food Insecurity

Last April, the State Comptroller's office released a report stating that while one in nine households in New York State experienced food insecurity between 2020-2022, the majority of those households lived in New York City.ⁱⁱ The report also noted that the Bronx experienced the highest percentage of food insecurity (20.2%). As a result, more families are turning to food pantries and banks to help alleviate food insecurity.

It is imperative that New York City continue to invest and fund resources that are vital to the health and well-being of children and families, where 33% of SNAP-enrolled households have children.ⁱⁱⁱ We must meet current needs and prepare for the increased demand for emergency food that will occur due to federal actions that weaken SNAP, freeze funding for pantries and farmers, and potentially raise food prices.

We applaud the inclusion of \$53.6 million baseline funding for Community Food Connection (CFC) in the FY27 Preliminary Budget. Food pantries are the last line of defense against hunger for so many, yet

these essential services are being asked to do more with less. While this funding constitutes a substantial investment in CFC, more is needed to provide critical support for communities facing worsening affordability and food insecurity crises.

As a member of the NYC Food Policy Alliance, a network of 60+ food system stakeholders that advocate for public policies and funding that ensure equitable access to a healthy, sustainable food system, CCC recommends the following investments be included in the FY27 Adopted Budget:

- **Increase and baseline** funding for the Community Food Connections (CFC) program to \$100 million to meet the rising demand for food assistance (including enhanced access to fresh food) across New York City, especially in the wake of unprecedented federal cuts to nutrition programs.
- **Protect** food benefits and make healthy food affordable for all New Yorkers by increasing investment in universal, low-barrier food affordability strategies by advocating for necessary city-level investment to support SNAP administration and HRA workforce to protect effective access to SNAP, including:
 - **Increase** baseline funding for Health Bucks from \$500,000 to \$700,000 to expand access to fresh, healthy food for low-income New Yorkers and support local farmers.
 - **Maintain** \$3.1 million for Get the Good Stuff programs

CCC also supports the continuation of funding for the following City Council Initiatives:

- \$8.26 million for Food Pantries Initiatives
- \$1.5 million for Food Access and Benefits Initiatives
- \$2.134 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative

Enhance Services for Systems-Involved Youth and Families

Restore Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and Supportive Programming for Youth and Young Adults

Extensive research demonstrates the positive impacts of Alternatives to Incarceration (ATI) and reentry programs, including lowering recidivism and crime.^{iv} Moreover, studies estimate between \$3.46-\$5.54 in returns for every dollar invested in ATI programs in addition to reduced costs for the criminal justice system and better community health outcomes.^v

Despite the well-established benefits of these programs, since 2023, the City Administration has cut millions from probation programs proven to support re-entry by connecting young people to mentorship and services. Failing to provide robust reentry services or supportive probation programs will harm youth and is counterproductive to building safe communities.

CCC supports the recommendations of the [New York City Youth Justice Coalition](#), including the following investments and restorations in the FY27 Budget:

- Restore and invest \$4.1 million for the IMPACT program
- Restore and baseline \$5 million for the NextSTEPS program

- Invest \$40 million for the Community Justice Reentry Network
- Baseline \$2.4 million with a cost-of-living adjustment to each new year of funding for the Mentoring and Advocacy Program (MAAP)
- Invest \$30 million for NYC's Assertive Community Engagement and Success (ACES) program to ensure that all young people with risk factors have access to this kind of prevention model
- Maintain current funding for Family Court Alternative to Detention Programs to ensure young people and their families are successfully supported in the community.
- Expand Parent Support Services and create an open door policy for Family Support Services for youth as a prevention intervention
- Invest \$8.1 million for the Anti-Gun Violence Employment Program
- Invest \$8.5 million to reinstate, expand and fully fund YES services with original work scope as an effective impactful preventive tool
- Invest \$59.1 million for ATLAS funding
- Invest \$1.6 billion to raise the Cost-Per-Participant funding for youth in detention in COMPASS programming
- Invest \$3.2 million for NeON program funding
- Invest \$3.7 million for the WorksPlus Program
- Restore and baseline \$130,000 for the Adolescent Portable Therapy

Invest in Child Welfare Primary Prevention and Workforce Stability

Fundamental to preventing child welfare involvement is investing in the primary prevention supports families need to be safe and secure, including housing, child care, healthy food, and economic supports. At the same time, the prevention workforce currently in place to support families is in crisis. [In 2025, CCC and the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies \(COFCCA\) surveyed prevention services providers](#) to better understand the challenges facing families involved in the child welfare system and providers' ability to serve them. Our results echoed the need for upstream prevention and workforce stabilization.

To help ensure that prevention services can best serve children and families, we recommend the following:

- Enhance child welfare prevention contract flexibility to allow providers the ability to aptly respond to different family circumstances
- Invest in salary increases, scholarships and tuition assistance to help agencies sustain a highly trained and credentialed child welfare workforce.
- Ensure that child welfare staff are paid complete salaries and agencies are paid the true cost of services on prevention contracts.
- Reform the current NYC procurement system to ensure timely payments to contracted agencies.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these recommendations to support New York's children and families.

ⁱ Citizens' Committee for Children analysis of Department of Homeless Services data, 2025; not yet published.

ⁱⁱ New York State Comptroller's Office. "The Cost of Living in New York City: Food." April 2025.

<https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/osdc/pdf/report-2-2026.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Citizens' Committee for Children of NY. "The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP): New York City Quick Facts." November 2025. <https://s3.amazonaws.com/media.ccnewyork.org/2025/12/NYC-SNAP-Factsheet-2025.pdf>

^{iv} Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. ATI Report. Accessed: <https://criminaljustice.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/MOCJ-ATI-RNR-Report-2019.pdf>

^v New York State Alternatives to Incarceration and Reentry Coalition (2024). Unlocking Potential: The Role of Community-Based Alternatives in Strengthening Public Safety. Accessed: https://www.lac.org/assets/files/Unlocking-Potential_The-Role-of-Community-Based-Alternatives-in-Strengthening-Public-Safety.pdf



Testimony of City Harvest

Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee Budget and Oversight Hearing on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 17, 2026

ASKS:

- 1. Strengthen and protect New York City's food pantry system**
- 2. Fully fund HRA SNAP enrollment operations and SNAP outreach programming**
- 3. Restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs**

Thank you, Chairwoman Crystal Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee, for holding today's hearing on New York City's Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027. My name is Carlos Rodriguez, and I am the President at City Harvest, New York's first and largest food rescue organization.

First, I want to thank the City Council for its steadfast support of City Harvest over the years. Year after year, we have been able to rescue millions of pounds of food, mostly fresh produce, and deliver it free of charge to a network of 400 food pantries across our city. These efforts are only possible because of a community of food justice leaders who run New York's pantry system, our hardworking staff and union drivers who pack our fleet of trucks and navigate our city's streets to pick up and deliver food, thousands of generous food donors ranging from restaurants in Manhattan to farmlands up the Hudson, and leaders in government who have been responsive to the community's needs. This year, we will deliver over 86 million pounds of food to millions of New Yorkers. We thank the City Council for its continued support in that effort, including its investments in the Feeding Our Communities Initiative established last year.

As an organization that has been fighting hunger for over 40 years, it is clear to us that this year is not business as usual. In City Harvest's network of 400 pantry programs across New York City,

we are seeing over 1 million additional pantry visits per month, an 87 percent increase compared to pre-COVID data from 2019.¹

These conditions reflect longstanding affordability challenges in our city. However, we are now at a crossroads where these conditions are all but certain to worsen due to decisions at the federal level. With food prices destabilized, historic federal cuts to SNAP and healthcare being realized, and other federal policy choices threatening affordability, this moment requires a bold response from both community organizations and government.

City Harvest has already taken significant steps in response to this growing need. Since 2019, we have increased the food we distribute by over 30 percent, with a focus on high-need neighborhoods with pantry food supply gaps and at-risk populations. We now procure over 6 million pounds of local food from New York State, more than any other NYC-based organization brings in from upstate farms. In addition, we have expanded our policy and advocacy work to deepen engagement between pantry leaders and government.

However, charity alone cannot and should not be expected to replace effective and equitable public policy. For those reasons and more, we stand in alignment with our network of food pantries and dozens of food system leaders in advocating for the FY2027 Budget to include the following investments:

Strengthen and protect New York City's emergency food system

Food banks and food pantries remain at the forefront of ensuring that New Yorkers have immediate and dignified access to food. Currently, as many as 250 million meals a year are at risk of being lost across New York City due to HR1's historic cuts to SNAP, potentially reaching its peak in FY2029 when the federal government begins to penalize states for SNAP payment errors by shifting upwards of \$1.2 billion in expenses onto New York State. When SNAP falls short, or when families find themselves ineligible, they turn to the emergency food system for support. As the federal government scales back key safety net programs, it is critical that New York City strengthens its investments in food security.

That is why we are asking the city to increase funding for the Community Food Connection (CFC) program from \$74.5 million to \$100 million. More than 700 food pantries rely on this program to provide high-quality food for free distribution to people in need.² City Harvest also leverages this program to supplement the food we distribute through our Mobile Markets, many of which operate at New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) centers across the five

¹ City Harvest analysis of FeedNYC data

² <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/food-assistance.page>

boroughs. A robust CFC program is essential to stabilizing New York's emergency food system in the years to come.

In addition to adequately funding CFC, we are advocating for the City Council to maintain \$26.89 million in funding for discretionary food security initiatives. This includes \$15 million for the Feeding Our Communities Initiative, \$8.26 million for the Food Pantry Initiative, \$2.13 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative, and \$1.5 million for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative. In total, this amounts to \$72.42 per year for each New Yorker experiencing food insecurity — a modest investment that can go further in scale and reach. Together, these programs are critical to City Harvest's ability to source high-quality and culturally responsive foods and distribute those resources equitably across our diverse network of community-centered pantries.

Fully fund HRA SNAP enrollment operations and outreach

HR1, the federal spending package signed into law on July 4, 2025, cuts SNAP by over \$186 billion nationwide. These cuts come through a number of changes that narrow eligibility, expand work-reporting requirements, modify how benefit allotments are calculated, and shift costs to local government. For New York State, those cost shifts could reach as much as \$1.2 billion.

In response, City Harvest has taken steps to prepare for the impact of these changes. We have reimagined our operational targets to respond directly to the 250 million meals at risk of being lost at the height of HR1's implementation. We have also partnered with the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to provide training to over 200 pantry leaders who plan to offer volunteer opportunities for an expanded group of nearly 200,000 additional New York City residents who may need to meet new work-reporting requirements to receive SNAP.

City government must do more to meet this moment. HRA will face an estimated \$100 million increase in SNAP administrative costs as a direct result of HR1 increasing the local administrative cost share from 50 percent to 75 percent. These funds represent the bare minimum needed to keep the program operating at a steady state. Any underfunding of SNAP administration or outreach could drive increased demand for emergency food at a level that charitable organizations cannot absorb in place of a strong nutrition safety net.

Restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs

Programs like Groceries to Go and Get the Good Stuff are helping tens of thousands of New Yorkers afford fresh, healthy food, reaching more than 4,000 patients through NYC Health + Hospitals' Groceries to Go program and more than 19,000 New Yorkers through Get the Good

Stuff, demonstrating that targeted nutrition incentives can improve health while helping families stretch their food budgets.³

Get the Good Stuff matches up to \$10 per day for every \$10 in SNAP that a household spends on produce at select stores. Groceries to Go provides a 50 percent discount, or up to \$30 per month in grocery credits, when participants purchase produce at over 25 participating grocers.⁴ While Get the Good Stuff primarily serves SNAP participants, Groceries to Go supports NYC Health and Hospitals patients who are experiencing food insecurity and managing chronic conditions such as hypertension or diabetes.

These programs directly address the connection between food and health by leveraging the NYC Health and Hospitals network to connect eligible New Yorkers with meaningful grocery support. In the context of HR1 cutting \$186 billion from families' grocery budgets through changes to SNAP, Groceries to Go represents a strong city model for strengthening food access and food agency.

Despite their success, the FY2027 Preliminary Budget did not restore \$3.2 million for Groceries to Go and excluded funding for Get the Good Stuff. We respectfully request that the Council ensure both programs are restored in the final budget. Providing New Yorkers with additional grocery support is urgent, particularly as SNAP continues to be weakened by decisions at the federal level.

About City Harvest's Strategy Today

City Harvest rescues and delivers food free of charge to more than 400 food pantries, soup kitchens, and community partners across the five boroughs, distributing more than 86 million pounds of food each year, or over 230,000 pounds every day. Beyond food delivery, we strengthen pantry capacity by providing grants and technical support for cold storage, equipment, staffing, and technology so organizations can safely store and distribute more food to their neighbors. We also regularly survey our partner network and program participants to understand operational challenges, food preferences, and emerging needs.

City Harvest pairs this feedback with quantitative data and research to ensure our food distribution strategy, programs, and advocacy respond directly to community needs. Each year, we analyze neighborhood-level data, including research from the New York City Mayor's Office of Food Policy, to identify priority neighborhoods where food insecurity is high, but emergency

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https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/NYC_FoodReport_2025.pdf?utm_source=chatgpt.com

⁴ <https://www.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/groceries-to-go.page>

food resources are limited. In response, we direct additional food, recruit new partners, and invest in local capacity so that communities with the greatest unmet need receive more support. We also work to ensure that the food we distribute reflects neighbors' cultural preferences and religious dietary requirements.

Today, pantry partners across the city are deeply concerned about federal cuts to SNAP. With as many as 250 million meals annually at risk in New York due to these historic reductions, food banks and pantries cannot fill the gap alone. In response, City Harvest has begun partnering with local government and other anti-hunger organizations to help families navigate immediate policy changes, including expanded ABAWD work-reporting requirements that put 200,000 New Yorkers at risk of losing SNAP in 2026. This work highlights the importance of continued partnership with the City to ensure community food programs have the resources needed in this new SNAP reality.

Conclusion

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. City Harvest is proud to work alongside the City Council, our network of food pantries, and community partners to respond to rising hunger across New York City. As the need for food assistance continues to grow and federal policy changes place additional pressure on families, it is critical that the City strengthen the systems that help New Yorkers access food with dignity.

Today, we urge the Council to protect and strengthen the emergency food system through increased funding for Community Food Connection and continued support for discretionary food security initiatives, fully fund SNAP enrollment and outreach operations at HRA, and restore access to healthy grocery incentive programs such as Groceries to Go and Get the Good Stuff.

We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Council to ensure that New Yorkers have reliable access to food and that our city's food system remains strong and responsive in the face of growing challenges.

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TESTIMONY OF CITYMEALS ON WHEELS

Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee

Honorable Crystal Hudson, Chair

FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 19, 2026

Submitted by:

Emma Lentz-Bessire

Senior Associate, Policy and Advocacy

Citymeals on Wheels

Citymeals on Wheels addresses food insecurity among New York City's homebound older adults in three ways: by funding weekend meals for the City's home-delivered meals program, serving as an emergency food responder for this population, and providing additional food to those who need more than the one meal a day they receive. In FY25, Citymeals provided 2.3 million meals to 22,000 older adults in all five boroughs across all our programs.

Of the 1.8 million people aged 60 and older in New York City, 18% live below the poverty line and an increasing number are immigrants, women, and people living alone with limited social support.¹ The impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic have compounded these challenges, dramatically increasing food costs that persist to this day. As a result, we have seen food insecurity among older New Yorkers emerge as a crisis. Existing nutrition assistance programs that many older adults access, such as SNAP and food pantries, are largely inaccessible to those

unable to shop for groceries regularly or prepare their own meals. Meanwhile, the aging sector's one-meal-a-day, five-days-a-week approach is not comprehensive. This leaves thousands of older adults falling through the cracks, unable to access other anti-hunger programs and remaining hungry: 60% of home-delivered meals recipients still experience food insecurity despite Citymeals stepping in to privately fund weekend meals. This patchwork does not serve our older neighbors. A truly comprehensive approach to hunger would offer a meal every day of the year to homebound older adults, while emergency food programs that reach people in their homes can step in for those who are in need of more. The City must invest in new and expanded programs to ensure that the City's most vulnerable older residents have the food they need to live safely in their homes.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the Council support the following requests:

1. **Increase Community Food Connection funding at a baseline of \$100 million.**
2. **Invest \$90 million to shore up the congregate and home-delivered meals programs, both of which continue to face steep increases in program costs due to high inflation rates and years of underfunding.**
 - a. **Pass Intro 280, to require the City's home-delivered meals program to provide a meal 365 days a year, with adequate funding in the budget.**
 - b. **Increase per meal reimbursement rates for HDM from \$14.78 to \$16.17/meal.**
 - c. **Increase funding for congregate meals by \$60 million.**
3. **Renew \$500,000 for our Emergency Food Programs through the Older Adult Centers, Programs, and Services Initiative.**
4. **Renew \$600,000 for our food programs through the Feeding Our Communities Initiative.**
5. **Renew \$50,000 for our food programs through the Food Pantries Initiative.**

Background

The City's two main food programs targeting older adults generally provide one prepared meal on weekdays only; one program operates in a congregate setting at Older Adult Centers, and the other provides home-delivery of these meals to those who cannot regularly get to a center. In FY25, 115,508 older New Yorkers received meals at an older adult center and 23,935 received home-delivered meals (HDM).¹ We have long known that one daily meal falls short of meeting the needs of the most food insecure older adults who cannot regularly access

additional food. In a national survey from 2018, 66 percent of home-delivered and 54 percent of congregate meal recipients reported that these meals provide half or more of their daily food intake.²

Our 2023 research, done in partnership with CUNY's Urban Food Policy Institute, confirmed that these programs leave too many hungry.³ We surveyed 500 older New Yorkers participating in the City's congregate and home-delivered meals programs to learn more about how they were meeting their food needs beyond the one meal a day they received through these programs. Some key findings include:

- **48% of all respondents “sometimes” or “often” experienced food insecurity.** This number went up to 60% for HDM recipients.
- Affordability was a clear barrier with **65% of respondents living on \$15,000/yr or less.**
- Physical limitations were experienced by many, including those receiving congregate meals: **41% said they are only sometimes or never able to shop for groceries,** and 38% have a limited ability to prepare their own food.
- **45% reported having little to no support** from family, friends, or a personal care attendant.
- **25% of participants don't have internet access and 20% prefer to go online as little as possible,** limiting online shopping opportunities for many.
- Other food programs are underutilized given the depth of need indicated: **only 56% received SNAP and only 18% had used a food pantry.**
- **34% of those receiving SNAP said the benefit was not enough** to meet their needs, and food pantries are not always accessible to homebound older adults.

It's clear that while the daily meal provided by congregate and HDM programs is critical, a wide meal gap remains. Many are unable to access the City's anti-hunger infrastructure due to a limited ability to physically access food pantries or grocery stores and/or the mental and physical difficulties that come from preparing a meal with ingredients from pantries. But the solution is clear too: we must improve our home-delivered and congregate meal programs and invest in innovative new programs that get more food to people in their homes.

Citymeals' Food Programs

Citymeals addresses gaps in the City's anti-hunger infrastructure by bringing food directly to older adults who cannot regularly access food in other ways.

The HDM Weekend Meals Program in NYC

The federal Older Americans Act of 1965, which funds HDM and congregate meal programs across the country, only requires them to serve one meal a day, five days a week. HDM programs may choose to provide additional meals using local public or private funding. Across New York State, some counties do provide public funding for meals on weekends, and some even fund a second daily meal.

The solution in the City is a unique public-private model: Citymeals began as a fund within DFTA tasked with raising private dollars to cover the cost of meals for days the program did not operate. This created two funding streams flowing to the same network of contracted nonprofits providing the meals: one stream responsible for the total core program costs (including its overhead) and the other funding just the additional food.

For nearly 45 years, Citymeals has had the privilege of working in partnership with DFTA and the City's contracted HDM providers to ensure that homebound older New Yorkers receive at least one daily meal. In FY25, we infused the program with over 1.4 million weekend meals at a cost of over \$14 million. The overwhelming majority of this funding is private. In FY26 we received \$2.7 million from DFTA (a cost which is offset for the city by a federal reimbursement of 74 cents on the dollar for these meals) and \$500,000 from the City Council for our weekend meals program.

While the return on investment for the City is significant, this model has begun to bow under the pressure of dramatic increases in both the number of older adults needing meals and inflation-driven food costs. Over the years, this has caused the difference between our reimbursement rate and what providers receive from the City has also grown due to the constraints of private fundraising. Today, while the City pays providers \$14.78 per meal, Citymeals pays \$10 per meal.

The administration has recognized the increasing costs of the program, raising its reimbursement rate to contracted providers by about a dollar every year since FY21, increases that Citymeals stood with advocates to fight for. But the City's investment in the weekend meals program has remained flat. If Citymeals were to increase our reimbursement rate at the same pace, we would have had to raise an additional \$1.5 million each year, or \$9 million over the past 6 years. We were able to increase our rate by a total of \$4 per meal over this time, but we know this is not enough and the widening gap between the true cost and what we can offer is becoming untenable for providers. Without additional investment from the City, the day may soon come when providers can no longer afford to partner with us for weekend meals.

In the absence of a greater partnership with the City, we support Int. No. 280 which addresses this issue by expanding the HDM program to provide meals 7 days a week, 365 days a year. The core program should provide at least one daily meal as this is the most basic need for all program participants. We also ask the council to note the following concerns:

1. Expanding the program must come with the proper amount of funding. Based on our work funding these meals we believe the City should budget for 1.5 – 1.8 million weekend meals at the same reimbursement rate they provide for weekday meals.
2. As written the bill could be interpreted to require that providers deliver meals 7 days a week, which is not how the system operates. Typically, weekend meals are frozen or chilled and delivered during the week along with that day's meal. Requiring providers to deliver meals on weekends would incur additional labor, fuel, and overhead costs beyond the current rate above.

Emergency Meals Program

Citymeals has been a citywide emergency responder for older adults since 9/11. In 2018, the opening of our Bronx warehouse solidified this role by giving us the capacity to store up to 10,000 packed and ready meals, and enough food to quickly package up to 60,000 more meals. With this level of inventory, we can pre-supply existing program participants with nutritious, shelf-stable meals and respond to those in temporary need during extreme weather, an emergency closure, or a suspension of meal delivery service. We can turn on a dime to reach large numbers of older adults in senior housing facilities, NYCHA housing, or Naturally Occurring Retirement Communities (NORCs), as well as individuals living across the five boroughs. We

have stepped up during citywide emergencies like Hurricane Ida, as well as more localized emergencies such as a power or gas outage. Time and again, we have illustrated the value of our agile and resourceful model.

Finally, in the current RFP, DFTA began to require that contracted HDM providers give an additional meal every month from November through March, to ensure that older adults had some extra food on hand in the event of an emergency. However, no additional funding was included to meet this new requirement. Therefore, Citymeals stepped in to provide that additional meal at no cost to providers.

In FY25, Citymeals' emergency food program provided 250,146 meals to older adults across the City. This is what we do, and what we hope to keep doing. Citymeals has the infrastructure and stands ready for the next emergency, provided we can access the additional funding that makes our nimble model possible.

Supplemental Food Programs and Pilots

To help fill the meal gap for homebound older adults enrolled in the home-delivered meals program, we launched a few new programs in FY25. We have a long-term goal to reach 60% of our current service population (~13,000 recipients) with additional food while increasing choices and diversity of meals where possible. By working closely with the City's case management agencies, we identify meal recipients who are actively experiencing food insecurity and place them into one of the following programs.

Our **Breakfast Box** provides enough food for 30 meals including: staples such as oatmeal, cereal, yogurt, milk, rice, and beans; four frozen meals (eg. breakfast burrito, omelet with potatoes); and, a minimum of seven pounds of fresh produce. This is procured, packaged, and delivered by Citymeals directly to homebound older adults on a monthly basis. Contents rotate monthly or seasonally to offer a variety of food. This year we began to offer a Kosher option. **In FY25 this program provided 381,480 meals to nearly 2,000 HDM recipients.**

Our **Mobile Groceries** program provides a monthly box with enough food for 14 meals, including pantry staples, two frozen meals, and about four pounds of produce. This year we

began to offer Halal, Kosher, and Latin options for the frozen meals. The program, which receives funding from the City Council through the Feeding Our Communities Initiative, currently serves 600 HDM recipients citywide. **In FY25, this program provided 44,559 meals to nearly 500 HDM recipients.** We are also running a smaller client-choice pilot program in partnership with the West Side Campaign Against Hunger. This program allows an additional 200 participants in the Bronx to order their groceries by phone, text, or online, and offers four choices (plant or animal-based proteins and milks, all fresh produce or a mix of fresh and shelf-stable foods). Participants receive enough food for 18 meals, delivered monthly.

These pilot programs are directly in response to the expressed needs of meal recipients and our research demonstrating deep food insecurity.

Finally, our **Shopping Assistance** pilot program provides 50 recipients in East Flatbush, Brooklyn with vouchers worth the equivalent of \$80 a month for three months to be used at two designated local grocery stores. This program addresses food insecurity while offering independence in making food choices that best suit participants' needs while allowing us to learn more about the nutritional needs and practices of older adults. While that pilot has concluded, we are currently building another model to test that pairs each participant with a volunteer who can help with grocery shopping and getting their groceries home.

Citymeals is continually assessing these food programs for impact and improvement.

In 2025, we conducted surveys of our Breakfast Box, Mobile Grocery, and Shopping Assistance Pilot Programs. We learned that:

The *Breakfast Box Program* is showing strong positive outcomes for Citymeals participants:

- 90% said it helps them to have more money to pay bills or necessities.
 - On average, participants estimated saving \$60/month.
- 81% said it helped them manage one or more health conditions.
- 79% reported the program helping them not be hungry.

Early evaluation findings show that the *Mobile Grocery Pilot* is a highly effective intervention that improves food security, reduces hunger and worry, supports independence and health, builds dignity and trust, and reaches some of the most food-insecure older adults in NYC.

- 87% say it reduces anxiety about food.
- 86% reported the program helping them afford rent, utilities, and medication.
 - On average, participants estimated saving \$38/month.
- 82% reported eating healthier foods.

The *Shopping Assistance Pilot* also delivered significant, measurable improvements for older adults in East Flatbush facing food insecurity.

- Severe food insecurity dropped sharply from 40% at the start of the program to 9% at the end of the program.
- Fewer cut or skipped meals.
- Increased purchases of fresh produce, proteins such as meat and fish, and culturally specific food (eg. yucca and yams).

We are so grateful for the support we received in FY25 from the Council which has allowed us to continue to serve older adults during emergencies, and to improve and scale these innovative programs, which are already showing impact. **We respectfully request that the Council continue to support our food programs by renewing its discretionary funding:**

- **\$500,000 for our Emergency Food Programs through the Older Adult Centers, Programs, and Services Initiative;**
- **\$600,000 for our food programs through the Feeding Our Communities Initiative; and,**
- **\$50,000 for our food programs through the Food Pantries Initiative.**

Sector-Wide Needs

New York City simply does not prioritize the services and programs that help older adults age in place, demonstrated by long-standing underinvestment in these services. Furthermore, many of the city's approaches to fighting hunger are simply inaccessible to the thousands of homebound older New Yorkers who are food insecure. Aging in place is the best strategy for older adults and for New York City, and that means ensuring that we have a robust home and

community-based services infrastructure. An older adult should never have to be placed in a nursing home simply because they cannot access enough food to remain healthy at home.

Along with our partners, we call upon the City Council to prioritize older adults and nutrition in the FY27 budget by:

- **Increase Community Food Connection funding to a permanent baseline of \$100 million** to provide sustained, flexible support for more than 500 pantries and community food providers serving over 1 million New Yorkers.
- **Investing \$90 million in the congregate and home-delivered meals programs, both of which continue to face steep increases in program costs due to high inflation rates and years of underfunding.**
 - Pass Intro 280, which would require the City's home-delivered meals program to provide a meal 365 days a year, with adequate funding included in the budget.
 - Increase per meal reimbursement rates for HDM from \$14.78 to \$16.17/meal.
 - Increase funding for congregate meals by \$60 million.

Conclusion

It is critical that the City adequately support more programs that get food directly to older adults. Citymeals works hand-in-hand with congregate and HDM providers to ensure that older adults are able to eat at the very least one meal every day, but more is needed. Older adults must no longer be an afterthought in the development of anti-hunger strategies. We need to look at the City's food programs and do more to ensure that they are accessible to older adults and present a comprehensive approach to hunger.



Testimony of
Coalition for the Homeless

before the General Welfare and Finance Committees
of the New York City Council

on the


General Welfare Committee – Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

submitted by

Alison Wilkey
Director of Governmental Affairs and Strategic Campaigns
Coalition for the Homeless

March 18, 2026

The Coalition for the Homeless (“Coalition”) welcomes this opportunity to submit testimony to the New York City Council’s Committee on General Welfare. As the court- and City-appointed independent monitor of the Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system and party in the historic *Callahan*, *Eldredge*, and *Boston* cases that created the right to shelter in New York City (“NYC”), we are uniquely situated to provide insight into the impact of proposed funding for the shelter system and related programs serving all unhoused New Yorkers.

Shelter census data over time reflects a distressing trend: a consistent increase in the need for, and use of, the emergency shelter system over the past 44 years. In the past year, the crisis has been exacerbated by the continued depletion of housing that is affordable to those at the lowest income levels and policies that make it more difficult for homeless individuals and families to exit shelter into permanent housing. These factors have resulted in long shelter stays and fewer housing options for low-income families. As a result, in the month of January 2026, there were an average of 100,437 people sleeping each night in all shelter systems in NYC, including 33,217 children.¹ 

Underlying this significant increase in the shelter census is a shortage of housing affordable to those at the lowest income levels. New York City’s vacancy rate for apartments renting for under \$1,100 per month is less than 0.4 percent, and the overall vacancy rate is 1.4 percent – the lowest it has been since the City began measuring it in 1968.² Rapidly increasing rent levels, wages that are not keeping pace with inflation and housing costs, and increasing population³ are all contributing to a worsening shortage in affordable housing – especially for those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Such a dramatic loss in the supply of apartments affordable to low-income renters, including those relying on a public assistance rental allowance, shuts many New Yorkers out of the housing market entirely. This trend is likely to continue, given that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development calculated that the Fair Market Rent (“FMR”) for a two-bedroom apartment in the NY metropolitan area is \$2,910 per month,⁴ while the public assistance rental allowance for a typical family of three with at least one child remains only \$400 per month. The FMR for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,655 per month.⁵ However, a single adult receives a public assistance rental allowance of only \$215 per month. This situation is not tenable.

The housing crisis has been fueled by decades of underinvestment in permanent affordable housing for low-income communities and the failure of all levels of government to enact policies to meaningfully reverse this trend. The affordable housing shortage in New York, particularly for extremely low-income (“ELI”) households, is underscored by stark data revealing the depth of the crisis. According to the

¹ Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness," accessed February 25, 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

² New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, "New York City's Vacancy Rate Reaches Historic Low of 1.4 Percent, Demanding Urgent Action," press release, February 8, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/news/007-24/new-york-city-s-vacancy-rate-reaches-historic-low-1-4-percent-demanding-urgent-action-new#/0>.

³ U.S. Census Bureau, “Growth in Metro Areas Outpaced Nation,” Census.gov, March 13, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/population-estimates-counties-metro-micro.html>.

⁴ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "FY 2026 Fair Market Rent Documentation System – New York, NY HUD Metro Area," 2026, accessed January 29, 2026, https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2026_code/2026summary.odn.

⁵ *Ibid.*

National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2025 report, “The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” there is a glaring disparity in the availability of affordable housing: for every 100 ELI households in the New York City metropolitan area, there are merely 35 affordable and available rental units.⁶ In a state where the cost of living far exceeds national averages, and ELI households are defined as those earning at or below the poverty line or 30 percent of the area median income (“AMI”), this gap leaves a vast number of residents in precarious housing situations.

The worsening housing precarity in New York State is evidenced by the growing rent burdens borne by its residents. In New York City metro area, seventy-three percent of ELI households are severely rent-burdened.⁷ This financial strain severely limits the capacity of ELI households to afford other necessities, such as food, healthcare, and childcare. It forces many of them to live in overcrowded conditions – defined as having more than two people per bedroom or more than one person living in a studio apartment. In fact, nearly a quarter (23 percent) of New York City households with at least one child are overcrowded.⁸ Given that living in overcrowded conditions is frequently a precursor to homelessness, such statistics portend greater levels of mass homelessness if this affordable housing crisis continues.

The crisis extends beyond those in shelters to include unsheltered homelessness, which presents its own significant challenges. According to the last HOPE estimate published in 2025, an estimated 4,504 individuals experienced unsheltered homelessness in one night.⁹ However, there is no reliable estimate of the total number of those sleeping unsheltered. The City’s annual HOPE survey, mandated by the Federal government, underestimates the true size of this population due to flawed methodology, and as a point-in-time survey, it fails to capture the dynamic nature of unsheltered homelessness. Whatever figure is reported by the City, we can safely assume the true number of homeless people sleeping unsheltered is far higher.

Housing is the Solution

Ensuring that every household has access to housing they can afford is the only solution to the decades-long homelessness crisis that shames our city. While the Coalition will continue to vigorously defend the Right to Shelter, our ultimate goal is to make shelters unnecessary.

Expand CityFHEPS to New Yorkers in All Shelters and Households At-Risk of Eviction

CityFHEPS remains the primary pathway enabling people to exit shelter to stable, permanent housing. According to the Mayor’s Management Report, subsidized exits to permanent housing increased in Fiscal Year 2025 for the third year in a row, with 8,149 single adults, 781 adult families, and 12,336 families

⁶ NLIHC Releases the Gap 2025: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, November 20, 2025, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report_2025_english.pdf.

⁷ NLIHC Releases the Gap 2025: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, November 20, 2025, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report_2025_english.pdf.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “2023 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings,” 2023, pg. 53, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

⁹ New York City Department of Homeless Services, “Homeless Outreach Population Estimate 2025 Results,” <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/hope/hope-2025-results.pdf>.

with children exiting shelter with a housing subsidy.¹⁰ These improvements were largely driven by coordinated efforts between DHS and contracted shelter providers to expedite housing placements.

However, over 100,000 people still reside in shelters, not counting those who are unsheltered or doubled or tripled up in others' homes.¹¹ Mayor Mamdani made a campaign promise to expand CityFHEPS and drop the litigation with City Council and the Legal Aid Society initiated by his predecessor. Since taking office, he has reneged on that commitment, citing budget concerns. While the budget for CityFHEPS has grown, it is because CityFHEPS is working to house homeless New Yorkers. It is the primary tool the City uses to help people exit shelter and stay housed.

The City Council must remain firm on expanding CityFHEPS to everyone in shelters, including runaway and homeless youth shelters and those in transitional housing contracted through the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. It is also critical to expand CityFHEPS as an eviction prevention tool. The number of people sleeping in shelters will not decrease unless the City is deploying resources to prevent evictions. Many households in rent-regulated or other low-rent apartments are still struggling to pay the rent because of growing income inequality.¹² Investment in the housing sector targeted to low-income households, using vouchers and other tools, is necessary to reduce the shelter census.

Successful expansion of the CityFHEPS program depends also on fixing the unnecessary delays and hurdles that plague every step of the process. Clients of the Coalition experience extended delays in processing their applications for CityFHEPS, approvals of apartments, and payments to landlords. Such extreme delays and processing issues are commonly experienced by people who are trying either to leave shelter and find permanent homes or to avoid eviction. More staff are needed at several critical points in the process: processing applications and issuing shopping letters, review of CityFHEPS packets and apartment clearance review, the rental assistance line, and processing of and assistance with renewals.

Fund Affordable Housing Creation for Homeless and Extremely Low-Income New Yorkers

The Mamdani Administration will soon release its housing plan and it is critical that the City Council ensures that the administration is producing sufficient affordable housing for homeless and ELI households. From 2014 to 2024, on average, only 2,000 units a year were financed for extremely low-income and homeless households—four times fewer than higher-income households.¹³ Over the next five years, building an additional 6,000 apartments for homeless households and 6,000 apartments for ELI households per year would go far toward addressing the imbalance in the City's historic "affordable" housing production.

¹⁰ New York City Department of Homeless Services, *Mayor's Management Report* (New York: City of New York, 2026), accessed March 13, 2026, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2026/dhs.pdf>.

¹¹ Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness," accessed March 13, 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

¹² Maximilian Buchholz et al., "Inequality, Not Regulation, Drives America's Housing Affordability Crisis" (working paper, 2026) International Inequalities Study, London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/131070/>.

¹³ Coalition for the Homeless, "Build from the Bottom Up: Affordable Housing for Homeless New Yorkers," January 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/build-from-the-bottom-up/>

In December 2025, the Council passed new mandates requiring that 30 percent of all new affordable housing production is set aside for ELI households, inclusive of the existing requirement that 15 percent of units are set-aside for homeless households, and an additional 20 percent must be set aside for very low-income households.¹⁴ Now, the City Council must ensure that there is sufficient capital funding to support the production of those units, and that this important mandate does not stall affordable housing production.

Meeting the Needs of Unsheltered New Yorkers

Low-Barrier Safe Haven Shelters

The City must invest in more low-barrier shelter beds, such as Safe Havens and Stabilization beds. The extreme winter weather that killed at least several homeless New Yorkers this year highlights the gaps and shortcomings of the City's approach to outreach to unsheltered people. Soon, we will experience extreme heat and Code Red notifications that will endanger the health of people who have nowhere else to sleep but public spaces, and potentially Code Grey alerts relating to dangerous air quality. There is real urgency to reform how the City performs outreach by focusing on meeting the short- and long-term needs of unsheltered individuals.

Safe Haven and Stabilization shelter beds offer fewer restrictions, more privacy and security, and better staffing and social services to meet the needs of our unsheltered neighbors. The City recently claimed that there are 4,200 low-barrier shelter beds.¹⁵ However, shelter census data from March 13, 2026, on file with the Coalition for the Homeless, shows that total capacity for Safe Haven and Stabilization beds is 3,960. Further, when taking into account beds that are offline, actual capacity is only 3,710. Rather than ensuring that we have a sufficient number of these critical beds, the City has reinstated encampment sweeps and outreach methods that do not meet unsheltered people's needs. As a result, we will continue to see few people connected to shelter, let alone permanent housing.¹⁶ Thus, the City must allocate \$98 million to add 2,000 new single-occupancy Safe Haven beds for unsheltered New Yorkers which while not sufficient to provide beds for all unsheltered individuals, will be a meaningful step in addressing a critical need.

Addressing the Closure of the 30th Street Shelter Intake

The Coalition has serious concerns about the closure of the 30th Street Intake site for single adult men and the proposed new site identified by DHS at 8 E. 3rd St. Based on the most recent population analysis from DHS provided to us pursuant to our consent decree in *Butler v. City of New York*, almost 16% of single adult men in have a mobility-related disability. At the Preliminary Budget Hearing on March 17, 2026, Department of Social Services Commissioner Erin Dalton testified that, "We believe the sites we have chosen offer comparable and better intake and assessment, accessibility." As currently configured, the site

¹⁴ New York City Local Law 66 of 2026.

¹⁵ Barbara Russo-Lemon, "NYC Has to 'Better Explain' How Its Funding Is Helping to Combat Homelessness, Which Is Increasing This Year Even as Outreach Expanded, According to a NYS Comptroller's Office Report Released on Wednesday," *amNY*, accessed March 13, 2026, <https://www.amny.com/news/nyc-homeless-increase-spending-dinapoli/>.

¹⁶ City of New York, Department of Homeless Services, "Local Law 34 of 2024 Quarterly Interagency Reporting on Encampment Cleanups and Aided Removals, CY25Q2," <https://www.nyc.gov/site/dhs/a-bout/stats-and-reports.page>.

has serious accessibility issues that are not comparable to the 30th Street site, and we have serious doubts that the issues can be remediated by May 1, 2026.

DHS hired an accessibility consultant to review the site in 2019. That assessment concluded that there were numerous accessibility issues. None of those issues have been remediated in the intervening years.

Our own inspection of the site raised the following concerns:

- Ramp and “accessible” entrance: the ramped entrance to the basement significantly exceeds the slope measurements to be ADA compliant and has other access barriers noted in the accessibility assessment. DHS said they were planning to reduce the gradient and address other related access barriers to meet ADA accessibility standards, but this plan would involve significant construction, unlikely to be completed prior to May 1, 2026.
- Elevators: access to the only functional elevator is impeded by a box-out, presumably of a beam, at the basement and third floors (we didn’t observe the other floors of the building). The box-out significantly impacts the landing area immediately outside the elevator doors by several inches and means the maneuvering space for mobility devices is limited to less than ADA accessibility standards allow. The other elevator has been out of service for several years.
- Bathrooms: there is currently no bathroom stall at the site large enough to fit a wheelchair. The one bathroom with grab bars is far too small to fit a wheelchair and installing or remediating the bathroom to be ADA compliant would require significant construction.
- Privacy: sleeping areas are visible from other floors, affording no privacy to residents.
- HVAC: In the past, clients at 8 E. 3d St. have been moved during periods of extreme heat because of the challenges of properly cooling the site.

These concerns must be addressed to keep the Right to Shelter intact and ensure that single adult men in need of shelter – especially those with disabilities – are able to access the shelter system.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Council on the budget and other legislation to address the needs of those who are unhoused or precariously housed throughout NYC.

About Coalition for the Homeless

Founded in 1981, Coalition is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to address the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fifth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 12 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-training for homeless and low-income women; and permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributed nearly 400,000 hot, nutritious meals to homeless and hungry people on the streets of the city this past year – up from our usual 320,000. Finally, our Crisis Services Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms, and money for medications and groceries. Since the pandemic, we have been operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right-to-shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981, the City and State entered into a consent decree in *Callahan* through which they agreed: “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 the independent court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor the municipal shelter system serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by Legal Aid and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws. During the pandemic, the Coalition worked with Legal Aid to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure Wi-Fi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic.



**Testimony of Enterprise Community Partners
The New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Oversight – Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal Year 2027**

March 17, 2026

My name is Agnes Kim, and I am a Program Manager at Enterprise Community Partners. Enterprise is a national nonprofit that exists to make a good home possible for the millions of families without one. We support community development organizations on the ground, aggregate and invest capital for impact, advance housing policy at every level of government, and build and manage communities ourselves. Since our New York office opened in 1987, we have committed more than \$4.7 billion in equity, loans and grants to affordable housing and community to create or preserve over 69,800 affordable homes across New York City. On behalf of Enterprise, I would like to thank Chair Hudson and the members of this Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony.

This year, New Yorkers made it clear that affordability is the top priority. New York City continues to experience a historic housing and homelessness crisis, driven by rising costs and a lack of affordable housing. To effectively address this challenge, greater investments will be required at every level of government, but especially given the uncertain federal landscape, we look to the City to ensure that its residents have access to safe, stable, and affordable housing. In the Mayor's preliminary budget, we were encouraged by the increases in expense budgets for Department of Social Services and Department of Homelessness Services. It is imperative that the City continues to prioritize the welfare of individuals and families experiencing homelessness and housing instability.

Expediting Lease Ups

To solve our housing and homelessness crises, we should work to move New Yorkers into permanent, affordable housing as quickly as possible. Yet the process of leasing up affordable housing is beset with delays and red tape. Our research demonstrates that it takes a median of 439 days to lease up an affordable building compared to a median of 235 days nationally. Every day that it takes to lease up a building is another day a family spends in shelter. This is unconscionable. These delays also impact mission-driven owners, who struggle to provide services amid escalating costs and decreasing revenue.

While the city and its agencies have taken steps to address these delays, more can be done. Over the last year, we worked with advocates, service providers and developers to develop a set of

recommendations to address these delays, focusing on HousingConnect, homeless placements and CityFHEPS. We wish to raise the following ideas and look forward to working with the Council and City agencies to make these processes work better for all New Yorkers.

- **Allow for Third Party Navigators for Homeless Placements:** City agencies should outsource aspects of the homeless placement process to third party housing navigators, who can liaise between shelters and housing opportunities. This approach would allow for greater efficiency and relieve administrative bottlenecks among the agencies.
- **Allow Some Direct Homeless Placements:** Currently, even if an organization offers a continuum of housing options including shelter and permanent housing, they are restricted from offering available affordable units to qualifying shelter residents. Some direct referrals from shelters into affordable housing should be allowed when the shelter and housing operators are the same organization, when the shelter is co-located with an affordable housing site, or when a housing provider has a relationship with a local shelter. However, housing owners must allow referrals from outside these direct sources as well.

Expanding and Reforming CityFHEPS

As co-conveners of the Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC), we are committed to tackling the homelessness crisis and working to ensure that families can safely exit shelter and remain stably housed. The City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) is New York City's best tool to do that. It is the second largest voucher program in the country, and responsible for about 70% of exits from the City's homeless shelters.

We continue to emphasize the urgent need to implement the CityFHEPS expansion that was passed into law in 2023 and has since been held up in legal limbo. The investment in CityFHEPS addresses the cyclical nature of homelessness. Without stable housing, families repeatedly return to shelter. A recent Win report finds that shelter costs 35% more and moving families into permanent housing with CityFHEPS could save the City \$635 million in shelter costs over 5 years. The choice is not only a financial one, but a moral one. We cannot let New Yorkers and their families remain in homelessness and wait any longer for the stability that these vouchers provide.

In addition to expanding CityFHEPS, we also recommend reforming its implementation. For far too long, significant administrative and operational barriers have prevented CityFHEPS from providing the critical support that New Yorkers need. As part of our lease up recommendations, we recommend the following reforms:

- **Streamline CityFHEPS Income Verification:** Income verification and rebudgeting, which is triggered when a household income changes by more than \$100 between the

shopping letter stage and lease up, causes delays that often end in lost units for tenants and necessitates a significant amount of human power to fix. The City could reduce this burden in a number of ways, ranging from the minimal (increasing the rebudgeting threshold or enabling community partners to do rebudgeting at package submission) to the more transformational (allowing the income and tenant share determined at the shopping letter stage to stand until package submission or even after move in, at least for cases where approval has been delayed more than a month).

- **Reform the CityFHEPS Inspection Process:** The CityFHEPS inspection process has consistently been raised as a major source of delay. The city can take a number of steps, including increasing awareness of virtual inspection options, allowing tenants to decide to move into units with non-hazardous notations, streamlining ground floor inspections and allowing Apartment Review Checklist (ARC) inspections to stand, even if a tenant doesn't end up moving into a unit.
- **Allow Building-Level CityFHEPS Registration for Faster Approvals:** For subsidized affordable housing properties with regulatory agreements, shift to a building-wide registration process rather than unit by unit for all local vouchers and significantly streamline the landlord package submission process. New York City Housing Preservation & Development (HPD), New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC) and the Department of Social Services (DSS) should coordinate to allow for seamless registration and eliminate the duplicative submission of materials for each unit. This would reduce the burden for property owners as well as for Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and Human Resources Administration (HRA) staff.
- **Modernize CityFHEPS Payments with Digital Check Issuance:** The numerous sources of payment for CityFHEPS causes additional opportunities for delay. Building on an HRA pilot, the two separate shelter allowance checks and HRA payment should be merged into a single payment that should be issued digitally.

Addressing Housing Discrimination

To ensure the success of CityFHEPS and other voucher holders, New York City must address source of income discrimination. The administration's preliminary budget threatens to cut funding for the City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR), the agency responsible for enforcing fair housing protections, by 8%. This would halt the slow rebuilding of the agency at this critical moment. We call on the Council and Mayor to reverse course, abandon the proposed budget cut and instead increase the FY26 budget for the Commission by \$10 million so that it is funded at \$25 million in FY27. Increasing funding would allow the agency to expand its successful early intervention unit to resolve cases quickly so that New Yorkers with vouchers can move into

housing faster and utilize our precious voucher resources and would also allow CCHR to adequately fund newly enacted protections for New Yorkers impacted by the criminal legal system.

Thank you again for the chance to submit testimony.



**Testimony Submitted by
Mikaela Perry, Advocacy Manager, Equity Advocates
Before the New York City Council
FY27 Executive Budget Hearing:
Committee on General Welfare**

March 17, 2026

Thank you to Councilmember and Chair of this committee, Crystal Hudson, for holding the Executive Budget hearing and the opportunity to submit this testimony. My name is Mikaela Perry, and I am the Advocacy Manager at Equity Advocates, a nonprofit organization that builds the capacity of food justice leaders from across New York State to advocate collectively to dismantle food inequity through policy and systems change. We accomplish this through policy development, advocacy education and training, and coalition leadership.

Equity Advocates convenes the [NYC Food Policy Alliance](#), a network of 60+ food system stakeholders that advocate for public policies to ensure equitable access to a healthy, sustainable food system.

Last year's passage of the federal H.R. 1 bill unleashed the largest cuts to food assistance in our nation's history, leaving New York City to manage a food affordability crisis. Under H.R. 1, roughly 180,000 New York City households are projected to lose their SNAP benefits, half of whose members are children and senior citizens. Estimates suggest that 70,000 residents in our city will be pushed below the poverty line every single year starting in 2028. As the federal government retreats, the City must step forward..

We urge the Administration and City Council to enact a budget that invests in access to healthy, affordable food, strengthens urban agriculture and supports the next generation of farmers, and fosters long-term resilience and economic opportunity in the City's food system. Specifically, we respectfully request your support for the inclusion of the following recommendations in the FY27 City Budget:

1. **Increase baseline funding to \$100 million for Community Food Connection (CFC)** to meet the growing demand for food assistance across NYC. We applaud the City Council for increasing this critical investment to \$74.5 Million in its Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Response. Due to an 83% rise in emergency food visits from 2019 to 2024, NYC's emergency food system is under unprecedented strain. An investment of \$100 million in CFC is essential to meet the growing demand for food, address increasing food prices and cuts to SNAP, and provide critical support for vulnerable communities facing worsening affordability and food insecurity crises.

According to the 2023 New York City True Cost of Living Report, published by United Way of New York City, 50% of working age New Yorkers are struggling to cover their basic needs. Families struggling to make ends meet live in every NYC neighborhood but across family composition, work status, and education, the report finds that people of color are disproportionately likely to lack adequate income. Further, 80% of households below the True Cost of Living had at least one working adult and the

presence of children in the household almost doubles the likelihood that a household will have inadequate income.

Federal Cuts to hunger programs make an already dire situation even worse. Now is the time to meet current need and prepare for the increased demand for emergency food that will likely occur due to federal actions that weaken SNAP, freeze funding for pantries and farmers, and raise food prices. Food pantries are the last line of defense against hunger for so many of our neighbors, yet these essential services are being asked to do more with less.

A substantial investment in funding for the CFC would accommodate the increased costs of adding fresh food into the program, rising cost of produce, and continued need in New York City. This increase will also help to address the inefficiencies found in using third-party vendors particularly in the procurement of kosher and halal items. Kosher- and halal-observant New Yorkers make up 21% of enrollees in GetFoodNYC. It is critical the City's food assistance programs have sufficient kosher and/or halal certified product available and allocate funding to agencies that can effectively store and distribute that food in a culturally competent way. Finally, we urge HRA to engage in an outreach and education campaign to ensure smaller, community-based providers are able to participate in the program, and are adequately supported to continue serving their communities.

2. **Increase funding for Health Bucks to \$700,000, Maintain \$3.1 Million in Funding for Get the Good Stuff, and Increase Funding for Groceries to Go to \$14 Million** to enhance reach and impact.

Health Bucks, New York City's longstanding farmers market SNAP incentive program, has been baselined at \$500,000 for several years, which is no longer sufficient to meet growing demand. The current \$500,000 in baselined funding for Health Bucks is divided between supporting SNAP incentives at farmers markets and providing free Health Bucks to community and faith-based organizations (CBOs) for distribution through their nutrition and health programs. In 2024, the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) received 600 applications from CBOs but was unable to fully fund all requests, leaving organizations underfunded or without support entirely.

By distributing Health Bucks through CBOs that integrate them into nutrition and health programming, the program reinforces nutrition education efforts, ensuring that participants have both the knowledge and the financial resources to choose locally grown and seasonal fruits and vegetables. This incentive structure strengthens the impact of nutrition education, increasing the likelihood of sustained behavior change. Importantly, Community Health Bucks are not tied to SNAP participation, making them a vital resource for individuals ineligible for public benefits, particularly in light of federal cuts to SNAP and barriers to immigrant families' access to public assistance.

Additionally, by increasing funding for Health Bucks, local farmers and producers selling at farmers markets will see increased sales, bolstering our local economy. [Over 75% of farmers in New York State are small-scale](#), and financially bolstering this program provides an increased opportunity to support small-scale businesses, especially women- and BIPOC-owned farms.

