

**Testimony of Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner  
NYC Department of Homeless Services**

**Before the New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare  
Oversight Hearing: State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC**

**December 6, 2021**

Good morning, I want to thank the Committee on General Welfare for holding today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify.

I am Molly Park and I am the First Deputy Commissioner at the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS). I am joined by Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social Services (DSS).

We appreciate the opportunity to discuss single adults experiencing homelessness in New York City and the steps this Administration has taken to support our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

At the outset, I want to acknowledge our DHS and contracted provider staff for their work at the frontlines. They work each day to provide shelter and critical services to New Yorkers in need to help them get back on their feet.

As we begin our discussion today on the state of single adult homelessness in New York City, we should acknowledge that the vast majority of people experiencing homelessness in our city are sheltered indoors across our shelter system because we have a right to shelter. That stands in stark contrast with other jurisdictions around the nation, particularly on the West Coast, where the proportion of unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness on the street is exponentially greater than in New York City. To better understand this context, it is important to understand the background that has brought us to this point and the steps that this Administration has taken to address homelessness.

Over the course of the last 40 years, New York City has been under court order to provide shelter to single adults and families experiencing homelessness. Against the backdrop of this legal and moral obligation to provide shelter from the elements, New York City saw steep increases in housing instability and decreases in housing affordability, with homelessness increasing by 115% between 1994 and 2014. In the decade between 2005 and 2015, household rents in the city increased by 18.4%, while at the same time incomes failed to keep pace by only increasing by 4.8%. Looking at affordable housing supply, between 1994 and 2012, the city suffered a net loss of about 150,000 rent-stabilized units. As a result, by 2015, the city had only half the housing needed for about three million low-income New Yorkers. These trends, along with factors such as economic inequality, domestic violence, overcrowding, housing evictions, untreated mental health

challenges and inadequate discharge planning from State institutions have driven homelessness and displacement in our communities over the past several decades.

### **Turning the Tide on Homelessness**

Now, we want to update the Committee on the progress that this Administration has made to address homelessness and address the policy failures that have exacerbated challenges for vulnerable New Yorkers. While the devastating impacts of the factors mentioned earlier, along with inaction from prior administrations, have led to the homelessness conditions we face today, the NYC Department of Social Services (DSS), Human Resources Administration (HRA) and DHS are beginning to reverse the trend. Today, the DHS census stands at approximately 46,000 – well below the level it was at the start of this Administration, and significantly less than the high point of more than 61,000. Without the Administration's initiatives, projections indicate there would be 71,000 people in shelter today.

This reduction in the DHS shelter census is driven by a substantial reduction in the number of families experiencing homelessness and residing in shelter. The peak number of individuals across those families declined by more than 17,000 people between 2014 and today.

Our agency has taken aggressive action to break and reverse the trajectory of an ever-increasing DHS shelter census over the past several decades, such as restoring the City's rental assistance and rehousing programs. We have directed unprecedented resources toward a new comprehensive and holistic approach to fighting homelessness, focused on:

- prevention, including expanded civil legal services for tenants
- outreach and support for unsheltered New Yorkers
- closing substandard shelter facilities
- expanded transitional housing options
- improved shelter conditions, and
- more robust rehousing and aftercare services

In February 2017, the Mayor announced “Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City,” a neighborhood by neighborhood blueprint for transforming a shelter system that was built up in a haphazard way over four decades. This plan takes the reforms that resulted from the 90-day homeless services review in 2016 even further, finally ending the use of ineffective stop-gap measures and band-aid approaches that date back decades, and replacing them with a smaller number of high-quality borough-based transitional housing facilities.

The Turning the Tide plan consists of four core pillars: 1) preventing homelessness whenever we can; 2) rehousing families and individuals so they can move out of shelter or avoid homelessness altogether; 3) addressing unsheltered homelessness; and 4) transforming the haphazard approach to providing shelter and services that has built up over the last four decades. Our strategies have taken hold and are headed in the right direction. To highlight this, we have made the following progress under each pillar:

## Pillar 1 Progress – Preventing Homelessness Whenever We Can:

This Administration has aggressively expanded free legal assistance for New Yorkers in danger of illegal eviction, increasing funding for legal services for tenants more than 25-fold, from roughly \$6 million in 2013 to \$166 million in FY22 – which is the largest annual investment ever by a Mayoral administration in legal services for tenants. Evictions then dropped by 41% pre-pandemic and thousands of New Yorkers were able to stay in their homes from 2014 through 2019 because of reduced evictions. Moreover, we have dramatically expanded legal representation for tenants: By 2020, 100 percent of tenants with calendared eviction cases had access to legal services, and 71 percent of tenants who appeared in Housing Court had full representation by attorneys – nearly double the pre-pandemic rate of 38 percent, and an exponential increase over the 1 percent of tenants who had lawyers in 2013. Overall, more than 500,000 New Yorkers have received free legal representation, advice, or assistance in eviction and other housing-related matters since 2014.

Amid the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic, DSS’s right-to-counsel program has continued to be a vital tool for protecting New Yorkers during this crisis and helping them keep their homes. Since the outset of the pandemic, DSS has worked closely with our dedicated legal services provider-partners on a range of immediate, comprehensive steps to ensure New Yorkers can access this vital resource. Furthermore, during the pandemic and as now codified in local law, legal services offered to New Yorkers via the right-to-counsel program are now available citywide, regardless of ZIP code, with eviction defense legal services available to all tenants in the city facing eviction in Housing Court as well as NYCHA residents in termination of tenancy proceedings.

## Pillar 2 Progress – Rehousing Families and Individuals:

Immediately upon taking office, the de Blasio Administration stepped in to fill the gap left by the City and State’s cancellation of the Advantage rental assistance program in 2011 by creating and implementing new rental assistance programs as well as reinstating rehousing programs. Through September 2021 these initiatives have helped more than 175,000 children and adults remain in or secure permanent housing, with the vast majority – more than 145,000 – moving out of shelter into housing.

As a result of these rehousing initiatives and the pre-pandemic efforts to reduce evictions by 41%, the number of people residing in DHS shelter is now well below where it was when this Administration began.

Move-outs to permanent housing have continued during the pandemic thanks to the incredible work of our essential staff and not-for-profit provider partners who reported for duty every day throughout this crisis and did extraordinary work, going above and beyond in unprecedented and challenging circumstances.

### Pillar 3 Progress – Addressing Unsheltered Homelessness

Since the start of HOME-STAT, the most comprehensive outreach program in the nation, outreach teams have helped more than 4,200 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new investments and expanding the size of those teams. As part of the City’s 24/7/365 outreach efforts, hundreds of highly-trained not-for-profit outreach staff, including licensed social workers and nurses, canvass the streets proactively engaging New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. These dedicated outreach teams offer services and assistance, working to gain individuals’ trust with the goal of addressing the underlying issues that may have caused or contributed to their homelessness – all to ultimately help these individuals transition off the streets.

Since 2014, the City has redoubled outreach efforts, dedicating unprecedented new resources to outreach programs and providers. This Administration has tripled the number of outreach staff engaging New Yorkers on the streets since 2014, from fewer than 200 to more than 600. Those dedicated staff canvass the streets every day, building relationships over weeks and months through regular contact and concerted engagement with New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, focused on encouraging them to accept services and transition off the streets. The City has more than quintupled the number of emergency ‘safe haven’ and ‘stabilization’ beds dedicated to serving unsheltered New Yorkers citywide since taking office. Thousands of these specialized beds have opened during this Administration, bringing the total up from 600 in 2014 to more than 3,000 open today, with hundreds more planned. Moreover, we have increased the joint outreach operations to engage more New Yorkers and offer more support, including expanding joint outreach operations with partner Agencies such as NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the Parks Department, Department of Sanitation, and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority to address conditions as they occur and provide alternative pathways to permanence.

### Pillar 4 Progress – Transforming the Shelter System:

The Administration has prioritized transforming and improving the shelter system, and these efforts are reflected by our closing of more than 290 shelter sites that did not meet our standards (out of the 647 sites reported in the Turning the Tide plan), thus decreasing the DHS shelter footprint by 45%. We have also recently completely phased out the City’s use of cluster units – ending the 21-year-old, Giuliani-era program that at its high point included more than 3,600 units – through innovative strategies, such as converting cluster units to permanent affordable housing and outright closure of other units.

We continue to address decades of disinvestment and restore our infrastructure through aggressive repairs, renovations, and funding. Over the past several years since the 2016 launch of the Shelter Repair Squad and the subsequent release of the Turning the Tide plan, the Mayor’s interagency Shelter Repair Squad task force has conducted more than 63,000 shelter inspections, driving down violations in shelter that went unaddressed for many years by more than 94% to an all-time low. We have also allocated millions of dollars to address remaining violations.

## Fiscal Landscape

While this Administration continues to address homelessness and improve conditions for vulnerable New Yorkers, it is important to understand the fiscal landscape affecting funding for our services. New York City has continued to increase investment to prevent and alleviate homelessness, while the State has continued a multi-year trend of disinvesting in services to address homelessness and walking away from its responsibility to support New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, resulting in substantial cost shifts to City programs and services. At the City level, we will continue to invest in the proven-successful programs this Administration created from the ground up, which will help even more individuals and families avert shelter entry and/or find available apartments that work for them. For example, the Council and the Administration have taken action this year to set the rent levels for the 100% city-funded CityFHEPS program at the same levels as the NYCHA Section 8 payment standard; and our agency implemented the increase ahead of schedule and with reforms to address the “income cliff” affecting continuing eligibility for families and individuals with increased employment income. State legislation to do the same for the rent levels for the State FHEPS program has passed the Assembly and the Senate. We hope the State will step up in kind, to ensure State vouchers remain competitive, protect State voucher-holders from being left behind, and join us in this mission, which can only be resolved by collaborating across all levels of government.

As we testified at this year’s Council budget hearings, the State has steadily disinvested in efforts to address homelessness in New York City over the past decades, which historically was an obligation evenly shared by both levels of government. Independent experts who have analyzed this dynamic for years have identified this pattern of State disinvestment. For example, the NYC Independent Budget Office (IBO) reported<sup>1</sup> that:

*“changes implemented in Albany have reduced the state’s contribution to fund shelters for single adults, leaving the city to fund the increased costs associated with the rising adult shelter population.”*

Likewise, in a report<sup>2</sup> measuring State disinvestment in homelessness services, the IBO highlighted that, as the City invests in an improved shelter infrastructure and a more holistic approach to homeless services, the State’s contribution dropped – pre-pandemic – to a 9% share of homeless services in New York City. The State’s diminishing support for these critical services is dire, and we have continued to call for a fair share of funding to help New Yorkers experiencing homelessness get back on their feet.