Get the Good Stuff, which provides SNAP users with matching dollars to purchase fresh produce at participating grocery stores, should also be funded at \$3.1 million and expanded to include more stores and communities. The current \$10 per day match cap for SNAP incentives should be increased to further support families in purchasing sufficient ingredients for their families. As food prices have risen substantially, \$20 is not adequate to purchase fruits and vegetables to last several days, particularly for larger households. By increasing investment in these programs, the City can make fresh, healthy food more accessible to low-income communities while maximizing federal funding opportunities.

Finally, we urge the council to fund **Groceries to Go** at \$14 Million to expand the program's reach and extend the current 18-month participation limit. Groceries to Go serves a uniquely vulnerable population: NYC Care members who are ineligible for SNAP, often due to immigration status, and are managing chronic conditions like hypertension or diabetes. By providing monthly credits of up to \$270 that cover not just food, but also delivery fees and tips, this program is a lifeline for homebound New Yorkers and those with limited food accessibility options who cannot physically shop in person.

According to recent [program evaluation funded by the NY Health Foundation](#), the program's success is undeniable, with redemption rates reaching as high as 99.9% and documented improvements in participants' diet and health. The infrastructure—including a highly efficient, multi-lingual call center and a customized data system—is already in place and ready to scale. What is missing is the city's investment. Increasing funding will ensure that the City can move beyond the current enrollment of 4,000 participants and provide long-term, stable food security to those who fall through every other safety net. It is estimated that for every extra \$1 Million the city invests in this program, an additional 1100 people can enroll in this program. This does not include their household members, which when taken into account would support an additional 1650 household members in accessing food per \$1 million investment.

Together, these three programs provide an incredible opportunity for the city to increase food security for its residents, despite cuts at the federal level. We urge the council to include funding for these programs in the FY27 Executive budget.

- 3. Allocate \$100 Million** in capital funds to support Mayor Mamdani's initiative to develop City-owned supermarkets. Both scale and sustained operational investment will determine the success of this initiative. Achieving real affordability requires a model that operates at sufficient scale, which our partners Community Food Advocates have identified at an initial 20 stores. While the \$70 million included in the Preliminary budget is an impressive baseline amount to initiate this project, long-term success will depend on ongoing operational funding. Current projections suggest approximately \$20 million per store in annual subsidy—roughly \$100 million annually for the first five stores— is necessary to ensure sustained affordability, quality jobs, and a dignified grocery experience for New Yorkers.

We also encourage the council to consider administration of this program, and highlight the need to ensure there are pathways to source food from local and regional farmers and producers in order to ensure New Yorkers are accessing the freshest ingredients, and our local economy is bolstered. Offices

such as the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture have existing relationships with urban farmers within the five boroughs and farmers throughout the regional foodshed. This office in particular is primed to ensure the food in the city-owned supermarkets is purchased through values-alignment, especially from BIPOC, Women-owned, and small-scale producers. When sourcing is considered, city-owned supermarkets could be a catalyst for an initiative that spans food security, climate justice, and economic development. Through this initiative and careful administration, NYC has an unprecedented opportunity to lead as an example to other municipalities across the nation in providing accessible, affordable, local food.

The NYC Food Policy Alliance also supports the following in the FY27 City Budget:

STRENGTHEN FOOD SECURITY

- **Combat older adult hunger by investing \$60 million in congregate meals at Older Adult Centers**, to account for steep increases in inflation over the last several years. In addition, ensure NYC Aging has at least \$27 Million in funding to provide homebound older adults with home-delivered meals 365 days per year.
- **Continue to fund the following Council Discretionary Initiatives:**
 - \$8.47M for the Food Pantry Initiative
 - \$2.134M for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative
 - \$1.4M for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative

INVEST IN URBAN AGRICULTURE

- **Allocate at least \$250,000 to fund the Mayor's Office of Urban Agriculture (MOUA)** to ensure strong food systems, climate justice, and economic justice within the administration. MOUA has proven its impact by leading programs such as **Reimagining Farm to School in NYC** and **Values Aligned Purchasing**. These programs align with the administration's priorities of greening public schools, providing access to fresh local foods for students, increasing agricultural and climate education for youth, and supporting local farmers in NYC's foodshed. This office has seen tremendous success with a small staff, and an increased investment will only multiply their impact. Further, we urge the incoming Administration to move forward with appointing an Urban Agriculture Advisory Board, as required under Local Law 123, to strengthen accountability and space for community voice.
- **Maintain \$2.6 Million in funding for GreenThumb and \$6.2 Million for NYC Community Composting programs** to provide essential resources for community gardeners.

BUILD LOCAL FOOD ECONOMIES

- **Create a \$5 million Food Justice Fund** for community-led projects designed to grow food justice and build wealth in BIPOC and low-income communities. In *Food Forward NYC*, the Mayor's Office of Food Policy calls for the establishment of a Food Justice Fund. We urge the City to invest in this program at \$5 Million and offer grants for both planning and implementation projects serving high need areas identified by Racial Equity Task Force. Funding would be allocated directly to community food organizations historically serving NYC residents with a demonstrated history of meeting the cultural and food needs of their communities. As this field of work requires long term investments, the fund should



prioritize 2 year grant cycles and allow for flexibility on spending deadlines upon receiving grants. We also ask that the City explore a private-public partnership and leverage its convening power to secure matching investment from local philanthropic foundations.

- **Increase Council Discretionary funding** to \$4.9 Million for the Worker Cooperative Business Development Initiative to allow for a specific focus on those operating in the food sector and maintain \$1.5 Million for the Citywide Community Land Trust Initiative.

We thank you for the opportunity to testify and we look forward to working with the City Council to achieve these goals in the upcoming budget.

Mikaela Perry

Equity Advocates

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TESTIMONY

Submitted to the

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

on the subject of The Preliminary Budget for FY27

March 20, 2026

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

We write to you today to express our concerns about the Preliminary Budget for FY27 and to identify priorities that the FHC believes the City should invest in during the coming fiscal year.

The FHC finds it unacceptable that a proposed budget of \$124 billion for FY27 will fund a system that leaves families experiencing homelessness and families at risk of homelessness, in the same crisis as they experienced in FY26. The City cannot continue to allow more than 150,000¹ children to experience homelessness over the course of a year and should work to end, not manage, family homelessness.

The City must change the way it does business by investing strategically and significantly to halt the patterns reinforced by the current City system. A system where families struggle to access housing security resources, struggle to maintain quality of life after losing housing, and struggle to access new housing once they are in shelter is not a system that will end family homelessness.

To that end, the Family Homelessness Committee first and foremost urges the City Council to fully fund the CityFHEPS program expansion in FY27. CityFHEPS has proven effective in supporting more than 13,000 families in exiting shelter and moving into permanent housing in a single year. Expansion of this program is one of the most impactful tools the City has to help families exit shelter and shift the trajectory of the family homelessness system.

The FHC also urges the Committee to sufficiently fund Homebase in order for it to resume its core functions of preventing imminent evictions, administering emergency rental assistance efficiently, and supporting extremely low-income families in obtaining the public benefits to which

¹ Advocates for Children of New York. (2025, October 20). *Student Homelessness in New York City, 2024–25*. https://advocatesforchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/student_homelessness_2024-25.pdf



they are entitled. As highly impactful community-based agencies, Homebase providers have become the go-to for administering new programmatic resources to an increasing number of families without a comparable funding increase. Homebase providers are one of the key tools that the City can use to shift the trajectory of family homelessness, however, they cannot make a strategic impact if the agencies are not fully and strategically funded.

Additionally, the FHC is concerned that funding for other programs that maintain the quality of life for children in shelter, support families in securing housing, and provide that housing are proposed to be underfunded or cut in FY27. While many of these funding sources are outside of the jurisdiction of the Committee on General Welfare, we urge the Committee to ensure that the essential complimentary funding from the Committees on Housing and Buildings, Public Housing, Education, and Finance is also in place. Without this coordination, the funding under the purview of Committee on General Welfare to be used to its highest potential- preventing housing instability, ensuring child and family well-being when shelter is unavoidable, and providing rental assistance to families with extremely low-incomes who are greatly in need.

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

The Family Homelessness Coalition²

² Steering Committee Members: *Advocates For Children, Barrier Free Living, Camba, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York, Coalition for the Homeless, CSH, Enterprise Community Partners, Family Action Board, Terra Linda Housing Services, Homes for the Homeless, Henry Street Settlement, Homeless Services United, Homes for the Homeless, New Destiny Housing, Riseboro, Safe Horizon, Sanctuary For Families, Settlement Housing Fund, Volunteers of America-Greater New York, Win*



Testimony of FPWA

**Presented to:
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Chair Crystal Hudson
March 17, 2026**

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

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

FPWA has a membership network of more than 170 faith and community-based organizations. We support our members by offering workshops and trainings on topics such as organizational management and trauma-informed approaches to service delivery. FPWA also provides a range of financial assistance grants through our member network, working to strengthen individuals and families at the ground level. These grants provide direct support to New Yorkers in the form of scholarships, financial assistance for aging adults, funding for organizations providing HIV/AIDS related services, and more.

In 2024, FPWA co-founded the National True Cost of Living Coalition. In partnership with Community Service Society of New York, FPWA commissioned the Urban Institute to develop a True Cost of Economic Security (TCES) measure, which provides a comprehensive view of households' costs and resources detailed at the county level.¹ This research revealed that across the nation, 52 percent of people—and 62 percent of New York City residents—are economically insecure, meaning they do not have the resources necessary to meet a comprehensive set of regular household costs, set aside savings both for future planning and for short-term emergencies, and manage debt.² In certain areas and for certain demographic groups, that number is even higher. For instance, 72 percent of families with children and an unconscionable 91 percent of single-parent households in New York City fall below the TCES, with New Yorkers of color disproportionately experiencing economic insecurity.³ More, the decline in economic mobility and the stagnation of wages has left economic security out of reach for most New Yorkers.^{4,5}

This hearing thus comes at a critical time for the city. In the last year, the cost-of-living crisis has been exacerbated by actions at the federal level that are negatively impacting New Yorkers across the city, but especially those who are facing deep economic insecurity. This includes funding cuts and other changes

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

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

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

³ Ibid.

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

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

that reduce the scale and scope of programs like the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Medicaid, and most recently, an attempted freeze on federal funds to New York for programs like Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), which funds cash assistance and other supports for New Yorkers with low incomes. Now more than ever, it is critical that New York City step up and do everything in its power to fulfill its responsibility to ensure a path to economic security for all and build a more affordable, equitable city.

The FY27 budget presents an opportunity to do just that by improving access to supportive programs like cash assistance, SNAP, and other food and nutrition programs; investing in CityFHEPS to address homelessness and build towards long-term solutions to fix the broken housing market; and ensuring that wages are aligned with what it costs to be economically secure in New York City today.

Key Budget Asks

1. Increase the Human Resources Administration's (HRA) budget to ensure the benefits system is efficient, accessible, and responsive to the needs of New Yorkers by:
 - a. Streamlining application and recertification processes to reduce case closings/application denials caused by administrative barriers.
 - b. Improving turnaround time for case processing.
 - c. Implementing people-centered and trauma-informed practices into the delivery of services.
 - d. Investing in improving technology used by HRA to manage cases.
2. Increase and sustain investments in food access programs that help New Yorkers afford healthy food and fully access their SNAP benefits by:
 - a. Increasing baseline funding for free Health Bucks, the city's farmers market SNAP incentive program, from \$500,000 to \$700,000.
 - b. Maintaining \$3.1 million for Get the Good Stuff programs.
 - c. Increasing funding to \$100 million for the Community Food Connection program to meet rising demands for food assistance.
 - d. Continuing to fund several Council Discretionary Initiatives, including the Food Pantry Initiative (\$8.26 million), Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education (\$2.134 million), and the Food Access and Benefits Initiative (\$1.5 million).
 - e. Making investments to combat older adult hunger, including:
 - i. \$60 million in congregate meals at Older Adult Centers to account for steep increases in inflation over the last several years.
 - ii. \$27 million to expand home-delivered meals to 7 days a week.
3. Fund the expansion of the CityFHEPS program and remedy existing issues in the program, including improving oversight and enforcing housing quality standards.
4. Ensure wages are aligned with economic security and invest in the human services workforce.

Vital Services Are at Risk

Income supports provide critical aid to New Yorkers, particularly during periods of economic instability. While the federal government is launching attacks on these programs, demand for them has increased significantly, with the number of New Yorkers enrolled in SNAP, Medicaid, and especially cash assistance

growing substantially since 2020.⁶ New York City must step up to ensure that individuals and families are not left without the benefits to which they are entitled.

We are pleased to see that New York City is making vital investments to meet the growing need for income supports. The FY27 Preliminary Budget includes an additional \$1.9 billion investment in public assistance, \$16 million in Emergency Food Operations, and \$11 million in SNAP, resulting in a 17.4 percent increase in the budget for the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) compared to the modified budget. However, while these investments are important and build on funding added in FY26, the majority of this additional funding is needed to correct longstanding underbudgeting of existing demand for human services. As a result, despite the scale of these investments, New York City will still face challenges in meeting growing needs for cash and food assistance as federal support declines. Given the fiscal constraints, the City Council must also explore ways to maximize the effectiveness of its investments. Below, we outline recommendations to improve service delivery and ensure that New Yorkers can access the benefits to which they are entitled.

Income Supports Provide Critical Support to New Yorkers Facing Economic Insecurity

Cash Assistance

As part of our work to support and stabilize New Yorkers who are the furthest from attaining baseline economic security, we continue to advocate for policies that address the ongoing gaps and shortcomings of current benefits programs, with a focus on the cash assistance program. While the cash assistance program remains vital, it is notoriously difficult to access and does not provide enough for individuals to meet even their most basic needs.

In December 2025, FPWA published a policy brief, [*Cash Assistance, Reimagined: Lessons from Guaranteed Income*](#).⁷ This brief synthesizes findings from a growing body of research on guaranteed income demonstration projects, which provide unconditional monthly cash payments to individuals and families, supplementing their existing income so they experience a net gain in resources.⁸ Research from these demonstrations has shown that these additional unrestricted cash payments increase household resources, support economic security, and enhance participants' ability to meet their needs, pay bills on time, pay off debt, and save for the future.^{9,10,11} They have also been shown to support overall health and well-being by reducing stress, supporting physical and mental health, improving birth outcomes, and

⁶ David, G. (2024, April 2). Safety Net Aid Enrollment Soars, Complicating Economic Recovery. *The City*. <https://www.thecity.nyc/2024/04/02/safety-net-family-assistance-soars/>

⁷ FPWA. (2025). *Cash Assistance, reimagined: Lessons from guaranteed income*. <https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/Guaranteed-Income-Policy-Brief.pdf>

⁸ The demonstration projects mentioned in this section provided direct cash in amounts ranging from \$500 to \$1,000 for a period of between 12 to 24 months and were targeted to people with low incomes (including those below the Federal Poverty Level, households with income below 80 percent area median income, and those in neighborhoods with area median income below \$46,033).

⁹ Downey, N. (2022). *Guaranteed income: States lead the way in reimagining the social safety net*. Shriver Center on Poverty Law & Economic Security Project. <https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ESP-Shriver-Center-Report-V7-040122-1.pdf>

¹⁰ Springboard to Opportunities. (2020). *Magnolia's Mother's Trust 2020 evaluation report*. https://springboardto.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/STO_MMT-2nd-Cohort-2020-Evaluation-Summary-1.pdf

¹¹ Springboard to Opportunities. (2024). *Holistic Prosperity: An abundance-based framework to develop programs and systems that are grounded in trust, equity, and a belief that all people deserve a life of dignity*. <https://springboardto.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Holistic-Prosperity-Full-White-Paper-1.pdf>

improving food security and nutrition.^{12,13,14,15,16} Additional, unrestricted cash enhances housing stability and prevents homelessness.^{17,18,19} Outcomes are also multi-generational, improving educational outcomes for children and increasing educational enrollment and rates of full-time employment for adults.^{20,21,22} Additional cash has even been shown to reduce intimate partner violence and child welfare system involvement.^{23,24}

Using this model of direct, unconditional cash, the policy brief explores how New York can apply the principles of guaranteed income to its existing cash assistance program, and we offer state-level recommendations to modernize and strengthen the program. The first recommendation is to increase the extremely low cash assistance grant, which was a key policy recommended by the Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC).²⁵ While New York City cannot increase this grant statewide,

¹² Kim, B. E., Castro, A., West, S., Tandon, N., Ho, L., Nguyen, V. T., & Sharif, K. (2024). *The American guaranteed income studies: City of Los Angeles BIG:LEAP*. University of Pennsylvania, Center for Guaranteed Income Research. <https://basicincome.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CGIRLABIGLEAPFinalReport.pdf>

¹³ West, S., Castro, A. B., Samra, S., & Coltrera, E. (2021). *Preliminary analysis: SEED's first year*. Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED).

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6039d612b17d055cac14070f/t/603ef1194c474b329f33c329/1614737690661/SEED_Preliminary+Analysis-SEEDs+First+Year_Final+Report_Individual+Pages+-2.pdf

¹⁴ Agarwal, S., Shaefer, H. L., Zamani-Hank, Y., Finegood, E., LaChance, J., & Hanna, M. (2025). *Perinatal cash transfers and birth outcomes: A population-based, quasi-experimental study of the Rx Kids unconditional cash prescription during pregnancy and infancy*. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=5459276>

¹⁵ Downey, N. (2022). *Guaranteed income: States lead the way in reimagining the social safety net*. Shriver Center on Poverty Law & Economic Security Project. <https://www.povertylaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/ESP-Shriver-Center-Report-V7-040122-1.pdf>

¹⁶ Springboard to Opportunities. (2020). *Magnolia's Mother's Trust 2020 evaluation report*. https://springboardto.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/STO_MMT-2nd-Cohort-2020-Evaluation-Summary-1.pdf

¹⁷ Kim, B. E., Castro, A., West, S., Tandon, N., Ho, L., Nguyen, V. T., & Sharif, K. (2024). *The American guaranteed income studies: City of Los Angeles BIG:LEAP*. University of Pennsylvania, Center for Guaranteed Income Research. <https://basicincome.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CGIRLABIGLEAPFinalReport.pdf>

¹⁸ Bogle, M., Williams, J. L., Braswell, C., & Fung, L. (2022). *Guaranteed income as a mechanism for promoting housing stability: Exploring an important policy lever for addressing America's affordable housing crisis*. Urban Institute.

<https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2022-12/Guaranteed%20Income%20as%20a%20Mechanism%20for%20Promoting%20Housing%20Stability.pdf>

¹⁹ Brisson, D., Calhoun, K. H., Coddington, L., Flaxman, J., Locke, S., Mann, B., Traver, A., & Yang, H. (2024). *Denver Basic Income Project: Year one evaluation report*. Denver Basic Income Project.

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/64f507a995b636019ef8853a/t/6671a15eec7a812dee108e7c/1718722914185/FINAL_D_BIP+Year+One+Quantitative+Research+Report.pdf

²⁰ DeYoung, E., Tandon, N., West, S., Castro, A., Golinkoff, J., & Thompson, A. (2024). *The American guaranteed income studies: Cambridge, Massachusetts*. University of Pennsylvania, Center for Guaranteed Income Research.

<https://upenn.app.box.com/v/CGIR-Report-Cambridge-MA>

²¹ Campos, S., Ebba, C. W., Karim, N., & Rowe-Harriott, S. (2024). *Magnolia Mother's Trust: 2022-2023 evaluation report*.

Springboard to Opportunities. <https://springboardto.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/MMT-4.0-Cohort-Full-Evaluation.pdf>

²² West, S., Castro Baker, A., Samra, S., & Coltrera, E. (2021). *Preliminary analysis: SEED's first year*. Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration (SEED).

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6039d612b17d055cac14070f/t/603ef1194c474b329f33c329/1614737690661/SEED_Preliminary+Analysis-SEEDs+First+Year_Final+Report_Individual+Pages+-2.pdf

²³ Kim, B. E., Castro, A., West, S., Tandon, N., Ho, L., Nguyen, V. T., & Sharif, K. (2024). *The American guaranteed income studies: City of Los Angeles BIG:LEAP*. University of Pennsylvania, Center for Guaranteed Income Research. <https://basicincome.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/CGIRLABIGLEAPFinalReport.pdf>

²⁴ Agarwal, S., Shaefer, H. L., Jubaed, S., Schneider, W., Finegood, E., & Hanna, M. (2025). *Cash transfers in the perinatal period and child welfare system involvement among infants: Evidence from the Rx Kids program in Flint, Michigan*. University of Michigan. <https://arxiv.org/pdf/2511.19570>

²⁵ New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. (2024). *New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council: 2024 recommendations and progress report*. Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

<https://otda.ny.gov/CPRAC/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>

there are steps it can take to make the program more equitable and accessible. In 2024, FPWA published a report, *Rewriting the Story*, that shares the findings from a series of in-depth interviews with New Yorkers receiving cash assistance.²⁶ The New Yorkers we interviewed spoke about how they struggle to get by on cash assistance and often go without basic needs. Parents spoke about skipping meals so that their children could eat and how, despite their sacrifices, their kids ultimately go without, too—from shampoo and hygiene products to clothing, shoes, and school supplies.

Participants also provided extensive accounts of persistent barriers to apply and recertify for cash assistance. Each year, tens of thousands of New Yorkers are denied access to the program or lose benefits due to administrative barriers related to these processes. These procedural denials and closures are consistently the main reason individuals are denied or lose cash assistance, demonstrating that these processes are overly burdensome for those seeking assistance. From July 2024 to June 2025, New York State denied 340,109 applications (67.8 percent of all denials) due to reasons related to the application process (i.e., “failure to comply with application requirements, such as failure to appear for interviews or failure to provide documentation”) and closed more than 142,911 cases due to reasons associated with the recertification process (i.e., “failure to comply with program requirements not related to employment such as failure to recertify”), representing 49.7 percent of all cases closed.²⁷

These barriers are a significant issue in New York City, especially as it relates to the benefits interview process. City data from FY24 shows that more than 108,000 cases were denied because the applicant was unable to complete the eligibility interview, representing the largest category of all cases denied. These issues continued during the recertification process, as more than 23,000 cases were closed for not completing the recertification interview.²⁸

Participants we interviewed consistently reported administrative errors that ultimately caused a delay or denial of their benefits: they were often told that they did not submit paperwork or that it was “lost,” even though they had a record of submitting it, and reported challenges with the recertification process, such as not knowing when to recertify and not receiving notice. Several participants reported that they lost benefits because of a processing error, such as a caseworker not entering their recertification into the system. Administrative errors of this kind lead to significant burdens on New Yorkers, and many individuals we interviewed reported going without food or other essentials or turning to local food pantries or nonprofit organizations when their benefits were cut off. As one participant stated plainly: “They make it so hard [to access cash assistance]. It makes it easier for you to walk away.”

These administrative errors are only one part of a myriad of other issues our interviewees reported while interacting with the Human Resources Administration (HRA). Participants by and large described a system that is punitive, confusing, and structured in ways that discourage people from seeking or maintaining assistance—patterns that mirror the historical design of the program itself. The other access and retention barriers that repeatedly emerged in our interviews include:

- **Long Wait Times:** Participants reported that they frequently wait hours while applying/recertifying in person or visiting an office to resolve an issue. One participant said she has had to take time off from work several times to resolve various issues, and she added that

²⁶ FPWA. (2024). *Rewriting the Story: Lived experiences of New Yorkers receiving cash assistance*. https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/FPWA-Cash-Assistance-Story-Collection-Series_10.21.2024_3.52_PM-1.pdf

²⁷New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance. (2025). *2025 Legislative Report on Public Assistance*. <https://otda.ny.gov/resources/legislative-report/2025-Legislative-Report.pdf>

²⁸ New York City Human Resources Administration. *Local Laws 168 and 170 Reports*. <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/news/local-laws-168-170-reports.page>

maintaining cash assistance “is like an actual job.” Participants also reported long hours on the phone. One participant, who had her cash assistance stolen, said she counted that she spent 30 hours on the phone trying to resolve the issue.

- **Poor Communication and Inconsistent Information About Program Requirements:** Many participants reported instances where they could not reach anyone at HRA or their local social services office to resolve an issue. Participants also reported receiving false or conflicting information from staff about program rules and application/recertification requirements.
- **Negative Experiences with Staff:** Participants reported being treated poorly by staff while applying, recertifying, or resolving issues with their cases. Participants described the experience of going to a Benefits Access Center as “uncomfortable,” “intimidating,” even “humiliating.”

Individuals and families generally turn to cash assistance during some of the most difficult periods of their lives. Many are navigating multiple crises at once, including housing instability, domestic violence, or other forms of hardship. Yet the administrative barriers built into the system often exacerbate these challenges rather than alleviating them, adding stress and making it harder for eligible New Yorkers to secure or maintain necessary benefits.

Participants in our interviews described these experiences as follows:

“To go into the [HRA] office...and sit there for a bunch of hours...I feel like I’m being judged when I go into the office, and I’m treated a certain way just because I need a certain thing...or I’m sitting there for hours, or I’m not given all the information I need.”

Dejonea from Brooklyn

“I went a couple times in person [while applying]. I’ve called them multiple times. I sat on hold for five hours at one point, and the system just hangs up on me...I think my worst experience was when I last tried to go in person. I came in with all the paperwork...and [they told me to call instead].”

Andrew from the Bronx

“The amount of paperwork that is requested is too onerous. Besides that, it is so hard to find someone who speaks Spanish.”

Pilar from the Bronx

“I think everybody knows that if you go there, it’s gonna be at least 3 hours. One time, I was there for 10 hours...they said I’m not eligible and I have to reapply. Each time I go, it’s 3, 6, 10 hours...I’m completely at the mercy of HRA...It’s taking way too long to process the documents. It’s like living life on hold.”

Camila from Queens

“It’s so impossible to reach out to [HRA]...It doesn’t matter how many hours you’re sitting on the phone, they never answer...it makes it very difficult for someone like me, who is disabled, to go in person.”

Elias from Brooklyn

“I just remember feeling just awful because I already felt terrible for being in that situation...the in-person process was just very intimidating. I just dreaded going to the office.”

Amy from Manhattan

Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)

In New York City, food insecurity remains a major challenge and is on the rise in all five boroughs, with the highest rate of food insecurity reported in the Bronx at 23 percent.²⁹ The most effective program we have to address hunger is SNAP, which provides individuals and families across the state with monthly food assistance. The positive impacts of SNAP are well documented. Research shows that SNAP reduces poverty and food insecurity while lowering health care costs and improving overall health outcomes.^{30,31,32} SNAP also enhances educational advancement, especially among children who grow up in households receiving these benefits.³³ SNAP has also been shown to yield macroeconomic benefits by stimulating local economies, and every \$1 in SNAP benefits generates \$1.50 in economic activity.^{34,35}

Despite the overwhelming positive impact of SNAP, the federal government has launched a full assault on the program and implemented the largest cuts to SNAP in history in the budget reconciliation bill (H.R.1), further exacerbating food insecurity and increasing demand for and strain on emergency food systems. The expansion of time limits alone threatens the benefits for more than 300,000 people across the state, while new eligibility restrictions may eliminate SNAP access for over 40,000 lawfully residing immigrants in New York. The bill will also shift approximately \$200 million in SNAP administrative costs onto state and local governments beginning in October 2026. Even before these changes, federal law already limited SNAP participation to U.S. citizens and certain lawfully present non-citizens, excluding over 800,000 income-eligible New Yorkers based on their immigration status. These cuts, as well as the SNAP suspension during the recent government shutdown, highlight the need for New York City to step up and mitigate the harm of these federal actions.

We recognize that many issues with SNAP and other benefits programs require state as well as city intervention. At the state level, we have advocated for a number of investments to improve SNAP, including increasing the minimum benefit level to \$100. Currently, some SNAP recipients receive as little as \$23 per month, barely enough for a single bag of groceries. We have also supported allocating state funds to cover the New Yorkers recently excluded from SNAP mentioned above, paving the way toward a future “SNAP for All” program that is inclusive of all low-income New Yorkers who are unable to access SNAP due solely to their immigration status.

Still, many of the barriers New Yorkers face when trying to access benefits occur at the local level. As the administrator of SNAP, HRA plays a critical role in ensuring that eligible residents can successfully apply

²⁹ Mayor’s Office of Food Policy. (2025). *Food by the Numbers*. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/foodpolicy/downloads/pdf/NYC-Food-by-the-Numbers-2025.pdf>

³⁰ Tiehen, L., Jolliffe, D., & Smeeding, T. (2015). *SNAP Matters: How Food Stamps Affect Health and Well-Being*. University of Wisconsin-Madison Institute for Research on Poverty (IRP). <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/resource/the-effect-of-snap-on-poverty/>

³¹ Li, Y., Mills, B., Davis, G. C., & Mykerez, E. (2014). Child food insecurity and the Food Stamp Program: what a difference monthly data make. *Social Service Review*, 88(2), 322–348. https://uknowledge.uky.edu/ukcpr_papers/29

³² Carlson, S., & Llobrera, J. (2022). *SNAP is linked with improved health outcomes and lower health care costs*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/food-assistance/snap-is-linked-with-improved-health-outcomes-and-lower-health-care-costs>

³³ Beharie, N., Mercado, M., & McKay, M. (2017). A Protective Association between SNAP Participation and Educational Outcomes Among Children of Economically Strained Households. *Journal of hunger & environmental nutrition*, 12(2), 181–192. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2016.1227754>

³⁴ Bolen, E., Wolkomir, E. (2020). *SNAP boosts retailers and local economies*. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/snap-boosts-retailers-and-local-economies>

³⁵ Canning, P., & Stacy, B. (2019). *The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and the Economy: New Estimates of the SNAP Multiplier*. United States Department of Agriculture. <https://ers.usda.gov/sites/default/files/laserfiche/publications/93529/ERR-265.pdf?v=70863>

for and maintain benefits. In recent years, applicants for both SNAP and cash assistance have experienced record processing delays, leaving thousands of New Yorkers waiting more than 30 days for their applications to be processed.³⁶ Addressing these access and administrative challenges is essential to ensuring that SNAP reaches the New Yorkers who need it.

Recommendations to Improve Access to Cash Assistance and SNAP in the FY27 New York City Budget

To address the challenges outlined above in both city data and testimony from benefits recipients, FPWA calls on the City Council to increase HRA's budget to improve the management and administration of benefits and make the experience simpler for New Yorkers. This should include funding to:

- **Streamline application and recertification processes to reduce case closings/application denials caused by administrative barriers.** HRA should hire staff to conduct a thorough review of these processes to determine if there are ways to waive certain documentation requirements or ease the paperwork burden on applicants/recipients in other ways. HRA should also develop resources and other protocols to mitigate these challenges, such as providing individuals with accessible, clear instructions on how to apply and recertify, and providing information about the specific programs they are eligible for and the requirements for maintaining benefits. In addition, because thousands of New Yorkers are denied or lose benefits because of the interview requirement, HRA should implement a tracking system to ensure relevant staff confirm interview completion (or failure thereof). We also previously testified before the City Council in support of Intro. No. 139, which would require DSS to provide a benefits interview confirmation notice no later than 24 hours after the completion of a client's eligibility or recertification interview. Simple changes like this can have a significant impact and help ensure New Yorkers can access the benefits while generating administrative cost savings for DSS.
- **Improve turnaround time for case processing.** In recent years, applicants for cash assistance and SNAP have faced lengthy processing delays. DSS has made some progress in rectifying the backlog of cases.³⁷ However, more work needs to be done to ensure that all eligible applicants receive benefits promptly, and HRA should be sufficiently staffed to process applications efficiently and prevent future backlogs. In addition, efforts to process applications more swiftly should ensure that applicants are still able to complete the interview and other requirements so that these efforts do not lead to more case closures.
- **Implement people-centered, trauma-informed practices in the delivery of services.** FPWA, in partnership with graduate students from New York University's Wagner School of Public Service, conducted a thorough analysis of strategies to make the cash assistance program more people-centered and trauma-informed. Recommendations stemming from this work include revamping Benefits Access Centers to create a more welcoming, accessible environment with clear signage, printed resources in multiple languages, a clear and uniform check-in process, and private spaces where individuals can complete applications or recertifications. Both in-person and remote services, such as telephone interviews, should also incorporate trauma-informed language to facilitate more respectful and effective communication. These improvements, combined with increased staffing, should also reduce wait times for individuals and families seeking benefits.

³⁶ Yi, Karen. (2024, January 31). Wait times for NYC cash benefits worsen, leaving vulnerable New Yorkers hanging. *Gothamist*. <https://gothamist.com/news/wait-times-for-nyc-cash-benefits-worsen-leaving-vulnerable-new-yorkers-hanging>

³⁷ Donaldson, Sahalie. (2025, January 31). NYC is getting faster at distributing SNAP and cash assistance benefits. *City and State NY*. <https://www.cityandstateny.com/policy/2025/01/nyc-getting-faster-distributing-snap-and-cash-assistance-benefits/402671/>

- **Invest in improving technology used by HRA to manage cases.** This includes improving internal management systems and expanding features on the ACCESS HRA app and on the website. For example, HRA could develop a chat box functionality and other simple assistance features to facilitate easy information access. In addition, applicants should receive automatic document confirmation to confirm receipt and acceptance of uploaded documents.

Additional Recommendations to Enhance Access to SNAP and Food Assistance Programs

In our work related to cash assistance, individuals we interviewed consistently shared that they are struggling to afford food for themselves and their families. The City Council must do more to address the rising cost of food and the increasing rates of food insecurity, and FPWA supports the following measures to further enhance food access and fight hunger in the FY27 New York City Budget.

- Increase and sustain investments in food access programs that help New Yorkers afford healthy food and fully access their SNAP benefits by:
 - Increasing baselined funding for Health Bucks, the city’s longstanding farmers market SNAP incentive program, from \$500,000 to \$700,000 to expand access to fresh, healthy food for low-income New Yorkers while supporting local farmers. This proposal funds both components: \$350,000 for SNAP-based farmers market incentives and \$350,000 for Health Bucks through community and faith-based CBOs.
 - Maintaining \$3.1 Million for Get the Good Stuff programs.
 - Increasing funding to \$100 Million for Community Food Connection (CFC) to meet the rising demand for food assistance. In the wake of unprecedented federal cuts to nutrition programs, New York City’s emergency food system is under severe strain. A substantial investment in CFC, including enhanced access to fresh food, will support communities facing deepening affordability and food insecurity crises.
 - Making investments to combat older adult hunger:
 - \$60 million in congregate meals at Older Adult Centers to account for steep increases in inflation over the last several years.
 - \$27 million to expand home-delivered meals to 7 days a week.
 - Maintaining Council Discretionary funding at \$8.26 million for the Food Pantry Initiative, \$2.134 million for the Access to Healthy Food and Nutritional Education Initiative, and \$1.5 million for the Food Access and Benefits Initiative.

Expand CityFHEPS to Reduce Homelessness and Invest in Long-term Solutions to Make Housing Affordable and Accessible for All New Yorkers

Safe, stable, and affordable housing is foundational to economic security, yet our state is experiencing both a homelessness crisis and a broader housing affordability crisis. According to a study by New York University’s Furman Center, approximately 46 percent of New York State residents are renters. Of those renters, 53 percent are rent burdened (meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent and utilities) and approximately 27 percent pay more than half of their income on rent and utilities each month.³⁸ In addition, more than 158,000 New Yorkers experienced homelessness in 2024, and these

³⁸ Been, V., Dong, J., & Raetz, H. (2023). *Critical land use and housing issues for New York State in 2023*. NYU Furman Center. https://furmancenter.org/files/publications/Critical_Land_Use_and_Housing_Issues_for_New_York_State_in_2023_Final.pdf

numbers are on the rise.³⁹ The population of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness grew by a staggering 53.1 percent from January 2023 to January 2024, more than four times the rest of the nation.⁴⁰

First, New York City must urgently address the homelessness crisis and help more New Yorkers move into stable housing. At the state level, we have urged the legislature to include funding in this year's budget for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP). This proposal, which was mirrored in CPRAC's recommendations, would create a state-funded rental assistance program that would provide housing vouchers to eligible low-income individuals and families who are homeless or who face an imminent loss of housing due to eviction, domestic violence, or hazardous conditions. Importantly, HAVP would be available to groups that are currently ineligible for local or federal rental assistance, including undocumented New Yorkers. Programs such as HAVP are essential to alleviating rent burden and ensuring that New Yorkers avoid homelessness.

At the city level, the City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) program also plays an important role in addressing the homelessness crisis by providing subsidy vouchers to assist households move out of shelters and avoid homelessness. Households in shelters or at imminent risk of eviction may qualify if they earn below 200 percent of the federal poverty level, maintain an active public assistance case, and meet minimum work requirements. Participants generally contribute 30 percent of their income toward rent, with the subsidy covering the remainder (up to rent limits aligned with the federal Section 8 standards).

In 2023, the New York City Council enacted a package of reforms to strengthen and modernize the program. These measures expanded eligibility to households facing eviction with documented rent demands (rather than requiring prolonged shelter stays as prerequisite), raised income eligibility to 50 percent of the Area Median Income, eliminated restrictive work requirements, and adjusted utility calculations to ensure voucher values were not reduced. Collectively, these reforms were designed to shift CityFHEPS toward a more preventative and inclusive model and expand eligibility to include an additional 47,000 households.⁴¹ Former Mayor Adams vetoed much of the package in 2023 citing cost concerns, the Council then overrode Adams' veto, but litigation barred implementation. Now, while Mayor Mamdani has identified a \$7 billion budget deficit and rising program expenditures as justification for reconsidering his support for implementing these changes, the need to fund this expansion remains, and it is critical that fiscal challenges be weighed against the cost of prolonged shelter stays and homelessness. According to a recent analysis by Win, when patterns of repeat homelessness and shelter reentries are properly accounted for, the cost of providing CityFHEPS yields significant cost savings overtime.⁴² Equally important, investing in immediate homelessness prevention measures like CityFHEPS can also help end the cycle of trauma and instability that disrupts the lives of New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness or living in the shelter system.

Moreover, according to an audit from the Comptroller, some of the recent growth in program expenditures was driven by weak oversight and administrative mismanagement, which can and should be

³⁹ Office of New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli. (2025). *New Yorkers in need: Homelessness in New York State*. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Goldenberg, S. & Zaveri, M. (2026, February 12). Mamdani Reverses Campaign Promise to Expand Rental Assistance. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/02/12/nyregion/mamdani-rental-vouchers.html>

⁴² Mann, Chris. (2026). *More than a Moral Choice: How CityFHEPS Could Save NYC \$635 Million*. Win. <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/More-Than-a-Moral-Choice-How-CityFHEPS-Could-Save-NYC-635-Million-2.pdf>

remedied to reduce costs.⁴³ But the audit also revealed that these issues have contributed to poor housing quality standards, demonstrating that families have been placed in apartments with serious housing-code violations, including mold, mice, rat, and roach infestations, and missing window guards. In some cases, DSS failed to conduct the required safety checks (“pre-clearance inspections”) before move-in, and the audit also found some instances where landlords continued to receive rent payments for uninhabitable apartments, contributing to increased costs and forcing families to relocate. Another concerning finding from the audit is that DSS has not implemented a system to disqualify landlords with repeated building code violations, leaving CityFHEPS participants vulnerable to exploitation and unsafe housing. In addition, discriminatory practices in the housing market like source-of-income discrimination undermine the program, ultimately exacerbating homelessness and putting additional strain on the shelter system.^{44,45}

Given these issues, we urge the City Council and the Mamdani Administration to agree on a path forward to fund the CityFHEPS expansion while also improving program management and enforcing proper housing quality standards and protections against source-of-income discrimination.

Ultimately, however, rental assistance programs are still in many ways a short-term fix to a much larger systemic problem. Our broken housing system requires government at all levels to intervene to build more affordable housing, and we urge the City Council to consider solutions like social housing, or publicly funded, permanently affordable housing, that will help New Yorkers find high-quality, permanent housing while also pushing back on market forces that perpetuate inequality, homelessness, and housing instability.

Ensuring Fair Wages for New Yorkers and the Human Services Workforce

Benefits like cash assistance, food supports, and housing vouchers help to begin filling the significant gap many New Yorkers face between their current economic precarity and true economic security, but they are only part of the picture. Wages have not kept pace with the high cost of living in our city, and the gulf between these costs and what resources New Yorkers have to meet them is alarming. TCES data shows that even in Manhattan, the most economically secure of the five boroughs, the average resource gap for families with children who are below the TCES threshold is still \$49,000. These disparities are even more pronounced outside of Manhattan, with both the Bronx and Brooklyn facing average resource gaps of \$54,400 and \$55,200, respectively.

Recent wage increases are an important step forward but still fall short of what it takes to achieve baseline economic security. On January 1, 2026, New York City’s minimum wage officially rose to \$17 an hour thanks to the tireless advocacy by workers, labor unions, community organizers, and economic justice advocates. However, a full-time worker earning \$17 an hour for all 52 weeks of the year will earn just \$35,360 a year—less than half of the \$71,300 that the TCES tells us a single adult needs in New York City. Families with children face even greater challenges due to the cost of prohibitively expensive necessities like child care, making them the least economically secure demographic.

⁴³ Office of New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli. (2026). *Audit of NYC’s CityFHEPS Program Reveals Weak Oversight and Rising Costs*. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2026/01/dinapoli-audit-nycs-cityfheps-program-reveals-weak-oversight-and-rising-costs>

⁴⁴ New York City Commission on Human Rights. (n.d.). *Source of Income Discrimination*. Retrieved March 10, 2026, at <https://www.nyc.gov/site/cchr/media/source-of-income.page>

⁴⁵ Zaveri, M. (2022, May 25). Discrimination Weakens Tool for Reducing N.Y. Homelessness, Lawsuit Says. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/25/nyregion/ny-vouchers-homeless-discrimination.html>

In March of 2026, FPWA published a policy brief on occupational segregation, which refers to the systematic sorting of workers into different industries and roles along lines of race, gender, immigration status, disability, and other marginalized identities. [*Unequal by Design: Occupational Segregation, Essential Labor, and Economic Disparities in New York City*](#) details how U.S. policy has created an economic system which results in the overrepresentation of workers from historically marginalized groups in low-wage, exploitative, and precarious jobs or industries and their underrepresentation in higher-wage, secure, and influential occupations.⁴⁶ Using a comparison of Manhattan and the Bronx, the report shows how economic security varies dramatically from borough to borough. In Manhattan, 50 percent of families with children can reach the economic security threshold, largely because of the higher wages earned by Manhattan residents, as the top 10 occupations among Manhattan residents are overwhelmingly high-wage, high-prestige roles. In the Bronx, where nearly all of the top 10 professions are low-paying, only 12 percent of families with children are economically secure, not because their costs are higher but because their incomes and available resources are significantly lower.

The human services workforce is not exempt from these concerns. This sector provides vital public services to our city, yet its workers remain grossly underpaid. Today, human services workers in New York City earn 30 percent less than what government employees earn for the same role, and 22 percent were eligible for SNAP in 2021.^{47,48} These workers are also disproportionately women and predominantly women of color.⁴⁹ Paying human services workers fairly, at a rate that recognizes their contributions, is not only long overdue but necessary to enable an equitable, just, and appropriately resourced sector that is responsive to the needs of New Yorkers. To that end, we urge the City Council to prioritize the needs of workers, especially human services workers, in the FY27 New York City Budget and encourage continued review to ensure wages are aligned with what it costs to be economically secure. The City Council should continue to explore policies that will raise wages for both low- and middle-income earners, and the TCES offers a powerful, ready-made tool to help do exactly that while centering economic security.

Conclusion

New York City is at a critical moment. As economic insecurity rises and federal support becomes increasingly uncertain, we must strengthen the systems that help New Yorkers meet their needs. The FY27 budget must prioritize improving access to benefits by investing in HRA, strengthening food access programs, expanding the CityFHEPS program to address the homelessness crisis, and ensuring that wages reflect the true cost of living. Meeting this moment will require strong, sustained commitment from both Mayor Mamdani and the New York City Council to prioritize equitable investments in New York communities that seed opportunity and growth for individuals and families across the city. We thank you for your time and attention to these critical issues, and FPWA looks forward to working with you to make meaningful investments in the economic security of New Yorkers in the FY27 City Budget.

⁴⁶ FPWA. (2026). *Unequal by Design: Occupational Segregation, Essential Labor, and Economic Disparities in New York City*. https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/Occupational-Segregation-Brief_FINAL-1.pdf

⁴⁷ Human Services Council of New York. (2021). *Essential or Expendable? How Human Services Supported Communities Through COVID-19 and Recommendations to Support an Equitable Recovery*. <https://humanservicescouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HSC-Taskforce-Report-Essential-or-Expendable-How-Human-Services-Support-Communities-Through-COVID-19.pdf>

⁴⁸ Just Pay Campaign. (n.d.) *Fast Facts*. <https://www.justpayny.org/facts-and-research>

⁴⁹ Parrott, J. (2025). *Moving Beyond COLAs to Salary Parity for New York City's Nonprofit Human Services Workers*. Center for New York City Affairs at The New School. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53ee4f0be4b015b9c3690d84/t/67928e2ea2dbb23e331ac21d/1737657937883/Moving+Beyond+COLAs+to+Salary+Parity+++For+New+York+City%E2%80%99s+Nonprofit+Human+Services+Workers+FINAL.pdf>



**TESTIMONY SUBMITTED ON BEHALF OF
FOOD BANK FOR NEW YORK CITY**

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026

Thank you, Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee. My name is Nicole Hunt and I am proud to serve as Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at Food Bank For New York City (Food Bank). I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Food Bank and our network of more than 800 soup kitchens, food pantries, and campus partners across all five boroughs in strong support of robust FY27 funding for food security programs.

Founded in 1983, Food Bank is the city's largest hunger-relief organization. To date, we have delivered over 1.6 billion meals to New Yorkers in need. In this past fiscal year alone, we have distributed more than 103 million pounds of food, equivalent to 86 million meals, with half of all food distributed consisting of fresh produce and lean protein. Our Member Network reaches all 51 NYC Council Districts and nearly every zip code in New York City.

We are here today because New York City must act in the face of compounding threats to food security.

I. The Scale of Need in New York City

New York City's affordability crisis is not easing; it is deepening. According to Feeding America's most recent Map the Meal Gap study, more than 1 in 6 New Yorkers are food insecure, a sharp increase from pre-pandemic levels. The most recent NYC True Cost of Living Report finds that 50% of NYC families, or nearly 1.3 million households, lack sufficient resources to meet basic needs, and 63% of households with children are income inadequate.

Across our network, pantries and soup kitchens report demand up to 80% higher than before the pandemic, especially among families with children. Food pantry visits across the city reached 47 million in FY25, an 84–87% increase over 2019 levels. That is 25 million more visits than just six years ago. In communities like the South Bronx and Central Brooklyn, where food insecurity rates already exceed 25%, the situation is particularly severe. Food insecurity in New York City is disproportionately concentrated among Black and Latino households, woman-headed households, immigrants, and people with disabilities. Veterans, older adults, families with children, and working New Yorkers are being forced to choose between food, rent, and healthcare. These are our neighbors.

One of our volunteers, a senior in the Bronx, recently shared her experience of dealing with the loss of food assistance during the 2025 shutdown. "When SNAP benefits weren't coming, I didn't know what I



would do. I would have to choose between getting the shot in my knee that lets me walk without assistance and buying groceries. I have worked all my life. I shouldn't have to make that choice." Investing in food security is an investment in the dignity of New Yorkers all over the city.

II. Federal Cuts Are Making Hunger Worse

At precisely the moment New York City's food assistance infrastructure is most strained, Washington is stepping back. The "One Big Beautiful Bill Act" (H.R.1) slashes \$186 billion from SNAP, putting more than 408 million meals at risk for New Yorkers over the next decade. New York State could lose more than \$1.2 billion annually in SNAP funding when the bill is fully implemented.

Even with strong state and city mitigation efforts, an estimated 180,000 New York City residents will lose SNAP eligibility under H.R.1, forcing even more families to rely on community pantries and soup kitchens. Beginning in October 2026, New York City faces over \$110 million annually in lost SNAP administrative funding, threatening the City's capacity to process applications and connect eligible New Yorkers to benefits.

The impact on our network is already being felt. According to a recent NYC food consortium survey, 92% of pantry leaders report higher demand, and 83% report that they are already experiencing the effects of federal cuts. The city's food assistance network was never designed and does not have the resources to replace federal nutrition programs, yet that is increasingly what is being asked of it.

III. Our Asks: FY27 Budget Priorities

We respectfully urge the Council to champion the following investments in the FY27 budget:

1. \$100 Million in Baseline Funding for Community Food Connection

Community Food Connection (CFC) is New York City's primary baseline investment in direct community food assistance, administered by DSS/HRA. CFC supplies nutritious, fresh food to 570 food programs across all five boroughs and provides direct access to wholesale food, giving pantries of all sizes the flexibility to meet community needs and respond quickly to emergencies.

The value of this investment is proven. During the 2025 federal shutdown, New York City's additional CFC investment of approximately \$15 million was deployed immediately and effectively by participating agencies. Every dollar invested in CFC now protects New York City from far greater long-term costs, in healthcare, shelter, and education, associated with entrenched food insecurity. Without baseline growth in CFC, providers cannot rely on this critical resource, and many may be forced to reduce the amount of food they distribute, the number of families they serve, or the frequency of distributions.

2. Support SNAP Administration and the HRA Workforce



SNAP remains the most powerful anti-hunger tool available, and every dollar of SNAP generates approximately \$1.50 in local economic activity. Federal cuts threaten New York City's budget for SNAP administration, including application processing and outreach to underenrolled populations such as seniors and households facing language barriers.

Application backlogs and processing errors directly cause eligible families to go unenrolled. The Council should invest support in non-profit SNAP outreach and assistance while protecting funding for the HRA workforce to ensure timely, accurate processing and robust outreach. Every 1% improvement in participation represents tens of thousands of additional households accessing critical benefits.

Recently, one of our SNAP Benefits Specialists received a call from a very distraught client, a 93-year-old man whose SNAP case was closed without any explanation. He lives alone, has no family for support, and relies on his SNAP benefits to pay for food. He was upset and felt helpless. Our staff went to work advocating through the Mediation Model, which Food Bank helps administer in partnership with HRA. We were able to get his case reinstated, and he received retroactive benefits. On top of that, our staff assisted him in updating his application and determined he was eligible for the maximum benefit of \$292 per month. Because he is a senior, he will maintain enrollment in SNAP for at least 2 years, meaning our Benefits Specialist's work connected this NYC senior to over \$7,000 in food benefits.

3. Invest in Key City Council Food Initiatives: Food Pantries, Food Access and Benefits, and Feeding Our Communities

City Council discretionary funding through these initiatives provides critical support for the community-based organizations standing on the front lines of the fight against hunger. These investments support many non-profits across the city, fill gaps, strengthen local capacity, and ensure that food assistance reaches the most vulnerable New Yorkers in every district and zip code.

Food Bank relies on support from these initiatives to provide pantry services at 25 K-12 schools, SNAP outreach and assistance, and targeted efforts to strengthen food security in high-need communities

One of our school pantry partners in Brownsville recently shared how much families look forward to the weekly pantry distributions, saying "Our parents have been so grateful for our school pantry. We service many families who do not qualify for SNAP benefits. The pantry provides meals to these households in need."

4. Fund Programs That Promote Food Access and Affordability

The NYC Department of Health has documented the clear link between food insecurity and avoidable hospital admissions, poor diabetes management, and adverse pediatric developmental outcomes. Diet-related illness costs New York State an estimated \$9 billion annually in healthcare costs.



Nutrition incentive programs, including matching programs such as *Get the Good Stuff* and *Health Bucks*, provide greater access to nutritious food for SNAP households. Healthcare-based initiatives such as *Groceries to Go* provide nutritious food to vulnerable communities not eligible for other assistance, promoting better health outcomes for those living with chronic, diet-related diseases. These programs are cost-effective public health investments that increase food security, reduce future healthcare expenditures, and improve outcomes for low-income families.

IV. Conclusion

As Washington steps back, New York City must step up. The investments we are asking for today are not luxuries, they are the backbone of a food security system that millions of New Yorkers depend on to feed their families. Each dollar invested in food security strengthens health, stability, and economic resilience across our city.

Food Bank For New York City urges the Council to prioritize food security in the FY27 budget by committing to:

- \$100 million in baseline funding for Community Food Connection
- Support for SNAP administration and the HRA workforce to protect access to SNAP
- Continued investment in the Food Pantry Initiative, Food Access and Benefits Initiative, and Feeding Our Communities Initiative through the NYC Council
- Funding for Get the Good Stuff, Health Bucks, and Groceries to Go

Food Bank shows up for New Yorkers in need, every day and in times of crisis. Through hurricanes, the pandemic, and federal shutdowns, as well as the affordability crisis and the clawback of federal resources, our network is there. With the City's support, we will continue to do so. We thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to continuing our work alongside the Council and the members of this committee to serve New Yorkers in need as part of our mission to empower every New Yorker to achieve food security for good.