Looking further back, beginning in the 1990s, New York State capped the funding it provides to New York City for sheltering single adults. Not only has the State failed to proportionally increase that funding as homelessness increased over the past several decades, but it has progressively cut the cap, and with inflation the value of the State share has eroded even more. Before the implementation of the cap in the 1990’s, the State reimbursed 50% of the cost of sheltering single

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/albany-shifts-the-burden-as-the-cost-for-sheltering-the-homeless-rises-federal-city-funds-are-increasingly-tapped-october-2015.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/governor-questions-citys-homeless-efforts-despite-nycs-expanded-outreach-and-prevention-programs-march-2018.pdf>

adults. During the Giuliani and Bloomberg Administrations, as shelter and street populations continued increasing, the State continued cutting funding, which meant that by 2005, the State contribution had shrunk to 35% of costs.

Today, funding provided by the State has dropped to just 9% of spending on single adult shelter services, with costs and responsibility shifting significantly to the City. New York City continues to shoulder the associated increases every year, despite the fact that the court-ordered right to shelter across New York State is based on the New York State Constitution that applies to both the State and the City. This has led to substantial cost shifts of millions of dollars over many years from the State to the City, requiring the City to take on more and more fiscal responsibility that has impacted the City's resources to deliver support to New Yorkers in need. It is also worth noting the State-set public assistance rent allowance for a single adult is \$215 per month – a grossly inadequate amount for rent payments in New York City that has not increased in several decades and fails to keep up with the increasing rent costs. The \$215 State-set rent allowance for single adults is a major driver of single adult homelessness in New York City and across the State.

We have repeatedly called on the State to support services to address homelessness by restoring the State's traditional 50/50 cost split for shelter and other services to address homelessness for single adults in New York City, outreach workers, safe havens, stabilization beds, and the cost of homeless services for the overnight MTA initiative. Nevertheless, despite the fact that a Consent Decree enforcing the State Constitution obligates both the State and the City to provide shelter to single adults experiencing homelessness, the State has steadily reduced its support to address single adult homelessness in New York City from 50/50 to a mere nine percent.

Moreover, the State provides zero dollars to support the more 600 outreach workers who help unsheltered New Yorkers and the more than 3,000 safe haven and stabilization beds that the City has funded that have enabled more than 4,200 people to come off the streets and subways and remain off since 2016.

To summarize this simply, the State must return to paying its fair share for life-saving services for single adults experiencing homelessness. Even as the overall DHS shelter census and the number of children and adults in family shelters have been reduced significantly, there are record numbers of people in DHS single adult shelters, and State support is critically needed.

### **State Parolees and Shelter**

NYC DSS-DHS has invested more than a quarter-billion dollars annually in our not-for-profit social service provider partners who operate shelters to enhance the services they provide to New Yorkers in need, including increased investments for mental health services. As I mentioned earlier, in our City, all people experiencing homelessness have a right to shelter, and we are committed to providing shelter to any New Yorker experiencing homelessness who needs it, regardless of their background, including criminal justice involvement.

Along with the ongoing affordable housing crisis, including the \$215 State-set monthly public assistance rent allowance for single adults, a driver of the single adult DHS census growth is the State's failure to invest in reentry services to prevent discharges from State prisons to DHS

shelters. Tragically, history is repeating itself. Just as State deinstitutionalization from State mental health facilities without sufficient community mental health services has contributed to modern day mass homelessness for single adults, now State decarceration without sufficient community reentry services is resulting in a State prison to shelter pipeline.

As a result, at any given time, there are approximately 1,500 State parolees residing in DHS shelters. The State sends these individuals directly to DHS shelter, even when they have housing options available to them. Instead of discharging parolees directly from State prisons to shelter, the State needs to invest in a real re-entry program, so individuals in need don't go straight from State prison to a City shelter. The State should work directly with parolees as part of the release process to assist them in reintegrating into society, including identifying suitable housing where they may be supported. The fact is, this sequence of events is preventable with better discharge planning and reentry services by the State, which provides little oversight on whether discharged individuals have viable housing options to help them get back on their feet and stabilize.

### **Outreach and Supporting Unsheltered New Yorkers**

Now, I would like to shift to updating the Committee on our services for New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Since the start of HOME-STAT, the most comprehensive outreach program in the nation, outreach teams have helped more than 4,200 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new investments and more than tripling the staffing of those teams. As you know, as part of the City's 24/7/365 outreach efforts, hundreds of highly-trained not-for-profit outreach staff, including licensed social workers, canvass the streets, proactively engaging New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness, offering services and assistance, working to gain their trust with the goal of addressing the underlying issues that may have caused or contributed to their homelessness in order to ultimately help these individuals transition off the streets.

Since 2014, the City has redoubled outreach efforts, dedicating unprecedented new resources to outreach programs and providers, including action such as: more than tripling the number of outreach staff canvassing the streets engaging New Yorkers 24/7/365 since 2014, from fewer than 200 to more than 600, as mentioned earlier; more than quintupling the number of emergency safe haven and stabilization beds dedicated to serving unsheltered New Yorkers citywide from 600 to more than 3,000; expanding the availability of Drop-In Centers (DICs) for New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness, with six City-funded DICs in operation 24/7, including one in each of the five boroughs, with two additional DICs planned to open in Manhattan; and lastly, increasing joint interagency street outreach operations to engage more New Yorkers and offer more supports.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and provide updates on our efforts to support New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. I welcome any questions you may have.

*Transmitted via email*

REBNY Testimony | December 7, 2021

## The Real Estate Board of New York to The Committee on General Welfare of the New York City Council Regarding the State of Single Adult Homelessness in New York City

The Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY) is the City's leading real estate trade association representing commercial, residential, and institutional property owners, builders, managers, investors, brokers, salespeople, and other organizations and individuals active in New York City real estate. REBNY thanks the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding the state of single adult homelessness in New York City.

It is our hope that there will be a renewed commitment moving forward to public-private partnerships to solve the challenges our city faces. Throughout the pandemic, REBNY and its members have taken several actions to help keep New Yorkers housed and ensure greater access to housing for New Yorkers in need. In the spring of 2020 and following a voluntary 90-day eviction pledge, REBNY members and others in the real estate community stepped forward to build new partnerships with the shared commitment to help vulnerable tenants during and after the pandemic, creating Project Parachute. [Project Parachute](#) is a coalition of owners, non-profit organizations and service providers led by Enterprise Community Partners, which aims to work collaboratively to keep vulnerable New Yorkers impacted by the COVID-19 crisis in their homes. Under the tenant-facing program FASTEN, which launched in the Fall of 2020 and is administered by the City's Homebase providers, Project Parachute has served nearly 3,000 individuals, 87% of whom are undocumented or in mixed status households, and over 50% of whom are single adult households.

REBNY members take seriously the Project Parachute pledge to find collaborative ways to reduce evictions and keep tenants stably housed. While we may not agree with our partners on every policy recommendation, focusing on the ones we do can bring real change and benefit to those New Yorkers who need it most. REBNY was [proud to support](#) the efforts of WIN and so many other tireless advocates in the passage of Local Law 71 of 2021, which raised the value of the CityFHEPS vouchers to make this form of rental assistance more competitive in our housing market. REBNY also submitted [comments](#) urging the New York City Human Resources Administration to ensure income eligibility is consistent with other programs and advocate for additional policy changes that will ensure the program is as helpful as possible to the very same hardworking New Yorkers FHEPS is intended to help.

What is clear is that any solutions to reducing the overall shelter population have to include eviction prevention methods and provide diverse housing options targeted to individual needs post-shelter. The City and the Council have taken steps towards meeting this goal, with the introduction and execution of several policies that emphasize a "Housing First" approach towards preventing and reducing homelessness. However, the City must continue to dedicate funds for the construction or conversion of



supportive housing units. While the emphasis on housing first is an important one, the City must also provide continued support to those individuals placed into market rate housing due to a lack of available appropriate units. Funding must be allocated for accompanying on-site supportive services, job training and a robust assistance fund to cover hard costs for property owners. The combination of housing assistance, direct supplementary assistance to cover basic needs for homeless individuals, and operational assistance to the providers housing these New Yorkers is equally critical to the provision of units to break the cycle of homelessness.

Providing housing support vouchers to people on the verge of homelessness is a prudent use of taxpayer money. Research from both the [Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#) and the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#) document show that it is more cost-effective for government intervention to keep or place someone in their home than it is to provide temporary shelter. Stabilizing New Yorkers prior to experiencing housing instability, and entering the shelter system, will always be less expensive than paying for emergency hotel rooms and dealing with the long-term health and social impacts of homelessness. Most importantly, though, providing housing is simply the right thing to do.

For vouchers to be most effective, there must also be available housing units. Increasing housing supply is critical considering the deficit of housing units produced over the last decade and the city's homelessness rate. We need more homes in every borough that are accessible to all New Yorkers, including more supportive homes and more homes affordable to low-income New Yorkers. According to [the National Law Center on Homelessness Poverty](#), "there is not enough affordable and available housing for America's millions of low-income renters.... The lack of affordable housing causes housing instability for low income renters and leads to increased risk of eviction."

REBNY and its members are ready and willing to work with the Council and appropriate City agencies to design a system that balances the needs of homeless households, obligations of the property owner, and that of other tenants.

Thank you for your time and consideration of these points.