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**Testimony: New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Preliminary FY27 Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Hudson, members of the General Welfare Committee, and other esteemed Council Members for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Jason Cianciotto, and my pronouns are he, him, his. I am the Vice President of Public Policy and External Affairs at GMHC, founded in 1982 as the world's first HIV and AIDS services organization. In 2025, GMHC served 7,661 clients who lived throughout all five boroughs of NYC and who represented NYC's poorest and most vulnerable residents. Upon intake, over 78% lived under the Federal Poverty Level; Over 47% were people of color and 33% identified as "Hispanic or Latino;" 62% identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or questioning; 5% were transgender, gender non-conforming, nonbinary, or questioning; Over 37% were ages 50+.

In 2025, GMHC provided supportive housing services to 424 unique clients with histories of chronic homelessness through our connections with the Federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Housing Opportunities for People with AIDS (HOPWA) program, a nearly 10% increase over clients served in 2024. In fact, GMHC started four HOPWA programs in 2025 that served 85 clients: HOPWA Families; HOPWA Mental Health; HOPWA Self-Pay; and HOPWA Substance Use. I am here to update you on two issues of import to this committee and the communities we serve.

This first is an issue for which the NYC Council does not have direct control, but it is important for you and HASA to be aware of. Over the past few years, we have been supporting clients in distress after receiving a letter from HASA indicating that they will lose their HASA housing subsidy in 30 days because of an increase in their income from a federal Social Security Income (SSI) cost of living adjustment (COLA). For example, one client, a 72-year-old Hispanic man, was \$1.00 over the HASA ceiling of \$376. Another received an SSI COLA that caused his income to be \$16.26 above the ceiling. GMHC supports the submission of an appeal for these clients, which is almost always denied. And while the appeals process is happening, these clients face having to pay back the subsidy they receive if the ruling is not in their favor.

As a member of the statewide Ending the Epidemic (ETE) Coalition, GMHC supports a solution to this issue that is incorporated into the HIV Housing for New York plan, which would extend the 30% rent cap that has supported New York City residents to people living with HIV statewide. This plan includes an increase in the income ceiling to 200% of Federal Poverty Level (FPL). This is the solution preferred by OTDA. HIV Housing for New York is included in the State Assembly's One-House bill, and GMHC urges the NYC Council to actively support its inclusion in the final adopted FY27 State budget.

As a member of the Supportive Housing Network of NY (SHNNY), GMHC also supports the following coalition housing priorities: Invest \$65.3 million to preserve 325 supportive housing units in FY27, including \$44 million in capital funding and \$21.3 million in services and operating support; Continue funding a 3% COLA for City-contracted human services workers and pass *Intro 452, the Human Services Wage Equity Legislation*; Raise the baseline funding for the Peer Behavioral Workforce to \$6 million in FY27.

Second, GMHC shares this committee's concerns about the impact of the federal HR 1 bill, which includes significant cuts to SNAP. In 2025, GMHC's Meals and Nutrition program served nearly 1,340 clients over 26,170 congregate meals and 24,840 long-term pantry bag meals. Due to the stricter eligibility rules included in HR 1, we are extremely concerned that a significant number of our New Yorkers living with HIV and AIDS will lose SNAP benefits beginning in June of this year. We urge the Council and HRA to continue focusing on how to mitigate these cuts and provide for the food security of all New Yorkers.

In closing, I want to thank the Council and this committee for the Immigrant Opportunities Initiative, which has helped to support GMHC's immigration legal services for several years. Thank you again for supporting GMHC, New Yorkers living with and affected by HIV and AIDS, and for the opportunity to testify today. If you have any follow up questions, you can reach me by email at jasonc@gmhc.org or by phone at 520-909-3104.

Send to: testimony@council.nyc.gov

Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Submitted by
Angel Donahue, Runaway Homeless Youth Coordinator
Good Shepherd Services

March 17, 2026

Thank you, Chair Hudson and the Committee on General Welfare, for the opportunity to testify today on the Mayor Preliminary Budget as it relates to the Department of Social Services (Human Resources Administration and Department of Homeless Services).

My name is Angel Donahue, and I am the Runaway Homeless Youth Coordinator at Good Shepherd Services' Chelsea Foyer program, a Transitional Living Program for youth experiencing homelessness.

Guided by our values, Good Shepherd Services (GSS) partners and grows with communities so that all NYC children, youth, and families succeed and thrive. We provide quality, effective services that deepen connections between family members, within schools, and among neighbors. We work closely with community leaders to advocate, both locally and nationally, on behalf of our participants to make New York City a better place to live and work.

My testimony will focus on CityFHEPS vouchers.

Good Shepherd Services continues to advocate to expand CityFHEPS eligibility for runaway and homeless youth (RHY) and youth transitioning out of foster care by counting their time spent in the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) and the Administration of Children Services (ACS) programs toward the 90-day shelter requirement.

In 2021, we joined in celebrating that the Council passed two pieces of legislation to expand the eligibility criteria for the CityFHEPS rental assistance program to include runaway and homeless youth and young people aging out of foster care.

- Intro. 2405 to require the Department of Social Services to count time a young person has spent in runaway and homeless youth shelter services when determining such youth's eligibility for rental assistance, when such eligibility is dependent on having spent time residing in the city shelter system.
- Intro. 148 to require the Department of Social Services to count time spent in foster care when determining a youth's eligibility for rental assistance.

Together, these bills would transform access to permanent housing for thousands of youth experiencing homelessness and youth in foster care across New York City each year. However, the City has yet to fulfill this commitment.

The City's adult shelter system is overwhelmed with a record number of homeless individuals entering shelter so to require vulnerable youth to enter the adult homeless shelter system to access a voucher the law already states they are eligible for, is unacceptable.

Everyday youth are aging out of the DYCD RHY system and into the adult shelter system. Today, I accompanied Lajoy Clarke to City Hall. Lajoy is a resident of the Foyer and spoke in support of the expansion of CityFEPHS for youth. Lajoy has been living in a DYCD RHY program for 2 years with no access to a voucher. Lajoy stated today that, "it is unfair that young people don't receive CityFHEPS vouchers as much as adults." She expressed that this is mentally draining. Lajoy is turning 21 soon and will unfortunately have to move into an adult shelter. We urge the Council to ensure youth in need of these vouchers can access them without any further delay.

As a member of the Homes Can't Wait Coalition, we join in calling on NYC Mayor Mamdani to expand CityFHEPS to those in shelters who are currently ineligible for the program and to households facing eviction. Far too many homeless New Yorkers are languishing in shelters because they are not eligible for CityFHEPS and/or are priced out of available housing options. We ask the Mayor to work with the Council to develop an interrelated strategy that invests in rental assistance programs, affordable and supportive housing, and expanded housing-first programs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

HELP USA Testimony
NYC Council General Welfare Committee Hearing 3-17-26

I am Dan Lehman, President and CEO of HELP USA. We provide homelessness prevention, transitional shelter and supportive housing. We serve over 35,000 people each year, mostly in New York City. We have over 1,200 staff on City contracts (DHS, HRA, DOHMH, Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice), most of whom live in New York City.

Ensuring Timely Payments for Nonprofits and Human Services Providers

I thank the Chair and committee members for understanding that human services providers continue to face late contracting and payment issues, which have a detrimental effect on the organizations themselves and the communities we serve.

Important progress has been made because of the Council's legislation to provide human services providers advances (LL156 of 2025, LL11 of 2026). However, this is only a band-aid fix to the millions still owed to providers across the City.

Frequent government contract payment delays put providers at risk of eviction and worsen deficits by forcing organizations to borrow to pay rent and salaries. The City's delays cost us real money and jeopardize the quality of services by diverting funds away from programs to pay interest on lines of credit.

These delays are most problematic for contract renewals or re-bids – when staff are already on-board, vendors are delivering key goods and services and people are already receiving services.

As an example, a new contract period for a shelter we have operated for many years began July 1st – but it was only on March 17th, over 8 months later that we even received a formal contract for signature. This means we almost certainly won't have a registered contract until early May. By then, we will have carried 10 months of operating costs for this site – over \$3 million dollars – before we can even submit a claim for reimbursement.

Many times the focus is on the City agencies that hold the contracts; or on the Mayor's Office of Contract Services. However, the Council should also investigate the role of OMB in the contract registration cycle – where months of delay in budget review, back-and-forth and nickel and diming end up costing human services providers tens of thousands of dollars in interest for lines of credit to cover operating

HELP USA Testimony
NYC Council General Welfare Committee Hearing 3-17-26

expenses. Just as City agencies and MOCS should be held accountable for delays in contract registration and payment, so too should OMB.

I would also like to address Intro 0452, a bill to rectify the wage gap between what the City pays contracted human services workers and what the City pays its own employees who perform the same or similar functions,

We are appreciative of the multi-year COLA investment the City has made. However, that current COLA cycle ends next year (FY27). What we need is true wage equity, where nonprofit workers are not paid up to 30% less than their government counterparts. This bill is a huge step, and we support the passage of this legislation.

Government is not just the predominant funder of human services, but is also the main driver of human services salaries, and either directly sets salary rates on contracts or does so indirectly by establishing costs for a unit of service along with required staffing on a contract.

By establishing a clear wage requirement system, this legislation promotes transparency in compensation, ensuring that every worker is paid solely based on their qualifications and experience. At HELP USA, two-thirds of our staff on City contracts earn less than \$50,000 per year; and one-third earn less than \$40,000.

Going further, when SNAP benefits aka food stamps were frozen last year, at HELP USA we offered all staff on SNAP an emergency one-time payment. We learned that over 1 in 10 depended on SNAP to feed themselves and their families.

You cannot preach equity and affordability while paying poverty wages. You are not a government for all New Yorkers if you leave the workers the City depends on behind.

Higher wages for low-paid workers means more economic activity and tax revenue. They shop and pay taxes locally. Turnover drops, productivity goes up, rent get paid.

Intro 452 is a moral imperative and good business and economic sense. Intro 452 is critical for our sector; and it should be done with all due haste.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.



Testimony: Hamra Ahmad, Esq., Head of Legal Programs and Policy
Hearing: New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Date: March 17, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding the City's FY27 Preliminary Budget. I am Hamra Ahmad, Head of Legal Programs and Policy at Her Justice, a nonprofit organization that has advocated with and for women and gender minorities living in poverty in New York City for more than 30 years.

In Fiscal Year 2025, Her Justice provided a range of legal help to more than 4,000 women and their children in our practice areas of family, matrimonial, and immigration law. Her Justice clients come from communities across all five boroughs of New York City. **31% of clients were from Brooklyn, 30% from Queens, 23% from the Bronx, 14% from Manhattan, and 2% from Staten Island.** Among the clients served, 92% are women of color and 85% are survivors of domestic violence. Three-fourths of our clients were born outside the U.S., coming from 103 countries across the world.

Her Justice provides direct representation and skilled advocacy in an arena that often fails to adequately serve the legal needs of the marginalized. In this moment of volatile change, as in ordinary times, legal services are essential. Every day, our staff attorneys provide women with information about the legal remedies available to them and work with clients to weigh their options, develop strategies, and decide on the course that is right for them and their children. We are grateful for this committee's commitment to recognizing civil legal services are essential in New York.

Her Justice is grateful for the New York City Council's longstanding partnership in expanding access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence. Council support through Citywide Domestic Violence Empowerment (DoVE), Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE), and the Speaker's Initiative has allowed Her Justice to provide critical legal services to low-income survivors of domestic violence and immigrant women in New York City. We hope the City Council will reaffirm and enhance resources to survivors and recognize legal services as essential to ensuring their economic well-being and safety. Her Justice respectfully seeks support through the following City Council initiatives:

- 1) \$300,000 Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE);
- 2) \$150,000 Citywide Domestic Violence Empowerment (DoVE);
- 3) \$100,000 Immigrant Opportunities Initiative;
- 4) \$200,000 Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence and Gender-Based Harm Initiative;
- 5) \$250,000 Divorce Proceedings Representation for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative.

In this testimony, we present **strategies to address the unmet civil legal needs of women living in poverty in New York**, including through our unique pro bono legal services model with a significant return on investment; our innovative approach to system reform through our policy program to learn more about the impact of the courts and drive ideas for change; and our focus on culturally competent services through our own training and collaboration with community partners to enhance our delivery of legal services.

I. The Unique Her Justice Model and Impact



“Pro Bono First” Model

Her Justice recognizes that the need for legal representation in New York far outstrips the supply of help. Through our unique pro bono first model, Her Justice pairs thousands of well-trained and resourced pro bono attorneys from the City’s premier law firms with women who have urgent legal needs. This model helps fill the “civil justice gap” – the difference between the number of Americans who need civil legal assistance and the few who receive help given inability to afford legal assistance and resource constraints on the availability of free legal help. By ensuring that more women have lawyers by their side, we help make their voices heard and we begin to break down systemic barriers to access to justice.

Her Justice serves women and gender minorities living in poverty in child/spousal support, custody and visitation, and order of protection matters in Family Court; divorces in Supreme Court; and immigration matters under the Violence Against Women Act. Many of the people who contact us for help are matched with a pro bono volunteer lawyer. Volunteer lawyers are assigned an experienced Her Justice staff attorney mentor who helps strategize, answer substantive and procedural questions, review documents before they are filed and provide referrals for social and other services. Four law firm attorneys work full-time in our office as externs, providing court representation in complex or emergency matters.

Non-attorney volunteers translate or interpret for non-English-speaking clients. Volunteer law students and paralegals work in-house in our main office, supervised by staff attorneys. Volunteer forensic accountants and investigators support litigation by compiling and analyzing the documentation necessary to obtain fair divisions of marital assets, maintenance awards and child support orders for our clients.

This novel and holistic approach has enabled us to assist tens of thousands of women over the years, far more than we could have reached relying exclusively on direct service. It also allows Her Justice to offer representation for many of the cases other legal services organizations do not have the bandwidth to take on – for example, child and spousal support matters, and litigated divorces. Her Justice’s 13 staff attorneys actively trained and mentored 1,378 pro bono attorneys and non-attorneys (summer associates or paralegals) who worked on both open and closed cases with Her Justice clients.

Our staff responds to those who contact us with a broad array of legal information and advice, know-your-rights materials easily accessible on our website and information about other resources. In addition to training and mentoring pro bono attorneys, Her Justice in-house attorneys provide representation to some clients whose legal issues are particularly urgent or complex. This both meets critical needs and allows staff attorneys to remain fully expert on the legal issues on which we train and provide support.

Return on Investment and Impact

In addition to achieving successful outcomes in individual representations, Her Justice is committed to providing legal services that help women living in poverty achieve stability in other areas of life. To measure the **impact of our legal services**, our team conducted a preliminary return on investment analysis based on our Fiscal Year 25 data. For these calculations, we used Her Justice client data across our various legal service areas, along with publicly available datasets used by other legal organizations to calculate the value of their services. During this period, Her Justice received \$7.8 million in funding from state and local government, donations, and private foundations. These core funding sources are



critical to Her Justice’s ability to provide essential legal services, and we are grateful to the Council for ensuring their protection in the City budget. From the full range of investments in Her Justice, we calculated the following benefits:

- Pro bono attorneys representing Her Justice clients were able to secure \$2.6 million in lifetime child and spousal support awards.
- For immigration clients served, increased wages will result in a benefit of \$8.6 million.
- Clients leaving abusive partners will see a one-year benefit of \$2.1 million in reduced health and mental health costs associated with an average of seven physical assaults per federal health and intimate partner violence statistics.
- Clients who had a successful case outcome during this period and their children will see a five-year improved health benefit of \$4.2 million.

Her Justice plans to update our return-on-investment analysis as new data becomes available and to utilize this analysis to support advocacy around the benefits of civil legal services and the need for greater investment in providers.

Her Justice policy and system reform approach

We believe that our client-centered services must also be paired with policy work to advance systemic reform while meeting individual needs through independent efforts and partnerships with peer organizations and coalitions. Our policy work is informed by the lived experiences of our clients, women and gender minorities living in poverty, whose livelihoods and well-being are often shaped by the civil justice system. Through this framework, we work to break down systemic barriers embedded in the civil justice system that reinforce and exacerbate economic, gender, and racial inequities. Her Justice is deeply committed to exploring the power of data to inform and support policy change. We have developed expertise in conducting original research to build civil justice data collections and leverage these to support reform.

- In November 2024, Her Justice launched our newest policy research project, [Report From Court](#), which surveys pro bono attorneys representing Her Justice clients in New York City Family Court about their experiences and case outcomes and presents survey data in real time on a website. By making visible the Family Court experience and the perspectives of pro bono attorneys, *Report From Court* aims to fill a critical gap in Family Court data and support meaningful reform.
- Her Justice has also conducted research on the legal needs of immigrants in our community to support policy reform. Our 2023 report, [Stories from Immigrant Survivors of Gender-Based Violence: The Impact of Work Authorization](#), features findings from qualitative interviews with 31 undocumented immigrant survivors about the impact of employment authorization on their employment, income, housing, access to government services, interactions with the criminal justice system, and mental health. Her Justice continues to highlight this research in local and federal advocacy around rights and benefits for immigrants.
- In 2021, Her Justice released our first policy research report, [Towards Justice for Parents in Child Support Courts](#), which presented an analysis of 800 court observations in New York City child support cases and recommendations for Family Court reform. Her Justice leveraged this research to support a legislative campaign focused on reforming the New York child support courts.



II. Strengthening Legal Protections for New York Families

Women living in poverty, particularly Black and Brown women, are forced to rely on a civil justice system that has been historically and systematically under-resourced. Many access the Family Courts to secure basic freedoms – personal autonomy, financial independence, and safety from abuse – through orders of protection, financial support from partners, or court-ordered visitation schedules. Yet most New York Family Court litigants are unrepresented, with the patchwork right-to-counsel laws providing this resource in only limited case types. They spend immeasurable hours, days and years moving through complicated litigations. From our years of experience representing women in the civil justice system, we know that the burden of economic instability due to stalled support or custody proceedings too often falls on people like our clients.

This burden is even more onerous for our undocumented immigrant clients who are often doubly disadvantaged waiting years for the historically under-funded immigration system to review their applications for legal status and employment authorization documentation (or work permits) which are critical for families' stability.

The need for legal representation in litigated matters, such as custody, visitation, child support, and litigated divorces, is great. In FY2025 **Her Justice worked on 866 family and matrimonial matters serving 2,048 women and children.** And the impact of our legal services in these areas is significant. **With our services, Her Justice clients obtained financial awards and settlements totaling \$1,092,560 and monthly benefits totaling \$36,102.**

Divorce as a Pathway to Economic Stability

New York City has demonstrated important leadership in recognizing the need for legal representation in divorce for survivors of domestic violence. Her Justice, alongside our pro bono partners, provides legal advice and representation to hundreds of women seeking divorce each year. Navigating the legal process of divorce is especially critical for women who are often the lower-earning spouse within a marriage. A fair divorce process helps ensure equitable determinations of child support, spousal support, and the division of marital assets, providing single mothers with a critical financial safety net as they transition to independent households. For survivors of domestic violence, financial stability is often essential to maintaining safety and independence after leaving an abusive relationship. **Her Justice was proud to support the passage of Int. 1175-2025 (Menin), which recognizes the importance of legal representation for survivors navigating divorce proceedings.** Passed as a pilot program, this measure creates an opportunity to assess the need for and impact of providing divorce representation for domestic violence survivors in New York City. The newly established **Divorce Proceedings Representation for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative will play a critical role in supporting this work by funding legal services that allow survivors to safely and effectively navigate divorce proceedings.** Continued investment in this initiative will ensure that survivors have meaningful access to legal representation, enabling them to secure fair financial outcomes and rebuild stability and independence for themselves and their children.

Addressing Financial Abuse and Coerced Debt

Domestic violence often extends beyond physical harm. Many of our clients experience financial abuse, a form of coercive control in which one partner restricts the other's access to financial resources, undermining their ability to achieve economic independence. Financial abuse can include coerced debt, identity theft, and manipulation of credit or financial



accounts. To address these challenges, Her Justice has developed specialized expertise in financial abuse and coerced debt that is widely recognized within the New York legal community. As part of our holistic legal services, we provide representation, legal advice, brief services, referrals, and financial advocacy across both family and divorce matters. We now run credit reports for 100 percent of our family and matrimonial clients to identify whether additional financial advocacy or services may be necessary. These legal services are essential to helping survivors rebuild financial stability and autonomy. In parallel with our direct services work, Her Justice remains committed to advocating for greater recognition of the economic realities of domestic violence within the law and the courts to ensure survivors receive full and meaningful relief.

We were proud to support the passage of the New York State coerced debt law (S.1353/A.3038), which provides critical relief for survivors of domestic violence, elder abuse, human trafficking, and abuse by caretakers who have been burdened with debt incurred through coercion or control. This law represents an important step toward recognizing and remedying the lasting economic harms survivors face. City investments in legal services play a key role in ensuring that survivors can access the protections available under this law. Through initiatives such as DoVE and SAVE, Her Justice is able to provide **legal advocacy that addresses the financial consequences of abuse while helping survivors rebuild economic stability.** Continued support for these initiatives ensures that survivors can obtain meaningful relief from coerced debt, restore their financial footing, and move forward safely and independently.

III. Civil Legal Services are Critical for Immigrant Survivors of Violence

Our immigration practice provides free legal assistance to survivors of domestic violence, sex trafficking, labor trafficking, and other forms of gender-based violence as they seek to stabilize their immigration status in the United States. **Last year our attorneys provided legal information, advice, and representation on 2,058 immigration matters, securing legal status for 802 clients and their children.**

Yet most New York Family Court litigants are unrepresented, with the patchwork right-to-counsel laws providing this resource in only limited case types. They spend immeasurable hours, days and years moving through complicated litigations. From our years of experience representing women in the civil justice system, we know that the burden of economic instability due to stalled support or custody proceedings too often falls on people like our clients. This burden is even more onerous for our undocumented immigrant clients who are often disadvantaged waiting years for the historically under-funded immigration system to review their applications for legal status and employment authorization documentation (or work permits) which are critical for families' stability.

New York City has demonstrated strong leadership in protecting immigrant survivors of domestic violence and gender-based violence through its sanctuary policies and investments in legal services. **The Council's Immigrant Opportunities Initiative and the Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence and Gender-Based Harm Initiative, are instrumental in ensuring that immigrant survivors can stabilize their status and rebuild their lives.** For survivors whose abusers exploit their immigration status as a means of coercion and control, access to specialized immigration legal services can be life-changing. Through this initiative, survivors can pursue immigration relief such as VAWA self-petitions, U visas, and T visas while also addressing family court and safety-related legal needs. Securing lawful status or work



authorization allows survivors to obtain employment, secure housing, pursue custody and child support, and rebuild economic independence. Continued investment in this initiative strengthens both individual safety and the City's broader sanctuary framework by ensuring that immigrant survivors can meaningfully participate in legal processes and access the protections available to them under the law.

Her Justice partners with trusted community-based organizations across New York City to reach women in need of legal assistance. These partnerships help ensure that survivors of domestic violence and women living in poverty learn about their legal rights and can access critical civil legal services. Community partners play an essential role in connecting clients to legal support. **In FY2025, Her Justice conducted 60 community outreaches, including informational and know-your-rights presentations, reaching 1,237 individuals across New York City.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to highlight Her Justice's longstanding commitment to meeting the need for critical civil legal services in our community through our innovative pro bono first model and our research-driven policy and advocacy efforts. We thank the Council for continued support for the essential services we provide. We look forward to continued collaboration and partnership around new ideas and greater investment in legal services for indigent New Yorkers.

Respectfully,

Hamra Ahmad, Esq.
Head of Legal Programs and Policy
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Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

March 17th, 2026

My name is Victoria Leahy, and I am the Director of Policy and Planning at Homeless Services United. Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing over 55 mission-driven, homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for the 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 Services United promotes effective solutions to end the crisis of homelessness in New York City.

New York City confronts an unprecedented homelessness crisis – at its height, sheltering 125,000 people. That is enough to fill Madison Square Garden five times over. In the first four months of FY26, the average length of stay in shelter increased by 7% for families with children to 401 days. It is clear that our current approach to ending homelessness suffers from chronic underfunding, aging infrastructure, and systemic inefficiencies that perpetuate the crisis rather than solve it.

This year's City budget can make a sizeable difference in lessening the number of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness by making targeted investments in our system. What this looks like is a full investment in CityFHEPS, increasing investment in prevention programs, street outreach, and low-barrier transitional housing, filling staff vacancies in social service agencies, eliminating contract and reimbursement delays, and guaranteed contract parity.

The FY27 must make investments to fund the full CityFHEPS expansion.

It is vital that the city fully invests in and continues to support the CityFHEPS expansion. This program has been critical in preventing families from eviction and moving families from shelter to permanent housing. Currently, two-thirds of referrals come from the shelter system, highlighting how much this program helps individuals transition to housing. The 2023 expansion allowed for greater reach of prevention services, keeping more individuals and families off the street by allowing them to qualify if they lived outside of a shelter and raising the income eligibility threshold. Over 50,000 individuals are currently depending on CityFHEPS to stay housed, meaning we cannot allow this program to lapse.

We know that vouchers break the cycle of homelessness and reduce the likelihood that a person will return to shelter. For example, per the MMR, 10% of families with children who exited shelter without a subsidy returned within one year, compared to 1% of families who exited with a subsidy.



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This year's preliminary budget does not make the investments needed to meet the requirements of the expansion package. We urge the administration to move forward with the package as is law and make the required investments so that New Yorkers can access this vital program.

This year's budget must increase investments in vital prevention programs and make accessing benefits easier for New Yorkers.

We must ease the workload on providers by expanding funding to meet increasing responsibilities and fill HRA vacancies. When case managers are overwhelmed with work, they are unable to provide effective services to their clients. As a result, wait times have increased for critical Homebase services like help with eviction prevention, emergency rental assistance, and obtaining benefits. Some HSU Homebase providers report exceeding their deliverables by 113% with months still left in the contract year – yet they receive no increased funding from HRA. To ease this burden, we need to increase the budget for Homebase by \$38.3 million to a total of \$100 million to right size Homebase contracts, so Homebase service providers can meet the increasing needs of the city.

Our social services and housing government agencies are charged to meet the needs of New Yorkers – yet these agencies are riddled with staff vacancies. For example, 23% of the 2,115 budgeted positions at DHS are currently vacant, and there are 1,307 vacancies at HRA. These vacancies cause systems to slow down by the lack of workers approving and processing benefits, meaning even when organizations are efficiently completing applications, client access to benefits from government is still delayed.

But staffing is not enough – we need to make sure social service agency staff are trained to best address the needs of New Yorkers. Too often, clients report being given information that is inaccurate or told that they cannot apply for programs at a center when they fully have the right to. These positions must be both staffed and trained at a level that makes service delivery more accessible – not add to the barriers that New Yorkers face when in need of help.

The FY27 budget must increase investments in street outreach and low-barrier transitional housing.

This Winter, the dire need for a coordinated system to assist New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness was highlighted after the unfortunate deaths of 26 neighbors. The administration, agencies, and organizations worked hard during the Code Blue and Enhanced Code Blue protocols.

We were pleased to see an additional \$11.9 million have been added to H+H for their SHOW vans and an increase of 60 outreach workers. As the recent cold snap sadly showed, outreach



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resources are key first responders to those residing on our streets. There is far more demand than the supply of experienced workers and resources.

In order to successfully move more clients from the streets to housing, we must expand the options available. Often times, clients don't want to enter shelter for a number of reasons. For example, clients repeatedly discuss wanting single rooms or private places that they can feel secure. This means investments in stabilization beds, which have become decreasingly available as funding dries up despite demand remaining the same. In FY26, the number of clients in safe haven and stabilization beds decreased by 7% in the first four months because of capacity issues. This also means more accommodating housing arrangements, like single or private rooms that make individuals feel safe and secure rather than congregate settings.

In emergency situations where temperatures are below freezing, our street outreach workers are key first responders in keeping our unsheltered population safe and warm. We also call on the administration and the City Council to examine how these programs are funded. The cold snap may be over soon, but New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness are just as much at risk during extreme heat. We must fund these programs to be innovative and responsive all year round. Our members report that staffing is always a challenge for outreach teams because of government-contracted low wages for extremely challenging work, which is especially challenging during conditions like the recent storm and cold weather fronts. We need contracts to be funded sufficiently to pay our staff career wages, and this is especially clear when emergencies happen.

Teams also need modernized software that aids data coordination. We hope an appropriation is made for technical enhancements to StreetSmart so that it is functional on mobile devices and is able to speak to other systems, like CARES. Currently, outreach teams cannot upload live-time data to StreetSmart and have instead resorted to creating their own.

We must ensure that the FY27 budget includes sufficient funding to restore and expand headcounts at DHS, DSS, and MOCS to eliminate pervasive contracting and reimbursement delays for non-profit providers.

As HSU has repeatedly highlighted, providers still routinely experience delayed contract registration, delayed approvals for budget modifications and invoices for review, and repeated requests for supporting documentation, only for there to be continued delays once submitting requested documentation. The lack of normalcy when it comes to payments puts organizations like our members at risk. It makes it difficult to pay staff, vendors, and run programs for clients. Organizations are often forced to take out lines of credit just to relieve cash flow issues, only to then be forced to pay interest. In a recent survey of HSU members who contract with DHS, we



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found that just 22 organizations were owed \$152 million from contracts dating all the way back to FY18.

In order to ensure stability from within organizations, the council must continue its oversight work to push city agencies towards more consistent contract payments and budget modifications. A major driver of this problem is the lack of staffing of City Agencies, leading to delays in review of documentation and contract registration. Per the New York Housing Conference, the DHS' budgeted headcount dropped by 268 staff from Dec. 2019 to Jan. 2026, and HRA by 2076 staff for the same time period. DSS has not been able to recruit and retain staff at a rate that keeps up with the demand, which results in payment lag times. This is evident by HRA having 1,636 vacant full-time positions that were budgeted for in the FY26 adopted budget and 44 at DHS, leaving a 13% and 23% vacancy rate respectively. DSS has not been able to recruit and retain staff at a rate that keeps up with the demand, which results in payment lag times. City agencies must be robustly staffed to ensure provider contracts are reviewed and paid on time. Additionally, we urge this year's budget to make appropriations for technical enhancements to PASSPort for increased functionality.

We must work towards establishing parity in shelter contracts.

For the first time in years, the Preliminary Budget makes a more accurate projection of spending on homeless shelters. The Preliminary Budget added \$586 million this year and roughly \$1 billion in the following years for shelter costs. However, what remains true is that there is a lack of parity across shelter budgets. This imbalance creates significant differences in the level and quality of programming an organization may be able to provide to their clients. New Yorkers experiencing homelessness deserve the same standard of care, regardless of which organization runs the shelter.

In the interest of creating and maintaining high quality facilities and programming at homeless shelters, strong investment must be made in service providers. This manifests as improving the conditions of shelter buildings as well as paying human service workers a living wage. As reported by the Human Services Council, nonprofit workers are paid 30% less than government employees with the same titles. New Yorkers who dedicate their careers to serving their neighbors should not be subjected to government-sanctioned poverty wages.

Enhanced shelter standards can also be accomplished through parity in provider contracts. As the cost of living rises throughout the city, state, and country, contracts must rise to match these prices or else leave providers at the risk of footing the cost. Contract standards must be edited to reflect this reality and give providers the resources needed to meet their clients' needs. This will give all providers an equal ability to meet programming and staff needs and provide the best care possible.



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We must fully fund and implement Local Law 35 requiring mental health professionals in family shelters.

New York City must invest \$40 million to successfully implement Local Law 35, which mandates clinical mental health professionals in every shelter for families with children, so that families experiencing homelessness can quickly access lifesaving mental healthcare in-person and virtually. Prioritizing this investment in the upcoming fiscal year would create long-term benefits for both the families and the city, as mental health treatments lead to improved health and employment outcomes for recipients.

While all of this work takes increased investment, we also need to streamline processes and remove bureaucratic barriers that clog our system.

We look forward to working with the City Council to make sure that this year's budget delivers for all New Yorkers. I can be reached via email at vleahy@hsunited.org.

Testimony of Housing Works
Before
The New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Regarding
Mayor's Preliminary Budget
March 17, 2026

Thank you, Chairperson Hudson, and Members of the General Welfare Committee, for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Housing Works, a healing community founded in 1990 with a mission to end the dual crises of homelessness and AIDS. We currently provide a range of integrated medical, behavioral health, housing, and support services for over 15,000 low-income New Yorkers annually, with a focus on the most marginalized and underserved—those facing the challenges of homelessness, HIV, mental health issues, substance use disorder, other chronic conditions, and incarceration. and, most recently, migrants displaced from their homes due to violence or other crises who seek safety and a better life in the United States. Our comprehensive prevention and care services range from over 750 units of supportive housing, to medical and behavioral health care delivered through our six Federally Qualified Health Centers, to job training.

Housing Works is also a founding member of the *End AIDS NY Community Coalition* (EtE Community Coalition), a group of over ninety healthcare centers, hospitals, and community-based organizations that are fully committed to ending AIDS as an epidemic in all New York communities and populations. New York City (NYC) and New York State (NYS) have made significant progress implementing the historic 2015 Ending the Epidemic (EtE) Blueprint recommendations developed collaboratively by HIV community members, providers, advocates, and public health authorities. Our EtE efforts enabled us to “bend the curve” of the epidemic by the end of 2019, decreasing HIV prevalence for the first time since the epidemic began. However, new challenges and troubling trends demand a sustained and even accelerated NYC HIV response if we are to reach our goals of ending our NYC HIV epidemic in every community and for all New Yorkers. New HIV diagnoses have increased in NYC in the last two years after decades of decline, with a 5.4% increase from 2023 to 2024, following a 6.9% increase from 2022 to 2023. Meanwhile, while HIV health outcomes have improved across all communities, stark and unacceptable disparities persist in HIV’s impact on Black and Latino/Hispanic communities, transgender New Yorkers, and young men who have sex with men. In 2024, Black and Latino/Hispanic New Yorkers accounting for 85% of people newly diagnosed with HIV in NYC, and 42% of people newly diagnosed with HIV lived in high- or very-high poverty ZIP codes. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated barriers to HIV prevention and care, suppressing uptake of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), HIV testing, and connection to care, and progress on improving HIV care outcomes have remained flat in recent years. New York City Council support has been critical to this progress, and we urge the Members of the General Welfare to continue your support for the Council’s Pathways to Care initiative and other efforts to continue to advance our critical Ending the Epidemic goals.

Housing Works and the EtE Community Coalition, on behalf of the marginalized New Yorkers we serve and represent, urge the City Council to ensure essential funding for the services that sustain and support our most vulnerable citizens and the non-profit agencies that work on the front lines of poverty and homelessness to meet critical needs. The Mayor’s Preliminary Budget falls short of the clarity needed on actions necessary to address the serious and overlapping humanitarian and public health challenges facing New Yorkers.

Transform the City’s Failed Response to Homelessness and Behavioral Health Issues

Housing Works and the EtE Coalition continue to strongly oppose efforts to expand involuntary inpatient and outpatient commitment initiatives, and in particular any effort to involuntarily commit an individual based on a determination of “*substantial inability of the person to meet his or her basic need for food, clothing, shelter or medical care.*” For over 35 years, Housing Works has successfully employed low-threshold, harm reduction strategies to engage the most marginalized New Yorkers in effective care to address co-occurring medical, mental health, and substance use disorders. What we have learned first-hand is that New Yorkers struggling to cope with serious mental health issues face multiple, significant barriers to voluntary access to the care they seek, especially those who are also trying to survive without a safe, stable place to live. These often-insurmountable barriers include a lack of supportive housing, low reimbursement rates for needed services, a shortage of health care professionals, high caseloads, and low pay for contracted service workers that makes it difficult to recruit or retain staff. As one result, on any given day, there are approximately 1,400 people with serious mental illness in City jails, where mental health services are woefully inadequate, leaving our most vulnerable New Yorkers to cycle between the streets, shelters, and jails with little or no access to voluntary care.

Housing Works, on behalf of the vulnerable New Yorkers we serve and represent, are deeply disappointed by the resumption by this Administration of sweeps of homeless encampments. Regardless of the agency responsible for carrying out such sweeps, harassing people experiencing homelessness through sweeps of the subways or encampments of those who opt for survival in public rather than entering frightening shelters is not a solution. We must stop stigmatizing people experiencing homelessness, especially those who are dealing with untreated or undertreated chronic medical and/or behavioral health issues while trying to survive in shelter or on the streets.

As noted in the New York State Comptroller’s report on [Services for the Unsheltered](#), New York City’s unsheltered population continues to grow despite a dramatic increase in spending on services, there is little evidence that current efforts are effective in moving people from the streets into permanent housing, and it is critical that we develop a better understanding of what type of interventions are truly effective in meeting the needs of this most marginalized and vulnerable group of New Yorkers. Housing Works implore New York City to transform the City’s ineffective response to the homelessness crisis by urgently adopting innovative, evidence-based approaches that will save lives and money.

We must stop treating mental illness and substance use disorder among low-income New Yorkers as criminal justice rather than public health issues and instead adopt harm reduction approaches that provide every New Yorker with the safe, stable housing necessary to engage in behavioral health care, including private rooms for those struggling with mental health issues. While we welcome the Mayor’s acknowledgement that additional investments are needed to address the needs of unsheltered New Yorkers, it is important to note the ongoing barriers posed by existing models of care for those who have been afraid or unwilling to engage with the Department of Homeless Services. Truly low-threshold facilities that combine a drop-in center with on-site medical and behavioral health care with private hotel rooms to provide transitional housing without preconditions are perhaps the most effective way to engage unsheltered persons with behavioral health needs who are unable or unwilling to access more traditional shelter or treatment programs.

Make a New York City Council Investment of \$12M Annually in a Meaningful, Evidence-Based Intervention to Address the Crises of Homelessness and Mental Health

After five years of fruitless efforts to work with the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to open an innovative new model of comprehensive housing and services for unsheltered New Yorkers, Housing Works seeks \$12M annually in New York City Council funding for the project, which would support at least 150 private safe haven rooms, a co-located drop in center with on-site medical and behavioral health crisis care, and access to a full range of health, mental health, and substance use services through a Housing Works Federally Qualified Health Center.

The model involves operating a drop-in center with co-located private safe haven transitional beds; its cornerstones include delivering on-site medical and behavioral health care through a harm reduction modality, prioritizing safe haven beds for drop-in center clients who reject “traditional” entryways into DHS shelters, and addressing chronic physical and behavioral health conditions that persist among drop-in and safe haven clients alike. These innovations were developed in thoughtful consultation with DHS and based on Housing Works’ experiences delivering DHS-funded services at the height of the COVID pandemic, including operating two DHS COVID isolation/quarantine hotels and providing medical and behavioral health services at all DHS COVID isolation sites citywide.

Between 2020 and 2023, Housing Works received both DHS and OMB approval to operate the proposed model at three distinct locations: Chelsea, Chinatown, and Jamaica. Unfortunately, in all three cases, the sites fell through for different reasons (in June 2020 the Chelsea hotel owner pulled out one week before opening, betting that NYC tourism would rebound; in May 2022 the hotels union persuaded the Mayor to object to and kill the Chinatown project; and in February 2023 the Jamaica hotel operator reneged on its deal with Housing Works to pursue—successfully—a more lucrative contract to use the site as a DHS City Sanctuary Facility).

Most recently, in 2025, Housing Works identified a former Holiday Inn on West 48th Street in Manhattan as a potential site. This location, a former DHS COVID quarantine hotel which Housing Works operated between 2021 and 2022, would have provided 166 private safe haven beds and 50 drop-in center chairs, and Housing Works proposed to acquire it through DHS’s nonprofit-owned (NPO) program to fund the acquisition and renovation, under which the site would have remained available for City use for a full 60 years, making this an excellent investment for New York City. Most significantly, the site was located two blocks from the Housing Works Westside Health Center, which provides robust primary and mental health care services, including services operated through our FQHC’s “Health Care for the Homeless” designation and our licensed Article 31 Office of Mental Health Program. The proximity of these two sites would have enabled a robust model of care that would supplement on-site medical and behavioral health crisis care with access to the full services available at the 48th Health Center, saving the City hundreds of thousands of dollars in staffing expenses. Unfortunately, however, DHS informed Housing Works that it would no longer support the project because they were only interested in facilities located at the ends of the transit lines in Coney Island, Staten Island, and the Bronx. Today, this facility is no longer for sale.

Despite these setbacks, Housing Works remains committed to bring its model of street homeless services to one of New York City’s most impacted neighborhoods such as Midtown West (including Hell’s Kitchen and edges of the Theater District and transit hub) which has long experienced an unmet need for street homeless services and substance use and mental health interventions. We

propose to leverage our 35 years of experience providing housing, supportive services, and primary and behavioral health care to populations other providers deem “too difficult to serve.” Our goal is to pilot a model that 1) engages NYC’s hardest-to-reach populations who reject “traditional” DHS services, 2) provides sustained high-quality care to addresses chronic medical and mental health conditions, substance use, and overdose, 3) demonstrates long-term cost savings by reducing avoidable utilization of hospital emergency department and other city resources, and 4) works intensively with stabilized residents to secure appropriate permanent housing placements.

We seek a site with proximity to one of Housing Works’ six Federal Qualified Health Centers, in order to leverage the full range of medical and behavioral health care for “stabilization center” clients. As we understand that opioid use, overdose, and co-occurring medical and mental health conditions are among the top public health issues experienced by street homeless populations, we will focus on leveraging on-site medical and behavioral health teams who can provide 24/7 crisis intervention and navigate clients toward buprenorphine induction, ongoing mental health care, and other appropriate interventions available at one of our community health centers. Staff between the two sites would work hand in hand to monitor client progress and health outcomes through interdisciplinary team meetings, integrated case conferences, and shared client data across our common electronic medical record and case management systems.

In 2023, Housing Works was awarded a grant from the New York State Health Foundation (NYSHF) to conduct a rigorous academic evaluation of the proposed model; while the grant was returned when the last site fell through, NYSHF has graciously invited us to reapply when a new site becomes available. Through a multisector partnership of government, nonprofit, and academic partners, we hope to provide an evidence-based model that would strengthen New York City’s ability to better address unsheltered homelessness and its associated issues.

Improve and Expand the CityFHEPs Program

Housing Works is grateful for the improvements to the CityFHEPs program enacted by the City Council in 2023 and fully support efforts to enforce their full implementation by the Administration. We urge the City Council to refuse to settle the *Vincent v. Adams* litigation and continue to pursue full implementation of CityFHEPS expansion approved by the Council, including clarification that access to CityFHEPS vouchers extends to all residents of New York City emergency or transitional housing, including those operated by DHS, DYCD, HRA, MOCJ, HPD, HRO, HASA, etc., homeless drop-in centers, transitional housing, and street homeless households who don’t already have access to a rent subsidy, regardless of immigration status.

The expansion and implementation of CityFHEPS are crucial tools in realizing our shared goal of a more affordable New York for working-class and low-income New Yorkers. To accomplish this goal, New York City must invest in cost-effective solutions like CityFHEPS that keep people in their homes and get people housed and out of the expensive and disruptive cycles of shelter and other institutional settings.

As just one example, The MOCJ Emergency and Transitional Housing Program (MOCJ ETH) provides up to twelve months of a safe stable place to live for people leaving incarceration without housing, while providing vocational, educational, and therapeutic services as well as assistance to secure permanent housing. Housing Works, as one of several non-profit MOCJ ETH program providers, provides 356 beds combined with skills building, job training, access to medical and behavioral health services, and housing placement assistance. Originally initiated during the COVID

crisis, the MOCJ ETH program has been continued and expanded in recognition of the fact that New Yorkers leaving incarceration often require housing assistance and supportive services to make a successful transition back into the community. However, while many of our program participants complete job training and secure employment they are not able to afford housing on the open rental market.

During the COVID crisis, MOCJ ETH program participants had access to Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) under the Housing Choice Section 8 program, but the supply of those vouchers has dried up, and our MOCJ ETH participants are not eligible for any other housing subsidies. Like other supportive housing programs for the justice-involved population, the MOCJ Transitional Housing Programs generate reductions in shelter and jail use, inpatient hospitalizations and related Medicaid costs, and substance use. However, this worthwhile investment is squandered when at the end of a successful 12-month transitional housing stay, participants who have completed educational and job training programs, and are stable and employed, are pushed back into homelessness in the mass shelters or on the streets, and in the worst-case scenario end up back in jail. It makes no economic sense to spend over \$130/day on shelter or over \$500K annually to keep someone at Rikers, when the City has invested \$50K to \$60K annually in supportive transitional housing but is unwilling to afford participants a housing voucher that would cost only \$25K to \$36K a year.

Even with expansion, as you know the CityFHEPs process is plagued by unpredictable and lengthy delays, rampant discrimination from landlords and brokers, and administrative missteps that discourage applicants, alienate landlords, and prolong homelessness. We urge the Council to address aspects of the program that undermine its efficacy, including using your oversight authority to hold DSS accountable for streamlining the CityFHEPS application and fixing administrative delays that prevent households from obtaining shopping letters and cause households to experience months-long delays in processing housing packets. These fixes will enable households to move out of homelessness quickly and avoid eviction. Likewise, we urge the Council to hold the Administration accountable to reverse the CityFHEPS rent hike that would increase working tenants' share from 30% to 40% after 5 years, as required by Council. As noted below, we also ask the Council to increase funding, as noted below, for enforcement of source of income protections.

Invest in the City's human services workforce.

The Preliminary Budget plan once again this year fails to make critically needed investments in the City's non-profit workforce. Housing and homeless service providers, and other members of the human services workforce, made up predominantly of women of color, are grossly underpaid. Housing Works, as part of the #JustPay Campaign, urge the city to invest in the human services workforce so that New Yorkers receive consistently high quality and effective social services. Specifically, we call on the City to continue to fund the 3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for City-contracted human services workers from 2026-2027 to uphold the City's multi-year COLA deal commitment, and to Pass Wage Equity Legislation (Int 0452-2026), which would align nonprofit and government human services job titles, and through that, raise salaries for nonprofit human services workers.

Fund Non-Profit Legal Services Organizations to Address Source of Income Discrimination

To maximize the effectiveness of existing NYC voucher programs, including HASA rental assistance and CityFHEPs vouchers requires more consistent and effective legal action to enforce the City prohibition on source of income discrimination. Housing Works and the End AIDS NY Community Coalition respectfully assert that in addition to adding resources to the City's Human

Rights Division, at least \$4M in funding be made available annually to support contracts with non-profit organizations with a record of successful litigation to address the continued illegal discrimination by brokers and landlords who refuse to accept government-funded rental vouchers.

Support Human Services Agencies with Adequate Indirect Funding

It is also time for meaningful action to address the underfunding of critical non-profit infrastructure needs. While we welcomed adoption by the City several years ago of a contracting agency's approved Federal indirect rate after years of inadequate funding, to date total contract amounts still have not been adjusted to reflect the additional infrastructure funding, and social service agencies employing their approved indirect rate are required to cut direct services by an amount equal to the additional indirect costs covered. Housing Works and the End AIDS NY Community Coalition call on the Council to support the funding required to amend each existing NYC human services contract as soon as practicable to increase the total contract amount to reflect the contracting agency's approved Federal indirect rate "below the line" without impacting contract funding for direct services. For the EtE Initiative Contracts alone, we request approximately \$2M in additional indirect funding be added to existing contracts to afford providers their Federally approved indirect rates.

Ensure That Agency Savings Efforts Preserve Essential City Programs and Human Services

Housing Works supports the stated intent of the Mamdani Administration's Executive Order 12, directing the appointment of Agency Savings Officers to identify streamlined processes and efficiencies to generate savings for the City. It is critical, however, that the City pursue these goals without undermining the staff and resources needed to meet the most basic needs of New Yorkers. Arbitrary cuts and hiring freezes under the previous administration undermined many City agency functions, resulting in massive delays in supportive housing placements, processing applications for public assistance, food stamps, and rental subsidies, as well as crippling delays in reimbursement of non-profit providers for services delivered. These delays are a direct result of agency understaffing at City agencies responsible for delivering human services and social supports. As one example, HRA's HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) is chronically understaffed, making it difficult or impossible for housing providers to meet the needs of New Yorkers with HIV experiencing homelessness.

Specifically, we implore the City Council and the Administration to proceed carefully with any cost-saving initiatives that would impact the essential services delivered by the Department of Social Services, the Department of Homeless Services, DOHMH, and the community-based providers they fund, and to instruct Agency Savings Officers within these agencies to in fact consider the need for restoration of funding and/or staff lines required for efficient delivery of services for our most vulnerable neighbors. Agencies responsible for managing public health and wellbeing, as well as their non-profit partners, must be protected from systemic funding cuts that undermine resources needed to protect public health and meet basic human needs.

Support Evidence-Based Housing First Harm Reduction Housing Interventions

From our beginning, Housing Works has been committed to a low-threshold, harm reduction approach to housing assistance, where admission and retention in housing is based on behaviors, rather than status as a drug user, person with mental health issues, or other condition. Residents are held accountable, as we all are, for the behaviors and conditions necessary to live safely with neighbors, are entitled to privacy within their own home, and are encouraged to feel safe to share behavioral health needs or crises without concern about jeopardizing housing security or being

required to engage in a particular course of treatment. Our programs demonstrate that this approach works, empowering residents to take action to improve their health and wellbeing, as shown by the high rate of viral load suppression, consistently over 90%, among the formerly homeless people with HIV we house. We have successfully employed a “Housing First” approach for over 35 years, which prior to the current federal administration was widely acknowledged as an evidence-based model that was endorsed as best practice by HUD and HRSA.

On behalf of the homeless and formerly homeless New Yorkers we serve, we implore New York City leadership to continue to support and fund “housing first” low-threshold housing interventions from federal attacks. We are deeply grateful for New York State Attorney General Letitia James’ leadership in bringing a lawsuit and securing a temporary injunction to protect billions of dollars in U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development that provide housing and other services to help address homelessness through HUD’s Continuum of Care (CoC) program. For decades, CoC prioritized the “housing first” approach to fighting homelessness, providing immediate shelter to those in need without forcing them to meet burdensome requirements that can leave many without a safe place to sleep.

In November, the Trump administration attempted to impose new and illegal conditions on CoC grants that threaten to upend the services the program supports, including a drastic cut in funding for permanent supportive housing that could result in the eviction of some 7,000 formerly homeless households in New York City, barring CoC funding from organizations that acknowledge the existence of transgender or nonbinary individuals or that practice harm reduction, excluding programs that provide services for mental disabilities to prioritize those that only serve people with physical disabilities, and imposing new conditions to withhold funds from regions that do not conform their local homelessness laws to the administration’s priorities regarding sweeps of persons experiencing unsheltered homelessness and other forms of criminalization of homelessness.

It is critical for New York City to stand firm in its support for evidence-based policies and housing interventions demonstrated to end homelessness for individuals and improve lives, and to protect formerly homeless New Yorkers and those still experiencing homelessness from federal attacks on critical funding for these programs.

In conclusion, Housing Works calls on the Council and the Administration to be bold when it comes to addressing NYC’s unprecedented crisis of homelessness that drives poor individual and public health outcomes among NYC’s most vulnerable residents. We call for increased Council oversight of the City’s homeless response and for an increased emphasis on peer and community health workers, a focus on cultural competency in service delivery, and implementation and rigorous evaluation of new approaches to the crisis of homelessness that drives poor individual and public health outcomes among NYC’s most marginalized residents.

Thank you for your time. Please direct any questions to Anthony Feliciano, Vice President of Community Mobilization at Housing Works, Inc., at a.feliciano@housingworks.org.



2026 Hearing of the NYC Council Committee on General
Welfare - Fiscal 2027 Preliminary Budget
March 17, 2026

Testimony of Beth Williams, New York State Policy Director
for Hunger Free America

Thanks so much for holding this vital hearing today. My name is Beth Williams, and I am the New York State Policy Director for Hunger Free America, a national direct service and advocacy nonprofit group headquartered in Manhattan, with a field office in the Bronx.

I am honored to submit this testimony today on behalf of more than 1.2 million city residents who are now struggling against hunger.

Our message is simple: New Yorkers face massive hunger and food insecurity crises citywide, made worse by the recent passage of H.R.1, which aims to systematically remove federal nutrition program participants. We need a massive response from the City, especially one that focuses on increasing participation in and otherwise strengthening federally funded nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and Summer EBT.

According to Hunger Free America's analysis of the most recent USDA data, one out of every five children in New York City experiences food insecurity, while nearly half of the children in the Bronx are food insecure. Food insecurity is also soaring among employed adults, whose meager salaries often do not cover all key living expenses, including food.

The most impactful and cost-effective way for the City to fight hunger is to increase participation in the federally funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly called the Food Stamps Program) – and help existing SNAP recipients keep their benefits by meeting the new work reporting requirements or by being declared exempt from them. Doing both of those would dwarf any impact that merely increasing charitable food distribution would have.

Even after the federal cuts to SNAP, the program still is the centerpiece of fighting hunger in New York City. In December of 2025, 1.7 million City residents received \$415 million in federal grocery support through SNAP.

If current caseloads and benefits levels were to stay stable, federal SNAP spending in New York City over the next year would be \$5.0 billion, which dwarfs City and private spending on charitable food. However, **around a third of the SNAP caseload in the City is subject to the new federal SNAP work reporting requirements, and if all those households lost SNAP, those residents—and the city’s economy – could lose up to \$1.5 billion in grocery support over the next year.**

In contrast, if the City created a comprehensive plan to work with nonprofit organizations to help all those households to keep their benefits, and if the City did more to work with nonprofit groups on SNAP outreach and access, and were able to raise the SNAP caseload and SNAP spending by merely five percent, that would equal \$250 million in extra federal spending on food relief.

It is important to note that, not only is every penny of SNAP benefits, for the time being, still paid for by the federal government, but any City money also spent on approved SNAP outreach and enrollment activities – including money sub-granted to nonprofit groups for such purposes – is partially matched by the federal government, through the State. For all those reasons, the most cost-effective way for the City to reduce hunger – by far – is to fund efforts to increase enrollment in SNAP and other federally-funded nutrition benefits. **Every City dollar that Hunger Free America spends on SNAP outreach work generates \$30 in federal benefits that fill the grocery carts of struggling New Yorkers. Since every City dollar spent on such SNAP outreach is 25% matched by federal funds, every City Council dollar allocated to one of our SNAP outreach workers now generates \$38 in federally funded food. That is a far higher return on investment than when the city directly pays for food purchases or food vouchers.**

The Council should also ensure that the final budget deal provides extra money for DHS to work with nonprofit groups to help SNAP recipients meet their work reporting requirements by being better screened for mental and physical disabilities, working in paid employment, participating in job training, or performing volunteer service.

Background on The Current State of Hunger in New York City

According to raw USDA data analyzed by Hunger Free America:

Across New York City, 15.4% of the population, or 1.2 million people, lived in food insecure households between 2022 and 2024. The Bronx is New York City's hungriest borough in terms of prevalence and number of hungry people, with 24.5% of residents (330,329 people) living in food insecure households.

One out of every five children (20%) in New York City experiences food insecurity, while almost half (46.1%) of children in the Bronx are food insecure. Food insecurity in Manhattan and Queens among employed adults increased when comparing 2022-2024 to 2019-2021 levels. The number of food insecure older New York City residents increased to 258,991 between 2022 and 2024.

At the same time, hundreds of thousands of City residents eligible for federally funded benefits do not receive them. The best under-participation estimates that we have for SNAP that are official are old (for 2018, pre-pandemic). For technical reasons we would be glad to discuss, we believe USDA's estimates, even in 2018, undercounted those who are eligible but did not then receive SNAP. But even if USDA's numbers were correct, that still meant that 1 in 10 people overall, 25 percent of working people, and 30 percent of older New York State residents who were eligible for SNAP did not get it. The percentages are likely even higher for the City than the State as a whole.

As for federally funded WIC benefits (for pregnant women and children under five), as of 2021, USDA estimated that whopping 45 percent of the pregnant women and children under five that are eligible for WIC statewide did not get it. Unlike SNAP, WIC has no immigration restrictions in the program and has slightly higher income eligibility than SNAP, so this under-participation in WIC is especially harmful. The percentages are likely even higher for the City than the State as a whole.

If the City were truly serious about reducing hunger statewide, it would:

1. Ensure that the State significantly raises the minimum wage, including for tipped workers, and increase the State Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC).
2. Increase the City EITC.
3. Dramatically reduce the costs for quality housing.
4. Significantly increase free childcare.
5. Make buses free.
6. Authorize, fund, and implement a government-wide "Assets Empowerment/Middle-Class Wealth Generation Agenda" across multiple City agencies. This will dramatically increase economic opportunity and mobility by enabling more families to transition from owing and paying interest on non-productive debts to owning assets such as first homes, small businesses, and savings accounts that can earn interest, increase in value, and/or provide profits. Stop the penalization of hard work – enact initiatives to eliminate, or at least reduce, "benefits cliffs" in which workers who get raises or work more hours are

punished by having their governmental benefits cut or stopped entirely just when they start doing a little better.

Beyond those broad steps to reduce poverty and expand economic opportunity, the most cost-effective thing the City can do, by far, is to increase participation in and otherwise strengthen federally funded nutrition assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, school breakfasts, and Summer EBT. Specifically, by:

- Increase funding to nonprofit groups (including Hunger Free America) that increase access to government food benefits through the NYC Benefits program and direct City Council funding. We are requesting the City Council provide our local division Hunger Free NYC, \$200,000 in FY27 funding (\$75,000 more than FY26) to support SNAP and emergency food assistance benefits education, outreach, and training; SNAP eligibility screening, application, and recertification assistance; and technical assistance provided to low-income individuals. We are also requesting \$75,000 in FY27 for funding for Hunger Free NYC (\$25,000 more than FY26) to support increased participation in SNAP, other nutrition assistance benefits and to assist low-income households citywide who remain eligible to retain benefits and to also provide technical assistance to food pantries and soup kitchens.
- Increase the Civic Impact Fund to fund nonprofit organizations to host SNAP recipients as volunteers to meet their work reporting requirements.
- DSS should implement a comprehensive plan to work with – and fund nonprofits – to address the new work reporting requirements for SNAP and Medicaid. The agency should better pre-screen clients for disabilities and increase their ability to meet Medicaid and SNAP work requirements through paid employment, job training, and/or unpaid community volunteering. This could include utilizing a better digital ABAWD pre-screening and referral system. DHS staff needs to be carefully trained on the new work reporting requirements. HRA should work with NYS OTDA and nonprofit groups to better draw down federal SNAP Employment and Training (E&T) funds.
- Create a comprehensive, rapid effort to create one digital portal where New Yorkers can simultaneously learn about, apply for, recertify for, and access and utilize the full range of benefits and services they need, not only including services provided directly by city agencies, but also nonprofit services funded by the City, as well as key other programs (such as WIC) not directly funded by the City. Mayor Adams promised, but failed to create such a portal, but it is imperative that the Council and the Mamdani Administration work together to get this done rapidly and effectively.
- We are aware that this Committee doesn't oversee DOE, but we think it's imperative that the entire Council be aware of how imperative it is for DOE to ensure that all classes in

all New York City public schools provide school breakfasts either in-classroom or as grab and go breakfast in their hallways. At least 310,205 New York City children live in food insecure homes and more than 154,000 New York City public school students—nearly one in every seven—experienced homelessness during the 2024–25 school year. Yet DOE is failing to adequately utilize one of the most impactful, cost-effective ways to ensure that such vulnerable students have the food and nutrition necessary to succeed at school: school breakfasts. In fact, NYC DOE has one of the lowest school breakfast participation rates of any large urban school district in the U.S. (and is much lower than Los Angeles, Chicago, and Houston.) In October 2023 (the last month for which we data), only 39.6% of DOE students who received school lunches also received school breakfasts, one of the lowest school breakfast participation rates out of any big city school district in the nation. This means that more than 60% of students failed to obtain breakfasts, forcing many students to skip breakfast entirely or eat less healthy food they picked up at a bodega on the way to school. If DOE increased the ratio of breakfast to lunch consumption from 39.6% to 100%, that would feed another 345,540 kids per day, equaling about 62 million more breakfasts over the course of a year, which would be paid for entirely (or almost entirely by federal and state funds). Even if the ratio were brought to only 80%, that would feed an additional 235,205 students per day, or about 42 million more breakfasts over the course of a year. To fix this, New York City Public Schools must make sure that all classes in all schools offer students the ability to eat breakfast in their first period classrooms and as grab and go breakfast in the hallways before the first period.

- Move beyond a reliance on means-tested programs aimed at mostly the impoverished to also focus more broadly on helping a wide array of New Yorkers obtain—and maintain—a full stake in the American dream with both universal programs (such free child care, buses, and school meals for all) and comprehensive policies to specifically help struggling New Yorkers develop assets in order to move from owing to owning.
- Make healthier food more accessible, affordable, and convenient in all neighborhoods, while utilizing food as an engine of community-based economic development. We hope that the City dramatically expands free food voucher programs, which likely are more economically efficient, equitable, and practical than creating a few City-owned grocery stores.
- Create formalized systems to empower New Yorkers with lived experience with poverty and food insecurity to advise the mayoral administration.

We hope you can take these actions rapidly. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.



TESTIMONY

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing

Submitted by:
Sierra Kraft, Executive Director, ICARE Coalition
March 17th, 2026

Good afternoon, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on Children and Youth and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Sierra Kraft, and I am the Executive Director of Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE). We lead a coalition of legal services organizations dedicated to ensuring that unaccompanied immigrant children in New York City have access to free legal representation.

ICARE's work sits at the intersection of child welfare, immigration, and economic stability. For the young people we serve, access to legal representation is not only about navigating immigration proceedings—it is a critical component of stability, helping youth remain in school, access services, and avoid deeper involvement with already strained city systems.

We are respectfully requesting \$18.6 million for the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative and \$2.6 million for the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative in the FY27 budget to sustain and expand access to legal representation for immigrant youth.

Our providers—Catholic Charities Community Services, Central American Legal Assistance, Human Rights First, Kids in Need of Defense (KIND), Legal Aid Society, The Door, Safe Passage Project, Lutheran Social Services, Children's Law Center, Lawyers for Children, Project Rousseau, and Immigration Law & Justice—are on the frontlines of this work every day, helping young people navigate some of the most complex legal systems in the country. Together,



we operate a coordinated legal referral and representation network designed to ensure that no child has to face the immigration system alone.

Every year, thousands of immigrant children and youth in New York City are placed into immigration proceedings. Many arrived after surviving abuse, abandonment, trafficking, or violence. Others have reunited with family members here after years of separation. Nearly all are trying to stabilize their lives while navigating an adversarial legal system that even trained attorneys struggle to understand.

Yet under federal law, these children are not guaranteed an attorney. Without legal representation, children facing deportation have only about a 15 percent chance of success in their case. With representation, that number jumps to over 90 percent. Legal representation is the single most important factor determining whether a child can remain safely in the United States or is forced to return to dangerous conditions.

For more than a decade, New York City has been a national leader in recognizing that reality. Through investments like the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative, the City Council has helped ensure that thousands of immigrant children have access to counsel, stability, and a meaningful opportunity to pursue legal protection.

Since 2014, ICARE providers have supported more than 15,000 children and youth and help over 2,000 young people each year obtain legal protection and stability through humanitarian pathways like asylum and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.



These legal services are a core part of the City's safety net. They connect young people to schools, healthcare, and community resources. They help stabilize families and ensure children can begin rebuilding their lives after profound disruption.

Legal representation is also a critical stabilizing force in a young person's life. When children have an attorney and trusted support, they are better able to stay engaged in school, access services, and focus on their development rather than living in constant uncertainty about their future.

This is a pivotal moment. The environment surrounding this work has become significantly more challenging. Legal protections for immigrant youth are eroding at the federal level. Policies are shifting rapidly, enforcement actions are expanding, and the legal pathways available to young people are becoming more complex and resource-intensive to navigate. Cases that once took months now often take years. Immigration courts are facing historic backlogs, leaving children in prolonged legal limbo while they try to attend school, support their families, and recover from trauma.

At the same time, providers are increasingly forced to respond to emergencies that were once rare. In recent months, legal teams have had to pursue complex federal habeas litigation simply to secure the release of detained youth who previously would have been released more routinely. Even children with pending or approved protections are facing detention and enforcement actions that require rapid legal response and significant staff time.

These shifts fundamentally change the nature of the work. What once might have been straightforward representation now requires far greater coordination, specialized legal expertise,



and significantly more time per case. At the same time that cases are becoming more complex, the funding landscape that supports this work has become deeply unstable.

For years, legal representation for unaccompanied children has relied on an unstable patchwork of federal contracts, philanthropy, and limited state and city investment. That fragility became clear last year when federal funding for unaccompanied children’s legal services was abruptly halted nationwide through a stop-work order. Although the order was rescinded shortly afterward, it served as a stark reminder that these protections can disappear overnight.

Even when federal funding exists, it has never been sufficient to meet the scale of need. **The instability itself is the threat.** When funding collapses or stalls, legal service providers cannot hire staff, plan caseloads, or maintain consistent services—and children lose access to counsel at critical moments in their cases. This is why sustained city investment is so essential.

New York City has long recognized that ensuring access to counsel is not simply a federal responsibility—it is a local investment in stability, due process, and community wellbeing. But while demand has grown significantly in recent years, city funding for immigrant children’s legal services has remained largely stagnant. Providers are being asked to serve more youth with increasingly complex cases, while **hundreds of youth remain on waiting lists for legal help.**

Without sustained investment, the progress made through programs like the Unaccompanied Minors and Families Initiative risks being reversed. Through UMFI, ICARE providers deliver coordinated legal representation, know-your-rights trainings, legal screenings, and referrals to critical social services for immigrant children and families across the city.



In addition, sustained funding for the Special Immigrant Juvenile Status Initiative is critical to ensuring that children who have already experienced abuse, abandonment, or neglect can access the protection Congress created for them. Securing SIJS requires navigating both Family Court and federal immigration proceedings, a complex dual-system process that is nearly impossible for a child to manage alone.

Continued City Council investment will determine whether thousands of young New Yorkers have access to counsel—or must face removal proceedings alone. The young people we serve are students, workers, and future leaders in our communities. They want to finish school, support their families, and build stable lives in the boroughs they now call home.

Ensuring they have access to legal representation is not just about immigration policy—it is about child protection, stability, and the opportunity for young people to grow and thrive in the city they now call home. No child should be expected to stand alone in immigration court.

We urge the Council to include \$18.6 million for UMFI and \$2.6 million for SIJS in the FY27 budget. We've included additional details and funding breakdowns in the attached one-pagers. Thank you for your time, your partnership, and your continued commitment to protecting New York's children and families.

In community,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sierra Kraft".

Sierra Kraft
Executive Director
ICARE Coalition
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Defend Their Future: Sustain Legal Services for Immigrant Children and Youth

About ICARE: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children and youth facing deportation in New York City and advocating for universal access to counsel so no child has to face the immigration system alone.

The Challenge: In FY26, City Council made a significant investment in immigrant youth legal services, enabling providers to expand capacity, reduce waitlists, and reach more young people than ever before. That investment has made a measurable difference and we're deeply grateful. The need remains urgent.

Legal protections for immigrant youth continue to erode. Cases that were once straightforward now require significantly more time, coordination, and specialized advocacy, including federal habeas work to secure release for detained youth. Federal funding remains unstable, and more youth are facing detention and emergency legal needs. Without sustained investment, this year's progress could quickly be reversed, leaving thousands of youth to face court alone, with life-threatening consequences.

Every year, thousands of immigrant children and youth in NYC face complex immigration proceedings without an attorney. Without counsel, they have only a 15% chance of winning their case. With ICARE-supported representation, that rate jumps to over 90%.

What We Do: Through the Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative, ICARE providers deliver coordinated, high-quality representation to immigrant youth and families fighting deportation in NYC, including KYRs, legal screenings, direct representation, connections to city & social services, and centralized referrals to reduce duplication and increase efficiency.

Our Impact (Since 2014)	Screened 15,000+ children and youth for relief	Represented nearly 4,000 children and youth	Obtained relief for 2,000 children and youth
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Unaccompanied Minors & Families Initiative FY27 Discretionary Funding Request: \$18,559,420

Sustained City Council investment will determine whether **more than 2,000 young New Yorkers** and their families have access to counsel or must face removal proceedings alone.



No child should face the immigration process alone





Stability Is Protection: Protect SIJS Representation

About ICARE: ICARE is a coalition of legal service organizations dedicated to expanding access to legal representation for immigrant children and youth facing deportation in New York City and advocating for universal access to counsel so no child has to face the immigration system alone.

The Challenge: Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS) is a federal humanitarian protection available to children who have experienced parental abuse, abandonment, or neglect. Securing SIJS requires navigating two separate legal systems, New York Family Court and federal immigration proceedings, a dual-system process that is uniquely complex and resource-intensive.

Federal backlogs and processing delays have created prolonged uncertainty for eligible youth. Even after SIJS approval, continued representation is necessary to secure lawful status and protection from deportation. Without sustained City investment, youth who qualify for SIJS risk remaining in legal limbo, or losing access to the protection Congress intended, protections the City has supported so these young people can thrive.

What We Do: Through the SIJS Initiative, ICARE providers secure Family Court findings, file and monitor SIJS petitions with USCIS, provide removal defense when necessary, and coordinate referrals across the city to ensure youth remain supported and able to move forward safely. SIJS representation protects children who have already experienced profound harm and provides a pathway toward lawful permanent residence.

Why It Matters: Without counsel, immigrant children are far less likely to secure relief. With representation, they can obtain lawful status, stability, and safety. SIJS is a statutory protection established by Congress. Continued City investment ensures that youth who qualify can meaningfully access that protection, remain safely and continue to build stable futures in New York.

In the first two months of this initiative, 215 youth were screened and 135 youth were matched to representation, a clear signal of both unmet needs and the importance of continued City support.

SIJS Initiative FY27 Discretionary Funding Request: \$2,575,000

Sustained investment will ensure that children and youth who qualify for SIJS can secure lawful status and long-term stability — rather than remain trapped in system that is impossible to navigate alone.



**No child should face
the immigration process alone**



**JOINT TESTIMONY OF RIGHT TO COUNSEL LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS
FOR THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL, COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE,
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING**

March 17, 2026

**BRONX DEFENDERS
BUILD UP JUSTICE NYC
CAMBA LEGAL SERVICES
HOUSING CONSERVATION COORDINATORS
LEGAL SERVICES NYC
MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION FOR INTER-CULTURAL AFFAIRS
NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE
NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION
THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY**

INTRODUCTION

Thank you to the City Council’s General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify about the crucial need to improve the City’s contracting process and the need for increased funding and contract reform to meet the mandate of the Right to Counsel (RTC) program to best serve New York City residents.

Over the last 9 years, the critical Right to Counsel program has been well established in housing proceedings in New York City. Studies consistently show that tenants with legal representation in eviction proceedings remain in their homes and that RTC programs reduce the number of eviction filings. In New York City, 84% of tenants with an attorney remain in their homes, while eviction filings and default judgments have dropped by 30% since the implementation of the RTC program.¹ Furthermore, legal representation results in fewer judgments of possession and lower

¹ See, “In the most expensive city in the country, evictions remain lower than before COVID-19,” by John Pablo Garnhem, The Eviction Lab (January 14, 2025), <https://evictionlab.org/in-the-most-expensive-city-in-the-country-evictions-remain-lower-than-before-covid-19/>, last visited March 18, 2026.

money judgments. The impact of RTC goes beyond keeping families housed. Evictions have far-reaching consequences, not only affecting housing stability but also impacting employment, physical health, and mental well-being. Even when displacement cannot be avoided, representation ensures that tenants obtain valuable time to navigate related challenges, such as finding alternative housing or stabilizing their finances.²

The benefits of RTC extend beyond the tenants themselves—it also saves the City money. By reducing the number of people who enter the shelter system, the program alleviates one of the most expensive items of the City’s budget.³ **In Fiscal Year 2024, DHS spent approximately \$2.22 billion on adult and family shelter operations, and the average length of stay for single adults in shelter remained longer than a year—378 days in Fiscal Year 2025.** The funding required to fully implement RTC -- \$350 million – is a fraction of that amount, making it a cost-effective tool to address the housing crisis, preserve affordable housing, and stabilize vulnerable communities.

This testimony highlights the critical issues currently facing Right to Counsel (RTC) providers in New York City, beginning with the ongoing delays in payment that threaten our ability to sustain our operations. Despite timely registration of contracts with the Human Resources Administration (HRA), some providers have been unable to invoice for services since July, placing immense financial strain on our organizations, particularly smaller ones. This delay, coupled with a proposed 10% penalty on payments and a recent policy that reimburses only 90% of invoices, undermines the fiscal viability of our programs and puts at risk the delivery of high-quality legal services.

Additionally, the FY25-27 RTC contracts fall far short of addressing the growing need for legal representation in eviction cases. The overall amount of funding fails to meet the demand for legal representation – in fact funding covers only 36% of the eviction filings each year. Moreover, the current contract’s proposed case rates are insufficient to cover the costs of providing competent, holistic representation. There are widely disparate case rates across providers which should be right sized to ensure that each organization is properly compensated for the true cost of the work.

Specifically, we urge the City to take immediate action to reform its current contracting process which is marked by significant disorganization and includes delays in payment that jeopardize provider’s ability to provide crucial legal services to clients. We also urge the City to reform the FY 25-27 RTC contracts which are greatly unequal across provider organizations and simply do not provide for funding sufficient to meet the demand for representation in eviction cases throughout the City.

² See, The Effect of Legal Representation on Tenant Outcomes in Housing Court: Evidence from New York City’s Universal Access Program, by Mike Cassidy, Janet Currie. Journal of Public Economics Volume 222, June 2023.

³ See, <https://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2025/03/Department-of-Homeless-Services.pdf> and <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2026/dhs.pdf>.

I. The City Should Reform its Current Contracting Process.

A. The City's Current Contracting Process Is Marked by Significant Disorganization.

The City's current contracting process is marked by significant disorganization, including delay in registering contracts, failure to timely allocate and disburse funds, and inadequate clarity regarding reimbursement procedures. Together these issues pose significant challenges to nonprofit organizations contracted to provide services on behalf of New York City.

Nonprofit organizations face significant disadvantages in comparison to City agencies when it comes to receiving funding to provide services. While City agencies begin the fiscal year with their funding already allocated and confirmed, nonprofits are left waiting for funding confirmation, often for months into the fiscal year. This delay in securing funding allocations and awards creates operational challenges and financial uncertainty for nonprofits, undermining their ability to deliver essential services to New Yorkers who rely on them. Additionally, the City's registration of the respective contracts can also take months, if not years, which further delays the availability of funds and wreaks havoc on nonprofits' budgets and financial statements.

Furthermore, nonprofits are subjected to a complex, bureaucratic reimbursement process that is characterized by frequent changes in rules, requirements, and deadlines. This lack of clarity and consistency creates further inefficiencies and delays, forcing organizations to spend valuable time and funding navigating a convoluted system rather than focusing on their core mission of serving clients.

The City must ensure that nonprofits receive their funding allocations in a timely manner at the beginning of each fiscal year. Delayed confirmation of funding forces organizations to operate without financial certainty, placing their operations, staff, and services at risk. By aligning the timing of nonprofit funding with City agencies and ensuring timely contract registration, the City can level the playing field and allow nonprofits to plan and execute their programs without interruption.

In addition to timely funding confirmation, nonprofits require a clear and consistent set of reimbursement guidelines to minimize confusion and ensure that payments are processed quickly and efficiently. The City should provide detailed and stable guidance on reimbursement procedures, clearly outlining the expectations and documentation requirements upfront. Furthermore, the City must avoid sudden changes to reimbursement rules mid-year, which can create serious operational disruptions and financial challenges for nonprofits.

The City must also streamline the contracting process itself, reducing unnecessary paperwork and bureaucratic hurdles that slow down the approval and payment process. Nonprofits should be able to enter into contracts and submit invoices without facing excessive delays due to administrative red tape. Increasing contract processing staff, and establishing clear and realistic timelines for approvals, would help ensure that contracts and payments move forward without unnecessary delay. By making the contracting process more efficient and user-friendly, the City will allow nonprofits to focus on serving clients, rather than spending valuable resources navigating an unnecessarily complicated and inefficient system.

Finally, to address cash flow challenges, the City should implement pre-approved advances or interim payments based on established milestones. This approach would help nonprofits cover operating expenses and ensure that they can continue to serve their communities while waiting for full reimbursement. Advances should be issued promptly and proportionally, reflecting the work being done, so that nonprofits have the necessary financial flexibility to maintain their operations.

By implementing these reforms, the City can reduce the operational burdens placed on nonprofit organizations, enabling them to better serve New Yorkers in need. Streamlining the contracting and funding processes will lead to more effective service delivery, reduced administrative costs, and a more sustainable nonprofit sector that is better equipped to fulfill its vital role in the community.

Recommendation

The City should align the timing of nonprofit funding with that of City agencies so nonprofits contracted to deliver services on behalf of the City can do so without interruption or delay. The City should also provide clear, upfront direction on reimbursement expectations and processes, reducing the bureaucratic hurdles nonprofits must cross in order to receive funding. The City should also implement pre-approved advances and interim payments to alleviate ongoing cash-flow problems plaguing nonprofit providers.

B. The City Should Pay Nonprofits Timely to Avoid Jeopardizing Providers' Ability to Deliver Crucial Legal Services to Clients.

The most urgent issue facing Right to Counsel (RTC) providers is the ongoing delay in receiving payment on contracts with the Human Resources Administration (HRA), which includes critical funding for RTC and the Anti-Harassment Tenant Protection Program (AHTP), and is greatly impeding providers' ability to provide crucial legal services to clients as well as sustain basic operations as nonprofit organizations.

While our contracts were registered on time, most of the nonprofit legal service providers that offer essential housing legal work for low-income and vulnerable tenants have not yet been able to invoice for all of their costs, due to the City's delays in approving our FY26 budgets. As a result, many RTC providers have now gone nine months without being able to fully invoice, except for limited advances that fail to cover providers' full costs. These outstanding amounts are on top of the significant amounts owed to providers for FY25 contracts.

Payment delays are threatening the viability of our organizations, especially for smaller nonprofits, and jeopardize our provision of legal services to those facing eviction or housing instability. The delays represent millions of dollars to smaller providers, and tens of millions to larger providers, causing financial strain to small and large providers alike. These delays not only jeopardize our capacity to meet payroll but also undermine our ability to fulfill our mission of providing high-quality, timely legal representation to those most in need, many of whom are facing imminent eviction.

Such delays often force nonprofit providers to subsidize their services with private dollars while waiting for payment from the City. Organizations frequently must rely on reserves or lines of credit

simply to continue operating, incurring interest costs and taking on financial risk in order to sustain services that the City has contracted them to provide. These borrowing costs represent resources that could otherwise be used to represent additional tenants and families in need.

While the advance on baseline City contracts this year was an appreciable improvement, we are now well beyond the period these advances cover, and we have no way to receive additional payment on these contracts beyond these advances. Even though HRA has been working to resolve this issue, providers are nearly nine months into the current fiscal year and many are *still* waiting for budget approvals in order to invoice for their services, and all have experienced payment delays for services they have been able to invoice. Nonprofit RTC providers need to invoice monthly to ensure they have enough cash to make payroll, and to continue providing much needed services, especially now that RTC contracts, with the expansion of the program, account for large percentages of providers' overall organizational budgets. Some organizations are already relying on or about to exhaust lines of credit. If providers don't have money to pay their attorneys and paralegals because of HRA contractual delays, their work will come to a screeching halt, completely frustrating the purpose of the RTC program. Nonprofits cannot continue to operate this way. It is simply unsustainable.

This existential threat is further compounded by HRA's position that, in implementing a provision that providers must meet performance milestones to earn 10% of the contract amount, HRA will pay the nonprofit providers only 90% of their invoices, whether they are meeting performance milestones or not. This plan, only shared with providers in mid-October 2024 after contracts were bid and issued (and not referenced in any contractual document) is disastrous for nonprofit RTC providers. Providers do not have reserves to await reimbursement for money they have spent – reimbursements that may not come if milestones cannot be met. This is an extremely damaging way to implement a new performance-based payment provision. This scheme unnecessarily undermines the effort to expand and improve this program for New Yorkers in need.

Recommendation

As the City continues to disentangle the bureaucratic morass that has utterly upended the orderly registration of contracts and payment of invoices, to ensure that RTC providers have sufficient cash to operate, the City must (1) allocate additional advances for 75% of the contract amounts immediately; and (2) commit to additional monthly advances until it is current in the payment of invoices submitted by RTC providers.

Further, the City must pay the full 100% on invoices as they are submitted.

II. The Providers Have Significant Concerns about the FY25-27 RTC Contract

A. The Funding Falls Far Short of Meeting the Need for Representation.

Despite the universally understood success of the Right to Counsel program, the vast majority of tenants face eviction in our City without any hope of having a lawyer represent them.

According to the New York State Unified Court System’s Statewide Eviction information, residential eviction filings in 2025 in New York City totaled 119,845.⁴ The City is funding only 33,000 full representation cases each year⁵ (and the reality of these poorly funded contracts is that the City-funded providers could afford to represent 22,700 households in eviction cases last year – a record high⁶). In contrast, the Independent Budget Office found that 50,000 tenants are eligible for full representation under RTC each year.⁷ **This means that fewer than half of the eligible tenants were provided with full representation.** This left over 27,300 cases last year where eligible tenants had no hope of getting a lawyer under the Right to Counsel program.

This harmful deficiency is borne out by the data on representation levels in housing court. Of the residential eviction cases filed on March 9, 2025, which have now been pending for more than a year, only 38% of those cases ever ended up receiving representation.⁸ Of the cases filed on January 11, 2026, and having at least 2 appearances, only 12% of those tenants have a lawyer representing them currently.

The City is severely under-funding a program that is objectively successful in both moral and economic terms. The RTC program boasts an extremely high success rate in preventing evictions and other collateral consequences. Every eviction prevented by the program creates huge savings to the City by avoiding shelter costs, brings the City closer into compliance with its own RTC law, and protects the most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Recommendation

The City should increase funding for Right to Counsel to a level sufficient for legal services providers to provide high-quality, holistic services to **all** eligible cases. There has to be sufficient funding to meet the demand for representation in the new cases being filed and the backlog of eviction defense cases pending without representation.

B. The Contracts Do Not Cover the Full Cost of Providing Anti-Eviction Services.

Eviction defense proceedings are complex and require significant time to resolve. New York City has some of the most robust and complicated housing laws in the country. Important laws, such as the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 and the Good Cause Eviction Law passed in 2024, have increased critical tenant protections while also adding to the complexities of tenant

⁴ New York State Unified Court System Statewide Eviction Information available at: <https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoiZGE3NzljYmItYTBMZC00OGI2LTliYTgtYzY5ZjI0N2U0MWYxIiwidCI6IjM0NTZmZTkYLWNiZDEtNDA2ZC1iNWZlTUzNjRiZWwYTYgzMyJ9>. Last visited March 16, 2026.

⁵ NYC Comptroller’s Report, Evictions Up, Representation Down: How New York City is Undermining the Right to Counsel, May 2, 2025, <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/evictions-up-representation-down/>, last accessed March 18, 2026.

⁶ NYC Office of Civil Justice, FY 25 Annual Report, https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/civiljustice/OCJ_Annual_Report_2025.pdf

⁷ The Expansion of New York City’s Right to Counsel Program, NYC Independent Budget Office Report, September 2025 at 2, <https://www.ibo.nyc.gov/assets/ibo/downloads/pdf/community-and-social-services/2025/2025-septemberthe-expansion-of-nyc-right-to-counsel-program.pdf>, last accessed March 18, 2026.

⁸ NYC Eviction Crisis Monitor, <https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/nycrisismonitor>, last accessed March 16, 2026.

defense. As a result, providers must increase staff training to stay current with the law and attorneys must dedicate more time per case. Notably, these changes have all occurred in the last few years. Since 2018, providers have seen a 24% increase in how many hours it takes to resolve a case, while increased administrative and training burdens mean that staff have fewer hours available to do casework.

The City should appropriate additional funds to the Right to Counsel Program so that each provider can receive the funding it needs to operate an effective program. Providers must be resourced to staff their programs appropriately, comply with reporting and programmatic requirements, train and supervise staff, retain experienced advocates, and deliver the holistic representation that tenants need. That includes not only attorneys, but also paralegals, social workers, administrative staff, and infrastructure supports such as finance, HR, and IT. While legal representation may stop an eviction in the immediate term, stabilizing a household often requires benefits advocacy, social work support, and coordinated follow-up. Underfunding these functions undermines the effectiveness of the program as a whole and leaves families vulnerable to repeated housing instability.

Before the RFX process, providers collected data showing that the average cost of holistically defending an eviction case with fair staff compensation and adequate program support was approximately \$7,500 per case. Since then, costs have only risen due to longer case timelines, new legal protections, inflation, and the operational burdens associated with delayed contract payments and borrowing costs. But even that figure should be understood as a benchmark, not the sole measure of program need. The City should recognize that organizations vary in size, structure, staffing models, and institutional capacity, and funding must reflect those differences if the program is to succeed.

During the negotiation process for the current contract, providers were pressed to lower their proposed budgets toward an artificially constrained average. Some were encouraged to move as close as possible to \$3,500 per reportable case; at least one provider was told the average case rate was \$4,100 and was asked to reduce its proposal accordingly. OCJ strongly implied that bids would be rejected if providers did not lower their rates. This process was incompatible with the City's stated goal of allowing providers to identify their own costs and undermined the possibility of building a sustainable, effective program.

The results were predictable. Some providers accepted funding levels far below the actual cost of delivering services because they were committed to continuing this essential work. As a result, many RTC providers report that they are now operating programs that are underfunded relative to their staffing, supervision, infrastructure, and service obligations. This underfunding strains program quality, contributes to unsustainable workloads, hampers recruitment and retention, and limits providers' ability to deliver the holistic representation that tenants require. It also disproportionately harms smaller and community-based providers, which are often more dependent on RTC funding and less able to absorb structural shortfalls.

As Housing Courts continue scheduling cases at near pre-pandemic levels and as provider costs continue to rise, the City cannot maintain an effective Right to Counsel program by relying on funding assumptions that do not reflect the actual cost of the work. Every provider must receive

the resources necessary to run an effective program, and contract funding must be aligned with the real operational needs of each organization.

Recommendation

The City must ensure that additional funds are appropriated so that every RTC provider is funded at the level necessary to run an effective program. Funding should not be driven by an artificially flattened case-rate metric, but by the actual cost of delivering high-quality, holistic anti-eviction representation within each organization.

C. Additional RTC Contract Issues

(1) The 10% Reduction in Compensation Should Be Eliminated or at Least Suspended.

In FY25, the Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) implemented a new contractual penalty for nonprofit legal services providers that imposes a **10% funding reduction** for failing to meet metrics on a newly created performance scorecard. This measure exacerbates the challenges already faced by providers and undermines the fundamental goals of the Right to Counsel (RTC) program.

Compounding the impact of the 10% penalty, the metrics used by OCJ to evaluate providers were unclear prior to the first evaluation in January 2025. Even after that evaluation, the written guidance issued by OCJ has remained vague, and significant confusion persists about how the scorecard metrics are calculated and how providers will be evaluated in future review periods. This lack of transparency makes it difficult for providers to plan staffing, manage caseloads, and ensure compliance with contractual expectations.

Providers are also frequently at the mercy of systemic delays that are outside their control, including Housing Court backlogs, congested court calendars, inefficient court administration, delays in obtaining public benefits assistance, unresponsive opposing counsel, and evolving legal standards that affect case timelines and outcomes. Penalizing providers for failing to meet rigid quantitative benchmarks disregards these external factors and unfairly shifts risk onto nonprofit organizations.

The penalty also creates **perverse incentives** that may undermine the quality of legal representation. In an effort to meet contractual benchmarks, organizations may feel pressure to prioritize quantitative outputs over substantive outcomes, potentially taking on more cases than their staff can reasonably handle or resolving cases prematurely. These dynamics risk compromising the quality of representation that the RTC program was designed to guarantee.

Notably, **this type of performance-penalty contract structure is not used for other indigent defense systems in New York City**, such as criminal or family court representation. Criminal defense providers funded through the City and State, including institutional defender offices and assigned counsel programs, generally receive stable funding structures designed to ensure representation, rather than contracts that impose financial penalties tied to case-processing metrics. Similarly, attorneys providing representation in Family Court matters such as parent defense

matters or custody cases are not subject to comparable contractual scorecards that reduce organizational funding based on performance metrics tied to case throughput.

The absence of similar penalty structures in other indigent defense contexts reflects a core principle: **legal representation for marginalized New Yorkers requires stable funding and professional independence, not financial penalties tied to outcomes influenced by court systems and external actors.** Applying a punitive metric-based model to housing defense, while other right-to-counsel systems in New York City rely on more stable funding frameworks—creates an inequitable and destabilizing structure for RTC providers.

Finally, the penalty provision has broader downstream implications for the City itself. Weakening RTC providers through financial penalties increases the likelihood of evictions, which in turn impose significant costs on municipal systems, including emergency shelter, public assistance, and healthcare services. From a cost-benefit perspective, adequately funding and supporting RTC providers is far more fiscally responsible than penalizing them within an already underfunded system.

Recommendation

The City should eliminate or suspend the 10% performance penalty. At a minimum, OCJ should assess its written guidelines detailing how scorecard metrics are calculated and evaluated. The City should also incorporate flexibility into the evaluation process when providers are unable to meet quantitative metrics due to systemic factors outside of their control.

(2) Rollovers and Brief Services Should Be Counted and Funded.

The current contracts, in sharp contrast to the first nine years of the RTC program, no longer allow cases continuing beyond one year to be “rolled over” and reported in subsequent fiscal years. This change ignores that eviction cases are complicated and often last beyond a year. Disallowing RTC providers from reporting rollover cases as part of their deliverables creates a perverse incentive for providers to prioritize “easy” cases and de-prioritize representing tenants with complex and time-intensive cases. Any incentivization of one case or another caused by contract terms is fundamentally repugnant to the letter and spirit of the Right to Counsel law and to our missions as legal service providers. Such antithetical incentives undermine this essential program.

In a world where not every eligible tenant will obtain legal representation, RTC providers' ability to be compensated for brief legal assistance is an invaluable part of preventing homelessness. For community-based legal service providers, providing brief legal assistance to their neighborhoods is a fundamental part of their mission. In contrast, the new contract’s elimination of partial payment for these cases and a shift to all those cases being handled by one provider via a telephone hotline means that every neighborhood referral forces the community provider to choose between providing services for “free” with limited resources and operating contrary to its mission by turning away the vulnerable tenants.

We urge the City to fund brief legal assistance, as it has under previous contracts. This change would allow providers to triage cases at intake and to provide legal advice to the community in accordance with our missions.

Recommendation

The City must fund providers for all active and litigated cases, even those that take a year or more to resolve. The City must also sufficiently fund brief services and advice work to reflect the realities of RTC practice on the ground, particularly for community-based RTC providers.

(3) OCJ Should Streamline and Simplify the Onerous Reporting Requirements of the Right to Counsel Contracts

OCJ's increasingly strict reporting requirements often obstruct the goal of obtaining data that accurately reflects RTC providers' work. By prioritizing strict adherence to reporting protocols over case management realities, OCJ does not obtain a complete picture of RTC providers' work, consumes precious resources with data collection and management, and fails to credit providers for work done where marginally relevant data cannot be obtained. For example, if a provider cannot obtain a tenant's unit number, the case cannot be reported despite the provider dedicating dozens of hours to the case. The resulting obligation to devote increasing resources to reporting data undermines the program's overall effectiveness.

Inaccurate or delayed data not only obscures the true scope of RTC providers' work but also undermines the program's accountability and strategic planning. When RTC providers must divert time and resources toward meeting burdensome reporting requirements, they have less capacity to focus on their clients' urgent legal needs.

Recommendation

OCJ must adopt less burdensome and more flexible reporting practices that align with the operational realities of nonprofit legal services providers, who expend excessive resources attempting to comply with OCJ's changeable yet rigid reporting requirements.

VI. CONCLUSION

As we move through the many stages of NYC's housing crisis, we as providers remain on the frontline of efforts to ensure that the needs of New York's marginalized communities are met. We will continue to make the case for justice and equity, and we urge the City to adopt the recommendations provided throughout this testimony. As our clients undergo this unparalleled crisis, we stand right there beside them. On behalf of Bronx Defenders, Build Up Justice NYC, CAMBA Legal Services, Inc., Housing Conservation Coordinators, Legal Services NYC, Mobilization for Justice, Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs, Inc., Neighborhood Defender Service, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and The Legal Aid Society, we thank you for your continued support, and for allowing us to testify today.

If you want to learn more about RTC and the issues discussed in the testimony, we invite you to read the RTC Concept Paper authored by the Legal Services Providers which can be found at <https://docs.google.com/document/d/14Vtdi7vfdw67YbnlUtYq9OkXP9WE55sAx24ZTjbVv38/edit?usp=sharing> and is attached to the version of this testimony submitted on-line.

LEGAL SERVICES PROVIDERS

BRONX DEFENDERS

The Bronx Defenders (“BxD”) is a public defender nonprofit that is radically transforming how people in the Bronx are represented in the legal system, and, in doing so, is transforming the system itself. Our office’s staff of over 450 includes interdisciplinary teams comprised of civil, criminal, immigration, and family defense attorneys, as well as social workers, benefits specialists, legal advocates, parent advocates, investigators, team administrators, and policy, organizing, and community engagement specialists who collaborate to provide holistic advocacy to address the causes and consequences of legal system involvement and push for systemic reform at the local, state, and national level.

Through this integrated, comprehensive, referral-based structure, we have pioneered a groundbreaking, nationally-recognized model of direct services representation we call “holistic defense” that achieves transformative outcomes for the people we represent. Each year, we defend over 20,000 low-income Bronx residents across civil, criminal, immigration, and family legal systems, and reach thousands more through our community intake, youth mentoring, and outreach programs. We take what we learn from the people we represent and communities that we work with and launch innovative programs designed to bring about real and lasting change.

Our Civil Action Practice

The Civil Action Practice provides comprehensive civil legal services to clients and their families by integrating civil representation. Our goal is to actualize the civil right to counsel – including for tenants – and minimize the severe and often unforeseen fallout from housing, criminal, family, and immigration court proceedings and facilitate the seamless reintegration of our clients into the community. Our Civil Action Practice attorneys, social workers and benefits & legal advocates represent clients in every forum in New York City – administrative, state, and federal – to address these problems and assist our clients in overcoming civil legal barriers to housing, eviction, employment, and public benefits, as well as addressing instances of police misconduct, criminal record errors, and civil forfeiture.

BUILD UP JUSTICE NYC

Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, doing business as Build Up Justice NYC (BUJNYC), believes all New Yorkers should have equal access to legal services to seek justice, make their voices heard, and overcome systemic racism and oppression. We represent low- and moderate-income individuals and families throughout New York City. Our clients live in rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods where many residents and small business owners have been displaced or are facing displacement and harassment. For more than half a century, BUJNYC has provided high-quality, low-barrier neighborhood-based legal services to individuals, families, nonprofit community-based organizations, community development corporations, coalitions, and small business owners, interested in developing and sustaining vibrant, healthy communities. Our Preserving Affordable Housing (PAH) Program uses legal and advocacy strategies to preserve and protect affordable housing, prevent evictions, combat tenant harassment and discrimination, and ensure that working families, individuals, older adults, and others live in stable environments and within their financial means. BUJNYC’s PAH Brooklyn and Queens Programs have almost 50 staff attorneys, paralegals, social workers, and supervising attorneys, in addition to other supporting staff.

CAMBA LEGAL SERVICES

CAMBA Legal Services, Inc. (CLS) is a community-based law practice in Brooklyn and Staten Island that provides free civil legal assistance to low-income New York City residents. Our mission as a dedicated and diverse staff of lawyers and paralegals is to provide our clients with the highest quality of legal representation while standing committed with our communities in the fight for racial, social, and economic justice. CAMBA Legal Services' Housing Unit provides anti-eviction legal services to tenants, including legal advice and representation in non-payment proceedings, holdovers, HP actions for repairs, HCR overcharge complaints, administrative hearings (NYCHA and HPD), Article 78s and other related proceedings. The CLS Housing Unit has a staff of more than 56 attorneys and paralegals. CLS prides itself on being guided by the following principles: compassionate case handling, decentering the attorney to empower the client, tenacious advocacy, collaborative learning, and a commitment to legal excellence.

HOUSING CONSERVATION COORDINATORS

Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC) is a community based legal services organization that was founded over 50 years ago to “advance social and economic justice and fight for the rights of poor, low-income and working individuals and families.” HCC provides comprehensive services on housing-related matters, including preventing displacement, accessing public benefits, and preserving the limited stock of affordable housing, immigration matters, consumer protection and elder law to help stabilize the lowest income households.

HCC has served income eligible residents in Manhattan through the Right to Counsel Program since 2017.

LEGAL SERVICES NYC

Legal Services NYC's (LSNYC) is the largest civil legal services provider in the country, with a mission to fight poverty and seek racial, social, and economic justice for low-income New Yorkers. For over 50 years, LSNYC has helped New Yorkers obtain the basic necessities of life, including housing, economic security, family and immigration stability, education, health care, and challenge the systemic injustices that trap people in poverty. At LSNYC, we pride ourselves on our deep community roots, our holistic, trauma-informed approach to advocacy, and our ability to work creatively, strategically, and collaboratively with our clients.

MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE

Mobilization for Justice's (MFJ) mission is to achieve justice for all. MFJ prioritizes the needs of people who are low-income, disenfranchised, or have disabilities as they struggle to overcome the effects of social injustice and systemic racism. We provide the highest-quality free, direct civil legal assistance, conduct community education and build partnerships, engage in policy advocacy, and bring impact litigation. MFJ has a staff of more than 150 attorneys, paralegals, social workers, and support staff. It is a diverse, unionized, and collegial workplace where staff share the organization's mission to achieve social justice.

MFJ's housing practice is honored to engage in Right to Counsel work in the Bronx and Manhattan, where we deploy a wide array of litigation and advocacy strategies to prevent eviction and to protect tenants' rights.

NEIGHBORHOOD DEFENDER SERVICE OF HARLEM

Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem (NDS) is a community-based public defender office that provides high-quality legal services to residents of Northern Manhattan and a member of the LEAP coalition. Since 1990, NDS has been working to improve the quality and depth of criminal and civil defense representation for those unable to afford an attorney through holistic, cross-practice representation. With the early implementation of Right to Counsel in key Northern Manhattan zip codes, NDS joined the Right to Counsel Coalition and began serving the community through the Right to Counsel Program. As a holistic public defender office, NDS is particularly familiar with the collateral consequences of homelessness, including an increased chance of entering the criminal legal system.

NORTHERN MANHATTAN IMPROVEMENT CORPORATION

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC) is a community-based, settlement house and not-for-profit organization founded in 1979. NMIC is a leading multi-service agency with over 140 staff members serving New York City, with a focus on residents of upper Manhattan and the Bronx. Our mission is to serve as a catalyst for positive change in the lives of the people in our communities on their paths to secure and prosperous futures. Integration is the cornerstone of NMIC's programs, and our staff can identify and address a broad array of immediate needs through comprehensive crisis intervention services. Clients may then move seamlessly to capacity building services through our holistic programs designed to transition individuals and families to safer, healthier, and more stable futures.

NMIC's Legal, Organizing, and Advocacy (LOA) unit meets community members' basic needs including legal representation, immigration assistance, housing advocacy and tenant organizing, eviction-defense representation, financial-planning and tax preparation services, services for survivors of domestic violence, and health and mental health related programming. NMIC serves about 14,000 clients each year across the LOA programs and its Education and Career Services unit.

NMIC's advocacy for the housing rights of its community began with the founding of the organization, nearly 45 years ago. NMIC's representation of tenants in New York City housing courts reaches back decades and it is an original RTC provider, since the program's inception.

THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY

The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, was founded in 1876 to provide free legal representation to marginalized New York City families and individuals. The Legal Aid Society's legal program operates three major practices – Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights – and through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel. Each year, LAS handles more than 250,000 cases and legal matters for clients, taking on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States.

Our Civil Practice works to improve the lives of low-income New Yorkers by helping vulnerable families and individuals to obtain and maintain the necessities of life - housing, health care, food

and self-sufficiency. We serve as a “one-stop” legal resource for clients with a broad variety of legal problems, ranging, among others, from government benefits and access to health care, to immigration and domestic violence. Our depth and breadth of experience is unmatched in the legal profession and gives the Society a unique capacity to go beyond any one individual case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals, and broader, more powerful systemic change at a societal level.

Our work has always taken an explicit racial and social equity lens, and the current housing crisis has further focused our efforts to advocate for the needs of New York’s marginalized communities.



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**Testimony of
The Legal Aid Society on
The Mayor's Fiscal Year 2027
Preliminary Budget Presented
before
The New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare
March 17, 2026**

Submitted on behalf of The Legal Aid Society by
Twyla Carter, CEO
and
Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney, Civil Practice

INTRODUCTION

The Legal Aid Society (LAS) welcomes this opportunity to testify before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare regarding the Executive Budget for Fiscal Year (FY) 2027 Preliminary Budget and its impact on low-income New Yorkers. We thank Chair Crystal Hudson and the members of the Committee for their continued leadership and commitment to advancing equity, stability, and access to justice for the City's most vulnerable residents.

With an annual caseload of nearly 200,000 legal matters, LAS takes on more cases for more clients who cannot afford private counsel than any other legal services organization in the United States. Through our Civil, Criminal Defense, and Juvenile Rights Practices – supported and amplified by a robust Pro Bono program – we deliver comprehensive, high-quality legal services while pursuing systemic reforms that improve outcomes far beyond individual cases. LAS's unique value is our 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 our annual caseload, LAS's law reform representation for clients benefits millions of low-income families and individuals in New York City. The landmark rulings in many of these cases have a statewide and national impact.

The Civil Practice: An Indispensable Component Of The Legal, Social, And Economic Fabric Of Our City

This testimony focuses on LAS's **Civil Practice**, an indispensable component of New York City's legal, social, and economic fabric. We outline key programmatic and operational priorities across the civil legal landscape, including:

- public benefits access and administrative capacity at the Human Resources Administration;
- rental assistance and homelessness prevention, with a particular focus on CityFHEPS;
- investments in housing stability, supportive services, inspections, and program oversight;
- the use of technology and artificial intelligence to expand access to justice;
- and the urgent civil legal needs arising in immigration, employment, family stability, foreclosure prevention, and survivor-centered representation.

In addition, this testimony details LAS's **requests for discretionary City Council funding** that support targeted Civil Practice initiatives. These discretionary investments are critical to sustaining specialized programs, responding to emerging needs, and ensuring that low-income New Yorkers can access timely, culturally responsive, and effective legal representation. Together, baseline funding and discretionary initiatives allow LAS to operate flexibly while delivering measurable impacts for individuals, families, and communities across the five boroughs.

We respectfully urge the City Council to preserve and increase funding for LAS in FY27 so that we can continue to meet escalating needs, address systemic failures, and provide comprehensive civil legal services that promote housing stability, economic security, family unity, and dignity for Black and Brown communities, low-income New Yorkers, and other disproportionately impacted populations.

PUBLIC BENEFITS AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE

Breaking Down Bureaucratic Barriers to Stability

In the past 12 months, HRA has made meaningful improvements in the timely processing of ongoing Cash Assistance and SNAP applications. However, LAS clients continue to experience significant barriers communicating with the agency, accessing benefits, and demonstrating ongoing eligibility. These challenges fall most acutely on New Yorkers seeking help with rental obligations—whether through ongoing subsidies such as CityFHEPS or FHEPS, or through discrete requests for emergency rental assistance to address arrears. Far too many households continue to find themselves trapped in a bureaucratic cycle driven by chronic understaffing, fragmented administrative systems, and outdated technological infrastructure.

While our testimony focuses largely on CityFHEPS, these concerns—and the recommendations we outline—apply broadly to all programs administered by HRA.

Rental Assistance Funding

The Department of Social Services (DSS) administers a wide range of rental assistance programs—ongoing subsidies such as CityFHEPS and FHEPS, as well as emergency rental assistance—that serve as critical supports for households at risk of housing instability. Demand for these programs continues to grow due to worsening housing market conditions. The most recent New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey shows that the citywide vacancy rate remains at an extremely low 1.4 percent, with the lowest-cost units (those renting under \$1,650 per month) well below 1 percent. The supply of affordable apartments is effectively nonexistent, and rising rents have far outpaced incomes for many low-income households.

At the same time, inflation has increased the cost of basic necessities—food, transit, healthcare—leaving households with even less flexibility to absorb rent increases or unexpected financial shocks. For older adults and people with disabilities living on fixed incomes, these pressures are especially acute. Even tenants in rent-regulated housing struggle as stagnant incomes collide with rising everyday expenses. As New York City’s senior population and number of residents living with disabilities continue to grow, the need for stable, accessible rental assistance programs grows with them.