## CONTACT(s):

**Ryan Monell**

*Vice President of City Legislative Affairs*  
Real Estate Board of New York

212.616.5247  
rmonell@rebny.com



Testimony of

**Coalition for the Homeless**

and

**The Legal Aid Society**

on

**Oversight: State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC**

submitted to

The New York City Council Committee on General Welfare

Jacquelyn Simone  
Policy Director  
Coalition for the Homeless

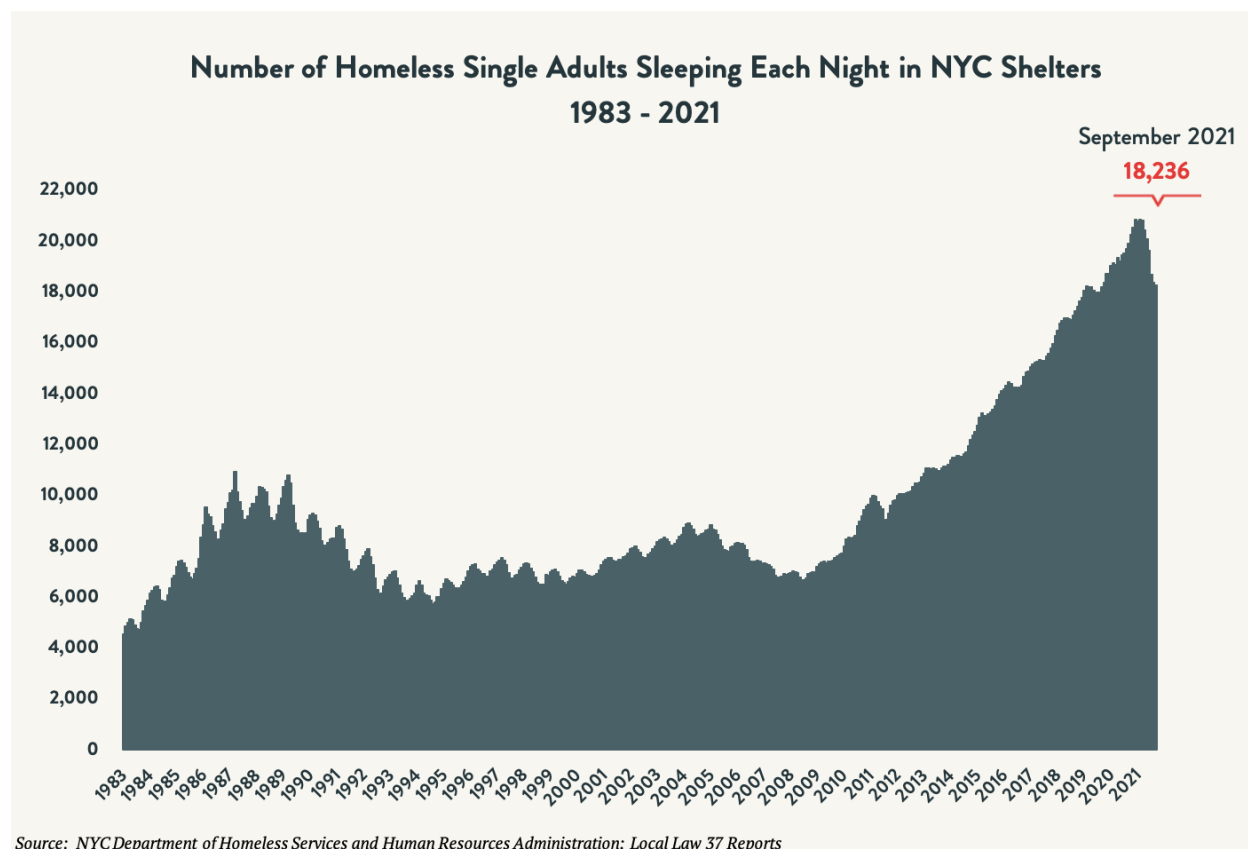
Joshua Goldfein  
Staff Attorney, Homeless Rights Project  
The Legal Aid Society

December 6, 2021

The Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society (LAS) welcome this opportunity to testify before the New York City Council’s Committee on General Welfare regarding the state of single adult homelessness in New York City.

### Record Numbers of Single Adults in Shelters

Despite the recent progress in reducing homelessness among families with children, New York City continues to see near-record levels of single adult homelessness. There were 18,236 single adults sleeping in Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters each night in September 2021, a staggering 97 percent more than a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> Although this is a slight decrease from the record high of 20,822 in February 2021, the expiration of the New York State eviction moratorium next month threatens this progress. Due to systemic racism in housing and economic policies, people of color are disproportionately represented among the homeless population: 86 percent of single adults in DHS shelters in Fiscal Year 2021 were Black or Latinx.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, an estimated 68 percent of single adults sleeping in DHS shelters have a disability.<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that these data reflect only those single adults in the DHS shelter system. There are thousands of additional homeless single adults who reside in shelters overseen by other agencies, who bed down on the streets, or who are doubled-up or couch-surfing.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/tables/FYTD21-DHS-Data-Dashboard-Data.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/StateOfTheHomeless2021.pdf>

According to DHS data for Fiscal Year 2019, the primary reasons for homelessness reported by single adults are discord at prior residence (30 percent), release from jail or prison (11 percent), and coming in off the streets after a period of unsheltered homelessness (10 percent).<sup>4</sup> An additional 9 percent of single adults entered shelters after being discharged from a hospital (including both medical and psychiatric units) or other non-hospital program, including nursing homes. Long-overdue criminal justice reforms and a shift toward decarceration have contributed to record homelessness because of the absence of adequate reentry planning. In 2019, 52 percent of people released from New York State prisons to New York City were released directly to shelters, comprising 3,614 people, up from 3,466 individuals in 2018.<sup>5</sup> While the right to shelter is a vital part of the safety net, people being released from prisons and jails need the stability of permanent housing to help them get back on their feet.

Given the various causes of homelessness among single adults, the City and State must collaborate on multifaceted prevention strategies, which can prove challenging. For example, some homeless single adults face formal evictions from apartments where they are tenants or lawful occupants, but others are forced to leave ad hoc living situations without judicial intervention or the opportunity to be represented by counsel. This explains why many single adults fell through the cracks of the eviction moratoria and became newly homeless during the pandemic. Once they become homeless, single adults frequently cycle between the criminal legal system, hospitals, nursing homes, the streets, and shelters.

### **Shelter Conditions and the Pandemic**

The Coalition for the Homeless is the court- and City-appointed independent monitor of the DHS shelter system, and we regularly observe and hear reports of issues in shelters ranging from inadequate maintenance and extreme temperatures to perennial complaints about the quality and quantity of food served and conflicts with security staff not properly trained to work in shelters. The pandemic exacerbated many of these issues, bringing staffing challenges and the threat of contracting an airborne virus in a shelter system composed mostly of congregate dorms.