Participation in CityFHEPS reflects these trends. As of November 2025, 65,092 households were receiving CityFHEPS—a 10 percent increase from the end of FY 2025. This sustained growth demonstrates not only the escalating need, but also the essential role these subsidies play in preventing homelessness. Ensuring adequate and sustained funding is therefore not simply a matter of responding to current need—it is a critical homelessness-prevention strategy. We applaud the council for enacting and defending the CityFHEPS expansion, and we are optimistic that the pending litigation can be promptly resolved to provide urgently needed relief to the City’s most vulnerable residents.

Service Delivery and Administrative Capacity

The Human Resources Administration (HRA) continues to fall short of its target of processing 95 percent of applications and recertifications within required timelines. Clients represented by LAS and other advocates continue to encounter persistent barriers when attempting to communicate with the agency regarding their cases, whether they are submitting documentation or demonstrating ongoing eligibility. These challenges affect households seeking a wide range of assistance, including Cash Assistance, SNAP, emergency rental assistance, and housing subsidies such as CityFHEPS and FHEPS.

The Mayor's FY 2027 Preliminary Budget acknowledges the importance of maintaining core social service programs and includes continued funding for HRA operations. However, the current proposal does not sufficiently address the operational gaps that continue to prevent the agency from meeting its timeliness goals or delivering services in a way that is accessible and responsive to the needs of vulnerable New Yorkers. Additional investments are necessary to ensure that HRA has the staffing, technological infrastructure, and oversight capacity required to administer these programs effectively. New Yorkers seeking help with rental obligations—whether through an ongoing subsidy such as CityFHEPS or FHEPS, or through emergency assistance to resolve rental arrears—often find themselves trapped in a frustrating bureaucratic process marked by delayed responses, lost documentation, repeated requests for verification, and long waits for application determinations. These systemic problems stem largely from insufficient staffing levels, fragmented administrative systems, and outdated technological infrastructure.

While our testimony today focuses heavily on the CityFHEPS program, the concerns and recommendations outlined here apply broadly to the full range of benefits administered by HRA. We recognize and appreciate the agency's stated commitment to improving the timeliness of application processing and to strengthening the CityFHEPS program as a tool for preventing homelessness. Unfortunately, the program has not yet realized its potential. Despite its strong policy goals, CityFHEPS remains hindered by substantial operational barriers, including administrative delays, fragmented oversight, insufficient support services, and rental assistance levels that often fail to keep pace with the housing market. As a result, many households who qualify for assistance remain unable to access or successfully utilize the program.

These concerns were reinforced by the October 2024 audit conducted by the New York State Office of the State Comptroller examining the administration of CityFHEPS. The audit identified multiple structural problems affecting the program's effectiveness, including weak oversight mechanisms, poor communication with participants, delays in processing applications, failure to serve all eligible households, and insufficient rental assistance levels. The report concluded that these deficiencies undermine the program's ability to meaningfully address housing instability and homelessness in New York City. Meaningful progress will require not only policy improvements but also increased funding targeted towards staffing, technology modernization, program oversight, and supportive services.

Hiring and Supporting Adequate Staff Across HRA Services

Staffing shortages at HRA are significantly harming the client experience across the full range of HRA programs. Households applying for and recertifying for Cash Assistance, SNAP, emergency rental assistance, and housing subsidies such as CityFHEPS consistently report extensive delays, processing errors, poor communication, and being incorrectly diverted to Homebase providers when they should be receiving assistance directly through HRA. HRA must ensure that Benefits Access Centers are adequately staffed with knowledgeable and well-trained workers who can address client needs whether residents seek assistance by phone, online, or in person. While the majority of applications and recertifications are submitted through ACCESS HRA, the critical back-office work that actually determines whether families receive benefits still requires sufficient human capacity. This work includes indexing and reviewing documents, conducting eligibility interviews, verifying information, processing case changes, and approving applications and recertifications.

Without enough staff performing these functions, applications sit unprocessed, documents go unreviewed, and households are forced to wait weeks or months for benefits that are meant to provide immediate support. Staffing shortages also contribute to another troubling issue frequently reported by

applicants: disrespectful or demeaning treatment when they attempt to access assistance. Workers who are overburdened, under-trained, and insufficiently supported are more likely to struggle to provide the level of service that New Yorkers deserve. Improving staffing levels, training, and workplace support is essential not only for efficiency but also for ensuring that clients are treated with dignity and respect. In addition, staffing shortages are contributing to growing backlogs in CityFHEPS processing, particularly as additional responsibilities shift from community-based Homebase providers to HRA under recent policy changes. Without additional staff, the system will be unable to keep up with increased demand. HRA testified that there are currently 161 staff in the Rental Assistance Program which charged with overseeing annual CityFHEPS subsidy renewals, request for modifications and general administration of the CityFHEPS program. This number is wholly inadequate to administer subsidies for the 68,000 households using CityFHEPS subsidies. Overburdened staff are unable to provide adequate assistance and support to tenants and landlords participating in the program.

The City must appropriate sufficient funding in the upcoming budget to hire, train, and retain the staff necessary to ensure that HRA can meet its obligations to process applications and recertifications accurately, efficiently, and with the level of professionalism and respect that New Yorkers deserve.

Strengthening Community-Based Access Through Homebase

For many households living in the community who are at risk of entering shelter, the first step toward accessing CityFHEPS is connecting with a local Homebase provider. These nonprofit organizations play a critical role in homelessness prevention, but they are currently operating under severe staffing and resource constraints. As a result, many families attempting to access services are forced to wait months simply to obtain an intake appointment. Recent reports indicate that waiting times for Homebase appointments often range from two to six months, a delay that can allow manageable housing crises to escalate into evictions and shelter entry.

Increased funding is necessary to expand staffing capacity both at HRA and among contracted Homebase providers. Additional personnel—including caseworkers, administrative support staff, and benefits processing specialists—would allow providers to conduct timely intakes, review documentation more quickly, coordinate housing placements, and issue vouchers without unnecessary delays. Expanding case management capacity would also allow staff to work more closely with households navigating the housing search process. Many tenants lose potential housing opportunities because administrative hurdles delay voucher issuance or verification. Additional case managers could help households respond quickly to these opportunities and ensure that eligible families are able to secure housing before those opportunities disappear. Strengthening Homebase capacity is therefore not only a matter of administrative efficiency but also a key component of the City’s homelessness prevention strategy.

Investing in Support Services That Promote Long-Term Housing Stability

Rental assistance alone is often not enough to ensure long-term housing stability. Families facing housing insecurity frequently need additional support services to help them maintain stable housing and navigate complex administrative systems. Robust case management, housing search assistance, and follow-up services are essential components of an effective housing subsidy program. These services help households identify suitable apartments, communicate with landlords, complete required documentation, and address issues that arise after placement. However, these services remain significantly underfunded. Without adequate investment in supportive services, households may struggle to maintain housing even after receiving a voucher, reducing the overall effectiveness of the program.

In addition, case managers, particularly those working in shelter settings, must receive adequate training in public benefits eligibility and application procedures. When staff lack familiarity with programs such as CityFHEPS or emergency rental assistance, clients may miss important opportunities to access assistance for which they qualify. Investing in support services and training will help ensure that housing assistance programs achieve their intended purpose: not just providing temporary financial aid but supporting long-term housing stability.

Modernizing and Expanding Property Inspection Capacity

The inspection process remains another significant barrier to the effective use of housing vouchers. Delays in scheduling or completing inspections often discourage landlords from participating in voucher programs and can cause tenants to lose apartments they were otherwise prepared to rent. Additional funding should be directed toward expanding the pool of inspectors responsible for reviewing units participating in CityFHEPS and other voucher programs. Increasing inspection capacity would allow units to be evaluated more quickly, reducing delays and making the program more attractive to potential landlords.

The City should also invest in technology that modernizes and streamlines the inspection process. Digital scheduling tools, improved data tracking systems, and other technological solutions could reduce administrative burdens, accelerate approvals, and improve transparency for both landlords and tenants. Improving the efficiency of inspections is a practical step that would significantly improve landlord participation and help households secure housing more quickly.

Establishing Stronger Oversight and Program Management

Another major factor contributing to the current shortcomings of CityFHEPS is the absence of strong centralized oversight and monitoring systems. Without effective tracking and evaluation mechanisms, it is difficult for the City to identify program bottlenecks, measure outcomes, or address operational problems as they arise. Additional funding should therefore be directed toward strengthening program oversight. This includes improving data collection and analysis, conducting regular program evaluations, and establishing clear performance metrics related to application processing times, landlord participation rates, and tenant outcomes.

The City should also consider creating a centralized management structure for the CityFHEPS program. A single, coordinated point of contact for both applicants and housing providers would significantly reduce confusion and administrative duplication. Currently, households and landlords often must navigate multiple offices or agencies, leading to repeated document submissions, redundant eligibility checks, and inconsistent information. A centralized system would streamline communication, improve coordination among agencies, and reduce delays caused by fragmented processes. By strengthening oversight and coordination, the City can ensure that resources are used more efficiently and that the program fulfills its intended mission of preventing homelessness and promoting housing stability.

Training and Professional Development for Staff

Dedicated funding for training and professional development is essential to improving the administration of housing assistance programs such as CityFHEPS and the broader system of public benefits administered by HRA. Well-trained staff play a critical role in ensuring that applications are processed efficiently and accurately. Training can reduce administrative errors, improve communication with applicants and landlords, and ensure that staff remain compliant with legal requirements governing public benefits programs. Equally important, training helps staff develop the skills needed to navigate

complex situations and respond effectively to the high volume of applications that the agency manages. When staff are well trained and confident in their responsibilities, they are better equipped to manage workloads efficiently and avoid delays caused by procedural errors or unfamiliarity with program rules. Training should also include instruction on the effective use of digital tools and case management systems. As HRA continues to rely more heavily on online platforms such as AccessHRA, staff must be proficient in using these systems to track applications, verify documentation, and update records quickly.

Communication training is equally critical. One of the most frequent complaints raised by applicants and landlords is the difficulty of obtaining clear and timely information about the status of their cases. Staff who are trained in effective communication practices can provide clearer guidance, resolve issues more efficiently, and help applicants navigate the system successfully. Finally, training in cultural competency, fair housing requirements, and anti-discrimination practices is essential for ensuring that the program remains accessible and equitable for the diverse populations it serves. Staff equipped with these skills will be better prepared to support both tenants and landlords and to ensure that housing assistance programs operate fairly and effectively.

Call Centers and Help Desks

With more funding, the HRA can establish or expand dedicated help desks or call centers that provide tenants and landlords with timely, clear information about their application status or program updates. HRA's Infoline requires callers to wait on hold for hours and even when calls are answered staff struggle to find meaningful solutions to case questions. Likewise, social media forums for voucher program participants are full of people who are unaware of their rights, obligations, and the next steps in their process. Providing accessible customer service that is staffed with trained, motivated and dedicated staff would reduce confusion and increase trust in the CityFHEPS program. Further, trained staff are better equipped to help tenants navigate challenges such as discrimination, confusion about the voucher process, or difficulties in securing housing. Empowered and informed staff can directly address these issues, ensuring tenants have the support they need to succeed in using their vouchers.

Public Awareness Campaigns

Increased funding could be used to conduct outreach and education campaigns to better inform tenants and landlords about how the voucher program works. Educating landlords about the benefits of participation, as well as providing guidance to voucher holders on how to apply for and use the vouchers, could reduce misunderstandings and encourage participation.

Landlord Education and Outreach

Funding can support training for staff members who work directly with landlords. Well-trained staff will be able to effectively explain the benefits of participating in the voucher program and address concerns that landlords may have. They can also ensure that landlords understand the legal protections and requirements related to accepting vouchers, which can reduce reluctance and increase participation. This training ensures that staff members are fully aware of their legal responsibilities and can better enforce these protections. Funding could also support programs that educate landlords about their legal obligations and the benefits of participating in the voucher program, helping to overcome reluctance caused by inefficiencies or misconceptions. This could include workshops, informational materials, and targeted outreach to property managers and rental owners.

Upgrading CityFHEPS IT Infrastructure

Funding should be directed toward improving the digital infrastructure of HRA administration, such as creating user-friendly online portals for both tenants and landlords like the Housing Choice Voucher Program administered by the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). Funding should also be allocated to invest in tools that automate various processes including application submission, document verification, annual subsidy renewals, requests for subsidy modifications and payment tracking. Funding should also be allocated to integrate the CityFHEPS systems and systems for ongoing Cash Assistance benefits so that clients do not have to provide the same information to different agency departments. These changes would facilitate quicker application submission, document uploads, communication between all parties, and a more seamless administration of subsidy payments. This can help reduce human error and speed up processing, which would reduce the incident of missed housing opportunities and litigation in housing court for missing subsidy payments.

Improving ACCESS HRA

We recommend the City invest in system improvements to ACCESS HRA to ensure that it functions as a meaningful virtual alternative to in-person services at the Benefits Access Center. Since the COVID-19 Pandemic, HRA has strongly encouraged the use of its virtual platform, ACCESS HRA, to submit applications and address issues with ongoing benefits, including CityFHEPS subsidies. Unfortunately, ACCESS HRA leaves much to be desired in functionality and accuracy. Our clients regularly report that Access HRA has incorrect information about the status of their case and benefits. Clients cannot easily make updates to their cases or submit requests for changes or modifications. For example, clients who receive a FHEPS subsidy cannot easily request a modification of those benefits when they receive a lease renewal. Further, if clients have a question or a problem while using ACCESS HRA they cannot communicate in real-time with HRA to troubleshoot and correct course. Investing to make ACCESS HRA more dynamic will improve the client experience and make benefits more accessible.

We recommend that the City regularly track the performance of the program through data on application processing times, landlord participation, and tenant satisfaction. Use this data to continuously improve the process and hold responsible parties accountable. We also recommend the City engage with participants (both tenants and landlords) to gather feedback about their experiences with the program. This can help identify ongoing pain points and areas for improvement.

Tenant Support Programs

More funding should go toward tenant advocacy and legal assistance programs to help individuals navigate the voucher process. These programs can assist with disputes, prevent discrimination by landlords, and ensure that tenants understand their rights, particularly in overcoming delays or unfair denials.

INNOVATIVE USE OF AI TO BRIDGE ACCESS TO JUSTICE GAP

AI-Assisted Legal Guidance and the Housing Justice HelplineAt LAS, we are committed to leveraging cutting-edge technology to expand access to justice for our client community. In partnership with Columbia Law School's Lawyering in the Digital Age Clinic, we created the Housing Access Navigator Assistant, or HANA – an award-winning, internally developed tool designed to support telephone helpline advocates navigate complex housing law resources more efficiently. With AI-assisted legal guidance, through helpline advocates, callers receive faster, data-driven responses to their urgent housing issues. Advocates using the platform are closely supervised by our expert housing supervisors.

Built intentionally to assist human judgment, not substitute it, HANA uses AI only to retrieve information from Legal Aid’s closed, curated knowledge base, allowing attorneys and advocates to spend more time where it matters most: listening to clients, building trust, and delivering holistic, high-quality representation.

We see enormous potential for scaling AI-assisted legal aid to reach even more unrepresented tenants facing housing instability as well as expand the use of the technology to other practice areas ensuring that justice is not just available, but truly accessible.

SUPPORTED CIVIL PRACTICE INITIATIVES

Our work across our Civil Practice touches practically all the civil legal difficulties experienced by vulnerable New Yorkers, issues that without intervention can quickly escalate into situations that leave our clients trapped in cycles of poverty. Only LAS has the depth of expertise, breadth of scope of services, and capacity to defend and advocate for New York’s marginalized communities in this way. By providing comprehensive civil legal services across all our practice areas, we remain flexible and ready to assist our clients and respond to emergent and changing needs. Our work directly supports vulnerable New Yorkers in transitioning out of poverty, mitigates the effects of systemic racism and inequities, and enhances the legal rights of low-income people overall. It is vital that the City centers these communities in its budget.

Therefore, we respectfully request that the New York City Council maintain its longstanding support for LAS’s work through the following citywide initiatives:

Legal Services for Low-Income And Working-Class New Yorkers

This initiative funds legal assistance, community legal education, hotlines, and other outreach activities for older people, survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities, people with HIV/AIDS and other chronic conditions, and other vulnerable children and adults. This program also provides legal representation in appeals of denials of federal disability and Unemployment Insurance benefits previously funded under the Unemployment Insurance/Supplemental Security Income (UI/SSI) Advocacy Program. Securing these state and federal benefits saves the City public assistance dollars.

As part of our work helping eligible New Yorkers obtain and preserve critical benefits to meet their needs and stabilize their households, LAS has been a vigorous advocate for households whose Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits have been stolen through “skimming” fraud. This sophisticated form of electric theft uses hidden devices at store checkouts that capture data on an Electronic Benefits Transfer card and remotely transmit it to a thief offsite, stealing an essential form of federal food assistance for low-income people. Skimming victims in New York and other states are not entitled to compensation for stolen benefits and are left with no ability to feed their families until receipt of the following month’s benefits, forced to frantically turn to food banks, relatives, and neighbors to make up the shortfall. The United States Department of Agriculture’s Food and Nutrition Service has refused to authorize New York State to use federal funds to replace the stolen benefits based on a regulation that the federal agency adopted in 2010 that does not give states authority to replace SNAP benefits in instances of skimming. As a result, New York and other states have taken the position that replacement benefits cannot be issued.

In February 2023, LAS and Freshfields US LLP filed a federal class action lawsuit, *Chen v. Vilsack*, on behalf of individual plaintiffs and all New Yorkers who receive SNAP and who have had their benefits

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stolen through skimming. While this litigation is ongoing, LAS has created Know Your Rights resources for SNAP benefit recipients to help them identify and prevent skimming schemes and obtain compensation; advocated with New York's Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to fulfill its duty to take immediate prevention actions to protect New Yorkers from further victimization, including converting all magnetic stripe EBT cards to more secure chip cards; and supported federal legislation allowing for the replacement of stolen benefits. We continue to identify potential class members through our Access to Benefits telephone helpline, our single point of intake for clients across nine civil legal practice areas, which operates five days per week and offers advice and brief services across all our practice areas and internal referral for eligible clients requiring a higher level of service. **LAS respectfully requests \$3 million for the Legal Services for Low-Income New Yorkers Initiative in FY27 so that we can continue providing essential services to thousands of families and individuals in New York City.**

New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP): Counsel For Detained Immigrants Facing Deportation

The New York Immigrant Family Unity Project (NYIFUP) is the nation's first-ever universal representation program for detained immigrants facing deportation. With Brooklyn Defender Services and The Bronx Defenders, LAS provides legal representation that would otherwise be unavailable to people facing deportation, as there is no right to counsel in these proceedings. We specialize in representing people who are detained while they await their deportation hearing and provide continued representation on immigration matters to secure immigration status to our previously detained immigrant clients after securing their release from ICE custody. We maintain continuous representation throughout the life of the immigration case, including related social work, public benefits advocacy, and other services to clients and their families.

Our offices have provided this critical representation for over a decade, representing over 4,000 individuals during this time, through multiple federal administrations. NYIFUP has demonstrated success in responding to changes in immigration policy, enforcement priorities, and rapid changes in executive orders. We experienced a significant increase in immigration caseloads during the first Trump administration and have already seen an even greater increase during the second. We expect this situation will grow worse before it gets better with increased federal law enforcement presence in New York City and nationwide. Mass detention and deportation efforts are well underway across this country, and ICE has also been targeting communities across NYC. We expect to see larger scale actions in the future as the administration fulfills its promises of draconian enforcement operations. As ICE has the authority and discretion to detain individuals in any state or territory in the United States, we anticipate an increase in the detention of New York City residents, and subsequent transfer to locations far away from their families and homes, possibly to places where they will not have access to legal services. We expect not just an escalation in immigration enforcement efforts, but also enforcement efforts that are hyper-focused on individuals involved with the criminal and family legal systems. We further anticipate increased efforts by ICE to arrest individuals at and around their homes and places of work.

Since its inception and increasingly over the past several years, NYIFUP, this City Council, and other immigration advocates have been forced to confront increasingly egregious and unlawful detention practices by ICE. LAS has documented ICE's illegal apprehensions of noncitizen New Yorkers at immigration court, scheduled interviews, and other routine check-ins, alongside withheld medical care, inhumane and unsafe temperature levels and food conditions, racist conduct, and violations of attorney-client privilege. These harms are compounded by failures of our own city agencies. Investigations have shown that the Department of Corrections and NYPD have repeatedly violated New York City's

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sanctuary laws by improperly sharing protected information, granting ICE unauthorized access to nonpublic areas, and disregarding the requirement of a judicial warrant. When these violations occur, the consequences are immediate and devastating: New Yorkers are taken into ICE custody, often quickly transferred out of state, cut off from counsel and family, and funneled into a federal system increasingly designed to deport them as rapidly as possible.

In this reality, NYIFUP stands as the last line of defense preventing the removal of our loved ones, friends, and neighbors. As federal enforcement escalates and local safeguards erode, universal representation is the only barrier ensuring that New Yorkers have a real chance to fight unlawful detention and deportation. As mass detention and deportation efforts are expected to increase, all immigration advocates will need more funding to meet the scale of what lies ahead. **LAS respectfully requests increased funding in the amount of \$13,299,000 for NYIFUP in FY27 to continue expanding these critical services.**

Unaccompanied Minor Children And Families' Initiative (UMFI): Supporting Immigrants Fleeing Abuse

With the support of the City Council, the Unaccompanied Minor Children and Families (UMFI) initiative has been providing free legal assistance to unaccompanied children and adults with children fleeing endemic gang violence and domestic abuse since 2014. With the NYC Bar Association's resolution supporting universal access to legal services for children in removal proceedings, LAS, along with our partners in the citywide Immigrant Children Advocates' Relief Effort (ICARE), work to ensure that children residing in New York City who are eligible for immigration relief receive free attorneys to fight for their right to remain safely in the United States and, wherever possible, to obtain lawful permanent residence.

As immigration court backlogs continue to grow, cases are becoming more complex and costly. At the same time, shifting federal policies have imposed new legal barriers including denial of asylum seekers' right to pursue protection in this country. Other humanitarian relief options such as Special Immigrant Juvenile Status are being attacked through executive and legislative action, narrowing the options for many of our clients. This change has forced providers to adapt services beyond traditional representation to ensure young people and their families can navigate the system safely. Since 2014, LAS has screened over 900 individuals and is currently representing over 450 clients across 48 council districts, contributing to the overall impact of ICARE in New York City. This investment is essential to ensuring immigrant children in New York City receive the legal support they need to navigate an increasingly restrictive immigration system, remain in safe and stable environments, and continue contributing to their communities. **LAS respectfully requests \$4,500,000 for UMFI funding in FY27.**

Protecting New Yorkers Habeas Initiative

As non-citizen New Yorkers are facing ever-increasing threats of being detained by federal immigration officials and rapidly deported into harm's way to their home country or to third countries they may never have even visited before, the need for habeas petitions to fight back against unlawful detentions has become increasingly clear. To meet the surging demand, LAS proposes to expand its habeas capacity through enhanced training and developing new litigation resources. This project will prioritize serving non-citizens at high risk of being targeted for detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and who will be ripped away from their families and community here in New York City and likely detained in far-flung corners of the country. The project will publish an immigration-focused habeas resource toolkit for advocates city-wide and utilize advanced technology to integrate emerging legal arguments and create sharable litigation resources, to ease in the drafting of habeas petitions. As federal litigation needs may continue to rise for noncitizen New Yorkers, the need for

additional funding by our City may be warranted and we welcome City Council's leadership in meeting the complex legal needs of our immigrant communities. **To support this work, LAS respectfully requests \$1,750,000 in FY27.**

Low-Wage Worker Support: Vindicating The Rights of Workers

The Low Wage Worker Initiative (LWWI) serves low-wage workers who live or work in the City of New York who are facing a range of employment-related problems, on a wide range of employment-related problems, including unpaid wages, minimum and overtime wage violations, unemployment insurance, discrimination, labor trafficking, and family medical and sick leave. Low-wage jobs are disproportionately held by immigrants, women, young people, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ people. LWWI is the only City dedicated funding for workers' rights and allows us to advocate on behalf of low-wage New Yorkers against wage theft and workplace discrimination, for safe and healthy workplaces, and vindicate the rights of workers. **LAS respectfully requests renewal of funding in the amount of \$580,596 for Low-Wage Worker Support in FY27.**

Domestic Violence and Empowerment Initiative (DoVE): Standing with Survivors of Domestic Violence

The Domestic Violence and Empowerment (DoVE) Initiative supports the LAS Family Law and Domestic Violence (DV) Practice's work providing comprehensive legal and social services to DV survivors citywide. The delays in our overburdened Courts continue, which in turn create difficulties for our clients who desperately need their cases to be heard quickly. As more people turn to non-traditional forms of employment, income and assets become more difficult to distribute, thus making our expertise crucial. Through our presence in all five boroughs, expertise in contested divorce matters, extensive referral network of specialized victim service providers, and unique incorporation of consumer law services — including expert assistance on bankruptcy matters related to financial abuse — LAS helps DV survivors achieve safety and self-sufficiency. **LAS respectfully requests \$20,000 per council district and \$100,000 citywide for the DoVE Initiative in FY27 to continue providing these essential services.**

Foreclosure Prevention Programs: Preserving Homes and Communities

This initiative supports LAS's Foreclosure Prevention and Home Equity Preservation Project, which serves homeowners at risk of losing their homes to foreclosure or other predatory practices, predominantly in the Bronx and Queens. An important part of our work includes litigating complex cases addressing abusive and predatory practices targeting vulnerable homeowners. For example, the Project worked with LAS's Consumer and Bankruptcy Law Project to file a lawsuit against one of the country's largest solar financing companies, Solar Mosaic, exposing its predatory and discriminatory practices (Campbell v. Solar Mosaic et al, EDNY Ind. No. 24-cv-06208). When Solar Mosaic declared bankruptcy in June 2025, we worked with pro bono counsel to protect our client's interests and we are now in the process of settling the matter.

We also conduct weekly court-based clinics to assist with pro se pleadings and advice and deliver community legal education trainings. In spring 2025, we worked with the NYC Department of Finance to educate homeowners about the resumed property tax lien sale and the new repayment and deferral plans available to them. In addition to educating the homeowners, we ensured that those homeowners who should not be on the list were removed, and we worked with many to enter deferral or repayment plans. **LAS respectfully requests renewal of funding for Foreclosure Prevention Programs in the amount of \$115,000 for FY27.**

Estate Planning and Resolution (EPAR): Protecting Generational Wealth and Equity

Through the Estate Planning and Resolution (EPAR) Initiative, LAS provides legal and technical assistance

services to protect the generational wealth of low- and moderate-income older adult homeowners and their heirs. Surviving heirs face multiple challenges after property owners pass away. Without timely access to legal assistance to settle the estate, arrears for mortgage payments and/or property taxes continue to encumber the home, depleting its equity and putting it at risk of foreclosure. LAS assists homeowners with estate planning, including assistance drafting wills and other related legal documents, to help them preserve the family home, protecting wealth and equity transfers from one generation to another.

We also handle cases both in Surrogates Court and Supreme Court to protect heirs' property from partition scams and to preserve homeownership. For example, one homeowner in the Bronx faced a partition action brought by an LLC that had purchased a fractional share of his family home from an estranged nephew. This is a common predatory scheme targeting low-income homeowners, especially in Black and Latino communities. Investors find homes with equity in which the homeowner of record has died. They reach out to the heirs of the homeowner who do not live in the house and offer a payment in exchange for their share of the property – usually only \$5,000 to \$10,000. Then the investor starts a partition action to force a sale of the property and recoup enormous profits. In this case, the LLC bought one third of the property from an out-of-state nephew that had never been to the home. The homeowner and his sister had grown up in the home and lived in the house as adults to take care of their late mother. In this case, the client's late mother actually had a will leaving him the home. We were able to represent the homeowner in Surrogate's Court and successfully probated the will. With the will probated, we then filed a motion to dismiss the partition and cancel the deed to the LLC which is pending. We also filed and won a Second Department appeal that presented an issue of first impression of Uniform Partition of Heirs Property Act (Laurelton Estates LLC v. Prince, 2nd Dep't, Ind. No. 2024-00974). The Second Department's decision will further protect homeowners from predatory partition actions and empower the courts to fully combat those practices.

Our EPAR Initiative also supports our Bronx and Queens Foreclosure Programs. Part of the intake process now in our Bronx and Queens Foreclosure Programs is to advise homeowners to prepare advance directives such as wills or Transfer on Death Deeds. Those interested are then referred to our EPAR initiative. To greater expand our impact, we have begun talking to our Pro Bono Department to see if we can work with pro bono firms to help prepare wills and other advance directives for homeowners. **LAS respectfully requests renewal of funding for the EPAR Initiative in the amount of \$70,000 for FY27.**

Continuing The Right to Counsel for Domestic Violence Survivors in Divorce Proceedings Pilot

Last fiscal year, LAS and the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG) proposed a pilot program in Manhattan for free legal consultations and/or full representation for an estimated 830 low-income domestic violence (DV) survivors in contested and uncontested divorce proceedings, as envisioned in Local Law 5 of 2022. DV survivors in NYC face significant civil legal issues that destabilize their lives and leave many either unable to leave their abusers or stuck in cycles of poverty and homelessness. Additional precautions and protective measures are needed to ensure their safety and security, and services must be trauma-informed and client-centered. Many survivors, particularly those who are low-income or who have suffered financial abuse, cannot obtain private legal representation.

As we received partial funding, we kicked off the pilot of this program, hiring 2 attorneys and 1 paralegal casehandler. Together, they are handling contested and uncontested divorces in New York County only, due to funding limitations. We have begun reaching out to the Courts to take referrals and are expecting

Justice in Every Borough.

our service numbers to significantly increase as referrals begin to expand. Our long-term goal is to expand these services to other boroughs, but this will require a higher funding level. For this year, we seek to secure expanded, full funding, allowing us to expand our staff and continue our services in New York County, and serve over 340 survivors of domestic violence in divorce proceedings.

LAS, NYLAG, and our new partners at Sanctuary for Families (SFF) will continue to provide low-income DV survivors with comprehensive services through an integrated model of care. We will continue to identify clients through referrals from the Manhattan Family Justice Center and other entry points (partners, the Courts, outreach through community legal clinics, and our telephone helplines). By collaborating and co-referring with our social and supportive services partners citywide, we reach underserved communities; deliver linguistically and culturally appropriate services; and contribute to clients' safety and economic self-sufficiency.

As some of the only DV legal providers in the state with contested divorce expertise, our coalition is particularly well-placed to implement the pilot and then scale up citywide. We also bring our institutional experience as providers in the city's Right to Counsel program for tenants – the first of its kind in the country – since its establishment in 2017. **LAS respectfully requests \$1.1 million for the Right to Counsel for Domestic Violence Survivors in Divorce Proceedings Pilot in FY27.**

CONCLUSION AND SUPPORT FOR FUNDING FAIRNESS

We thank the Council for your long-standing support for The Legal Aid Society's essential civil legal services and criminal defense programs and we thank you for the value you place on our role as first responders for the great people of New York City. We implore you to preserve and enhance our funding so that we can continue to be on the front lines for all low-income communities and communities of color throughout New York City. It is critical that you support our push alongside the criminal justice defenders and civil legal services providers for funding fairness to address years of underfunding and historical pay inequities, and for reforms to the contract registration and payment process. We will continue to update you during the FY27 budget process concerning our funding needs so that we can serve clients who depend on our work to provide access to justice.



**MET
COUNCIL**

Feeding the hungry. Serving the poor.
Changing lives.

**New York City Council Committee on General Welfare Preliminary Budget Hearing for Fiscal
Year 2027**

Chair Hudson, and fellow members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Thank you for holding this hearing on the New York City FY27 Preliminary Budget. We are writing testimony on behalf of the Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty (Met Council) to join other providers across the City in expressing our support for the proposed restoration of \$2.6 million funding for Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP) and calling on the Council to increase access to Domestic Violence shelters that meet the needs of survivors. Met Council's clients receiving family violence services rely on a robust network of city services, and a well-funded Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) in order to stay safe, housed, and find stability.

For over 50 years Met Council has been one of America's largest Jewish charities dedicated to fighting poverty. We operate ten departments ranging from 100 percent affordable housing to our award-winning family violence program to comprehensive Holocaust Survivor assistance, geriatrics programs, crisis intervention, and the country's largest kosher and halal emergency food network. Met Council provides a wide array of support to over 320,000 New Yorkers annually.

Met Council is a leader in addressing the needs of survivors of family violence in NYC. We offer comprehensive case management services, trauma-informed psychotherapy, financial assistance, and food assistance under one roof. Each client is given individualized care and assessed for a full range of social services including legal advocacy, emergency shelter and relocation, employment assistance, financial assistance, emergency food, entitlement counseling, short-term trauma informed therapy, and information and referral services. The Social Workers on our Family Violence Prevention team work with all New Yorkers regardless of race, ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation and have specific competency in working with Jewish communities throughout New York.

In 2024, NYPD reported more than 110,000 domestic or intimate partner violence complaints.ⁱ The true number of incidents is likely much higher, as nearly 50 percent of domestic violence incidents go unreported.ⁱⁱ Survivors who do come forward are often met with systems that are under resourced and unprepared to offer the timely, trauma-informed, and dignified support that recovery requires.

Met Council strongly supports the Mayor's proposed restoration of \$2.6 million for CVAP. This funding was previously discontinued by the prior Mayoral administration, severely destabilizing the program. CVAP embeds Victim Advocates in every NYPD precinct, where they provide trauma-informed, client-centered support to survivors of domestic violence and other crimes, including but not limited to housing transfers, home visits, and legal advocacy. Restoring this funding is essential to

keeping the program intact, ensuring Advocates are fairly compensated, and maintaining the staffing levels necessary to meet the city's significant need.

Met Council also urges the Council to significantly expand domestic violence shelter access citywide. For survivors deciding to leave an abusive relationship, access to housing is the number one reported concern, and too often, the system fails to provide it.ⁱⁱⁱ Met Council's Family Violence Prevention Social Workers work daily with survivors who are ready to leave but have nowhere safe to go.

The shortage is in part structural. Shelters operating near capacity are heavily incentivized to prioritize families, since the additional beds filled by children generate additional reimbursement. Ensuring that families can access safe shelter is essential, as more families with children enter shelters due to domestic violence than they do due to evictions.ⁱⁱⁱ However, this dynamic routinely leaves single individuals without options. Single women face serious capacity constraints; single men face something closer to a complete absence of services. There are virtually no domestic violence shelters in New York City that will accept a single man. This forces our Social Workers to refer clients to shelters outside the city, severing survivors from their support networks and compounding the disruption they are already experiencing. The Council must act to close these gaps and ensure that all survivors, regardless of family status or gender, have access to the safe, accessible shelter they deserve.

By restoring \$2.6 million in funding for CVAP and expanding access domestic violence shelters, this Committee and the Council can meaningfully strengthen the city's response to domestic violence and help ensure that no survivor is left without a safe place to turn.

We thank you for taking the time to review our testimony, and we hope to continue to work with this committee and the New York City Council to meet the needs of all New Yorkers

Thank you,

Dickran Jebejian

Director of Policy

Metropolitan Council on Jewish Poverty

ⁱ New York City Police Department. "Domestic Violence Complaints by Precinct Pursuant to Administrative Code 14-150(e): 01/01/24–12/31/24." New York: NYPD Analysis and Planning Division, 2024.

https://www.nyc.gov/assets/nypd/downloads/pdf/analysis_and_planning/domestic-violence/dv_complaints_2024.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Connections for Abused Women and Their Children (CAWC). "Stigma and Domestic Violence." February 27, 2023. Accessed March 19, 2026. <https://www.cawc.org/news/stigma-and-domestic-violence/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ New Destiny Housing. A Crisis Compounded: The Dual Crises of Domestic Violence and Homelessness. New York: New Destiny Housing, 2024. <https://newdestinyhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/DV-Report-1.pdf>.



**WRITTEN TESTIMONY ON
PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARING**

PRESENTED BEFORE:

THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

PRESENTED BY:

MONTEL CHERRY
DIRECTOR OF LITIGATION FOR CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
MOBILIZATION FOR JUSTICE, INC.

HEARING DATE:

March 17, 2026

Mobilization for Justice (MFJ) submits this written testimony to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare, to increase the overall legal services funding to provide additional representation to low-income New Yorkers seeking such services in New York City.

MFJ's mission is to achieve justice for all. For over 60 years, MFJ has provided free civil legal services to New Yorkers who are low-income, disenfranchised, or have disabilities. We also conduct community education, advocate for policy, and bring impact litigation. Every year, we handle approximately 14,000 cases from across New York City in the broad areas of Housing, Disability and Aging Rights, Economic Justice, and Children's Rights.

Through our services we prevent homelessness, help seniors and people with disabilities live independently, stabilize families, support immigrants and children with mental health disabilities, and address racial disparities.

Today we are in the midst of several crises: surging homelessness, skyrocketing cost of living, marginalization of the vulnerable, and a city struggling to meet the needs of its existing residents, let alone those of our newest neighbors who come here seeking safety, stability, and opportunity. And we're tackling these issues in the face of a federal administration openly hostile to the ideals of public service and the public good. The nonprofit community in New York City has also faced severe delays in contract payments and hiring obstacles amidst the challenges of pay parity for public service work. It has been a tough couple of years – especially for our clients.

Like all institutions, adjudication systems are imperfect. But courts and administrative hearings are where New Yorkers must defend their rights and assert their claims. People end up in court facing unfair evictions, foreclosures, or debt collection cases or to seek unpaid wages and overtime; they must attend administrative hearings to fight for disability benefits or to ensure that their struggling child's Individualized Education Plan meets their needs; and those escaping violence and persecution must bravely appear in immigration court.

No one wants to find themselves embroiled in a complex system that requires a lawyer they simply cannot afford – yet far too many do. At Mobilization for Justice, we seek to be their advocate and their ally. But doing so requires resources, and I strongly urge the Council to build and buttress those resources as much as possible so New York City can stand as a bulwark against callous federal policy.

Need for Comprehensive Resources and Support

We respectfully ask you to ensure the following Initiatives are fully funded and enhanced: Legal Services for Low Income New Yorkers and Working Class New Yorkers; Legal Services for Family Advocacy & Guardianship; Immigrant Opportunity Initiative; AAPI Community Support; and Community Housing Preservation Strategies.

Now is the time to make deep and comprehensive investments in these initiatives. This critical moment requires collaboration between the City and our nonprofit community to ensure that the

most vulnerable among us have the opportunity to thrive. This critical moment requires a commitment to providing access to justice for underserved communities whose rights and supports are being stripped away – from Medicare, Medicaid, and Social Security, to supports for children with disabilities in our public schools, and our newest neighbors seeking asylum.

Mobilization for Justice relies on City Council funding to protect and enforce these rights. For some of our most critical programs – such as our immigration practice, workplace justice, and our Kinship Caregiver Law Project – Council funding is *the* major source of support, without which we could not continue to provide robust services. For Kinship Care in particular, this is particularly crucial as we are the *only* New York City provider of free legal services for the grandparents, aunts, uncles and other kin caring for many of our children outside the foster care system.

And as New Yorkers, we know that immigrants are who make our neighborhoods the vibrant communities we all love. Now is the time to demonstrate that the Council will stand with all of our neighbors, providing legal pathways to permanency, citizenship, and the safety and stability promised by our highest ideals.

We know there is plenty of work to do in the years ahead. Mobilization for Justice stands ready to leverage our 60 years of expertise, experience in the community, and grit to serve New Yorkers. We respectfully ask that you favorably consider our funding requests.

For any questions about this testimony, please feel free to contact Tiffany Liston, Executive Director of Mobilization for Justice, at tliston@mjlegal.org or 212-417-3739.



New York City Council General Welfare Committee Preliminary Budget Hearing

**Testimony by Neighbors Together
Written by Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing & Policy**

March 17, 2026

Neighbors Together would like to thank the Chair of the New York City Council General Welfare Committee, Council Member Hudson, as well as the other committee members and staff for the opportunity to submit testimony.

About Neighbors Together

Neighbors Together is a community based organization located in central Brooklyn. Our organization provides hot meals five days per week in our Community Café, offers a range of one-on-one stabilizing services in our Empowerment Program, and engages members in community organizing, policy advocacy and leadership development in our Community Action Program. We serve approximately 125,000 meals to over 12,000 individuals per year. Over the last five years, the number of meals we serve daily has increased fourfold. Our members come to us from across the five boroughs of New York City, with the majority living in central Brooklyn. Over 80% of our Community Action Program members have a rental assistance voucher, and have experienced homelessness.

Over the last decade, our members increasingly report that homelessness and lack of affordable housing options are their primary concern. In our recent 2025 Community Action Program survey, over 85% of respondents said that housing is the main source of their instability. Our data backs the anecdotal evidence we see and hear from our members daily: an increasing number of our members are either living in shelter with vouchers for years at a time, ineligible for a voucher, or unable to find permanent housing due to rampant source of income discrimination and a vacancy rate of under 1% for affordable housing units in New York City.¹ The intense need for housing that is affordable for low-income and extremely low-income New Yorkers was clearly

¹<https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/news/007-24/new-york-city-s-vacancy-rate-reaches-historic-low-1-4-percent-demanding-urgent-action-new#/0>



Neighbors Together

illustrated by the extremely high number of applications for the Section 8 waitlist. When the waitlist reopened for the first time in nearly fifteen years in 2024, over 633,000 applications were submitted in less than a week.² Of the more than 633,000 applications, only 200,000 were added to the waitlist, and NYCHA is capped at 115,346 active vouchers.

Our Work with Voucher Holders

Neighbors Together has been organizing voucher holders since 2018. We conduct Know Your Rights trainings on how to identify and report source of income (SOI) discrimination, and Housing Search Workshops where voucher holders get additional support in their housing search and assistance with filing source of income discrimination complaints to the City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) when needed. We work closely with CCHR to ensure that source of income discrimination reports are effective and have the best possible outcomes for our members. We also partner with CCHR on their restorative justice set-aside program³ to ensure that set-aside units obtained through settlements are most likely to go to people in need as efficiently and effectively as possible. Additionally, in partnership with Unlock NYC, we built and launched the Stop Source of Income Discrimination (SID) NYC website,⁴ which provides information about source of income discrimination and how to report it as well as a mechanism for reporting via the website.

We work closely with Unlock NYC⁵ to improve New Yorkers' ability to utilize their vouchers. Starting in 2019 our members worked with the Unlock NYC team to design and test an online tool to help voucher holders easily report source of income discrimination. The tool has enabled hundreds of our members to quickly and easily gather evidence and report source of discrimination to CCHR. In our partnership with Unlock NYC, we have released multiple reports on source of income discrimination and voucher efficacy, including "An Illusion of Choice," the SOI visual online mapping tool, the "Serial Discriminators List"⁶, as well as ongoing budget advocacy to ensure CCHR is adequately funded to enforce against SOI discrimination.

After over a year of collecting data through the Stop SID NYC website, running know your rights trainings and conducting housing searches for people with vouchers, Neighbors Together built a

²<https://nychajournal.nyc/new-nycha-section-8-waitlist-established/#:~:text=In%20total%2C%20NYCHA%20received%20633%2C808,by%20the%20June%2028%20deadline.>

³<https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-requiring-landlords-set-aside-apartments-voucher-tenants-under-new-approach-enforcing-human-rights-law>

⁴ <https://www.stopsidnyc.com/>

⁵ <https://weunlock.nyc/>

⁶ <https://weunlock.nyc/data/>



Neighbors Together

grassroots organizing campaign of directly impacted people who had voucher shopping letters but couldn't find housing. The VALUE in Housing (**V**oucher **A**dvocates **L**ifting **U**p **E**quity in **H**ousing) campaign was created by voucher holders for voucher holders, to make vouchers more effective tools for securing housing, and to end source of income discrimination. The campaign's policy platform consisted of 5 reforms aimed at making vouchers effective tools for accessing permanent affordable housing. Since launching in 2019, the VALUE in Housing campaign has won a significant portion of its platform, including:

- Ensuring that CityFHEPS voucher holders receive know-your-rights information about SOI discrimination upon receipt of their shopping letter
- Increasing the size of the Source of Income Unit at CCHR
- Increasing the payment standard of CityFHEPS to fair market rent
- Improving income requirements for CityFHEPS vouchers so that recipients can increase their income until they are financially self-sufficient without fear of losing their voucher.⁷

This year, the VALUE in Housing campaign is fighting to **pass the MOVE Act (Making Opportunity for Voucher Equity)** in the City Council. **The MOVE Act includes 5 bills (Intros 264-269) that will address and disincentivize source of income discrimination.** The bills will:

- Increase fines for bad actors who continue to discriminate and intentionally violate orders from the Commission on Human Rights.
- Increase fines for housing discrimination based on landlord portfolio size, so that penalties for violating New York City's civil and human rights laws will be meaningful to larger landlords.
- Ban credit checks and minimum income requirements for voucher holders seeking apartments.
- Create standards for transparency in tenant screening
- Add source of income discrimination to the Certificate of No Harassment Program
- Publicly list SOI discrimination findings

We look forward to working with the Council to ensure these critical bills are passed, in order to help people exit homelessness and move into stable housing.

Holistic Approach to Ending Homelessness

Over the last decade, Neighbors Together's work with homeless and formerly homeless New Yorkers and voucher holders has made it abundantly clear that the city must take a

⁷ <https://www.stopsidnyc.com/get-involved>



Neighbors Together

multi-pronged approach to ending the homelessness crisis. New York City's right to shelter is critical, but it is not enough; the city must invest in eviction prevention through the expansion of

CityFHEPS and investment in Right to Counsel, maximize the number of supportive housing units available in NYC, open 2,000 additional new Safe Haven beds, and increase staffing at key agencies such as the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), the Human Resources Administration (HRA), and the Commission on Human Rights (CCHR).

Full Implementation of CityFHEPS Expansion

Full implementation of CityFHEPS is essential to stemming the homelessness crisis. The growth of the program is evidence that 1) the city is increasingly unaffordable for low-income New Yorkers, and 2) the program is working- it is moving people out of shelter and getting them into stable housing. With the absence of meaningfully funded voucher programs at the state and federal levels, New Yorkers depend upon CityFHEPS for a chance to escape homelessness.

At the end of 2025, median rent for New York City was approximately \$3,500 per month.⁸ In order for that rent to be considered affordable (30% of income), a person would have to be making \$140,000 annually. However, a household of one, working a minimum wage job, or close to minimum wage, making \$39,000 annually, makes too much money to be eligible for CityFHEPS under its current iteration. The gap between the CityFHEPS income eligibility threshold and the amount a person would need to make in order to afford NYC's median rent is massive. Fully expanding CityFHEPS will make people earning up to 50% AMI eligible for the voucher, creating a pathway out of homelessness for thousands who would otherwise be stuck in a kind of homeless purgatory. Removing work hour requirements for those in shelter, as per the 2023 expansion laws, will also help households with variable work hours as well as those who are unable to work but haven't yet qualified for disability.

The CityFHEPS expansion laws would also create a key eviction prevention tool for families on the brink of homelessness. Preventing those households from becoming homeless by offering them a CityFHEPS voucher creates numerous positive outcomes: it stabilizes communities, allows people to stay connected to their networks and support systems, it provides stability and improved educational outcomes for children, and in many cases it helps preserve affordable housing. By using CityFHEPS to keep people in their rent stabilized apartments, the city will save money it would otherwise spend if those households fell into homelessness, entered the shelter system, and then eventually secured a higher rent apartment using a CityFHEPS voucher.

⁸ <https://www.realtor.com/research/nyc-q4-2025/>



Neighbors Together

If a dam has multiple leaks, you cannot fix just one and expect the dam to hold. You must fix all the leaks. To address the homelessness crisis, the city can't just help people move out of homelessness with vouchers, it also needs to stem the tide of households falling into homelessness by using CityFHEPS as an eviction prevention tool and by building housing targeted at the lowest income New Yorkers.

Capital Funding for New Units Targeted to Homeless and Extremely Low-Income New Yorkers

With a vacancy rate of under 2%, there is a clear and long-standing need for housing that is affordable for homeless and extremely low-income (ELI) New Yorkers. The last few mayoral administrations have touted their “affordable housing” plans, however the majority of the units built in those plans targeted households at area median incomes far higher than what ELI and homeless households make.⁹

Addressing the homelessness crisis will take not only income support through rental assistance programs like CityFHEPS, but also a financial commitment by the city to ensure that there are units that are actually affordable for people living in shelter. We join the Homes for NYC coalition in calling for 12,000 units of new housing to be built per year for the next five years, all targeted for ELI and homeless households.

Importance of the City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR)

From early in our work with voucher holders, the City Commission on Human Rights has been one of our most important resources for getting our members housed. Rampant source of income discrimination is a nearly universal experience for voucher holders; the majority of our members with rental assistance vouchers have searched for housing for months and come up empty handed because they experience SOI discrimination with nearly every call.

The Commission on Human Rights is the only city agency that enforces against discrimination on behalf of the individual who was discriminated against. Other agencies can bring litigation against discriminators, but the penalties don't go to the person who experienced the discrimination. CCHR is the primary means by which voucher holders can receive restitution. This restitution can take different forms; monetary compensation for damages, access to view an apartment or access to an application, or an apartment itself.

⁹ <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/build-from-the-bottom-up/#housing-investment>



Neighbors Together

One of the practices of CCHR that has been most beneficial for our members is the pre-complaint intervention (PCI). If a voucher holder submits a complaint of SOI discrimination and there is enough evidence to support that claim, then the SOI Unit will intervene by reaching out to the landlord or broker to inform them about SOI discrimination and the city's human rights laws. This is often enough to make the landlord or broker reconsider, and our members often get housed as a result. PCI's are one of the fastest ways our members can secure housing with their voucher.

Another important tool that CCHR uses to help voucher holders secure housing after being discriminated against is their set-aside program. When negotiating settlements with landlords who discriminated against voucher holders, the Commission frequently negotiates for set aside units that will be held explicitly for voucher holders.

Litigation is another important tool, and when CCHR is adequately staffed, in addition to pursuing litigation on behalf of voucher holders, it can pursue impact litigation. In fiscal year 2024, CCHR added additional staff lines, and with increased capacity they were then able to bring impact litigation against Parkchester Preservation Management. The litigation resulted in a historic settlement of \$1 million dollars with 850 units mandated to be set-aside for voucher holders.¹⁰ Neighbors Together members feel strongly that the civil penalties for discriminators should be increased. For corporate landlords, small civil penalties are just the cost of doing business - our members want the financial consequences for discrimination to be meaningful. Members want to see more impact litigation like the recent Parkchester settlement - they want bad actors punished and a clear message sent to others in the industry that discrimination won't be tolerated.

It is important to note that although members of Neighbors Together frequently want to focus on securing safe and stable housing before they pursue litigation, they still feel that formal litigation is important, including both litigation on behalf of an individual and impact litigation. For many, the stability of housing gives them the mental and emotional bandwidth to consider or follow through on bringing litigation against a discriminating party.

When adequately staffed, the SOI Unit at CCHR is a life raft for voucher holders who are drowning in the unforgiving and inequitable sea of New York City housing. For that reason, **it is critical that the FY27 budget increase CCHR's budget to \$25 million.**

¹⁰

<https://www.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/653-24/mayor-adams-largest-civil-rights-settlement-city-history-protecting-new-yorkers-from#:~:text=Parkchester%20Preservation%20Management%20required%20housing,to%20qualify%20for%20a%20unit.>



Increased Capacity Improves CCHR Outcomes

Discrimination doesn't happen in silos - it is intersectional, and occurs in many different forms. SOI discrimination often overlaps with, or is a stand-in for, discrimination against other protected classes such as race, disability, gender, or presence of children, to name a few. With a robust and ever-growing City Human Rights Law to enforce, CCHR has a serious and large mandate. The Commission is tasked with protecting the rights of over 8 million people with less than 1% of the city's total budget.

After many years of advocating for increased funding for CCHR to bring on new staff to the SOI Unit and the Law Enforcement Bureau, Neighbors Together has been happy to see improved response times, and an increase in successful PCIs as CCHR has hired up. That said, the Commission needs increased funding support to continue its trajectory toward improved outcomes. Increased funding for CCHR to continue to bring on new staff, including critical support staff, as well as funding for OTPS, will help the Commission to meet its mandate. While Commission response times to inquiries have improved, Neighbors Together members have waited months at a time to hear back from staff at CCHR regarding formal complaints, and many have experienced their cases taking years to resolve.

Equally as important as funding increases is the Commission's ability to effectively utilize its funding and staff lines. Under previous administrations, austerity budgets, multiple rounds of PEGS, hiring freezes, and the 2:1 allotment process have made it difficult for CCHR to quickly and effectively staff up. Additionally, the city salaries for attorney positions are not competitive with the market, making the positions less attractive to potential applicants. This is compounded by only hiring at the lowest end of a given position's salary range, and the extreme amount of time it takes for conditional employment offers to be made official. The Commission must be permitted to hire all budgeted staff lines immediately and be exempted from the 2:1 allotment process, which requires that two people leave in order to bring on one new hire. The 2:1 hiring policy is counterproductive and illogical- it punishes CCHR for retaining staff, and it means CCHR will always be running below full capacity. OMB must expedite approval of all conditional hires at CCHR in order for the Commission to effectively fulfill its mandate.

The City Commission on Human Rights has a mandate to cover the more than 8 million people who live in New York City. Given the current federal administration's dismantling of federal agencies and civil rights, and the Commission's ever-expanding scope of work, meaningful investment in the Commission is needed now more than ever. **In order to effectively enforce the human rights law, and in order to make vouchers more effective, the city must fund**



Neighbors Together

CCHR at \$25 million dollars total and bring the Commission back up to its pre-pandemic levels, adjusted for inflation.

Commission on Human Rights Recommendations

The City Council must stand firm in its support for the City Commission on Human Rights, and champion increased funding for CCHR to effectively do its job. To that end, Neighbors Together strongly recommends that the Council:

- **Fund CCHR at \$25 million dollars total, including:**
 - Increased funding for additional staff lines; both attorneys and other critical support staff positions
 - Increased funding for OTPS so that CCHR is able to run robust public education and outreach campaigns. This will allow CCHR to meet people who might otherwise be scared to report discrimination, in their own neighborhoods and among trusted partners, where they will be more comfortable.
- **The city must classify staff positions at CCHR as “critical” positions and exempt them from any hiring freezes and 2:1 allotment process.**
- **The Commission, whose budget is less than 1% of the total city budget, should be exempted from PEGS.**
- **Salaries at the Commission need to be raised to competitive rates in order to attract and retain experienced attorneys, and CCHR must be allowed to hire at the top end of position salary ranges.**
- **Create a team within the Law Enforcement Bureau to resolve cases older than 18 months old, within one year.**
- **Implement the following changes in the first year of the Mamdani administration:**
 - Resolve eligible cases through early intervention within two weeks.
 - Appoint a Deputy Commissioner of Adjudications with appropriate staff in the Office of the Chair.
 - Establish an Affirmative Litigation Team.
 - Authorize CCHR to Appear in Court.
 - Ensure the Office of Policy Counsel is adequately staffed.
 - Create an OATH Division specifically for CCHR cases.



Neighbors Together

Increasing Staff Capacity at Key Agencies

In addition to increased funding for CCHR, **the city must address deep staffing shortages in the Department of Homeless Services and the Human Resources Administration, as well as Homebase, all of which administer or process CityFHEPS vouchers.** DHS, HRA and Homebase's serious lack of capacity to meet the need of voucher holders affects voucher holders' ability to secure housing. It also affects CCHR's ability to effectively settle negotiations and close out cases in a timely manner. Lack of communication, slow response times, and delays in processing voucher packets can draw out the timeline for securing housing and jeopardize a voucher holder's chance to exit homelessness.

Since approximately the end of 2025, early 2026, Neighbors Together's housing specialists report that around 35% of their members working with Homebase are being told to return to Homebase for a shopping letter after they've found an apartment. This jeopardizes members' ability to secure housing because shopping letters are typically the first thing that brokers and landlords ask to see when working with a prospective tenant with a voucher. If the broker then has to wait multiple extra days for the member to get proof of their voucher via the shopping letter, they are extremely likely to offer the apartment to a tenant who is ready to move forward. Additionally, lack of shopping letters also hold up CCHR's ability to move forward with pre-complaint interventions, a time-sensitive tool that CCHR uses to help house voucher holders.

To offer another example of the serious consequences of delays in processing due to staffing shortages at DHS and HRA: A member of Neighbors Together with a CityFHEPS voucher secured housing through a CCHR set-aside unit, but it took the HRA over a year to process and renew his voucher packet. He lost the unit because of the delays, and remains homeless to this day. To prevent other voucher holders from experiencing the same unnecessary fate, the city must:

- **Increase Staffing in CityFHEPS Units at DHS and HRA**
- **Improve CityFHEPS application processes to ensure the efficient administration and lease-up of vouchers.**
- **Increase Staffing at Homebase Offices**
- **Allow other community-based organizations to submit CityFHEPS applications to help increase processing capacity of Homebase and improve turnaround times for CityFHEPS applications**



Neighbors
Together

Conclusion

In order to address the historic homelessness and housing crisis in New York City, Council must stand strong in their support of a robust social safety net and use a holistic approach to solving the crisis. In particular, **Council must fully expand CityFHEPS as per the 2023 expansion laws, invest in building new units targeted to homeless and extremely low-income New Yorkers, ensure meaningful funding of at least \$25 million for the City Commission on Human Rights and improve hiring practices, and increase staffing at key agencies that process CityFHEPS applications.**

Without a proper investment in this type of multi-pronged approach, New York City will continue to see New Yorkers languish in shelters while more families fall into homelessness each day. Budgets are moral documents, and the allocation of funds represent the values of our city. If New York City is truly to be an affordable city for all, one that values equity and uplifting its vulnerable groups, then it must affirm those values by investing in and supporting those groups. The historic homelessness crisis that New York City is currently facing requires a bold willingness to invest in our city's systems and its people, and the funding priorities outlined above will provide significant positive outcomes for tens of thousands of New Yorkers for years to come.

For questions regarding this testimony, please contact Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing & Policy at Neighbors Together, at amy@neighborstogether.org or 929-759-6667.



Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry

For the Committee of General Welfare Budget Hearing on New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030 and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

March 17, 2026

My name is Stephen Grimaldi. I'm the Executive Director of New York Common Pantry, one of the largest food pantry and social services organizations in the city, and a founding member of The Roundtable: Allies for Food Access. The Roundtable is a coalition of nine of the largest emergency food providers in New York City. Aside from ourselves, it includes: Citymeals on Wheels, Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, Met Council, Part of the Solution (POTS), Project Hospitality, St. John's Bread and Life, The Campaign Against Hunger, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger.

Thank you, Committee Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare for this opportunity. We appreciate the thoughtful manner in which the City Council is considering our requests.

As you know, poverty and hunger in New York has reached epidemic proportions:

- Nearly 60% of New Yorkers – nearly 55 million NYC residents -- had incomes below 200% of the poverty line in 2024¹
- More than 40% of New York City families are unable to afford weekly food costs, falling short \$205 per week²
- 1.3 million households – nearly 3 Million people – in New York are struggling to make ends meet.³
- More than 3 out of 4 NYC households say the cost of food is rising faster than their income⁴

¹ The State of Poverty and Disadvantage in New York City, Volume 8, Robin Hood and Poverty Tracker Research Group at Columbia University (March 2026)

² Robin Hood Poverty Tracker, November 2025

³ True Cost of Living Report, April 2023. Produced by Center for Women's Welfare, University of Washington School of Social Work, for the Fund for the City of New York and the United Way of New York City

⁴ New Yorkers Are Going Into Debt Over The Rising Cost Of Food, No Kid Hungry Survey, March 2025.

<https://state.nokidhungry.org/new-york/new-poll-new-yorkers-are-going-into-debt-over-the-rising-cost-of-food/>



As the Council considers priorities for the upcoming fiscal year, we urge you to continue investing in frontline emergency food providers' innovative, community-based solutions that address food insecurity at scale and strengthen the emergency food system that so many New Yorkers rely on.

Secure Baseline \$100M for Community Food Connection (CFC)

- Secure \$100 million as a baseline annually for Community Food Connection (CFC) to provide sustained, flexible support for more than 500 pantries and community kitchens serving more than 1 million New Yorkers.
- Reform CFC eligibility and screening criteria to best serve the highest-need communities based on the Mayor's Office of Food Policy data guidelines.

Support Collaborative, Community-Led Solutions

- Establish a dedicated City Council Committee on Food to reaffirm the City's commitment to building a just and resilient food system, elevate food policy across legislative priorities, and ensure sustained oversight and accountability in addressing food insecurity across all five boroughs.
- Broaden FeedNYC leadership to prioritize community-driven resource allocation and include frontline emergency food providers, thereby promoting equitable decision-making and improved transparency.

Continue and Expand Feeding Our Communities

Last year, City Council funded this new initiative to provide additional support to emergency food providers. New York Common Pantry was awarded \$400,000 under the Feeding Our Communities Initiative. We need this funding to continue in FY27.

- This funding provided supplemental support for food and hygiene product purchases and operational expenses for food pantries and soup kitchens
- The adopted \$115.9 billion NYC Fiscal Year 2026 budget maintains steady funding for emergency food programs, with a \$15 million investment for the "Feeding Our Communities" initiative. We request that City Council maintains this funding for FY27.



Increase Support for SNAP Case Management Services

The City Council funds initiatives related to Food and Benefit Access, which provide support for case management and benefits assessment work. Given the changes to SNAP, including cuts to funding for SNAP Benefits Managers and onerous new administrative hurdles, we request that the City Council increases funding support for these critical case management services through its existing initiatives.

Provide Budget Support for SNAP-Ed Nutrition Education

SNAP-Ed strengthens the impact of SNAP by helping families stretch their food dollars and make informed decisions about what they eat. Through community-based providers such as New York Common Pantry, SNAP-Ed gives New Yorkers of all ages practical nutrition education and access points to fresh, affordable food that fits real budgets and real lives.

- Although H.R.1 completely eliminated federal funding for SNAP-Ed, the need – and the impact – remains. We request City Council increase funding to support essential SNAP-Ed programming to support New Yorkers struggling to make ends meet.
- Last year, NYCP's SNAP-Ed program, Live Healthy!, worked with more than 20,000 New Yorkers to create healthier lifestyles for themselves and their families, and we served the equivalent of 33,000 meals through our Farm Share Program. The termination of this education program will have a devastating effect on the low-income communities we serve.

At New York Common Pantry, we see struggling city residents daily and have stepped up our provision of healthy and fresh food to communities in need. Last year, we:

- Served more than 11.7 million meals
- Assisted more than 764,000 guests and
- Expanded our mobile programs to serve 350 community partner sites throughout the city

Since January, we have experienced more than a 10% increase in Pantry meals when compared to the same time last year, and that's on top of the 17% increase in individuals we served last fiscal year.



New Yorkers face a series of hardships that are hard to overcome: rising costs and lack of access to quality food and healthcare, the high price of utilities, childcare and housing. We, at New York Common Pantry and the Roundtable battle daily to feed the millions of New Yorkers who are facing these hardships.

With committed, sustained investment to frontline providers, we can build a more equitable and resilient food system that ensures all New Yorkers have reliable access to nutritious food.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to supporting New Yorkers facing food insecurity.

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Testimony of the New York Housing Conference

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Testimony

March 17, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Cheney. I am Director of Policy and Operations at the New York Housing Conference (NYHC). I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify about the FY 2027 preliminary budget.

NYHC is a nonprofit affordable housing policy and advocacy organization. As a broad-based coalition, our mission is to advance City, State and Federal policies and funding to support the development and preservation of decent and affordable housing for all New Yorkers.

New York City's affordability crisis has led to growing housing instability and homelessness and federal cuts to SNAP and healthcare will put even more pressure on local programs in upcoming years, [pushing an estimated 70,000 New York City residents into poverty](#) each year between 2028 and 2034. In recent years, the City has aided tens of thousands of households with local rental assistance and arrears programs and in 2019 required new affordable housing projects set-aside 15% of their units for households experiencing homelessness.

However, while the city's social services agencies have aided record numbers of households with emergency shelter, rental assistance and cash assistance programs in recent years, the agencies have not received adequate resources or support in planning appropriate staffing levels. With a new administration keen on addressing public excellence and service delivery, now is the time to properly plan for staff needs based on current and future processing needs. These programs are necessary to prevent and end homelessness.

At times, insufficient planning has led to processing delays impacting benefit access resulting in lawsuits from legal services organizations. Inadequate staffing levels for DSS means that people stay in shelter longer, which is more costly to the city, and means affordable housing units stay vacant longer waiting for tenants to move in, costing the providers income they need to run the building.

Since the pandemic, staffing at the city's Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services have decreased dramatically and not recovered. Many agencies lost staff during the pandemic due to budget cuts, hiring freezes, and policies around remote work.

The headcount at HRA was 12,528 in December 2019 before the pandemic and was just 10,866 in January according to the most recent data. The Department of Homeless Services saw headcount decrease from 2,257 to 1,621. Meanwhile, HPD staffing decreased during the pandemic but has since recovered to slightly more than before the pandemic.

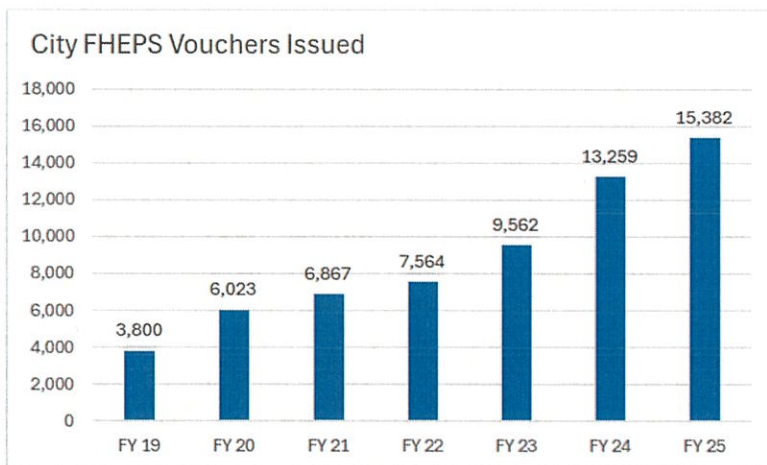
Actual Headcount at HRA and DHS

	Dec. 2019	Dec. 2021	Oct. 2022	Sep. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Percent Change From 2019
HRA	12,528	11,298	10,468	10,942	10,981	10,991	10,866	-13%
DHS	2,257	1,874	1,818	1,794	1,792	1,763	1,621	-28%

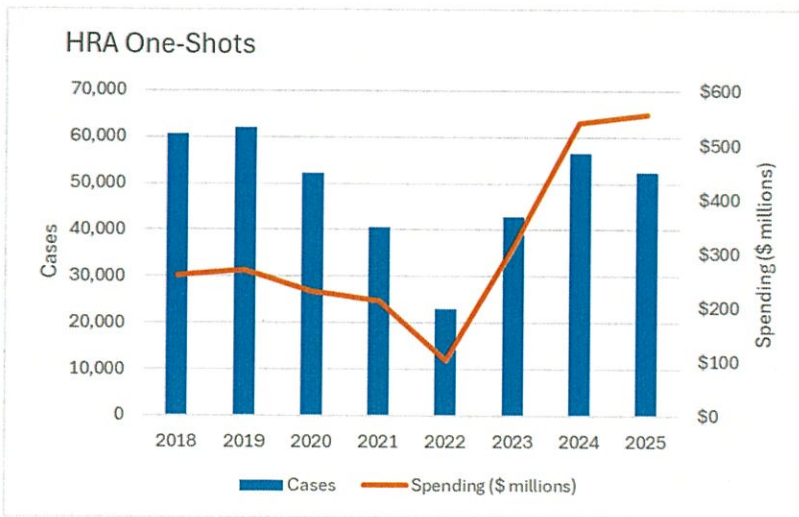
Source: NYHC Analysis of OMB and NYC Comptroller Data

The decrease in staffing at HRA has impacted how effectively the agency can utilize the programs. HRA has wide-ranging programs, from cash assistance and food stamps, to adult protective services and homeless prevention. The unit responsible for rental assistance and one-shots, among other things, saw headcount decrease 5 percent over that time, from 4,479 staff to 4,259. And this is a time period when need and funding for these programs has increased, but staffing has decreased.

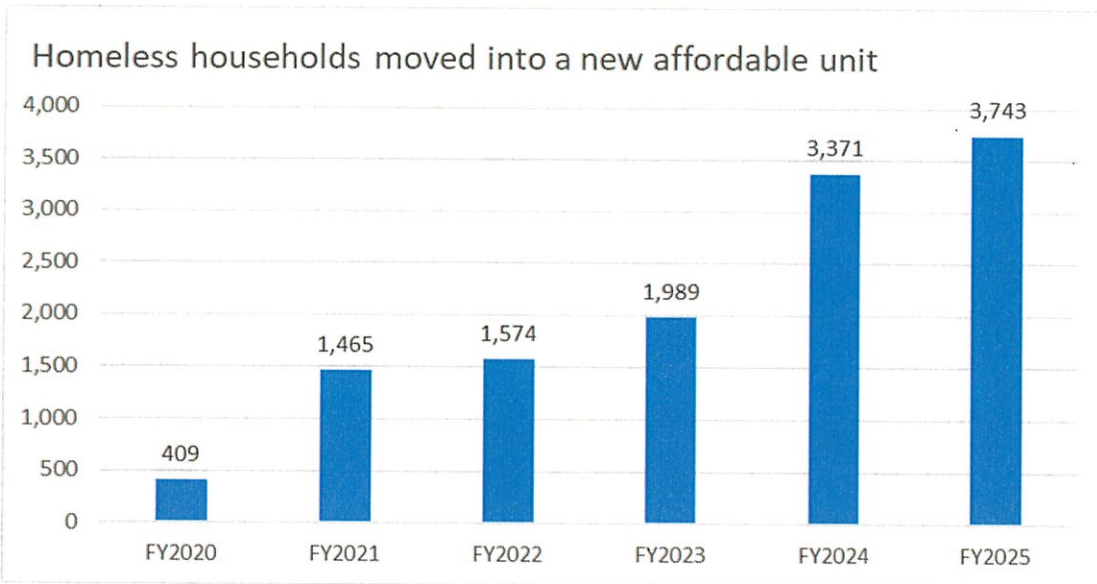
The city's CityFHEPS rental assistance program has grown since it started in 2019, increasing from issuing 3,800 vouchers that year to issuing more than 15,000 last year. Spending on the program has increased from roughly \$500 million in FY2023 to a projected \$2 billion in FY2026.



Meanwhile the city's One-Shot program is near historical levels, and is much higher than it was during the pandemic. Last fiscal year the City issued 52,300 One-Shots, compared to 23,100 in 2022. And spending on the program has grown significantly, increasing from \$102 million in 2022 to \$555 million last year. But the agency has fewer staff to process the funding.



Finally, the City is moving people from shelter into affordable housing set-aside units. DHS staff are responsible for referring people in shelter to HPD affordable housing units. Placements have increased while staffing has decreased. In 2009, the City moved just 409 households into affordable housing while in 2023 they were moving under 2,000 households. Last year the City moved more than 3,700 households into new affordable housing.



HRA staff may also see increased demand in their programs once cuts to federal programs, including SNAP and healthcare, start impacting New Yorkers.

While HRA and DHS clearly need more staffing, decreasing bureaucracy will make processes more efficient and can decrease staffing needs. For example, 3 out of 4 homeless households referred to affordable housing units by the City shelter system do not submit required paperwork even though they are assisted by caseworkers.

Recommendations

- **Plan for sufficient capacity: HRA must sufficiently staff the agency to meet the needs of its various programs and ensure timeliness of their processing. In addition, HRA can improve processes to make their staff and their policies more efficient.**
 - **Ensure homeless referrals are supported and already approved:** The City's processes to rent up affordable housing buildings is bureaucratic and causes lengthy delays getting people into housing. In a case study, we looked at a project that took two years to rent up. In that project we found that it took nearly eight months to approve tenants for the 46 units reserved for people experiencing homelessness once the building was ready for occupancy. The City should ensure homeless referrals arrive income-eligible with rental assistance pre-approved.
 - **Appoint coordinator for one-shots for proactive strategy:** In NYC, too many tenants in affordable housing face eviction due to nonpayment and wait months before they get assistance from HRA. HRA should establish an Affordable Housing Stability Coordinator to troubleshoot CityFHEPs processing, one-shot assistance and other benefit issues for tenants in affordable housing.
-
- **End CityFHEPS inspections:** CityFHEPs housing assistance should not require inspections to use the subsidy. These same apartments can immediately be rented without an inspection by a household who is not using a voucher.



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**Testimony of Nevien Swailmyeen, Health Justice Advocacy Manager at New York Lawyers
for the Public Interest to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare on
March 17, 2026, regarding the New York City FY27 Budget**

My name is Nevien Swailmyeen, and I am the Advocacy Manager in the Health Justice Program at New York Lawyers for the Public Interest (NYLPI). Thank you, Chairperson Hudson and members of the Council, for the opportunity to testify today.

After more than one year in power, the federal administration continues to create unprecedented threats to the rule of law and to New Yorkers' freedoms, civil rights, access to public services, and access to a healthy environment. New York City legislators must continue to leverage the substantial power of local government to uphold and protect our laws and rights, and to make the major investments needed to protect and strengthen infrastructure, public institutions, and the renewable energy economy.

In recent years, the City Council has played a critical role in defending vital city services, investments, and infrastructure from budget cuts and flatlining. We appreciate the Mamdani administration's transparency about the major fiscal challenges facing New York City. We urge both local and state lawmakers to pass and implement policies like congestion pricing, a well-designed Cap and Invest System, and public health insurance programs that advance social equality, public health, and sustainability while creating revenue and savings for New York City.

Immigrant Health Initiative

We ask the Council to continue and enhance support for the Immigrant Health Initiative, which continues to save lives and improve health across our city. This program supports more than 20 nonprofits, including NYLPI programs aimed at improving the health and well-being of New Yorkers and their families through direct legal representation, litigation, community education, strategic partnerships with public hospitals, and non-legal advocacy. Through vigorous client and community advocacy and wraparound services, NYLPI improves health outcomes, increases access to healthcare, and provides critical and timely education for communities, healthcare providers, and legal service advocates.

Such access to essential healthcare often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net healthcare system when people are able to resume work and productive lives.

As increasing numbers of New Yorkers are detained in immigration jails, we remain one of few organizations focused on medical advocacy and the acute health hazards of immigration

detention. In addition, in the face of continued attacks on the asylum process, we have offered culturally competent legal representation, including to those who identify as transgender, gender-expansive, or live with HIV.

Nonprofit Rapid Response Network

The federal administration has focused tremendous power on mass deportations, revocation of racial justice initiatives, claw backs of climate and environmental justice funding, and retribution against those standing up to it. The human cost to New York's disadvantaged communities has already been staggering. Nonprofits and CBOs serving or employing immigrants and other marginalized groups continue to form a critical shield but are also becoming direct targets of federal agencies attempting to conduct raids, chill advocacy, and cut services to people in need.^[1]

With continued support from the Speaker and the Protect NYC Families Initiative, our Nonprofit Rapid Response Network will strengthen and protect New York City's nonprofit sector by providing legal resources, relationship-building, practical training, and legal advice and representation to nonprofits and CBOs. It will foster collaboration, build capacity, and distribute essential resources and legal advice to help nonprofits survive attacks by the federal administration.

Nonprofit Contracting Reform

Legal services providers continue to face significant challenges related to timely payments for our contracts with the City. When non-profit legal services organizations take on such contracts, we commit to providing high-quality services, supporting marginalized individuals and communities. We urge the Council to invest adequate resources towards fixing the city's flawed contracting and procurement systems to ensure providers are paid on time. This entails filling long-empty agency vacancies for contracting positions and reforming the payment process, so providers are no longer completing the critical services they are contracted for and then waiting years to receive already allocated funding.

Improving Access to Healthcare for NYC Residents Through the Immigrant Health Initiative

Over 400,000 New Yorkers are undocumented and uninsured. We are grateful that the City Council's continued support has allowed us to continue our efforts without pause and respond to ever increasing need. Access to healthcare across the system is scarce, and the most marginalized and very sick often go without medical care. Your support has led to increased enrollment by eligible immigrants in state-funded comprehensive health insurance via Medicaid and the Essential Plan.

The improved access to health insurance has had life-changing and often life-saving effects on the lives of our clients, and often results in cost savings for the City, the State, and our safety net healthcare system when people are able to resume work and productive lives. In 2025, we were able to provide comprehensive immigration and health benefits screenings to 85 people with serious health conditions including End Stage Renal Failure and HIV in the community and in

detention. We provided direct immigration and civil rights legal representation for 60 cases. We obtained state-funded healthcare for more than 30 previously uninsured New Yorkers. IHI funding also allowed NYLPI to advocate on behalf of over 50 clients who, even with our support in becoming eligible for state-funded healthcare, needed our specialized advocacy and navigation with healthcare administration entities to secure their enrollment. Additionally, NYLPI reached hundreds more New Yorkers through our trainings on immigrant access to healthcare to frontline caseworkers, medical providers, community-based organizations and legal service providers who serve immigrant communities throughout the city.

Informed by our client experiences, NYLPI has been working to advance Transplant Equity since 2015 for immigrant New Yorkers. Based on misinformation, healthcare inaccessibility, and mistreatment of immigrant patients, many people in need of kidney transplants are denied necessary, lifesaving healthcare furthering racial/ethnic disparities in healthcare. With the support of IHI funding, NYLPI has been advancing this work through direct representation, advocacy, legislative efforts, trainings, and research. In 2021, we launched our pilot Transplant Justice Pipeline with the kidney transplant program at SUNY Downstate Medical Center. This program has trained hundreds of healthcare and legal services providers, including health providers at Montefiore Medical Center, the Bronx Health Collective, Bellevue, and Kings County Dialysis Centers.

Unfortunately, many insured noncitizen and immigrant New Yorkers are still denied medical care based on misinformation and misunderstanding between immigration status and insurance eligibility. NYLPI's clients have faced unnecessary barriers to care based on their immigration status alone. NYLPI has supported clients in navigating these complicated systems and advocated for them to receive the life-saving care to which they are entitled. With continued funding, NYLPI can further our commitment to advancing immigrant justice and access to health coverage for all New Yorkers.

Shelter Policing Undermining Healthcare for Immigrant New Yorkers

Despite New York City's historic welcome to immigrants, entrenched discriminatory barriers leave tens of thousands of noncitizens without access to life-sustaining medical care. Clients and providers report that health insurance enrollment is inconsistent across the city shelter system. Moreover, the shelter eviction rules have the potential to significantly undermine access to healthcare for this vulnerable population. As a threshold matter, Medicaid enrollment typically takes 45 days. After initial enrollment, enrollees are prompted to provide documentation establishing their eligibility for continued coverage. Coverage may be terminated if they do not respond on time. Individuals forced to leave their shelters risk not receiving these critical notices and losing access to their health insurance as a result.

The shelter policies also limit continued access to care: NYLPI encountered one individual living with kidney failure who is successfully enrolled in health insurance. But because of the shelter eviction rules, he lacks a stable address to provide to his medical team, an important factor in the determination of whether or not he will be listed for a kidney transplant. Repeatedly uprooting individuals connected to vital health services will interfere with their abilities to seek care and have their health needs addressed. Finally, many of these individuals arrive to New York after

suffering unimaginable harms or enduring traumatic journeys to find safety. They are in need of counseling and other mental health resources and not the continued destabilization that results from lack of stable housing. The Immigrant Health Initiative helps to close these gaps through advocacy and services.

Strengthening Oversight and Expanding Resources for DOH and HRA

The Department of Health plays a central role in ensuring that people can access care that is culturally competent, trauma informed, and responsive to the needs of diverse communities. Right now, DOH does not have the staffing, multilingual capacity, or targeted funding required to reach Black and LGBTQIA+ immigrants who face some of the highest health disparities in the state. Increased investment would allow DOH to strengthen community partnerships, expand HIV and STI prevention, improve mental health outreach, and support continuity of care for people who often arrive with significant trauma and chronic health needs.

HRA supports more than three million New Yorkers each year. It administers Medicaid, SNAP, cash assistance, HASA, and other essential programs. Yet the agency continues to struggle with long delays, high caseloads, and inconsistent case handling. These challenges create real barriers for people who are already navigating trauma, language obstacles, and unfamiliar systems. Additional funding is needed to support:

- Hiring and retaining staff
- Training on LGBTQIA+ competency, disability, and immigrant eligibility
- Improving language access
- Ensuring trauma informed service delivery
- Regular audits and updates of consumer-facing software and resources

When HRA is under-resourced, people go without food, medical care, and housing. When it is properly staffed and trained, it becomes a stabilizing force for entire communities

Investment must be paired with oversight. Communities need to know that increased funding will translate into better outcomes. Oversight must include public reporting on processing times, monitoring of diversion practices, and clear accountability for offices with persistent backlogs. Community organizations should also have a direct channel to report systemic issues as they arise.

Addressing ABD and 65+ Needs, Including for Undocumented New Yorkers

Older adults and people living with disabilities face some of the steepest barriers in the system. We consistently encounter serious systemic problems within HRA's processing and case-management practices. These barriers are even more severe for undocumented New Yorkers. For people applying through ABD pathways, common issues include delayed disability determinations, improper documentation requests, and missed screenings for programs they qualify for. For adults who are 65 and older, the challenges include confusion around eligibility, lack of guidance on long term care, and limited language access.

Clients routinely receive inconsistent and contradictory information when they visit HRA offices. The guidance they are given about eligibility, required documentation, or the status of their case often changes from one visit to the next, leaving them without a clear path forward. This lack of consistency forces individuals, many of whom are older, have limited English proficiency, or are managing chronic health conditions, to make repeated trips simply to understand what is required of them.

Many of our older undocumented clients experience these failures firsthand. One of our clients, an older woman and long-term dialysis patient, spent months trying to secure the coverage for which she was PRUCOL-eligible. She made repeated trips to HRA offices, each time receiving different explanations about her eligibility and the documents she needed to provide. Despite submitting everything requested, her case was delayed, mishandled, and never processed consistently due to misinformation at every visit. During this time, she continued receiving treatment, but because her enrollment was never activated, she began receiving substantial medical bills. The stress of navigating these administrative barriers compounded the strain of managing a serious health condition.

These systemic failures create dangerous gaps in coverage for older immigrants who cannot afford interruptions in care. Administrative delays become health risks, mismanaged records become financial crises, and inconsistent guidance erodes trust in the very systems designed to protect vulnerable New Yorkers.

To ensure that older immigrants can access the care they need, HRA must strengthen its internal processes, improve communication with partner agencies, and provide consistent, accurate information to the public. Without meaningful improvements, clients will continue to face preventable harm simply because the systems meant to support them are not functioning as they should.

Improving Insurance Enrollment and Navigation

Insurance enrollment is one of the most confusing processes for New Yorkers, and it is even harder for immigrants. People regularly experience incorrect eligibility decisions, gaps in coverage, and confusion around the Essential Plan expansion. Older adults struggle with Medicare and Medicaid coordination. LGBTQIA+ immigrants face barriers to gender affirming care coverage.

A major challenge we see every day is that many people are not being properly screened for the programs they qualify for. This happens because enrollers and navigators across multiple agencies often do not have accurate information about immigrant eligibility, disability pathways, or age-based programs. As a result, people who should be approved are incorrectly denied, delayed, or pushed into the wrong coverage. These errors are preventable, and they stem directly from underfunding, understaffing, and inadequate training. New York needs more navigators, better staff training, and clearer multilingual materials so that people can enroll and stay enrolled.

One of our clients, a Black LGBTQIA+ asylum seeker living with a chronic health condition, spent months trying to secure Medicaid. They were eligible, but they were repeatedly turned

away, given conflicting instructions, and denied interpretation services. Their medication lapsed, their condition worsened, and they were hospitalized for something that could have been prevented.

The budget decisions made this year will determine whether DOH and HRA can meet the needs of the communities they serve. Strengthening these agencies is essential for public health, for equity, and for the dignity of every New Yorker, regardless of immigration status, age, disability, or identity.

Conclusion

Thank you, Chairperson Hudson and the Committee, for giving us the opportunity to present testimony today and for this tremendous assistance, and we ask that the Immigrant Health Initiative funding is restored and enhanced in FY 2027 for both NYLPI and our partners. We look forward to continuing our work to improve immigrant New Yorkers' access to healthcare for new arrivals and long-time New Yorkers alike.

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For 50 years, NYLPI has fought to protect civil rights and achieve lived equality for communities in need. Led by community priorities, we pursue health, immigrant, disability, and environmental justice. NYLPI combines the power of law, organizing, and the private bar to make lasting change where it's needed most.

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^[1] In 2025, NYLPI published guidance for nonprofits responding to the threat of immigration enforcement. See: <https://www.nylpi.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Guidance-to-Nonprofits-Regarding-Immigration-Enforcement.pdf>



Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)

Before the New York City Council General Welfare Committee regarding:

Preliminary Budget Hearing

March 17, 2026

Chair Hudson, Council Members and staff, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony to the General Welfare Committee about The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2027-2030, and The Fiscal 2026 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report. NYLAG uses the power of the law to help New Yorkers in need combat social, racial, and economic injustice. We address emerging and urgent legal needs with comprehensive, free civil legal services, impact litigation, policy advocacy, and community education. NYLAG serves immigrants, seniors, the homebound, families facing foreclosure, renters facing eviction, low-income consumers, those in need of government assistance, children in need of special education, domestic violence victims, persons with disabilities, patients with chronic illness or disease, low-wage workers, low-income members of the LGBTQ community, Holocaust survivors, veterans, as well as others in need of free legal services. NYLAG impacted the lives of nearly 120,000 individuals in 2025.

NYLAG's Public Benefits Unit at NYLAG serves clients who are experiencing barriers to accessing and maintaining public benefits, including Public Assistance, SNAP, appropriate shelter, Medicaid, Homecare, Social Security Disability, Supplemental Security Income, Veterans' Benefits, and we prepare medical and financial advance planning documents for

clients in need. In New York City, where the high cost of living is coupled with a level of benefits insufficient to meet basic needs, we serve clients with overlapping needs related to food scarcity, housing instability, and homelessness.

Our Shelter and Economic Stability Project represents clients having trouble accessing or maintaining public assistance, SNAP, and appropriate shelter. We represent clients at Administrative Fair Hearings and conduct advocacy with the Department of Social Services (“DSS”), Benefits Access and SNAP centers, and bring impact litigation to ensure that our clients are obtaining and maintaining an adequate level of benefits. In partnership with our Tenants’ Rights Unit, we have a TRU Benefits Project that works to prevent eviction by addressing the public benefits issues that often place tenants at risk of losing their housing. We provide direct advocacy, guidance, and training to ensure clients can access critical supports such as cash assistance, rental subsidies, and emergency grants so they can remain stably housed. We also provide legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access homeless shelter placements in New York City. We work to ensure that every New Yorker has a safe place to sleep by offering legal advice and representation throughout each step of the shelter application process. We also assist and advocate for clients who are already in shelter as they navigate the transfer process, seek adequate facility conditions and resources for their needs, and offer representation at Administrative Fair Hearings.

We have worked with individuals and families who are attempting to apply or recertify for cash assistance and SNAP benefits, in addition to families facing eviction who applied for or receive rental assistance administered by HRA, and households who have or need CityFHEPS to exit the shelter or maintain their permanent housing. We appreciate the opportunity to offer the following comments.

Improving Access to Benefits Administered by the Human Resources

Administration

NYLAG continues to fight for the rights of low-income New Yorkers in need of Public Assistance and SNAP benefits and shelter placements. The settlement in our case, *Forest v. City of New York*, has been submitted to the court for preliminary approval, and we continue to fight for the rights of our clients who encounter problems completing their applications and recertifications because of barriers outside of their control. These include phone interview wait times and documents that are not timely indexed and added to their case. Both persistent issues lead to improper denials. With this settlement agreement we will hold the Agency accountable, and we hope to continue to work together and see improvements to these systems for our clients. We also urge the Agency to take seriously the testimonials of advocates who work with clients in need every day, and direct resources necessary to effectively serve clients on the phone and in person.

The cash assistance application timelessness rate of 67% reported in the Mayor's Management Report¹ is an improvement from prior years, but it is still insufficient. We know that HRA can improve processing times when ordered by the court, and we remind the agency of its legal obligation to process applications within 30 days.

NYLAG clients continue to wait far too long for rent arrears grants needed to prevent eviction, and they face numerous barriers throughout the process. Our clients routinely apply for this emergency assistance, upload all required documents, and complete their phone interviews, yet they are often denied for allegedly missing a step they did in fact complete. Many wait more

¹ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2026/hra.pdf> at 205.

than 30 days for a decision. These delays put our clients up against Housing Court deadlines and dangerously close to eviction. They frequently wait without updates they must provide to a judge, or they are forced to restart the process running up against court deadlines.

Finally, NYLAG clients are also experiencing extremely long wait times on DSS One Number (718-557-1399)² One Number, as distinguished from the Interview Line, is the phone number clients are directed to use to contact the Agency for anything other than completing a phone interview. Some clients must use this number to obtain a temporary Client Identification Number (“CIN”) needed to complete their applications for benefits. NYLAG attorneys and clients have reported extremely long wait times on One Number. Advocates have sounded alarms about InfoLine over the past several years, and the Agency restructured its phone lines and rebranded, but the inadequate service on this line is mostly the same. We urge the agency to work on improving service and wait times on One Number.

We appreciate that the city is working hard to process a high number of benefits applications, but it must maintain functional systems that allow clients to complete the steps required for applications and recertifications. Improving staffing, training, and attention to detail is essential to prevent wrongful denials. When these systems fail, they create administrative churn, causing clients to lose these critical subsistence benefits and forcing many to submit multiple applications before being approved. In the meantime, clients are missing deadlines in Housing Court, losing out on rental subsidy programs, and facing serious risk of eviction. The city must address the failures to administer these benefits properly.

² <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hra/about/contact.page>

Finally, recent changes to SNAP eligibility have increased the Agency's responsibilities. It must now enforce and verify compliance with work rules, review additional documentation to determine the correct Standard Utility Allowance (SUA) levels, and likely implement new rules affecting immigrant eligibility. Without adequate resources, these added burdens will lead to higher rates of benefit loss among eligible individuals due to procedural barriers and challenges.

CityFHEPS

We continue to support the City Council's efforts to expand access to CityFHEPS vouchers, and we recognize the challenges posed by current budget constraints. However, we are disappointed that the necessary funding has not been allocated and that key CityFHEPS expansions have not yet been implemented. The current funding level only sustains the existing costs of the program. Without fully implementing the CityFHEPS expansion law, families who should be eligible for assistance remain unable to exit shelters, prevent eviction, or secure permanent housing.

The City must plan to invest in the expansion of CityFHEPS so more households can qualify for the voucher without needing a shelter history or current placement in the DHS shelter system. Expanding CityFHEPS is both fiscally responsible and humane. Right now, households are being evicted from stable and affordable apartments simply because there are not enough programs that help them maintain their housing. When people are not eligible for rental assistance, they face a far greater risk of eviction and may ultimately be forced into the shelter system, where they often remain for extended periods before obtaining a shopping letter and finding a new apartment.

Providing the voucher earlier would prevent unnecessary shelter entries and reduce overall costs to the City. In addition, shelter stays can be traumatic. Making the voucher available to more households in the community would help preserve their homes and avoid that trauma altogether.

In addition, we urge attention and funding needed to address administrative delays at the Agency. Our clients report a frequent breakdown of information between their shelter caseworkers, DSS, and the landlords. If a willing landlord makes a mistake on the CityFHEPS application (as often happens), it can take many days or even weeks before that information is relayed from DSS to shelter caseworkers and then back to the landlord. The landlords do not work directly with DSS, and information is often lost in the process. Clients report situations where forms are filled out incorrectly multiple times and landlords are not able to obtain clarification on how to correct issues with the forms. This confusing and time-consuming process creates significant delays in exiting shelter and serves as a deterrent for landlords.

NYLAG urges this committee to be cognizant of the ways in which the expansion of case management services can be overseen and further resourced to ensure that these services are helpful to our clients. Providing more case management to homeless clients, including housing specialists and public benefits specialists, is another step in ensuring that shelter is an accessible and helpful resource on the path towards permanent housing. Increased staffing at all levels of the bureaucratic chain will bring internal and external relief: allowing DSS to be more responsive to issues and more communicative to their clients and community partners. Similarly, a digitized document system, which provides voucher-holder access to information about which documents have been accepted and rejected, would work to simplify the communication morass that currently plagues the CityFHEPS benefit system.

Finally, strengthening CityFHEPS administrative processes is needed. A key component of the stability that permanent housing can provide is the reliability of rental assistance programs. NYLAG represents clients in Housing Court and people who are existing the shelter system with CityFHEPS. Once approved, problems persist for our clients with the administration of the benefit itself. Clients report being unable to reach anyone at HRA to report changes and missing benefits. Our clients who rely on CityFHEPS vouchers report that HRA often does not pay their rent on time and sometimes will discontinue rental payments without notice to the landlord or fail to recertify a client who submitted their recertification paperwork on time. We routinely represent clients who are in months of arrears without being made aware that CityFHEPS payments were not being made. For some, the problems persist for so long that they end up back in Housing Court and at risk of homelessness once again. The CityFHEPS voucher program can only provide meaningful support if attention is paid to its administration.

Department of Homeless Services

Despite the critical role that on-site social service support plays for families experiencing homelessness, access to these services within DHS shelters remains deeply uneven. While DHS provides licensed social workers in some family shelter to conduct behavioral health assessments, developmental screenings for children, and link families to mental health services, only 43% of families received these services in the first months of Fiscal 2026³, a decline from 47% in the same period of Fiscal 2025 apparently due to a shortage of available social workers to administer the screenings, and because different shelters receive different funding for these services. This already troublingly low rate is compounded by the fact that access is entirely

³ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2026/dhs.pdf> at p.228.

dependent on the shelter to which a family is randomly assigned. Families in shelters without dedicated social work staff receive no comparable support, leaving many children without essential screenings and parents without help navigating complex systems.

The Mayor's Management Report highlights another deeply concerning trend: families with children are not spending an average of 401 days in shelter, according to data from the first four months of Fiscal 2026.⁴ This is a 7% increase from the previous year. Four hundred and one days is not simply a statistic, it is more than an entire year of a child's life spent in a temporary placement that is not designated for such a long term. These prolonged stays reflect the systemic barriers families face in securing permanent housing, including insufficient access to affordable units, delays in rental subsidy processes, and the lack of supports that help families transition out of shelter. A system with a family's "temporary" stay routinely exceeds twelve months is one that is not functioning as intended, and it signals an urgent need for stronger, more coordinated efforts to shorten shelter stays and accelerate pathways to permanent, stable housing.

Safe Haven Beds

The City reports that an average of 3,048 low-barrier safe haven and stabilization beds were occupied during the first four months of Fiscal 2026⁵, which is a seven percent decrease from the previous year, driven largely by temporary capacity in fluctuations such as facility changes and maintenance. While this decline is explained as a technical adjustment, the underlying reality is far more urgent: even at 3,000 beds, the system falls dramatically short of meeting the true level of need. Safe havens are one of the most effective pathways for engaging people who cannot or will not access traditional shelters, yet the current number of beds barely

⁴ *Id.* at 229.

⁵ *Id.* at 230.

scratches the surface of demand. As a result, far too many individuals remain on the streets simply because there is nowhere appropriate for them to go. The modest year-to-year fluctuations distract from the core issue, which is that the City needs a substantial expansion of safe haven and stabilization capacity, not just to maintain current levels, but to meaningfully address chronic street homelessness.

Housing — Right to Counsel

As detailed in our colleagues' testimony, over the past 9 years, Right to Counsel (RTC) has become an established program that keeps families housed. Nevertheless, the program still faces challenges in implementation and addressing the growing need for eviction defense services. First, despite providers like NYLAG continue to face challenges in invoicing, despite timely contract registration, which result in significant delays in payment. Additionally, funding under the current RTC contracts covers eviction defense services for about 1/3 of eviction filings, not meeting the demand or need for services. We urge the council in increase funding for RTC to ensure the costs of providing services are fully covered and to meet the need.

Immigration

NYLAG is proud to operate in a City that values its immigrant citizens and supports much-needed services to them through its annual budget. We are thankful that the Council has long funded initiatives, and developed new initiatives, that respond to emerging needs of our immigrant neighbors. We are particularly thankful for the Council's increased investment in immigration legal services in FY26. This funding has been critical as we navigate the ever-changing immigration landscape. Long-term, continued and increased investment in legal services – including the deep expertise housed within our organizations – is crucial to meeting the current

and future needs of immigrant families in New York. Our city of immigrants is under attack by the federal government, whose policies are undermining our security, subjecting our residents to cruel and inhumane enforcement and detention, and threatening our economy by dividing our communities.

Increased council funding through initiatives including Rapid Response Legal Collaborative, ASLAN/Pro Se Plus, Unaccompanied Minors, and others has been critical as our organizations remain nimble to respond to the immigration needs of our communities. For NYLAG, this has meant having a continued presence at 26 Federal Plaza to offer pro se assistance for families and being ready to support individuals being detained with habeas petitions through our Rapid Response program.

We are asking the City to continue to increase investments in immigrant services and support, including: \$40 million fund to support immigrants and families who have been detained; \$150 million to support detained New Yorkers (includes NYIFUP and Rapid Response); and \$70 million to restore Action NYC.

Divorce Proceedings Representation for Domestic Violence Survivors

NYLAG, in partnership with the Legal Aid Society and Sanctuary for Families, was very grateful to launch the Divorce Proceedings Representation for Domestic Violence Survivors Initiative, providing low-income survivors of domestic violence seeking to obtain a divorce. This initiative was developed in response to the recommendations made by the working group created in response to Local Law 5 of 2022, recognizing the increased obstacles that survivors of domestic violence face in obtaining a divorce. Domestic violence survivors have unique needs resulting from the trauma and abuse they experienced, and often unequal access to information regarding

marital assets and finances due to economic abuse. Divorce helps survivors achieve final separation from their abusive partner and move forward as they reclaim their lives.

Despite the demand for legal representation and the unique needs of domestic violence survivors, many survivors do not or cannot obtain private legal representation, particularly those who are low-income or who have suffered financial abuse. New York City survivors are not guaranteed appointed counsel for financial or other aspects of a divorce proceeding. While partner agencies provide a wide breath of divorce services for survivors, we do not have the capacity to accept every client in need of representation in divorce proceedings. Generous funding from the NYC Council gave NYLAG (as well as partner agencies) the ability to begin this crucial work last year. In FY26 NYLAG is on track to provide 120 consultations, and full representation services to 30 survivors in contested matrimonial proceedings and 60 survivors in uncontested matrimonial filings. For FY27, we are requesting increased funding to expand the project which has been thoughtfully built and already seeing positive impacts as survivors of domestic violence hope to access justice. NYLAG specifically is asking for \$1.1 million in FY27 to continue and to expand this work.

FY27 NYLAG Requests:

For FY27, NYLAG has submitted the following initiative requests, for which we are asking to be renewed. It is funding through these City Council initiatives that allows us to provide critical legal services to low-income and vulnerable New Yorkers and remain nimble as needs shift. We thank you for your continued partnership and consideration of these requests. Legal Services for Low-Income and Working Class New Yorkers: \$1,100,000

Immigrant Opportunities Initiative: \$500,000

Immigrant Health Initiative: \$500,000

Low-Wage Worker Support: \$500,000

Legal Services for Veterans: \$125,000

Rapid Response Legal Collaborative: \$1,000,000

ASLAN/Pro Se Plus: \$300,000

Unaccompanied Minors and Families: \$200,000

Estate Planning and Resolution: \$100,000

Thank you to the Committee on General Welfare for the work it has done to facilitate services for vulnerable New Yorkers and for holding this hearing. We look forward to a strong continued partnership with the Council and the Mayor's Office.

Respectfully Submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



NEW YORK

Testimony for the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare on the Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

March 17, 2024

Submitted by No Kid Hungry New York

Introduction

Good morning, Chair Hudson and members of the Committee on General Welfare of the New York City Council. My name is Rachel Sabella and I am the Director of No Kid Hungry New York. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing on the FY27 preliminary New York City budget proposal.

First, we thank the City Council for your continued commitment to protect New Yorkers from food insecurity. The City Council has long been a leader in addressing food insecurity, from defending against mid-year cuts to school meal programs, partnering to promote Summer EBT and other safety net programs to families, supporting the expansion of Breakfast in the Classroom, and advocating for increased, baselined funding for food pantries and soup kitchens to ensuring that food insecurity remained a top priority throughout the pandemic. Now more than ever, we are grateful to count you as our partner in the fight against food insecurity.

No Kid Hungry New York is a campaign of Share Our Strength, a national organization dedicated to ending hunger and poverty. Using proven, practical strategies, our No Kid Hungry campaign builds and supports public-private partnerships with the goal of ensuring children have access to the healthy food they need, every day.

No Kid Hungry New York believes that all children, no matter their borough or circumstance, deserve the opportunity to be nourished and safe, so they can live up to their full potential and achieve their dreams. Adequate nutrition, both at school and at home, helps lay the foundation for a child's physical and emotional development, educational attainment, and health and well-being. Years of data and research have demonstrated that federal nutrition

programs are our nation's most effective defense against hunger and food insecurity and have helped lift millions of families out of poverty.

CURRENT STATUS OF HUNGER AND POVERTY IN NEW YORK CITY

Now more than ever, as 1 in 4 children face hunger in New York City., we are counting on you as our partner in the fight against food insecurity. No Kid Hungry New York's own 2026 poll found New Yorkers continue to struggle to put food on the table. Two-thirds (67 percent) of New Yorkers have had to choose between buying enough nutritious food and other necessities, like rent or mortgage payments, utility bills, or transportation costs, in the past year. For families with children, the rate was even higher as three-fourths (74 percent) reported making difficult trade-offs between paying for groceries and covering basic household expenses.

Overall, 74 percent of New Yorkers reported their financial situation suffered in the past year due to the cost of food.

Here are some of the key findings:

- 52 percent of New York City residents have taken on additional debt in the past 12 months due to the rising cost of food
- A majority of New York City residents said their physical health (54 percent), mental health (60 percent), social connections (53 percent), and financial health (78 percent) had suffered due to the rising cost of food
- 77 percent of New York City residents oppose federal cuts to food assistance programs like SNAP, WIC, and Summer EBT.

As you begin negotiations on the FY 2027 New York City budget, this is a reminder for the need to protect and expand programs that help New Yorkers put food on the table.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE NEW YORK CITY FISCAL YEAR 2027 BUDGET

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) is our nation's most effective tool to end hunger, but the federal budget reconciliation bill H.R.1 passed by Congress on July 4, 2025 made nearly \$200 billion in cuts in SNAP – the largest in the program's history – shifts significant costs to states, and made structural changes to the program. This occurred despite SNAP's proven track record for helping individuals and the broader economy. These cuts will have devastating consequences for New Yorkers. It is imperative that the FY 2026 New York City budget include necessary funding for the Department of Social Services to appropriately administer SNAP.

Include the Necessary Increase in SNAP Administrative Funding.

SNAP is the first line of defense against hunger and an irreplaceable source of support to New Yorkers struggling to keep up with the high price of groceries. Across the state, nearly 3 million New Yorkers currently use SNAP to help put food on the table.¹ More than half of SNAP participants live in a household with children.² SNAP also plays a pivotal role in supporting school meal programs: data matching with SNAP is a large part of how federal funding rates are determined.

One change to SNAP included in H.R. 1 is reducing the federal contribution to SNAP administrative expenses. Historically, the federal government has matched state spending on administration. Starting October 1, 2026, the federal government will only pay for 25 percent of administrative expenses instead of 50 percent.

New York is one of ten states where counties administer SNAP rather than the state. Counties in all but one of those states bear some or all of the administrative costs, and in New York, counties cover the cost.

This means that New York City must include additional administrative funds in the Fiscal Year 2027 budget. While this is estimated to be more than \$100 million in additional spending for the city, it is especially critical to invest in SNAP administration now rather than scale back the overall budget.³ This is because of the need for resources for the ongoing implementation of other new provisions in H.R.1, like expanded work reporting and time limits, in addition to the potentially catastrophic financial impact associated with the state's SNAP payment error rate.

Invest in Error Rate Reduction Strategies While Preserving Access to SNAP.

Another damaging change made by H.R.1 is that states will soon be liable for a portion of SNAP benefit costs for the first time ever. The percentage of total benefit costs that New York State must pay each year will be based on the state's payment error rate from three years prior: if the error rate three years prior was below 6 percent, the state would *not* be required to pay any portion of benefit costs that year and the federal government would pay 100 percent of benefit costs as usual. If the error rate was above 6 percent, the state would be forced to pay between five to 15 percent of benefit costs. A fraction of a percentage difference in the state's payment error rate could be the difference between a 10 percent share and a 15 percent share.