While DHS moved thousands of single adults out of congregate facilities and into single- and double-occupancy hotel rooms in 2020 to better protect them from the virus that causes COVID-19, Mayor de Blasio prematurely decided to return the vast majority of single adults to congregate shelters this summer. With mounting evidence of the chaos caused by the abrupt and unnecessary returns to congregate shelters, The Legal Aid Society and Jenner & Block LLP, on behalf of the Coalition for the Homeless, Center for Independence of the Disabled, and homeless New Yorkers, and in coordination with the Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center, filed a motion in *Butler v. City of New York* – a previous legal victory concerning disability-based discrimination in the City’s shelter system.<sup>6</sup> The court papers documented numerous deficiencies in the City’s hasty process, including the sudden and inappropriate uprooting of people with physical and psychiatric disabilities without due consideration for the accommodations they may need to safely and fully access shelters and other support at DHS facilities. The court eventually required the City to develop and implement a notification and assessment procedure before

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/StateOfTheHomeless2021.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/StateOfTheHomeless2021.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> <https://legalaidnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Butler-Memo-of-Law.pdf>

proceeding with additional moves. Nonetheless, the mass shelter transfers over the summer were traumatic and disruptive for homeless single adults, some of whom left the shelter system entirely and now reside on the streets.

As COVID-19 infection rates again increase and the world closely tracks contagious new variants, thousands of homeless single adults will face the next phase of the pandemic – and likely future pandemics – in dorms rather than in the safety of hotel rooms due to Mayor de Blasio’s short-sighted decision. Learning from the pandemic, the City should redesign the shelter system for single adults to reduce the reliance on large congregate facilities, and shift the creation of new capacity toward single-occupancy accommodations with full accessibility features for those with disabilities as well as smaller, low-threshold shelters such as Safe Havens.

### **Unsheltered Single Adults**

In addition to the single adults who reside in shelters, thousands of others bed down in the streets, subway system, and other public places. Interviews with hundreds of unsheltered New Yorkers indicate that most are aware of the shelter system but feel it does not fulfill their desire for safety, dignity, and independence.<sup>7</sup> Unsheltered homeless New Yorkers have long faced daunting challenges and indignities as they draw on meager resources and their own perseverance to survive life on the streets. Their day-to-day struggles include meeting the basic needs for food, clothing, and restrooms, as well as avoiding abuse, including unnecessary, traumatic interactions with law enforcement personnel. The pandemic created new problems, as the subways were closed overnight for months and many public restrooms and other resources were largely unavailable.

Unfortunately, rather than adopting a harm reduction approach to unsheltered homelessness, Mayor de Blasio directed his agencies to dramatically increase street sweeps.<sup>8</sup> These sweeps often result in City workers discarding homeless people’s meager belongings and forcing them to move to a different location if they do not want to enter the shelter system. Sweeps can be traumatic and counterproductive in that they break the trust that trained outreach staff work hard to build with unsheltered people, often over long periods of time. Furthermore, this increase in sweeps during the pandemic egregiously and shamefully flouts guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, which states: “If individual housing options are not available, allow people who are living unsheltered or in encampments to remain where they are. Clearing encampments can cause people to disperse throughout the community and break connections with service providers. This increases the potential for infectious disease spread.”<sup>9</sup>

The City must immediately cease all activities that criminalize unsheltered homelessness, while meeting the immediate needs of homeless New Yorkers and providing them with ready access to stable, permanent affordable and supportive housing options. Many people on the streets who are not interested in the main shelter system would be willing to accept the offer of a low-threshold shelter placement like a Safe Haven or stabilization bed, and the City must make more of these options readily available. Ultimately, what unsheltered New Yorkers truly want and need is permanent housing, but housing applications can be particularly challenging for those sleeping

---

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/View-from-the-Street-April-21.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/03/world/new-york-city-homeless-cleanups-covid-coronavirus.html>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/homeless-shelters/unsheltered-homelessness.html>

outdoors. For example, Coalition for the Homeless staff have struggled to meet the arduous documentation requirements to prove that an individual has been sleeping on the streets for a certain length of time in order to qualify for supportive housing. The City must identify and eliminate all bureaucratic barriers that prevent people from moving off the streets and into homes of their own.

### **Council Legislation to Help People Access and Maintain Permanent Housing**

As we mark the 40th anniversary of the landmark legal right to shelter, it is clear that we must build upon that baseline of decency by embracing a right to housing. Perhaps the most enduring lesson from the past eight years is that substantial progress in addressing homelessness will remain elusive if there continues to be a disconnect between housing and homelessness policies. Future City housing plans must dedicate significantly more units to homeless and extremely low-income New Yorkers to help people avoid or exit homelessness. The de Blasio administration, which siloed housing and homelessness policies, has failed to quickly connect people to permanent housing: In Fiscal Year 2021, single adults languished in DHS shelters for an average of 476 days – a dramatic increase from the already-shocking 383 days in Fiscal Year 2017.<sup>10</sup> The barriers to accessing housing include the persistent lack of affordable apartments for the lowest-income New Yorkers; the shortage of accessible and affordable apartments for those with disabilities; housing discrimination on the basis of source of income, disability, family composition, race and ethnicity, and gender identity and sexual orientation; and bureaucratic roadblocks that cause needless delays. The City must address these barriers through legislation, budget priorities, and robust enforcement against housing discrimination.

We applaud the Council for taking bold action this year to raise the value of CityFHEPS vouchers and to expand eligibility to other homeless New Yorkers in an effort to help people access permanent housing more quickly. We are already seeing the impact of these changes, as some of our clients who had struggled to find housing for years with the unrealistically low CityFHEPS voucher amounts have now moved into homes of their own.