It must be noted that the payment error rate is *not* a measure of fraud or even waste. It is a measure of the agency's accuracy in benefit determinations, including both overpayments and underpayments. Any overpayments beyond a modest disregard threshold must be repaid. The vast majority of payment errors are a result of simple mistakes or participants not

¹ U.S. Department of Agriculture. [SNAP Data Tables](#): State Level Participation & Benefits - Latest Available November 2025. Accessed March 2026.

² Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. [A Closer Look at Who Benefits from SNAP: State-by-State Fact Sheets](#). January 2025.

³ New York State Association of Counties. [One Big Beautiful Bill Act \(OBBBA\)](#). July 2025.

understanding complicated rules and instructions as well as administrative errors on the part of the agency.

While a five to 15 percent share may sound modest, the totals are high. SNAP participants in New York State received more than \$7 billion in SNAP benefits in Federal Fiscal Year 2024.⁴ If New York had been subject to a 15 percent benefit cost share that year, the state overall would have been forced to put in more than \$1 billion. The share associated with benefits distributed in New York City alone is estimated to be more than \$700 million.⁵

New York State's payment error rate in FFY 2024 was over 14 percent, high enough to put it in the 15 percent benefit cost shift category.

The first year of the benefit cost shift is Federal Fiscal Year 2028, which begins October 1, 2027. For the first year only, the state will have the option to use either its FFY 2025 or FFY 2026 payment error rate. States may also qualify for a one-year delay or exemption for the FFY 2028 benefit cost shift if the state's FFY 2025 payment error rate is roughly 13.34 percent or above. There is also the possibility of another one-year exemption for the FFY 2029 benefit cost shift based on the FFY 2026 error rate.

It is too late for any state or city actions to change the FFY 2025 payment error rate: it is expected to be officially announced in June 2026. Preliminary estimates indicate that it is too low to qualify for an exemption but well above the six percent threshold. The FFY 2026 payment error rate is being determined now based on benefit calculations made now through the end of September.

But, the city's investment now in strategies to address the error rate remains critical. As the federal law currently stands, there is no chance for an exemption from the benefit cost shift in FFY 2030, which will be determined in large part on the agency's work over the next fiscal year.

It is also important that efforts to reduce the payment error rate do not make the program so burdensome that New Yorkers drop off or stop seeking assistance. New Yorkers facing low wages, job loss or fixed incomes need SNAP more than ever, and its benefits ripple through the economy, supporting grocery stores, farmers markets and other retailers, suppliers, producers, and everyone they employ.

Ensuring adequate staffing, providing robust staff training, improving participant support and communications and implementing improved technology and systems are all important steps. While these efforts may cost the city now, they are essential for the long-term sustainability of SNAP in New York.

Support Headcount Additions for SNAP

⁴ U.S. Department of Agriculture. [SNAP Data Tables](#): National and/or State Level Monthly and/or Annual Data – FFY 2024 Benefits for New York. Accessed March 2026.

⁵ New York State Association of Counties. [One Big Beautiful Bill Act \(OBBBA\)](#). July 2025.

We were pleased that the preliminary budget included funding to increase the headcount for SNAP Eligibility Specialists and SNAP trainers. Appropriate staffing is necessary to ensure New Yorkers apply for SNAP and are able to maintain their SNAP benefits as long as they are eligible. As New York City works to reduce error rates, filling needed roles will also help with calculations and monitoring paperwork.

CONCLUSION

Residents across New York City continue to face economic challenges. As deliberations continue on the FY 2027 New York City budget, we urge the City Council to work closely with the Mamdani administration to prioritize funding programs that ensure no New Yorker faces hunger and to ensure the necessary funding to keep SNAP operating is included in the final budget. No Kid Hungry New York stands at the ready to work with the Council and Mayor Mamdani and our fellow New Yorkers to ensure all children and families have access to the food they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to share my testimony.



NYSFAH Testimony
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
FY2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing
Submitted: March 20, 2026

To the Honorable Members of the Committee on General Welfare:

The New York State Association for Affordable Housing (NYSFAH) represents nonprofit and for-profit developers, owners, and managers who create and preserve affordable housing across the five boroughs. We submit this testimony regarding the FY2027 preliminary budget as it relates to the Department of Social Services and the Human Resources Administration.

Our members are on the front lines of the City's homelessness response. Since 2019, new affordable housing projects have been required to set aside 15 percent of their units for households experiencing homelessness. Our members have embraced this mandate, but implementation has been plagued by delays that hurt the very families these policies aim to serve.

When HRA and DHS lack adequate staffing, the consequences ripple directly into our buildings. Units set aside for homeless households sit vacant for months while we wait for approvals and referrals. In one recent project, it took nearly eight months to approve tenants for 46 homeless set-aside units after the building was ready for occupancy. During that time, the building lost rental income needed for operations and maintenance, and families stayed longer in shelter at greater cost to the City.

The numbers tell the story. Since December 2019, HRA staffing has dropped 13 percent while DHS staffing has fallen 28 percent. Over the same period, CityFHEPS vouchers grew from 3,800 to over 15,000 annually and One-Shot spending quintupled to \$555 million. More demand with fewer staff means slower processing.

We also hear from members that the referral process itself creates barriers. DHS refers households to affordable units, but three out of four referred households do not complete required paperwork, despite caseworker assistance. By the time those referrals fall through, and new ones are identified, weeks or months have passed. Units remain vacant, income is lost, and families remain unhoused.

We urge the Committee to support the following changes:

- Ensure DSS is adequately staffed to process rental assistance and homeless referrals efficiently, reducing vacancy times in affordable housing.

- Require that homeless referrals arrive income-eligible with rental assistance already pre-approved before they are matched to units.
- Appoint an Affordable Housing Stability Coordinator at HRA to troubleshoot CityFHEPS and One-Shot processing for tenants in regulated affordable housing.
- End redundant CityFHEPS inspections for apartments that already meet housing quality standards and can be rented immediately to non-voucher households.

These steps would move families out of shelter faster, stabilize affordable housing buildings, and protect the City's investment in both. We know the crisis runs deeper than agency staffing alone but addressing any one of these barriers makes a difference.

Respectfully submitted,

Irak Cehonski-Rivas
NYC Policy Director
Contact: irak@nysafah.org

Rethink Food

116 W Houston St, 2nd Floor | New York, NY 10012
www.rethinkfood.org

March 17, 2026

Dear Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee,

My name is Shana McCormick, and I proudly represent Rethink Food — a chef-led nonprofit that has spent the past six years ensuring quality, culturally relevant meals make it to those who need it most.

We believe that every New Yorker, regardless of their circumstance, deserves a meal that nourishes them — not just nutritionally, but culturally. For the 100,000+ of our neighbors living in public shelters, food is more than sustenance. It is dignity. It is belonging. It is a signal that this city sees them.

Right now, that signal is too often missing.

At Rethink Food, we've built a model that works. We partner with small, independent restaurants and food businesses across this city — many of them women- and minority-owned — to prepare and deliver meals that are fresh, chef-crafted, and reflective of the communities being served. Through this model, we have deployed ~ 35 million meals. We've aided in keeping small businesses alive through the hardest seasons this city has faced. And we've done it at a cost that is competitive, sustainable, and proven.

New York City does not need to invent a new solution. The solution exists. It is operating right now, in the kitchens and communities of this city.

What we're asking for is simple: ensure nonprofits like ours have a fair shot within contracting opportunities, letting them do what they do best. For us, that is making quality meals for the community, at scale. When public dollars flow through mission-driven organizations, they don't disappear — they recirculate. They fuel more meals, more partnerships, more impact.

The diverse, inventive, resilient fabric of New York City is one of our greatest assets. Let's use it.

With Gratitude,

Shana McCormick

Sr. Director of Government & Community Relations



**New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026
Testimony of Danna Dennis**

Hello, my name is Danna Dennis. I'm a Senior Organizer with Riders Alliance, and I've been working on the campaign to expand Fair Fares since 2015.

I want you to take a good look at me. I am the face of a priced-out New Yorker—someone who was told I make “too much” to qualify for help, but not enough to actually afford the cost of living. I was born and raised in New York City, and like so many others, I had to leave my home and move to New Jersey just to survive.

Every day, I speak with riders across this city who are struggling to make impossible choices. Many New Yorkers today have two jobs, two roommates, and a side hustle—and they are still barely making it. The current income threshold of \$23,000 is simply not enough to reflect the reality of what it costs to live here.

People are juggling childcare, sky-high rent, and the rising cost of groceries. And on top of that, transit keeps getting more expensive.

Some might think a 10-cent fare increase isn't a big deal. But when you're poor, every dollar counts. That 10 cents adds up. It can be the difference between getting to work all week or not.

I also speak with riders who can't afford to load money onto their OMNY cards. And when that happens, they risk getting hit with a \$100 fine. That doesn't solve the problem—it pushes people deeper into hardship.

Fair Fares is supposed to help struggling New Yorkers, but too many people are falling through the cracks.

We need to expand Fair Fares by raising the income eligibility threshold and implementing automatic enrollment so people who already qualify for other benefits are not forced to navigate complicated systems just to access basic transportation.

Affordable transit is essential. It connects people to jobs, childcare, education, and healthcare.

I urge the Mayor to expand Fair Fares so more New Yorkers can afford to ride—and stay in the city they call home.

Thank you.



March 17, 2025

New York City Council

Committee on General Welfare
Hon. Crystal Hudson, Chair

Testimony of Jimmy Meagher, LMSW, Senior Policy Director, Safe Horizon

On the Fiscal Year 2027 Preliminary Budget

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Jimmy Meagher, and I am Senior Policy Director at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim assistance organization. Every year, 250,000 people seek safety through our services. Our mission is to stand with those who have experienced violence, abuse, and exploitation. We offer unwavering support and advocate for systemic change. We envision a world where safety is a universal human right.

Whether we are called on to provide expert testimony at an oversight hearing or to assist a constituent in crisis and in need of emergency services, we are proud to partner with the City Council in a collective effort to make our city safer for all. We are here to help you and your staff learn how best to support survivors and connect them to the resources available in your borough and community.

Over many years, the City Council has been a key supporter of our programs helping adult, adolescent, and child victims of violence and abuse. City Council funding fills in gaps where no other financial support exists and allows us to draw down critical dollars from other sources. Moreover, this funding demonstrates the value that you and your colleagues place in helping survivors of all ages access desperately needed shelter, legal assistance, counseling, and wraparound services and supports.

The City Council has also championed the human services nonprofit sector. Our sector desperately needs your continued help to ensure that human services workers across our sector receive the compensation and support we need. To be frank – our sector continues to operate in a perpetual state of crisis. Nonprofit human services organizations are suffering as a result of delayed contracts and payments – preventable and solvable problems.

Initiative and Discretionary Funding

Citywide Initiative funding contracted through the Human Resources Administration/Department of Social Services (HRA/DSS) supports the following Safe Horizon programs:

Domestic Violence and Empowerment (DoVE) Initiative

Since 2006, the New York City Council's DoVE Initiative has provided critical resources to communities impacted by domestic violence. Recognizing that survivors of domestic and intimate partner violence have varied needs and may not always access the criminal justice system, the City



Council partnered with Safe Horizon to create the DoVE Initiative to provide a neighborhood-based response to survivors and their families. The DoVE Initiative was funded at \$12,010,000 in FY26, with Council Members then allocating funding to local providers in their district.

Currently, 170 organizations across NYC use DoVE funding to address domestic violence in the community by providing legal services, crisis intervention, case management, counseling, support groups, outreach, education, and training. **Safe Horizon oversees and administers this entire project and ensures program compliance.** We provide in-depth training to help organizations stay competitive in future funding environments, as well as networking opportunities to help DoVE-funded organizations learn from each other and coordinate services. DoVE has always been important, but it has literally been a lifesaver for New Yorkers in every neighborhood and every community who continue to navigate these scary times. As we advocate for options for victims and survivors both inside and outside traditional criminal justice responses, DoVE is pivotal. DoVE directs funds to the organizations rooted in community that provide necessary and lifesaving supports to survivors. This is especially critical for survivors who are immigrants and/or LGBTQI+ who may fear seeking help from government systems under this current federal Administration.

We are very grateful to the City Council for supporting the DoVE Initiative for many years. We are seeking **a restoration of \$12,010,000** so our network of CBOs can continue to reach survivors in every neighborhood and every district across New York City.

Immigration Law Project

Safe Horizon's Immigration Law Project (ILP) provides expert legal advice and representation to victims of crime, violence, abuse, trafficking, and torture. ILP staff help guide their clients through complex immigration proceedings and assist them in VAWA self-petitions, petitions for U nonimmigrant status and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status (SIJS), applications for asylum, adjustment of status and citizenship, as well as in removal defense. ILP receives referrals internally from Safe Horizon's other programs, as well as externally from the immigration courts, law enforcement agencies, other community-based organizations, legislators, and from former and current clients. ILP strives to provide the highest quality services to a very vulnerable population. Clients live in all five boroughs and experience a multitude of victimizations including domestic violence, sexual assault, and other crimes. As a result of the settling of recent arrivals in New York City and the anti-immigrant policies emanating from Washington, Safe Horizon's ILP has seen an increase of survivors seeking our immediate assistance. In addition, overwhelmed government systems have left countless in tenuous circumstances—food and housing insecure and desperate for work - making them even more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation and in need of our support and services.

The Adams Administration prioritized assisting migrants with completing asylum applications, not comprehensive legal screenings and long-term representation and assistance. We were grateful to see that the Council invested heavily in nonprofit civil legal assistance in the FY26 budget, and we urge the Council to continue to do so this year.

In FY25, ILP provided full representation, advice, and consults to nearly 600 clients and provided over 5,100 telephonic information and referral services. The City Council supports ILP through



Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence & Gender Based Harm (contracted through DSS/HRA), the **Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative** (contracted through DYCD), the **Protect NYC Families Initiative** (contracted through DSS/HRA), and the **Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI)** (contracted through DSS/HRA).

City Council Initiative funding increases ILP's capacity to assist noncitizen survivors across NYC who have experienced violence here and abroad, including survivors of domestic and gender-based violence, with a wide range of immigration relief. We are seeking **a restoration of \$200,000 in Immigration Legal Services for Survivors of Violence & Gender Based Harm funding, a restoration of \$175,000 in Culturally Specific Gender Based Violence Initiative funding, a restoration and enhancement to \$50,000 in Protect NYC Families Initiative funding, and a restoration of \$20,000 in Immigrant Opportunities Initiative (IOI) funding.**

Domestic Violence Law Project

Safe Horizon's Domestic Violence Law Project (DVLP) provides expert legal services and guidance to at-risk New Yorkers seeking relief on family and matrimonial law matters. Our team of attorneys and paralegals help their clients access orders of protection, custody, visitation, child support, and divorces. In FY25, DVLP provided services to nearly 1,400 clients and offered telephonic helpline services to over 1,600 callers seeking assistance. The City Council supports DVLP through the **Safe Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE) Initiative**, contracted through HRA/DSS.

Our Domestic Violence Law Project utilizes funding through the Supportive Alternatives to Violent Encounters (SAVE) Initiative to provide direct legal services to indigent victims of domestic violence in Family, Supreme, and Integrated DV Courts throughout the city. We are seeking **a restoration and enhancement to \$300,000** so our Domestic Violence Law Project can continue to provide survivors with the legal services they require to find safety and healing.

Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC) Policy Solutions to End Family Homelessness

Lastly, Safe Horizon sits on the Steering Committee of the Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC). FHC is made up of organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience in homelessness, united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelters, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

Safe Horizon strongly encourages the City Council and the Administration to work together to implement FHC's recommendations to reform the shelter intake process and reform and streamline the CityFHEPS administrative process. New York City can end family homelessness. And given the current federal landscape, we urge New York City and New York State to do everything in our collective power to empower organizations and programs in the homelessness and anti-poverty space.



The Administration must fully implement the 2023 CityFHEPS Reform Package passed by the Council, ensuring that New Yorkers experiencing or at risk of homelessness have access to lifesaving CityFHEPS vouchers. We must ensure that no one is left behind – including survivors of domestic violence residing in HRA DV shelter, Runaway and Homeless Youth, and victims of crime at risk of losing their apartment and seeking a safe new home.

Late Contracting Issues

We are grateful to the City Council for understanding the systemic late contracting issues that impact the nonprofit human services sector. Late contracts have a detrimental effect on community-based organizations and the communities we all serve. Great progress has been made because of the Council’s movement on these issues through legislation to provide advances on contracts (LL156 of 2025, LL11 of 2026). However, much more needs to be done to address the millions still owed to providers across the city.

Frequent government contract payment delays put providers at risk of eviction and worsen deficits by forcing organizations to borrow to pay rent and salaries. Safe Horizon has, on many occasions, been forced to borrow money to sustain service provision to survivors while waiting months or even years for a contract to be registered so that we could receive payment.

The City’s delays cost providers real money and jeopardize quality of services by diverting funds away from programs to pay interest on lines of credit, for which we are not reimbursed.

In addition, when nonprofits are owed money, we cannot respond to emergencies effectively because of limited cash flow to meet urgent needs. For example, during the pandemic, we needed to purchase supplies, like masks and cleaning equipment, and were forced to utilize our credit line for that purpose because of the city’s payment delays.

As of January 31, 2026, Safe Horizon is owed \$5.1M across 15 contracts through DYCD and DOHMH. Many but not all of these contracts are related to the City Council funding detailed above. As the Council knows, these contracts are frequently registered long after the start date for services.

Int. 0452

Additionally, we urge the Council to support wage equity legislation that will bolster the nonprofit human services sector.

We are grateful for the multi-year COLA investment, which was a major victory for the nonprofit human services sector. There are still challenges, in that the COLA funding is implemented by agencies in ways that are overly restrictive. That investment ends next year so now is the time to push for true wage equity, where nonprofit workers are not paid up to 30% less than their government counterparts. We enthusiastically support Intro 452, which would be a huge step forward.



Government is not just the predominant funder of human services but also the main driver of human services salaries. Government either directly sets salary rates on contracts or does so indirectly by establishing costs for a unit of service along with required staffing on a contract.

New York City has relied heavily on the nonprofit human services sector to house, shelter, safety plan, and provide other critical services for survivors of violence. However, our government partners too often ask our community of nonprofits and community-based organizations to do more with less and to accept the bare minimum. This means that many - too many - nonprofit human services workers, the majority of whom are women and people of color, are barely surviving on the wages paid by underfunded contracts. Because many survivors come into victim services work to help other survivors, government funding for the nonprofit victim services sector is an economic justice issue for survivors. To live up to our shared values of equity, equality, and supporting communities, New York must commit to funding contracts at appropriate levels to allow nonprofits and community-based organizations to offer competitive living wage salaries. Pay equity is a racial justice issue, a gender justice issue, and an economic justice issue.

The human services nonprofit sector is dealing with a sustainability crisis. Organizations across the sector continue to lose staff because wages are not comparable to wages in the government and private sectors. Hiring and staff retention continue to be major issues across the field. Vacancies and staff turnover directly impact our clients – survivors of domestic violence, runaway and homeless youth, and victims and survivors of violence and abuse across New York City. When staff leave for a better paying job in the private, for-profit sector, our programs must reassign cases, which is disruptive to the survivors coming to us seeking safety and healing.

Intro 452 is a significant step towards ensuring that human services workers receive equitable pay comparable to their City counterparts. By establishing a clear wage requirement system, this legislation promotes transparency in compensation, ensuring that every worker is paid solely based on their qualifications and experience.

Conclusion

As the City Council and the Administration sets the budget for the next fiscal year, it's imperative that our city expand, perfect, create, and invest in programming that provides healing and support to people who have experienced harm, violence, and trauma. When we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of individual New Yorkers, we invest in the safety, healing, and well-being of New York City as a whole.

And it is essential that the City invest in the nonprofit human services workforce that we collectively rely on to support our safety net. We urge you and your colleagues to listen to providers, our dedicated workforce, and survivors. Thank you again for the opportunity to submit testimony.



Thank you to Chair Hudson and the other members of the Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Rachel Jordan, and I am the Managing Attorney for Partnerships and Advocacy at Safe Passage Project, a non-profit legal services organization that provides free representation to immigrant children facing deportation. We currently serve over 1,600 children and young people who live in the five boroughs of New York City and on Long Island.

Safe Passage Project works closely with partner organizations through the ICARE Coalition, with the goal of providing quality legal representation to as many unaccompanied minors as possible. Once we accept a client, we commit to their case until we achieve the best possible outcome for them, usually a green card. Our clients' cases take three to seven years due to delays in visa availability and court backlogs. We receive funding from the City Council through UMFI, the SIJS Initiative, School-Based Immigrant Rapid Response, Speaker's Initiative, and DoVE. The City Council's unwavering support for immigrant children through these initiatives has been groundbreaking on a national level, and has shown that local initiatives to advance universal representation for immigrant youth can be truly transformative.

These initiatives not only enable us to fight in court for children to gain lawful status in the U.S., they also enable our incredible social work team to make sure that these children can live their day-to-day lives in safety and security by connecting them to critical mental and medical health resources, shelters, food assistance programs, educational programs, and more.

Increased Funding for Children's Legal Services

We strongly urge this Committee to support immigrant children and their caretakers at this frightening time by safeguarding and increasing funding for immigrant children's legal services. The federal administration's daily attacks on immigrants have taken a severe toll, and together with the systemic stripping of due process rights in Immigration Court and the increase in brutal ICE enforcement tactics, Safe Passage Project's dedicated team of attorneys and social workers are working harder than ever to prevent the unjust incarceration and deportation of our



clients, many of whom are already well on their way toward lawful permanent residence. Every week, these challenges increase, requiring our staff to dedicate more time and resources to advocate for the best outcome in each case.

As the fight to stave off deportation in court becomes harder, the psychological and social impact on our clients and their families likewise becomes more burdensome. Many of our clients' parents have felt compelled to keep their children out of school, for fear that ICE raids in or near schools could tear them from their child permanently. The Trump administration's cruel decision to strip young people with approved Special Immigrant Juvenile Status of their access to employment authorization while awaiting their chance to apply for lawful permanent residence has also had a negative impact, forcing many young people to leave jobs and lose income that had sustained themselves and their families.

To ensure that Safe Passage Project can meet the increasingly complex legal and social work needs of immigrant youth in the midst of daily attacks from the federal government, we request that the City Council increase our funding at this historic moment.

Oversight of the NYC Department of Social Services

Finally, we respectfully ask that this Committee ensure that the NYC Department of Social Services be more responsive to legal service providers like Safe Passage Project in its administration of its grants. HRA/DSS administers millions of dollars in discretionary funding to our organization every year, the bulk of which is used to support the salaries of our attorneys and social workers. However, persistent lapses in communication from the agency continue to delay our ability to receive our full funding for eight to ten months after a contract has ended, creating a severe strain on our resources and cash flow that directly threatens our ability to continue providing legal services. Now more than ever, at a time when the federal government has made our work exponentially harder, it is critical for the City and providers on the front lines to be fully aligned in their operations, so that we can work together to meet our critical mission of providing legal representation and social services for immigrant children in need.

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**Testimony of Sanctuary for Families before
The New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026
SUBMITTED TESTIMONY**

About Sanctuary: Sanctuary for Families is New York State's largest provider of comprehensive services exclusively for gender violence survivors and their children. Last year we served 9,200 adults and children through 11 locations across all five boroughs, with holistic services including legal, shelter, clinical, and economic empowerment programs. In total, over 90% of our clients identify as people of color and over 70% are immigrants from more than 140 countries.

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony on important issues affecting the lives of survivors of gender-based violence in NYC. We urge you to ensure that this year's City budget adequately funds critical services for survivors, including funding for immigrant survivors, people in the sex trade/trafficking survivors, and other underserved populations. In particular, we ask the Council to continue and expand the citywide Council Initiative, funded for the first time last year – **Divorce Proceedings Representation for Domestic Violence Survivors.**

The Divorce Proceedings Representation initiative provides low-income New Yorkers trapped in abusive marriages a pathway to getting the legal assistance they so desperately need but usually cannot afford. A result of Local Law 5 of 2022, guaranteeing a right to counsel in divorce proceedings, the Council-funded Initiative provides free legal assistance to income-eligible survivors who cannot bear the astronomical costs of divorce. As an example, private attorney fees are usually \$400-\$800/hour and it is common for a divorce to cost around \$40,000 in total. Sanctuary for Families, along with our partners at New York Legal Assistance Group and The Legal Aid

Society, have already served many hundreds of survivors this year who otherwise would have fallen through the cracks of the legal system.

Divorce cases are complex and require the expertise of specialized and experienced attorneys. Many survivors also have additional legal needs that impact their divorce proceedings, such as housing, immigration, consumer or bankruptcy issues related to financial abuse. Without high-quality legal assistance, survivors are left with an unfair division of marital debts and assets, improper spousal support and/or child support, and custody arrangements that continue to harm the family. Any funds the survivor can secure are limited and quickly exhausted. Often this continues the cycle of financial abuse and results in survivors being economically devastated. It can also result in extremely unsafe custody arrangements for children, such as unsupervised or extended visitation with dangerous abusers.

Divorce cases—in particular, contested divorces when spouses cannot agree on key issues—regularly take over a year of litigation to resolve, and often several years. It is therefore imperative that funding for this critical initiative be continued and expanded to fund each of the three current provider organizations – Sanctuary for Families, The Legal Aid Society, and New York Legal Assistance Group – at the level of \$1,100,00 each, or \$3,300,00 million in total. Expanded funding will continue representation for some of NYC's most vulnerable survivors and their families and would additionally allow Sanctuary to expand services to the Bronx and Queens (currently services are focused on Manhattan, Brooklyn, and Staten Island).

Thank you to the General Welfare Committee and Chairperson Hudson for your attention to this important matter, and for giving an essential escape hatch for the many low-income New Yorkers who without these free legal services, would remain legally and financially tethered to their abusers.

Hi Council,

Thank you for your work on these very important budgetary considerations. My name is Henry Zhu Ph.D. I am a Licensed Clinical Psychologist in NY and I represent a non-profit, Save South Brooklyn Inc. which fights to make sure that South Brooklyn residents' concerns are heard. I have the unenviable task of fighting alongside concerned community members in South Brooklyn, who repeatedly get ignored by government agencies, and we get 0 compensation for the 1000s of hours spent. We've worked for the last year or so to monitor the bait & switch situation at 2134 Coyle Street. The problem started with the lies to the community, as pointed out by [Rafael Salamanca on March 25th, 2025](#) regarding the commitments made to develop affordable housing, and the development was programmatically changed behind the scenes (Transcript attached). Though this was a problem that was started by the previous Adams administration, it is the responsibility of the current administration to hear our concerns and to get to the root cause of the corruption happening here.

We've worked on a number of things this past year, all of which warrants the city to perform oversight on this project and the associated contracts.

- 1) We've partnered and engaged with Councilwoman Mercedes Narcisse and State Senator Sam Sutton to make sure that proper oversight is being done at city agencies. We also have the full support of neighboring districts and elected officials
 - a. We've encountered a lack of communication and oversight numerous times with the Dept. of Buildings, leading to 0 meetings despite our repeated outreach attempts.
 - b. We encountered a gas leak at 2134 Coyle which was only found out because FDNY and National Grid had to respond to the situation, shutting off gas and maintaining safety on the premises. The Dep. Of Buildings issued immediate "Stop Work" orders on the same day or day after citing multiple [Class 1 – Hazardous violations](#).
 - c. This was only reported by [Chinese newspapers](#) and despite outreach, other local news did not cover the story. It should not take a potential tragedy for the Dept. of Buildings to heed the many complaints filed and to heed the evidence we've found on improprieties of the developers and lack of safety and permits to proceed with work.
 - d. As such, we've engaged CM Mercedes and SS Sam Sutton to refer this case to the Dept. of Investigations, as we do not trust the DOB to handle the situation with the required scrutiny it requires. As of today, March 19th, the DOB has not

responded to requests to have a meeting, opting only to “do an investigation” and to “furnish a report,” which is unacceptable and insufficient for the community to feel safe.

- 2) We’ve outreached to the comptroller’s office to do multiple audits into the contract awarded by the city to the non-profit Westhab. We asked simple questions that should be within the purview of the office to explore especially as it directly relates to the budgets:
 - a. Was the contract obtained with a competitive and open RFP? Who else was given the opportunity to bid on this contract?
 - b. Were the proper NYC Procurement Policy Board rules followed for notifying appropriate parties of the contract awarded?
 - c. Was this good value for money spent by the city?
 - d. Was there and are there currently conflicts of interest that potentially corrupt the procurement process?

Here are some off-ramps that the entities involved should follow through on:

1) **Community Safety Responsibility:** The DOB owes the community the time and space to answer to concerns raised by 100s of members in the last year. The DOI needs to investigate why certain permits are being rubber stamped and a lack of proper application materials are being furnished before approval. We request a meeting with the DOB and request that the DOI take seriously our concerns.

2) **Fiscal Responsibility:** The Comptroller’s office stated that they are utilizing every lever to find savings. We’ve been in contact and have shared our concerns. We request a meeting with the comptroller’s office to discuss more.

3) **Mayoral Responsibility:** The previous Adams administration ignored South Brooklyn’s concerns for multiple years during his tenure. This is but one site and one situation which required the scrutiny of the previous administration and is the responsibility of the Mamdani Administration to oversee. If fiscal responsibility (by law you have to balance the budget) and an affordable housing agenda is truly to be realized, please meet with South Brooklyn to hear our concerns and our proposed solutions.

It’s imperative that NYC right-size its budget and look for waste, fraud, and inefficiencies to allow for more effective programs to flourish. **Based on recorded testimony** from DHS/DSS/HRA, non-profits, and community members alike on the Preliminary Budgets: General Welfare on March 17th, it’s clear that city money is being misallocated. Not enough money is going to longstanding, trustworthy, and efficient programs that serve communities, and especially a lack of funding is going to MWBEs (5% instead of the mandated 30% of funds)

which would significantly help communities of color. Not enough money is actually going to the administrative staff at DHS/DSS/HRA to make timely payments, maintain mental health staff employment rates that gets lost to attrition due to stress and burnout, and actually service the New Yorkers the agency purports to serve. We know as New Yorkers homeless people deserve dignity and deserve to have clean and quality housing. But more importantly, we know that getting individuals and families into sustainable and affordable housing is the best use of city finances in the short-term and in the long-term.

To the developer and the non-profit involved – you have a chance to do the right thing for the communities that you purport to be benefitting. [Slate Properties builds affordable housing.](#) [SD Builders \(Contractor integrated with Slate Properties\) needs to get proper permits and shore up their practices to protect workers.](#) [Westhab Inc manages and operates affordable housing.](#) Do better.

Rafael Salamanca to HPD Acting Commissioner Tigani, FY 2026 Preliminary Budget Hearing: Committee on Housing and Buildings (March 25, 2025), Transcript attached.–

Salamanca: I want to close with this.(...) I've been in communications with my colleague, Councilmember Narcisse, Mercedes Narcisse. I think what happened to her in this project at 2134 Coyle Avenue was irresponsible and wrong. Where we came here, we approved an affordable housing project where the community was not in favor of it. The councilwoman went out of her way to speak to community members to get them on board. She did that. We approved the landings, we rezoned it, and then the property owner and the developer did a switching bait on her and gave that property to someone else and now a shelter is being built there. This is how you lose trust in a community. And I hope that you find out who the lobbyist is, who the developer is, and who the general contractor was that signed in because I'm pretty sure that you did all the numbers.

Tigani: It's not an HPD project.

Salamanca: It was not an HPD project?

Tigani: No, this is my understanding. My understanding is that this was a mixed income project that didn't come through the HPD pipeline. There's a discretionary project, but they may be subject to either MIH or 421A, but it wasn't a subsidized HPD project.

Salamanca: Well, I hope that we take notice. HPD takes notice of who the developer was, the lobbyist was, and who the general contractor was, and that there's a resting on their record for doing a bait and switch on councilmember Narcisse and on this body. Thank you.”



Testimony to the NYC Council Committee on General Welfare
FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026

I am Katie Mui, Policy & Programs Manager at the Supportive Housing Network of New York, a membership organization representing over 200 nonprofits that develop and operate supportive housing across the state. As you know, supportive housing is one of the most effective tools to end homelessness and strengthen communities. However, the model faces mounting challenges as ongoing federal uncertainty, rising costs, and workforce shortages place increasing pressure on our providers.

We thank the Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to testify today. We are here to discuss the need for targeted investments to preserve the City's existing supportive housing stock, advancing the goal of 1,300 units preserved by 2030 in alignment with the [NYC 15/15 Reallocation Plan](#), which the Council has been in support of. Now it's time to put that plan into action.

We are asking the City to **invest \$44 million in capital funding and \$21.3 million in the expense budget to preserve 325 supportive housing units in FY27**. Our data show that at least 7,623 units are prime for preservation due to their age and precarious rental subsidies and service contracts. All of these units are at least 15 years old and use a combination of federal rental assistance and NYSSHP/HRA SRO support services funding, putting them at significant risk of closure.

Federal cuts to the Continuum of Care are imminent. Despite a Congressional stopgap solution and ongoing litigation, HUD has made very clear that they plan to reduce funding for permanent housing and there are many avenues that they can use to do so. While this disaster may unfold slowly and in phases, it means that nonprofits will lose their **operating** subsidies for thousands of units, which will destabilize programs and displace tenants. By investing in preservation right now, the City can mitigate this loss.

On the **services** side, the units we've identified are currently operating service contracts through NYSSHP/HRA SRO Support Services. This is the lowest funded service contract in existence. While the Network was successful in securing a \$17.8 million increase in last year's State budget, this still falls far below what is required to adequately address service needs:

- The new NYSSHP/HRA SRO Support Services base rate is \$3,600 per unit, which is still five times lower than NYC 15/15 service contract rate of \$17,500 per unit.
- This year, HRA received \$20.7 million from NYSSHP for the SRO Support Services program. We understand that HRA is still in the process of determining how the funds will be allocated and awards for SRO Support Services contracts have not yet been announced.
- There are 3,227 units of SRO Support Services that are at risk (due to no other source of funding) and are still waiting to hear whether they will receive the enhanced rate of \$6,000 per unit.

Allowing nonprofits to claim NYC 15/15 service contracts will address the significant gap in funding, so that providers can deliver the level of care needed.

The \$44 million in **capital** funding will preserve at least 325 units that are 15 years old or older to complete necessary renovations, meet energy efficiency standards, and offset rising maintenance and operating costs. This will also support the conversion of outdated SROs without private bathrooms or



kitchenettes into modernized studios that are more functional and desirable for formally homeless tenants.

Nonprofits are experiencing enormous financial strain. An analysis of Enterprise's and the National Equity Fund's NYC portfolios shows that 57% of properties have negative cashflow in 2024 (up from 22% in 2017), insurance costs have doubled over the same period, and rent collection has declined across the affordable housing sector. If the City does not address the significant preservation needs, we will have to contend with the reality of programs closing, residences shutting down, and tenants losing their homes. Proactive investment in preservation is crucial to the stability of nonprofits and formerly homeless New Yorkers.

We also fully support the following measures to strengthen the human services workforce:

- Fund the **3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA)** for City-contracted human services workers and pass **Intro 452, the Human Services Wage Equity Legislation, sponsored by Councilmember Stevens**.
- Raise the **baseline funding for the Peer Behavioral Workforce to \$6 million in FY2027**, a \$1.5 million increase from last fiscal year, to add peers with lived experiences to client-facing teams.

Supportive housing works when the system is fully funded and supported. We are at a critical moment where the sector must work in close partnership with the Council to ensure supportive housing remains a viable solution to the homelessness and housing crises in the city.

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING PRESERVATION



What is Supportive Housing?

- Affordable, permanent housing with voluntary on-site support services
- Helps people break the cycle of homelessness

Supportive Housing Models



Congregate

A building with on-site services; adds affordable units to the housing stock



Scattered site

Relies on scarce, unaffordable units in the private rental market

What is NYC 15/15?

- **2015:** NYC made a commitment to develop 15k total units over 15 years, split evenly between congregate and scattered site.
- **2023:** NYC awarded all congregate units, but only 17% of scattered site units due to challenges of the model. **In response, the Network proposed the NYC 15/15 Reallocation Plan.**
- **2025:** Mayor Adams announced the reallocation plan to develop and preserve 5,850 NYC 15/15 units by 2030.

The Need for Preservation:

The Westbourne, WSFSSH Case Study

Without preservation efforts, the city could **lose existing supportive housing units**. **Insufficient services and operating funding** and **threats to the Continuum of Care** put **aging buildings** at risk.



- Opened in 1987 on the Upper West Side.
- **128 SRO units** with shared bathrooms and kitchens, including **76 supportive housing units**.
- **Support services** funding via NYSSHP/HRA SRO at **\$2,964 per unit** which is **6x lower than the NYC 15/15 service rate** of \$17.5k per unit.
- Several units are **not receiving subsidy** due to **disrepair** in common areas.
- Seeking **preservation funding** for **substantial rehabilitation** and **conversion** to studio apartments, which are more sought after and appropriate for **older adults aging in place**.

Why Every Unit Must Be Preserved

10,134 households eligible for SH (LL3 FY25 report)



844 available SH units (LL135 12/25 report)

There are twelve eligible households for every available supportive housing unit in NYC.

More than **7,600 units in aging buildings** could be in **need of preservation** based on their precarious **rental subsidies** and **service contracts**.

FY2027 Budget Ask



Invest \$44M in Capital and \$21.3M in the Expense Budget to preserve 325 units in FY27



Counts towards the 1,300 unit goal (under NYC 15/15) by the end of CY30

SUPPORTIVE HOUSING NETWORK OF NY

BUDGETARY & LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES



BUDGET:

Invest \$44M in Capital and \$21.3M in the Expense Budget to preserve 325 units in FY2027

A total investment of \$65.3M to prevent existing supportive housing units from closure. The units preserved will count towards the preservation goal of 1,300 units under NYC 15/15 by the end of CY2030.

3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for human services workers

Continue to fund a 3% COLA for City-contracted human services workers. Additionally, support the Human Services Wage Floor Legislation to ensure a living wage.

\$6 million for Peer Behavioral Workforce in FY2027

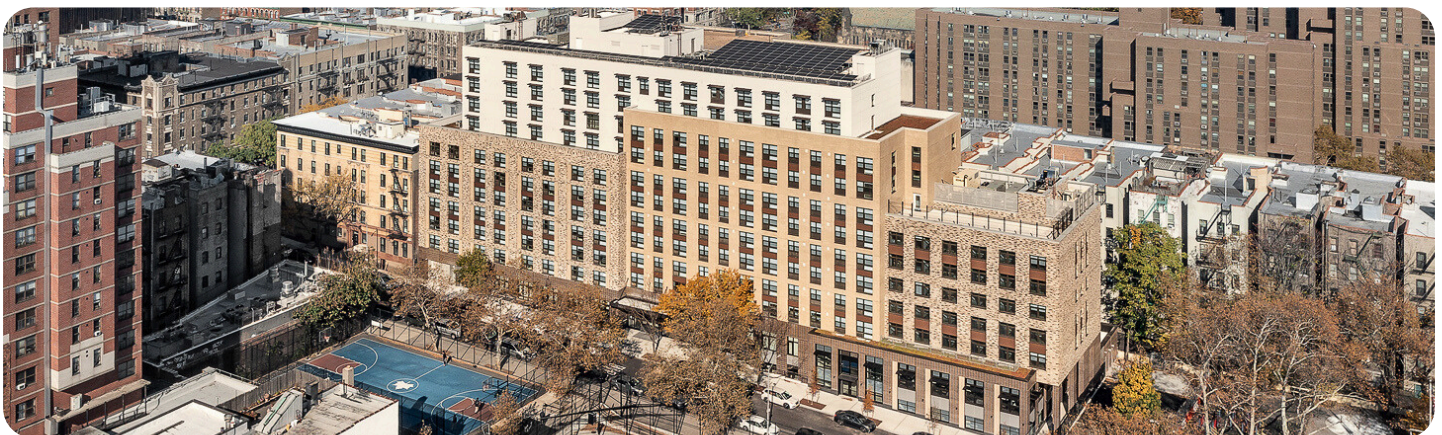
An additional \$1.5M investment from last year, totaling \$6M in FY27, to enable the peer workforce to expand the services they provide, better support existing behavioral health workers, and better track and improve outcomes.

LEGISLATION:

Intro 0452 – Council Member Althea Stevens

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to establishing wage requirements for city-contracted human services workers

The proposed legislation would require payment of prevailing wages to human service workers providing human services pursuant to City contracts. Specifically, the proposed bill would require human service providers to pay their human services employees no less than the prevailing wage.





TakeRoot Justice provides legal, participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic and social oppression.

Testimony Concerning:

Preliminary Budget Hearing – Committee on Finance
March 17, 2026

Presented Before:

Chair Crystal Hudson and the General Welfare Committee

Presented By:

Keriann Pauls (she/her)
Interim Executive Director
TakeRoot Justice
123 William Street 4th Floor New York, NY 10038
(646) 459-3029
kpauls@takerootjustice.org

To Chair Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee:

Thank you for your consideration of TakeRoot Justice's written testimony. We've had the privilege of partnering with you in your districts over the past years and look forward to continuing our work supporting your constituents and New Yorkers across the City.

TakeRoot provides legal, participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups to dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression. We approach this work holistically to meet the needs of our community partners and thus have a variety of practice areas including Immigrants' Rights, Tenants Rights, Workers Rights, Consumer Justice, Equitable Neighborhoods, Capacity Building, Participatory Research and Policy, and Coalition Coordination.

In this ongoing era of cruelty imposed by the Federal government, the work TakeRoot does to support organizing and coalition-building, is increasingly important. This essential legal services work is supported through several key City-wide Initiatives, such as Legal Services for the Working Poor and Low-Wage Worker Support – both administered by DSS/HRA.

As our organizational costs are rising, and the need for our services continues to increase, TakeRoot Justice is respectfully requesting a \$600,000 allocation for Legal Services for the Working Poor (LSWP) and a \$450,000 allocation for Low-Wage Worker Support (LWWS). Both initiatives fund essential legal services work for Immigrant New Yorkers, and communities most at risk during these times of increased oppression.

Legal Services for the Working Poor

TakeRoot Justice is one of the original five members of the Legal Services for the Working Poor (LSWP) Coalition that also includes CAMBA Legal Services, Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC), Mobilization for Justice and Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation. The Coalition was created with support from the City Council over 20 years ago to address the civil legal needs of working poor and other low-income New Yorkers whose income is slightly higher than the poorest New Yorkers, thus rendering them ineligible for free civil legal services. LSWP's services are critical in allowing working New Yorkers to maintain financial independence and preserving economic stability in communities across New York City. In Fiscal Year 2026, the LSWP initiative was funded in the City Council budget under Legal Services for Low-Income and Working-Class New Yorkers, which totaled \$9,255,000, with each of the five original LSWP Coalition members receiving \$455,000.

For FY27, TakeRoot Justice and the other members of the LSWP Coalition are requesting a \$600,000 allocation each from the City Council. This enhancement would support critical legal services and allow providers to deepen their impact in the practice areas of immigration, consumer, workers' rights and benefits law. Additionally, the impacts of cuts and actions on the Federal level significantly threaten the social safety net for working poor New Yorkers. We call on the City Council to make critical investments into legal services in FY 27, including the Legal Services for the Working Poor initiative. Added resources are needed to safeguard against misaligned Federal policy.

Low-Wage Worker Support

TakeRoot Justice also works in coalition with our allied legal services providers providing Low-Wage Worker Support (LWWS) employment legal services, including Catholic Migration Services (CMS) and Make the Road New York (MRNY) as part of the Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC).

LWWS is the only dedicated City funding that ensures that the City's low-wage and immigrant workers have redress from wage theft, sick leave and minimum pay violations, discrimination, retaliation and other workplace injustices. In the last few years, the funding has supported our work in representing immigrant workers with claims of sick leave violations, sick leave retaliation, and wage theft before the City's Department of Consumer and Worker Protection ("DCWP"). We request that the Council renew and increase LWWS funding, requesting \$450,000 for TakeRoot, and expanding the entire initiative to \$3 million in FY27. LWWS funding has remained the same for nearly 10 years, and an increase is needed to cover increasing costs and the escalating demand for services supporting immigrant workers.

The return on investment and impact of LWWS is tremendous. Since FY25, TakeRoot, CMS and MRNY have accomplished the following:

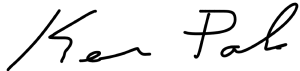
- Conducted 54 community trainings on workplace rights;
- Advised & represented NYC workers in 969 cases to recoup unpaid wages and enforce laws relating to paid sick leave, unemployment benefits, discrimination, and retaliation; and
- Obtained more than \$6.3 million in settlements and judgments for workers.

This is just the tip of the iceberg. Low-income New Yorkers across NYC continue to experience devastating workplace violations so the need for increased funding for this work is crucial. Enhancing LWWS in FY27 will undoubtedly result in greater recovery of damages for harmed workers, and heightened accountability for unjust employers.

Conclusion

We are grateful for the General Welfare Committee's oversight of the administrative agencies handling these initiatives, and for your ongoing support. Please do not hesitate to contact us with any follow up questions or discussion items.

Respectfully submitted,



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TakeRoot collaborates with 70+ groups organizing low-income, BIPOC and immigrant communities throughout NYC to serve 2100+ New Yorkers per year and share \$20 million+ in support for work toward racial, social and economic justice. We are proud to work with the following organizations:

City Council Must Renew and Expand Low Wage Worker Support for Fiscal Year 2027



For FY27, NYC needs the Council to renew and expand the Low Wage Worker Support (LWWS) initiative to \$3 million to support vital legal services to New York City's low wage workers.

The Citywide Immigrant Legal Empowerment Collaborative (CILEC) is comprised of legal service providers and community-based organizations that work throughout New York City. Through organizing and legal representation, CILEC members TakeRoot Justice, Catholic Migration Services, and Make the Road New York have helped strengthen low-income immigrant communities through the citywide LWWS initiative.

LWWS enables nonprofit legal service organizations to provide thousands of low-wage workers across NYC with a range of free employment-related legal services, including individualized legal advice and full legal representation in pre-litigation settlement negotiations, unemployment insurance hearings, and individual and group cases before state and federal courts and administrative agencies.

LWWS is unique: it is the only city funding stream dedicated to fighting wage theft, unsafe working conditions, and workplace rights violations. It is also unique because it funds community-based, holistic legal services and advocacy that provide low-wage workers access to economic justice.

Since FY25, as a result of our LWWS funding, we've been able to:

- **Conduct 54 community trainings** on workplace rights;
- Advised & represented NYC workers in **969 cases** to recoup unpaid wages and enforce laws relating to paid sick leave, unemployment benefits, discrimination, and retaliation; and
- **Obtained more than \$6.3 million** in settlements and judgments for workers.

LWWS is necessary: nearly \$1 billion in wages are stolen from low-wage workers in New York City every year, with devastating consequences for low-income communities, and the City's economy as a whole.

In FY26, LWWS was awarded to TakeRoot Justice, Catholic Migration Services, Make the Road New York, Legal Aid Society, Legal Services NYC, NICE, NYCOSH, NYLAG, and Third Sector New England.



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Council Member Crystal Hudson, Chair**

FY2027 Preliminary Budget Hearing

**Submitted by Anita Kwok, Policy Analyst
March 17, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Hudson and members of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare for convening today's Preliminary Budget hearing.

United Neighborhood Houses of New York (UNH) is a policy and social change organization with a mission to promote and strengthen settlement houses' neighborhood-based, multi-service approach to improving the lives of low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. Settlement houses provide multi-generational services designed to support individuals, families, and communities. Settlement house programs build bonds within and between communities and create opportunities for advocacy and social change. UNH was founded in 1919 by settlement house leaders who recognized the strength in their collective voices to drive important social reforms. With this goal, UNH was tasked to coordinate the efforts of settlement houses; document their shared learning and experiences; and increase the influence and impact of settlement houses for the greater good of New York communities. UNH has successfully advocated for fair and affordable housing, child labor laws, inclusive policies and services for immigrants, adult literacy education, public recreation space, quality child-care and after-school programs, job training, programs serving older adults, access to the arts and to healthy food, and more.

Food insecurity remains a top community need for New Yorkers. With rising housing costs and federal changes to SNAP, settlement houses continue to see an escalation in demand for food assistance across the five boroughs. In 2023, 14.5% of New Yorkers reported food insecurity—meaning they sometimes or often didn't have enough to eat—compared to 10.7% in 2019.¹ Roughly 1 in 5 New York children (19%) were food insecure in 2023.² Food insecurity falls disproportionately along racial lines: 26% of Hispanic New Yorkers, 25% of Black New Yorkers, and 9% of white New Yorkers reported food insecurity. Noncitizens are nearly twice as likely to be food-insecure as U.S.-born and naturalized citizens.³ Food is a basic human right, and all New Yorkers deserve equal access to vital food assistance, regardless of their immigration status.

¹ [Food Insecurity among the Overall Population in New York](#) - Feeding America

² [Food Insecurity among the Child Population in New York](#) - Feeding America

³ [Food Insecurity Disparities Among Immigrants in the U.S.](#) - American Journal of Preventive Medicine

Recent federal policy changes, such as expanded Able-Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) work requirements and new restrictions on immigrant eligibility under H.R.1, will push more New Yorkers to utilize emergency food assistance at community-based organizations. Settlement houses address hunger through benefits enrollment, pantry services, community outreach, and referrals. Across the settlement house network, nearly 70,000 individuals received support with public benefits enrollment (including through NYC Benefits, the Hunger Prevention and Nutrition Assistance Program, and the Nutrition Outreach and Education Program) last year. Still, resources and government support remain sparse.

Additionally, FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program funding has not resumed since the January 2025 funding freeze, which significantly reduces community-based organizations' ability to provide food assistance and eviction prevention services. Settlement houses are seeing a significant rise in pantry demand with long waitlists. For example, one settlement house food pantry received 90 new registrations, above the 520 community members they typically serve. This program was a recipient of the FEMA Emergency Food and Shelter Program, but that program saw its funding frozen in January 2025 and the funding has not yet resumed. Without FEMA funding, this organization has been forced to reduce their food pantry days for over a year.

Our testimony at today's hearing will focus on the need to strengthen New York City's emergency food assistance programs amidst the rise of increased food insecurity and federal policy changes, including investments in Community Food Connection, the Civic Impact Fund, the NYC Benefits program, actions to address SNAP skimming, and eligibility gaps in SNAP coverage.

Community Food Connection (CFC)

Settlement houses indicate that food insecurity is one of the top community concerns, and that those needs continue to grow rapidly. A 2023 survey⁴ of more than a 1,000 settlement house families within the UNH network found that food insecurity remains widespread. A third of surveyed parents said that they visited a food bank in the past seven days. Nearly one in four (23 percent) respondents reported that they were "sometimes unable to afford food for their children," with an additional 10 percent reporting they were "often" or "always" unable to do so.

Today, demand for emergency food remains at higher levels than ever before, with many New Yorkers who are grappling with meeting their basic needs. Federal funding threats and cuts to programs like SNAP are leaving settlement houses without the necessary tools to respond, while placing greater strain on other emergency food programs. With CFC providers seeing over 37.2 million visits in FY25 and distributing 47.1 million pounds of food⁵ New York City's emergency food system is under unprecedented strain.

The Community Food Connection (CFC) program, formerly known as the Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP), plays a vital role in CBOs' efforts to combat food insecurity. Through strategic partnerships with local businesses, farmers, and dedicated volunteers,

⁴ [Settlement House American Rescue Plan \(SHARP\) Wave 2 Report](#)

⁵ [NYC Mayor's Office of Food Policy Marks Major Milestones to Expand Food Access and Advance Health, Equity, and Sustainability Across the City's Food System](#)

providers have expanded the program's reach and improved the quality and variety of food available to those in need.

Several settlement houses in UNH's network receive CFC funding. For example, WHEDco's weekly Community Food Pantry serves approximately 65 households per week and approximately 3,400 individuals per year. Project Hospitality uses CFC funding for their pantry, mobile pantry and community (soup) kitchen. Kingsbridge Heights Community Center has used CFC funding for bulk food items, pantry equipment, and a new pilot program to provide pantry clients with grocery gift cards. Overall, providers have emphasized the critical importance of continued or increased CFC food funding to the CBO's ability to address the growing need for emergency food resources in their respective neighborhoods.

In the FY27 Preliminary Budget, Mayor Mamdani announced a large, \$54 million investment in the CFC program by bringing the total baselined investment up to \$74 million. Last year, one-time funds supplemented this program, and it is currently funded at a total of \$59.9 million. **A total investment of \$100 million total is needed to sustain and grow CFC in this time of deep need**, which will allow providers to allocate resources and support the growing needs of food-insecure residents. This involves securing funding for procuring fresh produce, addressing staffing, and enhancing community outreach efforts. This increase will also address the inefficiencies found in using third-party vendors, particularly in the procurement of kosher and halal items, by allowing for spending flexibility and direct purchasing.

Civic Impact Funding

The Civic Impact Fund, under NYC Service, provides up to \$10,000 for nonprofit and community-based organizations in TRIE-designated high-need neighborhoods to expand volunteer-driven services addressing food access, safety, and mental health. Organizations use this funding for staff time, supplies, volunteer stipends, and training needs. In 2024, [CIF recipients](#) engaged 2,792 volunteers, served 122,584 residents, and distributed 444,385 pounds of food. **In the FY27 Budget, the City should invest \$13 million in NYC Service's Civic Impact Fund, which funds nonprofits to expand their volunteer infrastructure, which in turn will help those newly subject to federal SNAP work or volunteer requirements.**

The federal administration has implemented new barriers to accessing SNAP that requires Able Bodied Adults Without Dependents (ABAWD) recipients to meet specific work requirements, which is expected to impact hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers. These work requirements can also be met through community service or volunteer hours. Settlement houses are eager to assist New Yorkers who are unable to access SNAP benefits that they could previously access, and many have volunteer opportunities available, thus offering a win-win solution that also benefits the community. In fact, last year 13,535 people volunteered with UNH member settlement houses. Still, it takes staff time and money to manage volunteers, and the City should provide modest support to organizations who are providing these volunteer opportunities.

Investing in the CIF program presents an opportunity for SNAP recipients who are ABAWD to continue receiving SNAP benefits by meeting their work requirements through volunteering at organizations across the City. A \$13 million investment in the FY27 Budget would expand the CIF program to include more community-based organizations and larger grant sizes, allowing CBOs and settlement houses to expand or fund their volunteer programs.

NYC Benefits

Settlement houses and community-based organizations play a vital role in bridging the gap between the government and the community. NYC Benefits – an HRA program established in 2022 – formalizes that relationship by supporting community outreach and benefits enrollment in neighborhoods across the City. Settlement houses in UNH’s network operate 40% of the NYC Benefits contracts (15 programs) and report tremendous results. **The City must sustain and invest in the NYC Benefits program in the FY27 Budget to ensure providers are able to continue their essential work.**

Through this program, CBOs deploy dedicated staff members to help their community access benefits such as SNAP, cash assistance, affordable housing, Medicaid and tax assistance, among others; with a holistic approach that addresses various areas of need. This past year, NYC Benefits programs also received dedicated funding for child care outreach, which has been essential in getting families signed up for child care programs, and must continue.

Having local, in person, one-to-one support for an individual navigating benefits applications results in fewer application errors and more successfully completed applications, as well as greater outreach in communities, thus increasing the number of people receiving the benefits they are entitled to. Many NYC Benefits grantees report working with individuals to submit new applications for various benefits, meaning a greater utilization of state and federal benefits and offering more economic security for families across New York City.

A key strength of NYC Benefits lies in the collaborative processes between CBOs and HRA, which allows for CBOs to have accurate and up to date information about trends in benefits enrollment, such as how to respond to federal changes around SNAP eligibility. It also allows HRA to have feedback about application processes, as well as to troubleshoot on particularly complex cases. This program has shown HRA’s ability to be nimble and respond to emergent needs, and collaborating with CBOs with geographic and population-specific focuses allows it to reach different populations and offer a broader range of support. This collaborative focus is a great strength and potential model for other human services programs moving forward.

Some program successes include:

- BronxWorks was able to serve over 800 people and help submit more than 680 applications for services like child care subsidies, food stamps and immigration services in 2023.
- Sunnyside Community Services’ engagement with NYC Benefits has been pivotal in addressing unique challenges faced by families with mixed immigration statuses. Client support includes immediate relief through One-Shot Deals, SNAP, or Cash Assistance, in addition to assistance in navigating long-term needs like applying for public housing, entering housing lotteries, and securing benefits for eligible children.
- WHEDco navigated a complex hospital bill for a severely low-income 67-year old client, who was mistakenly billed after his surgery, during a time period when he was no longer covered by Medicaid. The case manager assisted him in completing the appropriate form and submitted it with income documentation, resulting in the bill being cancelled.

It is crucial that all NYC Benefits grantees have their contracts sustainably funded into FY27 and beyond. The current list of contracted CBOs has proven that having a wide pool of providers gives the program a broader geographical reach, helps support specific populations with specific language and cultural needs, and provides several touch points throughout the City.

Address SNAP Skimming

Over the last several years, SNAP skimming has emerged as a top challenge facing low-income New Yorkers. UNH's settlement house members have increasingly raised concerns that this is persistently occurring in communities, especially for older adults and those who rely on EBT card benefits to feed their families, and there is little recourse to address the problem. UNH strongly supports Governor Hochul's Executive Budget proposal to transition to EBT chip card technology to address SNAP skimming, and further supports a \$20 million State investment to create a SNAP skimming victims compensation fund to support New Yorkers who have had their benefits stolen. **We urge the City Council to support our State Budget advocacy this month to secure EBT chip cards and a SNAP Skimming Victims Compensation Fund in the final FY26-27 State Budget, and to support Intro 512 (Zhuang) to help track skimming cases.**

Skimming is the practice of individuals using devices and attaching them to point-of-sale (POS) machines or PIN pads to steal card numbers and other information from credit, debit, and EBT cards. The process of skimming retrieves data from the magnetic strip on an individual's card, which is then used to record the cardholder's PIN.

This has had a devastating impact on families such as skipping meals until the next grocery pay period, and leaving them without funds to buy essential groceries and other necessities. Skimming exacerbates food insecurity and financial stress for already vulnerable households, making it harder for them to meet their basic needs and maintain stability.

The scope of the problem in New York is stunningly large: The [USDA reports](#) that New Yorkers have received almost \$51 million in replacement SNAP benefits between 2023 and the end of 2024. The cost of this problem is likely even higher, since many families do not report the crimes. In a recent [Propel survey](#) of New York State SNAP recipients, over 2,500 of the almost 12,000 survey respondents reported having their SNAP benefits stolen within the past year. Nearly 40 percent of theft victims did not file for reimbursement, with the majority reporting that they weren't aware refunds were an option. The cost of this problem is likely higher, since many families do not report the crimes. With fewer recipients reporting skimming thefts due to the federal government no longer providing compensation funds, it is nearly impossible to have an accurate grasp on the amount of funds being skimmed.

UNH has been urging Governor Hochul to transition EBT cards with more secure chip card technology and we are grateful for the inclusion of chip cards in her Executive Budget Proposal. According to Visa, EMV chip cards decreased fraud by 87 percent from 2015-2019 because they have higher amounts of encryption technology on the chip. Several states have taken action to replace the cards on their own, including California, Maryland, Massachusetts, and Oklahoma. California saw an [83% decline](#) in skimming fraud when it implemented the chip cards in 2024-2025. We are grateful that New York will be the next state to make this simple and impactful change.

In addition, UNH has been advocating for the State to establish a compensation fund of approximately \$20 million so those who have had their benefits stolen can receive replacement funds until the chip cards can be implemented, as the federal government was providing until December 2024. Many families and individuals benefitted from the federal government providing replacement funds, but now there is no recourse if someone has their benefits stolen. The absence of reimbursement funds means if someone has their benefits stolen, they cannot afford to purchase food. People may turn to food pantries, though these options are limited as emergency food demand has been rising. Many people are certainly going hungry due to this crime of skimming. We urge the City Council to support this State Budget ask in the final weeks of budget negotiations.

UNH supports Council Member Susan Zhuang's Intro 512 which would create a 311 complaint category for those who have had their SNAP benefits skimmed. With the federal government ceasing to provide compensation funds on skimmed SNAP benefits in December 2024, both clients and benefits access staff at community-based organizations have felt less compelled to report theft. Staff at CBOs are often overworked, and reporting SNAP theft may feel futile if there is no reimbursement available for their clients. As a result, many cases go unreported. Intro 512 addresses this gap by creating a centralized procedure to track SNAP theft, providing government officials and advocates with a more accurate scope of the crime. Current data does not fully capture the scope and UNH is concerned that government officials do not have a clear understanding on how widespread skimming is and the urgency to address the issue.

Create a Statewide "SNAP4All" program

At the State level, UNH is advocating to create a ["SNAP4All" program](#), which would utilize state funds to provide food benefits to low-income New Yorkers who are currently ineligible for SNAP due solely to their immigration status. Federal law limits SNAP participation to U.S. citizens and certain lawfully present non-citizens, while roughly 673,000 New Yorkers are excluded from SNAP for no other reason than their immigration status. Last year's federal spending bill went even further and struck existing SNAP eligibility for refugees, asylees, and victims of trafficking, representing 41,000 New Yorkers. Every New Yorker deserves the basic human right to food, regardless of their citizenship status. Investing in SNAP4All ensures every New Yorker has the food they urgently need.

The NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council recently [recommended](#) the creation of a state food benefit for households with children that are ineligible for SNAP based on citizenship status. Several states have recently enacted similar programs, including California, Illinois, Maine, Minnesota, and Washington. SNAP4All is detailed in legislation S.9033/A.6632 (Senator Rivera and Assemblymember González-Rojas).

We are grateful that the previous Council expressed support for this concept through the adoption of Resolution 57 of 2024, which calls on the state to advance this policy for older adults. **We urge the Council to support our ongoing efforts to create a SNAP4All program at the State level, and to explore new ways the City can step in and support these populations.**

Thank you for your time. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at akwok@unhny.org.



**Volunteers
of America®**
GREATER NEW YORK

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARINGS MARCH 17, 2026

Introduction and Thanks

My name is Catherine Trapani, Assistant Vice President of Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Hudson and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

About Us

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's oldest and largest human service providers, founded 130 years ago and serving more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester and thousands more via our Operation Backpack® initiative. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline. VOA-GNY is a member of Homeless Services United (HSU), The Supportive Housing Network of New York, the Human Services Council (HSC), and the Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC).

Background:

VOA-GNY has been providing shelter services to homeless families since 1991 when DHS first began contracting with nonprofits to do so. We operate five DHS transitional housing programs for families in the New York metropolitan area which serve 456 families, three DHS “emergency” shelters serving an additional 244 families, seven HRA Domestic Violence programs serving families and individuals fleeing domestic violence, two DHS adult women’s shelters, one DHS adult men’s shelter, a DHS safe haven for unsheltered individuals, and a DHS Street to Home Pilot program which utilizes a Housing First approach to place individuals

experiencing unsheltered street homelessness directly into supportive housing within 1 to 2 weeks of first meeting them.

Thank you to Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee for your unwavering leadership and commitment to all New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty, and for your unquestioning dedication to nonprofit providers like VOA-GNY who have answered the city's call to help our neighbors stabilize and thrive within our communities.

VOA-GNY urges Speaker Menin and Chair Hudson and the entire City Council to protect and expand the human services safety net for vulnerable New Yorkers at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness and housing instability. This Budget is an opportunity to build upon what the Council knows works as well as take bold action to address longstanding issues leftover from prior administrations.

Full Implementation of CityFHEPS Laws

The Council rightfully passed a comprehensive bill package, Local Laws 99 to 102 of 2023, to widen access to CityFHEPS, our City's most effective tool to reduce homelessness and maintain permanent housing. Today, VOA-GNY stood with members of the Homes Can't Wait coalition on the steps of City Hall to urge the administration to fully implement these laws without further delay.

Through the foresight of the Council, CityFHEPS would be able to help tenants at risk of eviction to stay in their homes regardless of whether they were previously in shelter. These laws would also help survivors of domestic violence and runaway and homeless youth to find permanent housing without forcing them into DHS shelters to qualify for a voucher. Families and single adults in our DHS shelters would be able to find permanent housing, as a significant number either work too few hours or earn too much to qualify for a voucher but too little to afford rent. An analysis of our own shelter portfolio revealed that at any given time, as many as two-thirds of our residents are not eligible for a subsidy, leaving them few options to successfully move beyond shelter. The laws passed by the Council would remove the tightrope walk our clients must walk for permanent housing, and **full implementation of CityFHEPS is critical to protecting affordability within New York City.**

Preserving and Strengthening the Human Services Safety

To ensure that the City and its contracted non-profit human services providers can administer timely and high-quality services for New Yorkers in crisis, **VOA-GNY urges the Council to use your Budget Authority to prioritize preserving and expanding headcount for DSS/DHS/HRA safety net services and non-profit providers.** While there could be cost savings found by

eliminating vacant positions in City agencies, we caution against reducing vacancies for the Department of Social Services in roles where government is already struggling to meet its most basic mandates with limited staff capacity. Given longstanding challenges vulnerable New Yorkers face accessing public benefits, rental assistance, and senior services, as well as continued fiscal delays which are draining the health of New York City's non-profit safety net, we cannot afford to lose ground.

We urge the Council to prioritize preserving and expanding headcount for the following:

- **HRA staff** that conduct eligibility screening and interviews, review and approve applications and issue payments **for public benefits including ongoing Cash Assistance and SNAP, one-shot deals, and ongoing rental assistance.** While HRA has made strides towards compliance with Federal guidelines for timely provision of SNAP benefits, our clients in shelter continue to experience delays with public benefits rebudgets which delay processing of their CityFHEPS applications. HRA will also need staff to help SNAP recipients meet stricter work requirements implemented by H.R. 1, including processing paperwork throughout the year to document hourly compliance. Implementation of the CityFHEPS laws will also need more HRA staff capacity to process the increased number of vouchers.
- **HRA Adult Protective Services staff** that determine eligibility and provide **services for elderly and extremely vulnerable New Yorkers.** In line with APS' 95% denial rate as confirmed¹ by HRA, our supportive housing programs need to refer tenants multiple times before APS approves them for services, if at all. APS needs more staffing to keep up with the spike in referrals citywide. Our staff report that APS staff sometimes come after business hours to conduct preliminary assessments, when our case workers are not on-site to help engage the tenant. IBO's recent report reinforces this staffing deficiency, finding a significant exodus of experienced staff with a high number of new staff leaving within a year.²
- **DSS and DHS Fiscal Staff, and Mayors Office of Contract Services (MOCS) staff to address long-standing reimbursement backlogs for shelter providers.** As of June 30th, 2025, **Volunteers of America-Greater New York was owed approximately \$40 million for services rendered through our city contracts as far back as Fiscal Year 20, with the lion's share owed by DHS (\$18.7 million) and HRA (\$10 million).** As a result, VOA-GNY was forced to rely on our private line of credit and incurred non-reimbursable interest costs to bridge the gap created by City reimbursement delays. **VOA-GNY spent 1.08 million for FY25, and budgeted \$1.14 million for FY26,** money we could use to do a lot

¹ David Brand, Gothamist, NYC Agency Meant to Help Vulnerable Adults Rejected 95% of People Referred for Aid, April 16th, 2025 <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-agency-meant-to-help-vulnerable-adults-rejected-95-of-people-referred-for-aid>

² NYC Independent Budget Office, Adult Protective Services: Higher Demand and Fewer Staff, November 10th, 2025, <https://www.ibo.nyc.gov/content/publications/2025-november-aps-higher-demand-and-fewer-staff>

of good, if not for the City's fiscal delays.

Improving DHS Shelter Conditions and Services

We seek the Council's support in calling on the Administration to revisit the DHS model budget, to right-size programmatic funding for DHS' aging shelter portfolio. The DHS model budget which was created in FY18, sought to bring up the most underfunded contracts within DHS' portfolio, but budgets have remained flat since then, lacking annual increases and were not indexed to inflation. While budgets have remained fixed, our costs have only increased, with more needed for rent, utilities, health insurance, and competitive wages. A comprehensive examination of the City's 400 plus shelter programs is needed to assess and update rates to ensure access to quality food, robust services, dignified living spaces, and high-quality care to help get people back on their feet. Without additional investments, shelters face a starvation cycle which sees headcount stretched thin and services reduced to make do with less.

In addition to flat budgets, **unfunded mandates from local legislation make the work even less sustainable and must be avoided at all costs.** Without additional funding to comply with **Local Law 35** which went into effect in July 2025, **VOA-GNY had to reduce headcount for our Clinical Care Coordinators (CCCs) across four of our Family with Children shelters from thirteen LMSWs down to six to increase their salaries, while also doubling their caseloads from 1:25 to 1:50, with the scope and intensity of tasks remaining largely unchanged.**

Int 452-2026

VOA-GNY supports this legislation to establish wage requirements for city-contracted human services workers. Our staff work tirelessly and deserve to be paid at rates that comport with industry standards and match their government counterparts. The contract funding and budgets **MUST** reflect this and allow us to pay our workforce the compensation they deserve.

Even though VOA-GNY increased our CCC's starting salaries to \$70,000, we still see staff leave within two months of gaining their license, as LMSWs can make ten to twenty thousand more in other social work settings. Likewise, our LCSW Social Work Supervisors are also hard to attract and retain, as starting LCSWs can earn forty thousand more in other settings. The City must invest in our human services workforce to value their work and help us to retain dedicated, compassionate front-line heroes who save lives every day.

Conclusion

Thank you, Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare, for your unwavering leadership and support of New Yorkers experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and the non-profit homeless services sector. By ensuring existing homeless services are sufficiently resourced and expanding housing resources targeted to our lowest-income

residents, the City can realize its affordability agenda for all New Yorkers.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Catherine Trapani. For more information, please contact me at ctrapani@voa-gny.org



TESTIMONY OF VOLUNTEERS OF LEGAL SERVICE
New York City Council Committee on General Welfare: Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2026

Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS) supports New Yorkers with comprehensive, free legal advice, representation, and education. Through our legal team and robust pro bono program, we provide free legal services on a range of civil issues for communities throughout New York City. VOLS' core free legal programs are:

- VOLS Benefits Law Project, providing legal support to individuals seeking public benefits;
- VOLS Senior Law Project, providing incapacity and life-planning services for older adults, with initiatives focusing on veterans, Chinese American, LGBTQ+, and Latine older adults;
- VOLS Microenterprise Project, offering transactional support for small business owners;
- VOLS Incarcerated Mothers Law Project, offering family law services for incarcerated mothers; and
- VOLS Immigration Project, supporting young people with immigration legal services.

Our testimony focuses on the work of our Benefits Law Project and the challenges that we face when contracting with the City of New York to provide free civil legal services to New Yorkers.

Benefits Law Project

VOLS' Benefits Law Project helps to ensure that New Yorkers receive the housing benefits they are entitled to so that they can continue to remain in their homes and avoid displacement and homelessness. In particular, the Benefits Law Project assists low-income older and disabled adult New Yorkers to access the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) or Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) under the New York City Rent Freeze Program.

The NYC Department of Finance's 2025 Report on the New York City Rent Freeze Program found that while an estimated 158,214 households were potentially eligible for SCRIE/DRIE, 67,132 received benefits (approximately 42.2%). There are many barriers to older adults accessing this benefit: understanding eligibility criteria, knowledge of the programs, access to technology, navigating complex applications, fear of identifying immigration status, language barriers and social stigma. As poverty rates rise in the city, the need for this program to freeze rent prices and maintain housing for older and disabled adults is critical.

Our team assesses eligibility, helps clients apply for benefits, renew, and recertify existing benefits, and appeal denials of benefits. If a loved one who passed away received

SCRIE/DIRE, the Benefits Law Project will assess remaining family members' eligibility for a benefits takeover and assist with applications. The Benefits Law Project also assesses eligibility for increased benefits and helps with applications where there has been a loss of household income that entitles a client to a redetermination.

In addition, the Benefits Law Project recently launched a new on-site, benefits-focused Housing Court Initiative at Manhattan Housing Court to reach pro se litigants who are in court for a pending proceeding. The primary reason low-income New Yorkers are evicted from their homes is because they are behind on their rent payments. Yet, NYC has a variety of public benefits programs designed to assist in maintaining housing. At the housing benefits legal information table, VOLS' legal team educates tenants on the housing benefits that are available in order to help them pay rent and prevent their eviction. During follow-up services, our team assesses eligibility and advises on additional benefits that tenants may be unaware of. The Initiative is providing legal information, advice, education, and representation on applying for/maintaining benefits such as Section 8 (project-based benefits and vouchers administered by NYC Housing, Preservation, and Development (HPD) and NYC Housing Authority (NYCHA), Family Housing Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS), City-FHEPS, Mitchell-Lama, SCRIE/DRIE, Shelter benefits, NYCHA (public housing non-Section 8 benefits), and HIV/AIDS Services Administration.

With poverty rates and homelessness on the rise, programs such as the VOLS Benefits Law Project are essential for ensuring that New Yorkers can remain in their homes and communities. We call upon City Council to ensure that the FY27 budget provides financial support for legal services programs that help New Yorkers access the benefits to which they are entitled, including \$150,000 in support of the VOLS Benefits Law Project.

Nonprofit Contracting

For legal services organizations such as VOLS, contracts with the City of New York represent an important source of funding. VOLS is grateful for the city funding that we have received to date to provide free civil legal services to New Yorkers. However, the process of executing these contracts and the timeline for receiving payment places a significant strain on our small team. It is not unusual for our team to receive instructions to prepare budgets and invoices one way and then once submitted to be told to resubmit documents in a different way. In addition, data requests have grown more cumbersome over time and the data requested does not meaningfully represent the legal services that VOLS provides. Our team spends hundreds of hours each year responding to requests in connection with city contracts. The time spent responding to these requests pulls the team away from focusing on the delivery of our program model. It also takes a year on average to receive payment and sometimes even longer, which



places significant pressure on VOLS cash flow. To date, we still have not been fully paid for a Department of Social Services contract from FY25.

We are grateful to City Council for their continued support of free civil legal services for New Yorkers. As part of your commitment to the legal services community, we call upon the Council to prioritize the timely execution and payment of city contracts so that legal services organizations can continue to serve New Yorkers in need.



**Testimony Submitted by
Alyson Rosenthal, Chief Program Officer
West Side Campaign Against Hunger
General Welfare Committee, April 17, 2026**

Chair Hudson and members of the General Welfare Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and for your continued commitment to addressing food insecurity in New York City.

My name is Alyson Rosenthal, and I am the Chief Program Officer and Registered Dietitian at the West Side Campaign Against Hunger (WSCAH), an anti-hunger organization that, for 47 years, has been focused on providing access to healthy, fresh food and direct benefits enrollment to New Yorkers in need. WSCAH is one of the founding members of The Roundtable, Allies for Food Access. The Roundtable is a coalition of nine of the largest and most innovative emergency food providers in New York City: Citymeals on Wheels, Holy Apostles Soup Kitchen, Met Council, New York Common Pantry, Part of the Solution (POTS), Project Hospitality, St. John's Bread and Life, The Campaign Against Hunger, and West Side Campaign Against Hunger.

Together, our members serve communities in all five boroughs and collectively support a network of more than 800 pantries, soup kitchens, and feeding providers that feed more than one million New Yorkers each year.

I am speaking today on behalf of West Side Campaign Against Hunger and The Roundtable, which works every day on the frontlines of hunger relief while also collaborating to strengthen the city's broader emergency food system through strategic purchasing, shared resources, and policy advocacy.

As the Council considers priorities for the upcoming fiscal year, we urge you to continue investing in frontline emergency food providers' innovative, community-based solutions that address food insecurity at scale and strengthen the emergency food system that so many New Yorkers rely on.

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DIGNITY. COMMUNITY. CHOICE.

First, we strongly support establishing \$100 million as a permanent annual baseline for Community Food Connection (CFC). CFC is the backbone of the city's emergency food network, providing flexible funding that allows more than 500 food pantries and community kitchens to serve neighbors experiencing food insecurity. Baseline funding would provide stability for providers facing rising food costs, growing demand, and ongoing economic uncertainty. We also encourage the Council and Administration to review and reform CFC eligibility and screening criteria, so resources are directed to the highest-need communities using the Mayor's Office of Food Policy data guidelines.

Second, we encourage the City Council to strengthen collaboration and accountability across the city's food policy infrastructure. Establishing a dedicated City Council Committee on Food would elevate food policy as a citywide priority and ensure consistent oversight of programs addressing hunger and food access. At a time when food insecurity continues to affect hundreds of thousands of households, this leadership is essential.

Finally, we urge the city to broaden leadership within FeedNYC to include frontline emergency food providers. Those working directly with communities experiencing hunger bring essential expertise that can help guide equitable resource allocation, improve transparency, and ensure programs reflect real community needs.

At The Roundtable, we see every day how vital community-based food providers are to New York City's safety net. With \$186 billion in cuts to the SNAP program over the next decade, the federal government has enacted the largest reduction to our nutrition safety net in history, leaving hundreds of thousands of New York families struggling to put food on the table. With committed, sustained investment to frontline providers, we can build a more equitable and resilient food system that ensures all New Yorkers have reliable access to nutritious food.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to supporting New Yorkers facing food insecurity.

Alyson Rosenthal, MS, RD
Chief Program Officer, West Side Campaign Against Hunger
The Roundtable NYC

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We are experiencing a Hunger Crisis. Even prior to the new federal administration taking office, 1 in 8 New Yorkers were experiencing food insecurity, and that was up from 1 in 10 the year prior. The number of people seeking food from our organization is at an all-time high and we need the City's help.

Today I was joined by dozens of emergency feeding organizations on the steps of city hall urging you all and the mayor to increase the community food connections program (CFC) from \$57 to \$100 million dollars. Collectively, the emergency food programs in NYC serve over 3 million hungry New Yorkers annually. **Over 3 million New Yorkers rely on emergency food programs to feed their families.**

The current proposed budget of \$57 million is simply not enough to meet the growing demand for food.

SNAP cuts are looming, Federal Budgets have been cut, grocery prices are continuing to rise. We need our City to step up. The CFC program budget needs to be significantly increased to 100 million and that money needs to be baselined into the budget. We urge you to do the right thing and increase CFC to 100 million.

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Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

**Testimony of Win (Formerly Women in Need, Inc.) for the New York City Council
Committee on General Welfare Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17th, 2026**

Thank you, Chair Hudson, and the esteemed members of the Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to submit testimony on the Fiscal Year 2027 budget. My name is Jade Vasquez, and I am the Director of Policy and Research at Win, the largest provider of shelter and supportive housing to families with children in New York City and the nation. We operate 16 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Each night, nearly 7,000 people call Win “home,” including 3,600 children.

Today, as our city faces its worst affordability crisis, more than 100,000 New Yorkers, including 33,000 children, are experiencing homelessness. However, this year, as we welcome a new Mayor and Council with a strong affordability agenda, we believe that New York City can lead the nation in passing a progressive budget that centers the needs of working people and marginalized communities.

As the federal government significantly cuts social welfare programs, like SNAP, and threatens to cut funding for housing assistance and homeless services, it is imperative that our City government expand *not* diminish local programs and initiatives that serve struggling New Yorkers experiencing housing insecurity or homelessness.

Last fall, Win released our [Action Plan to End Family Homelessness](#), with local policy recommendations that the Mayor and City Council can pass to address the root causes of family homelessness and help families in shelter obtain permanently affordable housing. Considering the ongoing federal cuts to social services and NYC’s years-long affordability crisis, we urge the City to:

- 1. Fully implement the 2023 CityFHEPS Reform Package and allocate funding that would extend the rental assistance program to low-income households in the community, expand to households earning 50% of the City’s Area Median Income, and remove burdensome work requirements.**

We are thankful to City Council for passing Local Laws 99, 100, 101 and 102 of 2023, which, if implemented, could have helped more than 92,000 New Yorkers access the CityFHEPS housing voucher, saved over \$730 million annually, and significantly reduced the shelter system without forcing people onto the street.¹ Additionally, a recent analysis by Win found that when looking at just the comparative cost of CityFHEPS to shelter, the City could save as much as \$630 million over five years in shelter costs alone.²



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

Notwithstanding the Mayor's commitment when he was a candidate, the CityFHEPS expansion was not included in his Preliminary Budget, which only allocated an additional \$1.64 billion in FY27, \$300 million less than what the Comptroller's Office estimates it would cost to fully fund the existing CityFHEPS program that houses over 65,000 households.³

Therefore, we urge the Council to continue fighting for CityFHEPS reforms and allocate sufficient funding to finally begin implementing the laws passed nearly three years ago, so that homeless and housing insecure New Yorkers have the resources they need to become financially stable and to provide a better future for themselves and their families. We also urge Council to pass other reforms to improve administrative delays, such as updating the application technology, decreasing processing times, and streamlining inspections, so that voucher recipients can exit costly shelters sooner.

2. Fully fund and implement Local Law 35 requiring mental health professionals in family shelters.

The City must invest \$40 million to successfully implement Local Law 35, which mandates clinical mental health professionals in every shelter for families with children, so that families experiencing homelessness can quickly access lifesaving mental healthcare in-person or virtually. Prioritizing this investment in the upcoming fiscal year would create long-term benefits for both the families and the City, as mental health treatments lead to improved health and employment outcomes for recipients.

3. Increase funding for immigration legal services and rental assistance programs that help long-term stayers in shelter and recent arrivals access legal pathways to work and obtain housing.

A significant portion of households in shelters are led by immigrants, including mixed status families, recent arrivals legally seeking asylum, and undocumented families, who tend to be some of the longest stayers in shelters due to low wages and ineligibility for federal assistance. As the Trump Administration continues its attacks on immigrants, removing legal pathways and kicking many immigrant families off federal benefits, it is critical that local government step in and support these families' legal and housing needs.

While we are pleased to see the Mayor's Preliminary Budget include an additional \$21.3 million for immigration legal services, it falls short in meeting the legal needs of our immigrant neighbors facing daily and unlawful threats from federal immigration enforcement. Council should allocate an additional \$85 million for immigration legal services in FY27 to better enable nonprofit immigration legal service providers and support staff meet the ever-growing demand of legal aid for New York's immigrant community and maintain a strong City workforce of legal service providers.



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

Furthermore, to alleviate shelter capacity, the Department of Social Services established the Special Housing Assistance Resource (SHARE) program, which utilizes up to \$68 million in funding from New York State’s Rental Supplement Program to provide rental assistance to the longest-term stayers in the shelter system, the vast majority of whom are undocumented immigrants. Since this program began last year, 25 Win households (or 96 individuals) have exited shelter with a SHARE voucher. On average, these families had spent 4 years in shelter. Thus, the City should invest more funding into this program, so immigrant households ineligible for most housing subsidies finally have a pathway out of shelter and into permanent housing.

4. Expand Workforce Development Programming in Shelter.

While workforce development programs in shelters receive some public funding, it is not nearly enough to provide the educational, financial literacy, and employment upskilling services and workshops that Win’s Income Building Program (IBP) offers. Currently, DHS’s employment specialist positions have little mentorship or support beyond Program Directors, and consequently little capacity to develop relationships with potential employers.

The City should allocate more funding toward shelter workforce development programs and adopt a similar model to Win’s IBP, including creating a “Job Developer” position responsible for supporting clients prepare for job or school applications and developing robust partnerships with local employers to identify job opportunities, and funding “Youth Income-Building Specialist” (YIBS) positions responsible for serving young people ages 14–21. At Win, YIBS assists clients with school attendance, GED completion, applying for the Summer Youth Employment Program and other internship opportunities, and college readiness.

5. Continue to fund a 3% cost-of-living adjustment (COLA) for City-contracted human services workers in FY2027 to uphold the City’s multi-year COLA deal commitment.

Win is a proud member of the JustPay campaign committed to raising the wages of hardworking human services workers. We thank the Council for signaling your commitment to a 3% raise through FY27, and we hope you see this as a minimum standard for what is needed for human services workers in future years.

In addition to these budget priorities, our [Action Plan to End Family Homelessness](#) urges the City to: increase funding for source of income discrimination enforcement so that voucher holders can utilize vouchers without risk of refusal; fully fund the Right to Counsel program to prevent low-income households from entering shelter; invest in aftercare services for all families leaving shelter; expand the number of shelter-based community coordinators to support the needs



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

of students experiencing homelessness; and expand direct cash transfer programs serving high risk populations, including families with children experiencing housing instability or homelessness.

The Trump Administration and Congress have created much uncertainty for the nonprofit providers serving low-income New Yorkers who are concerned over the reliability of funds from the federal government. We know federal cuts to social safety net programs will have dire results for the communities we serve, including the closure of programs that serve people experiencing homelessness. Given the imminent loss of these federal programs, it is crucial that New York City, the wealthiest city in the world, allocate the necessary resources to providers and low-income households to help struggling New Yorkers obtain financial stability, and achieve our collective mission of ending homelessness.

¹ “CityFHEPS Bills Could Save NYC Millions and House Thousands of Families,” *Win*, July 2023, <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/CityFHEPS-Bill-Packagev5.pdf>.

² “More Than a Moral Choice: How CityFHEPS Could Save NYC \$635 Million,” *Win*, February 2026, <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2026/02/More-Than-a-Moral-Choice-How-CityFHEPS-Could-Save-NYC-635-Million-2.pdf>.

³ “Comments on New York City’s Preliminary Budget,” *Office of the New York City Comptroller*, March 2026, <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/comments-on-new-york-citys-preliminary-budget-for-fiscal-year-2027-and-financial-plan-for-fiscal-years-2026-2030/>.

Zoey Z.

Teachers College, Columbia University

New York, NY

March 12, 2026

New York City Council

Committee on General Welfare / Food Policy

Dear Council Members,

I am a graduate student studying nutrition at Teachers College, Columbia University, and I am writing to advocate for increased investment in community based nutrition education programs in New York City, particularly those that address digital literacy barriers among older adults and immigrant communities.

Through my community work with the UA3 food pantry, I have observed that many pantry participants are interested in improving their health but face challenges accessing reliable nutrition information. Many of the individuals served are older adults or immigrants who may have limited experience using digital technologies. As health and nutrition information increasingly moves online, these barriers can make it difficult for them to access resources that could support healthier dietary choices and better management of diet-related conditions.

For example, some participants have difficulty using basic smartphone features such as downloading apps, navigating websites, scanning QR codes, or searching for reliable health information. These challenges limit their ability to access nutrition resources, health guidance, and even public benefit information that is increasingly delivered through digital platforms. Without additional support, many individuals risk being excluded from important health and nutrition information.

Community-based nutrition education programs are well positioned to address these barriers. By integrating basic digital health literacy into nutrition education, such as teaching participants how to find trustworthy nutrition information online, access simple healthy recipes, or use mobile tools to support health management. These programs can empower residents with practical skills that improve both nutrition knowledge and health outcomes. Community organizations and food pantries serve as trusted spaces where such education can be delivered in culturally appropriate and accessible ways.

I respectfully urge the New York City Council to increase funding and support for community-based nutrition education programs that incorporate digital health literacy training. Strengthening these programs would help ensure that vulnerable populations are not left behind as health information and services increasingly move online. Investing in both nutrition education and digital literacy will help

improve nutrition security, support chronic disease prevention, and promote health equity across New York City.

Thank you for your time and consideration for this important issue.

Sincerely,

Zoey Z.

Teachers College, Columbia University

Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Preliminary Budget Hearing for FY2027
March 9, 2026

Good afternoon,

Committee Chair and members of the Committee on General Welfare and thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I Alexis Smallwood-Foote Support the amending the following laws to support families and the most vulnerable population.

Int 0139-2026 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring the department of social services to provide a benefits interview confirmation notice

Int 0232-2026 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to shelter referrals and assessments for temporary housing assistance

T2026-1352 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the commissioner of homeless services coordinating with hospitals to distribute informational materials on certain weather events to patients and make services directly available to discharged patients during such events Preconsidered

T2026-1353 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the commissioner of homeless services coordinating with hospitals to make certain supplies available to discharged patients during certain weather events Preconsidered

T2026-0008 A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to creating an integrated and confidential data system to track all engagement with street homeless individuals Preconsidered

T2026-0004 AND SUCH OTHER BUSINESS AS MAY BE NECESSARY

I am the Founder of the ReAL (Residents Acquiring Land) Edgemere CLT, community activists, mommy of three and a survivor of domestic abuse at the hands of my husband. My estranged husband weaponizes the NYPD, MTA, and his age to have me arrested. My estranged husband and I are in a horrible family court case battle for my two youngest children.

My oldest child Alexander Jones-Baker and I are living in a DHS shelter that is getting paid \$5128 for Alexander and me. What I find more disturbing is that there aren't any housing vouchers for families at are in the shelter. Human Resources Administration, Department of Homelessness Services, Department of Social Services all need to be fired, audited, and replaced with individuals that are exactly like what they do.

My son and I have been in the shelter system for a year now because the system isn't working in our best interests. I am very disappointed with the following agencies: Human Resources Administration, Department of Homelessness Services, Department of Social Services, and Administration for Children Services. These agencies work with outdated computers and software.

The computers, equipment and software (CARES) all need to be updated to services the clients and make life easy for the employees. Families like mine are being told that there isn't any housing program to support families moving out of the shelter. We are being told to use our own money to move out or to the SOTA program because we all make too much for City FEPS.

It is 2026 that there should be several types of housing vouchers and homeownership programs to support the city's most vulnerable residents and homeowners in New York City. The governor needs to fund Section-8 for Families in the New York City Shelter system. Human Resources Administration, Department of Homelessness Services, Department of Social Services and Administration for Children Services is failing, and I can't help but wonder if this City is profiting from the pain and suffering of the families and single individual's living in the New York City Shelter System. Governor Kathleen Courtney Hochul needs to open Section-8 for everyone living in the DHS system.

Thank you for your dedication and support.

From: [charisma.white](#)
To: [Testimony](#)
Subject: [EXTERNAL] FY27 Preliminary Budget Hearing Testimony – Housing Equity and Source of Income Discrimination
Date: Monday, March 16, 2026 5:07:45 PM

Good afternoon Chair and members of the committee,

My name is Charisma White, and I am here today to provide testimony on the FY27 Preliminary Budget as someone with lived experience navigating the housing system as a voucher holder.

Despite having a housing voucher in hand, I experienced homelessness due to ongoing source of income discrimination and barriers within the housing market. Far too often, landlords refuse to accept vouchers, delay paperwork, or create additional obstacles that make it nearly impossible for voucher holders to secure safe and stable housing.

Even after finally being placed in housing through the system, the conditions many voucher holders face remain inequitable. Many of us are placed in units or buildings where oversight and accountability are lacking. Complaints about discrimination, unsafe conditions, or improper rent practices often go unresolved for long periods of time, leaving tenants feeling unheard and unprotected.

The FY27 budget must prioritize stronger enforcement and oversight to ensure housing programs are working as intended. Funding should support:

- Stronger enforcement against source of income discrimination
- Increased oversight of landlords participating in voucher programs
- Accountability mechanisms when tenants report discrimination or unsafe conditions
- Adequate staffing and resources to investigate and resolve complaints in a timely manner

Housing vouchers are supposed to be a pathway out of homelessness, but without enforcement and accountability, they become another broken promise.

I urge the council to ensure that this budget prioritizes housing equity, tenant protections, and meaningful enforcement so that voucher holders are not left behind.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Preliminary Budget Hearing

Testimony By: Ethel Brown

March 20, 2026

Hi everyone. My name is Ethel Brown. I'm a directly impacted person, a mother, grandmother, and friend to many—those who have experienced homelessness and do not want ever to experience it again. I would never want anyone to go through being unhoused/homeless. This is why I am a member of organizations that are truly helping people to become housed. Neighbors Together (NT), Safety Net Project, Vocal-NY. All under the umbrella of Housing Justice For All (HJ4A). It's an honor for me to share my story and to be part of these groups fighting housing injustice. I appreciate the offer for me to speak about why Mayor Mamdani must fully implement CityFHEPS Expansion laws.

CityFHEPS is the most effective tool we have to prevent families from entering shelter in the first place, to help individuals and families exit shelter, and move into permanent housing. Every day of delay means more households stuck in the system for longer periods, or as I see it, "Shelter Purgatory", limbo, compounded trauma, and significantly higher costs for the City. CityFHEPS has the potential to stabilize our communities if expanded to our neighbors on the brink of eviction/homelessness. We all voted for you because we felt you would make a difference for people experiencing homelessness and other forms of housing instability. The Mayor has doubled down on his promises, and New Yorkers who are depending on the expansion have no recourse when it comes to preventing homelessness. There are youth who are aging out of the foster care system, runaways, parents with children ready for housing in ACS, people who were incarcerated, etc. New Yorkers need the CityFHEPS expansion laws enacted now, because rent has outpaced income, and low-income working class are locked out of housing because their income exceeds the eligibility requirements. The rent is too damn high!

I did not like being homeless and don't ever want to again. It is a horrible situation to be in. It's a domino effect when you are homeless. While in the shelter, I developed health problems. I'm a health-conscious person. I went to a shelter I should never have gone into. Only to find out that the city places people where there is space. Not caring or accommodating to needs may place someone's life in danger. My personal health and wellness belongings, such as Emergen-C and alkaline water, were taken from me as contraband! What a shock that was to me. Some of the employees there said I didn't belong there. Being in environments like this is not right, because people who dictate to

you think they control your life and feel you are not capable of taking care of yourself or others. Being in the shelter is not safe. Your children are not able to do their school work because some places, as well as the place that you're couch surfing at, may not allow you or your children access to their computers, nor have wifi access. You have no space for your belongings and now have to store them with a multi-billion-dollar corporation when those monthly payments should be going to rent! This is why you see people with their belongings. It's expensive to store things. You not only pay the monthly bills, but also. You pay for late fees and liens that you cannot afford. You end up paying more than what you bargained for. It is an expensive way of life to live in a shelter, doubled-up, and or on the streets. This is why it is a necessity for the Mayor to expand the CityFHEPS

Having a CityFHEPS voucher was a relief; now we have a place to lay our heads and eat the way we should. Not the shelter food that made you sick, horrible food! You need to nourish not only your body, but also your mind and soul. I wasn't as sick anymore. You can now call your family and friends, who were there to support you. If they weren't there, I'd probably lose my mind. I can go out and stay out a long time, and return whenever I please—not having a curfew hanging over my head again or losing my bed in the shelter. It costs a lot to be homeless/unhoused. It's less about housing someone than about having them reside in a shelter. I lost out on a lot of opportunities, job-wise. I would not be in this predicament. I would have been working, retired with a pension, traveling, and really enjoying life. There are over 80,000 homeless New Yorkers in DHS shelters alone (that doesn't include youth, DV survivors, and people living on the street. CityFHEPS usage has grown because people are struggling- the rent keeps going up, but wages and income aren't increasing. Expanding CityFHEPS will help people (you can expand on how you think it might help others based on how it helped you), and helping people is a worthy investment.

CityFHEPS is a vital program, and a much-needed program. Imagine how many people it has already helped and how many it has now moved onto being self-sufficient, as well as helping others. There are so many people in need. The system needs more staff, some should include those directly impacted. That would greatly ease many inefficiencies caused by poor administration, administrative barriers, and insufficient staffing at city agencies and contracted providers as we have had issues such as not receiving the CityFHEPS Renewal package in time. There are many voucher holders who have to decide whether to quit their job to qualify for CityFHEPS in order to get access to apartments. This is how many people lose out on apartments due to income cliffs, job opportunities, these stressful dilemmas impact families stability. The city needs to expand CityFHEPS so that those who are currently excluded from the program and those who are at risk of evictions in the community become homeless and lose their opportunity to move into an apartment of their own.

The City also needs to invest in building new housing that is targeted to the folks who need it most- extremely low-income and very low-income New Yorkers. The City should commit capital funding to building 60,000 new units, 12,000 units each year for five years, which is targeted at the lowest-income individuals and families. A voucher only works if there are units within its price range to rent- in NYC, the vacancy rate for low-rent apartments is below market rate.

In conclusion, Mayor Mamdani needs to execute the CityFHEPS Voucher Expansion. Hire directly impacted people to help the city agencies involved in doing the work that is necessary for people to have their vouchers in hand and completed in less time, so that they can move in, and landlords/owners/management companies can receive their monies on time. The City must build more housing targeted for unhoused/homeless and extremely low-income households. Also, allow single men and women to live in 1-bedroom units, not studios.

Special thanks to the committee for your time and consideration. It takes people working together, no matter how tough it is, to be on the same page. Please, "Do The Right Thing". In the interim of housing the houseless/homeless, and truly enforcing eviction prevention, fully implement the CityFHEPS expansion laws.

Respectfully,

Ethel Brown

Esteemed members of the City Council. I thank you for the opportunity to hear us today.

My name is Jeremiah Gonzalez. Since November 2024, I have been a member of the Fair Fares program, a Human Resources Administration initiative that provides half-fare to those who need it to travel across the five boroughs.

I have taken advantage of the HRA program to access job workshops, recruitment opportunities, and other related activities the city offers. Whether I have to go to Manhattan, Brooklyn, or just across The Bronx, Fair Fares allows me to stretch my transportation costs without having to wonder if I have to put less into my card to pay my Con Ed bill.

Unfortunately, many don't have the opportunity to use Fair Fares because they aren't eligible, even though they would absolutely benefit from this program just like me. With this program, just this year alone, I have saved \$81 with 54 trips – for an unemployed person like me, those savings are significant.

I don't have any children, so my costs and savings aren't much in comparison, but many who would benefit do have children. With childcare costs and inflation significantly higher than pre-COVID, less money is in their families' budget to afford the \$6 or more they need to get where they need to go and back. This isn't to mention the rents, already increasing, the Con Ed bills, et cetera. Saving a little for these costs would really help the purse strings hold firm a little while longer.

Esteemed members, what my colleagues and I are describing is a general welfare crisis. We do not ask for handouts; we ask for a hand up. That we can contribute to the biggest city in the largest economy in the world is something we shouldn't beg for.

You may wonder how transit fits into this conversation. I'll explain. The savings accrued from programs like Fair Fares are swallowed up by costs I've already described, like rent or childcare. But you can't swallow up savings if they don't exist to begin with. Transportation, child care, and housing are not privileges to be handed to the few. They are rights – and if we treat them as rights, the Big Apple and its residents and guests will notice and love it. On behalf of the Riders Alliance, we ask for this.

Esteemed city council members, I want to have enough money to pay bills and contribute to this city. I was born here. I would rather this city and its people prosper. They can't do that if at every turn their finances say no. Expanding services like Fair Fares and making transit accessible to everyone, especially those who rely on it every single day, is something that will help the five boroughs in the short and long run. It has helped me immensely. I want to see these benefits given to many more people – it will help them immensely too.

Esteemed city council members, thank you for your time and for having us.

Re: March 16th @9:30am Committee On Health

Subject: Support for city funding for spay neuter and pet food pantries

Hi, I'm Lynda from Pelham Gardens in the Bronx and I have had to arrange drives to Long Island and rely on extremely scarce spots at the ASPCA to get my local cats spayed and neutered.

It's ludicrous that the Bronx does not have affordable spay neuter services within the borough. I have been doing this for 7 years and have dealt with far too many cats put out on the street because they're in heat or are spraying. My first rescue cost \$600 to spay at a local vet before the pandemic, and it only got worse after the shutdown.

Food insecurity for pet owners is very real as well and we should have accessible pet food pantries in the Bronx.

Thank you for your time.

Lynda Naclerio
[REDACTED], Bronx, NY 10469

**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: Erin Dalton

Address: _____

I represent: DSS Commissioner

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: Scott French

Address: _____

I represent: HRA Administrator

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: Christine Fellini

Address: _____

I represent: DHS Interim Administrator

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Richard Johns

Address: _____

I represent: DSS Chief Program Performance & Financial OFFICER

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: Chris Gonzalez

Address: _____

I represent: DSS Chief Strategy Officer

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

X

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Vermin Vega

Address: _____

I represent: Hispanic Federation

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: Mikaela Perry

Address: _____

I represent: Equity Advocates

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Marcos Reyes

Address: ↙

I represent: Chinese-American Planning Council (CPC)

Address: 45 Suffolk Street

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Hailey Nolasco

Address: _____

I represent: Center for Justice Innovation

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Shana McCORMICK

Address: _____

I represent: Rethink Food

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: JEREMIAH GONZALEZ

Address: _____

I represent: RIDERS ALLIANCE

Address: 150 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, NY 10038

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeremiah Gonzalez

Address: [Redacted] Bronx NY 10472

I represent: Riders Alliance

Address: 150 Broadway, Manhattan

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 03/17/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sheron M. Small / Legal Services NYC

Address: 40 Worth Street

I represent: Legal Services NYC

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: Nicolas Pearson

Address: _____

I represent: Riders Alliance

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: 3/11/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Arthi Bala

Address: [Redacted] New York NY 10032

I represent: Riders Alliance

Address: 150 Broadway Ste 1005 New York NY 10038

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Montel Cherry

Address: 100 William Street 4th Fl

I represent: Mobilization for Justice, Inc.

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: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anna Arkin-Gallagher

Address: 177 Livingston St - 7th Fl, Brooklyn NY 11201

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

Address: 177 Livingston St, Brooklyn NY 11201

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3-17-2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: RICHARD W. FLORES

Address: _____

I represent: BRC

Address: 224 East 47th St NY, NY 10017

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ana Champeny

Address: [Redacted] West Washington St NY 11450

I represent: Citizens Budget Commission

Address: 240 W. 35th St, NYC, NY 10001

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brian Fritsch

Address: [Redacted] Brooklyn

I represent: PCAC

Address: 2 Broadway, Manhattan

**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: Anita Kwok

Address: _____

I represent: United Neighborhood Houses

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Katie Mini

Address: _____ NY 10011

I represent: Supportive Housing Network of NY

Address: 247 W 37th St Fl 18 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: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nicole Hunt

Address: Fl 18

I represent: Food Bank For NYC

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: Gabina Santamaria

Address: _____

I represent: Riders Alliance

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/2026

Name: Melodie Crowell (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: DSSI/HRA - FIA, Title ABOSI

Address: 2322 3rd Avenue, 4th Fl. NY, NY 10035

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Danna Dennis (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Riders Alliance

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: _____

Name: Judith Douglas (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: _____

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Rachel Sabella

Address: Queens, NY

I represent: No Kid Hungry

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: Beth Williams

Address: _____ Brooklyn, 11201

I represent: Hunger Free America

Address: 50 Broad St. New York

**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: Amy Blumsack

Address: _____ Brooklyn 11233

I represent: Neighbors Together

Address: _____

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alison Wilkey

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for the Homeless

Address: 129 Fulton St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

FULL CITYFHEPS EXPANSION Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Calvin Michael - Safety Net Project

Address: _____

I represent: Safety Net Project

Address: 40 Rector Street, N.Y. N.Y.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

Date: 3-17-26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elizabeth Mackay

Address: _____

I represent: Brooklyn NY

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: Catherine Trapani

Address: _____

I represent: Volunteers of America - Greater New York

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____
legal services initiative & benefits access City FHEPS in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Abby Biberman

Address: _____

I represent: New York Legal Assistance Group

Address: 100 Pearl St. NY NY 10004

**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: Jade Vasquez

Address: _____

I represent: Win (women in need)

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Brendan Cheney

Address: _____

I represent: NY Housing Conference

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: Victoria Leahy

Address: _____

I represent: Homeless Services United

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: 3/17/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Chaundra Smith

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Eligibility Specialist, Local 1549

Address: DC37

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lisa Rhymes

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: Eligibility Specialist, Local 1549

Address: DC 37

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Anthony Lackham

Address: 125 Barclay Street NY NY 10007

I represent: President, Local 1549 DC37

Address: (representing Eligibility Specialists in HRA)

**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: 03/17/26

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Schuster

Address: 205 East 42nd Street, NY 10017

I represent: Urban Resource Institute

Address: 205 East 42nd Street

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

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

in favor in opposition

Date: 3/17/26

Name: Mun Clifford (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 40 North Street

I represent: The Legal Aid Society, NYC

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: _____

Name: Devien Swaimyeen (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: New York LAWYERS FOR THE Public Interest

Address: 151 W 30th St, 11th Fl, New York, NY 10001

**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: _____

Name: Alyson Rosenthal (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 263 W 86th St NY NY 10024

I represent: West Side Campaign Against Hunger

Address: 263 W. 86th St. NY NY 10024

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

X

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Molly Eckerle

Address: _____

I represent: Met Council

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: 3/17/2026

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carlos Rodriguez

Address: _____

I represent: City Harvest

Address: 150 52nd St Brooklyn 11232

**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: REHAM BADER

Address: _____

I represent: ARAB-AMERICAN FAMILY

Address: SUPPORT CENTER

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

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SHANAYA RAMSEY

Address: _____

I represent: ANTHOS HOME

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: MEG ESPEY

Address: _____

I represent: HER JUSTICE

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: MARIA DIAZ

Address: _____

I represent: ANTHOS HOME

Address: _____

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