We encourage the Council to use the remaining weeks of the session to build upon this progress and help connect other homeless New Yorkers to permanent housing. In particular, we urge the Council to pass three pieces of pending legislation: **Intro. 2047**, **Intro. 147**, and **Intro. 2176**. The Fair Chance for Housing Act, **Intro. 2047**, would prohibit housing discrimination in rentals, leases, subleases, or occupancy agreements in New York City on the basis of arrest or conviction records. Landlords and real estate brokers would be prohibited from doing background checks or inquiring about arrest or conviction histories at any stage in the application process. This would help thousands of New Yorkers, including many single adults who are currently sleeping in shelters or on the streets, access stable housing. Passing the Fair Chance for Housing Act would also advance racial justice, as it is impossible to deny the pervasive racism of the criminal legal system and therefore the disproportionate racial impact of the records created by that system.

Supportive housing is also an essential tool in the fight against homelessness, but there are currently an estimated five approved supportive housing applications for each vacancy.<sup>11</sup> We urge the incoming Council and administration to continue and strengthen the NYC 15/15

---

<sup>10</sup> [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2021/2021\\_mmr.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2021/2021_mmr.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nynycampaign.org/>

program, which creates 1,000 units of supportive housing each year, and finance an additional 1,000 units per year – a mix of preservation and added housing for new populations that are not included in the current plan, such as people leaving jails, prisons, and hospitals. However, the City must also ensure that the process for accessing this housing is equitable and that tenants know their rights once they secure a supportive housing apartment. **Intro. 147** would shed light on supportive housing referrals, interviews, and rejections in order to deter discrimination and identify barriers to accessing supportive housing. **Intro. 2176** would equip supportive housing tenants with a bill of rights so they are empowered to assert those rights and know where to turn if they encounter issues – recognizing the importance of long-term housing stability. The City must continue to invest in new supportive housing to serve more New Yorkers, but it must also simultaneously implement these safeguards to guarantee that the supportive housing model is as effective as possible.

## **Conclusion**

We thank the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify on this important topic, and for the Council's dedication to addressing the crisis of mass homelessness in New York City.

---

## **About The Legal Aid Society and Coalition for the Homeless**

The Legal Aid Society: The Legal Aid Society (LAS), the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal, and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform. This dedication to justice for all New Yorkers continues during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State, and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of more than 2,000 attorneys, social workers, paralegals, and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26 locations in New York City, LAS provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

LAS's legal program operates three major practices — Civil, Criminal, and Juvenile Rights — and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by LAS's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of more than 300,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload of 300,000 individual cases and legal matters, LAS's law reform representation for clients benefits more than 1.7 million low-income families and

individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

The Legal Aid Society is uniquely positioned to speak on issues of law and policy as they relate to homeless New Yorkers. The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the *Callahan* and *Eldredge* cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the *McCain/Boston* litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to homeless families. LAS, in collaboration with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLC, filed *C.W. v. City of New York*, a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of runaway and homeless youth in New York City. Legal Aid, along with institutional plaintiffs Coalition for the Homeless and Center for Independence of the Disabled-NY (CIDNY), settled *Butler v. City of New York* on behalf of all disabled New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, and Legal Aid is currently using the *Butler* settlement to prevent DHS from transferring disabled homeless New Yorkers to congregate shelters without making legally required reasonable accommodations. Also, during the pandemic, The Legal Aid Society along with Coalition for the Homeless continued to support homeless New Yorkers through litigation, including *E.G. v. City of New York*, Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure WiFi 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.

Coalition for the Homeless: Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, 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 11 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, which usually distributes 800 to 1,000 nutritious hot meals each night to homeless and hungry New Yorkers on the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx, had to increase our meal production and distribution by as much as 40 percent and has distributed PPE and emergency supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. 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. In response to the pandemic, we are 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 court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor other facilities 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 The Legal Aid Society 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 has worked with The Legal Aid Society to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure WiFi 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.



## **New York City Council General Welfare Committee Oversight Hearing on Single Adult Homelessness**

**Testimony by Neighbors Together  
Written by Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing & Policy**

**December 6, 2021**

Neighbors Together would like to thank the Chair of the General Welfare Committee, Councilmember Steve Levin, the Council Members staff, and the General Welfare Committee staff for your dedication and years of commitment to addressing New York City's homelessness crisis.

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 80,000 meals and 10,000 individuals per year.

Our members come to us from across the five boroughs of New York City, with the majority living in central Brooklyn. Nearly 60% of our members are homeless or unstably housed:

- 21% stay in shelters
- 19% live in three-quarter houses, which are essentially boarding houses that advertise themselves as licensed substance use treatment programs and rent beds out to single adults, often packing them in 4-8 people per room in bunk beds. These houses are unlicensed and unregulated by any government entity, and are known for forcing tenants to attend outpatient drug use treatment programs as a condition of maintaining their bed, while engaging in illegal Medicaid kickback schemes.
- 10% are doubled-up with relatives or friends
- 7% are living on the street

Another 36% rent apartments or rooms in privately owned homes, the majority of which are unregulated.



## **City Response to COVID-19**

The housing and homelessness crisis that existed well before the pandemic was both exacerbated and highlighted by COVID-19. Over the course of the pandemic, there has been a cruel and callous response towards homeless people by government officials and residents of the city. In the early months of COVID-19 public health advisories instructed people to stay home and socially distance themselves from others, ignoring the reality that tens of thousands of homeless people living in congregate shelters or on the streets did not have that luxury.

After significant organizing and advocacy by homeless New Yorkers and advocates, the Department of Social Services began moving homeless New Yorkers out of congregate shelter and into COVID de-densification hotels. The move to single or double hotel rooms was overwhelmingly successful, resulting in positive outcomes for people who were homeless. Unfortunately, the Department of Social Services decided, against CDC recommendations, and often against reasonable accommodation laws, to move homeless individuals back into congregate shelter over the summer of 2021, causing widespread fear, confusion, disarray, and trauma for the individuals living in the de-densification hotels, as well as serious increased risk of COVID infection and severe health outcomes.

Additionally, police targeting and harassment of homeless individuals seeking refuge in the subway, as well as sweeps of street homeless individuals increased to unprecedented rates. These street sweeps directly contradicted CDC guidance for assisting people who were unsheltered, and put homeless individuals at greater risk of contracting COVID-19.

## **CityFHEPS**

Neighbors Together commends the City Council for passing Intro 146 to raise CityFHEPS payment standards to fair market rent, and is pleased that the administration addressed the income cliff issue in the final CityFHEPS rule. This will allow New Yorkers with CityFHEPS to access more units with their voucher and remain stably housed while they work toward economic independence.

While the changes to CityFHEPS are significant improvements, barriers remain that inhibit the voucher's effectiveness:

- CityFHEPS initial eligibility criteria of 200% federal poverty level prevents homeless New Yorkers who are working near minimum wage jobs to access the voucher, despite their income being deeply insufficient to afford market rate rent independently. Neighbors Together recommends that the City adjust income eligibility requirements to allow people to increase their income above 200% and still qualify for a CityFHEPS shopping letter. Additionally, the time frame for recertifying CityFHEPS shopping letters should be increased to longer than 3 months. The short period



# Neighbors Together

between recertifying for a shopping letter and the low-income eligibility threshold discourages potential voucher holders from looking for and securing work because it could jeopardize their ability to get or renew their shopping letter. An individual who was making near 200-250% of the federal poverty level just three months ago will have amassed enough economic stability to be able to support themselves and afford market rate rent. The City shouldn't punish individuals for wanting to work and begin the path toward economic self-sufficiency.

- In the final CityFHEPS rule, utilities were required to be covered within the total cost of rent. In effect, this undercuts the value of the increased payment standards, which makes it more difficult to find housing for voucher holders at the price of the voucher. It is counterproductive to the goal of the voucher and the recently passed local law to raise the amount that CityFHEPS vouchers pay for rent. The City should not require that utilities be included in the cost of the rent, or they should increase the amount of the voucher so that the base pay is fair market rent, with additional monies added to cover utilities.
- Administrative and bureaucratic delays during inspection and lease-up often lose housing opportunities for voucher holders. Particularly now that the signing bonus was eliminated, the Human Resources Administration must find a way to expedite the paperwork necessary to get a unit approved and a voucher holder moved in.
- Last but not least, there is a great amount of confusion and lack of communication about CityFHEPS vouchers, the increase, and the income eligibility changes. Neighbors Together members have been given conflicting and incorrect information about their vouchers, and have had difficulty getting in touch with their caseworkers to get answers. Once individuals are moved in, there is nowhere to call for assistance and troubleshooting.
  - The City should create and staff a dedicated line to assist people with CityFHEPS questions and concerns once they've moved into a unit with their voucher. This line should also be accessible for people "in community" to get assistance before and after they move into a unit with the CityFHEPS voucher.

## **Other Bills to Address Homelessness and Housing**

In order to address the homelessness crisis, the City must increase homeless individuals' ability to access safe, affordable housing. There are multiple bills before the City Council that Neighbors Together supports that would help do this:

- **Intro 2047: Fair Chance for Housing**- this bill would increase access to housing for justice involved individuals by banning discrimination based on history of incarceration and criminal record.



- **Intro 147: Supportive Housing Tracking Bill-** this bill would require the City to produce an annual report tracking demographics of individuals rejected from supportive housing and why they were rejected. Increased transparency about the process of accessing supportive housing will help ensure that all supportive housing applicants receive a fair chance.
- **Intro 2176: Supportive Housing Tenants Bill of Rights-** this bill would require that all supportive housing tenants be provided with a bill of rights listing their rights and how to address any concerns. This bill is critical to ensuring that supportive housing tenants are afforded the rights to safe, habitable housing, and the ability to get their concerns resolved.

Intro 1233, a bill to give written notice in advance of non-emergency shelter transfers was recently passed and sent to the Mayor for his signature. Neighbors Together supports this bill and is glad to see Council begin to address the major problems with shelter transfers. However, there is more work to be done in this area: People living in shelter are often transferred with little-to-no notice, transfers are often retaliatory, they are transferred to shelters hours away from their medical providers, places of employment, and support networks. During the transfer process, individuals are told they can only take two garbage bags worth of their belongings and the rest is thrown away. Often there is no transportation provided for the transfer and individuals are expected to travel on their own with their remaining belongings. When transferred, individuals' files are not shared with their new shelter or caseworker, and therefore they are forced to start the process of searching for housing all over- redoing applications, regathering documentation, losing opportunities for housing that were already in process, etc. All of these are deeply harmful and destabilizing to homeless individuals and work counter to the goal of moving people out of homelessness. The City must begin to address these major flaws and create more transparency about their transfer practices.

### **A Holistic and Systemic Approach to Ending Homelessness**

In order to end the homelessness crisis, the City must take a holistic, multi-pronged approach that addresses the systemic failings and infrastructure that contribute to the crisis.

- **Source of Income Discrimination and increased funding for the City Commission on Human Rights (CCHR) Source of Income Unit:** Although increasing payment standards for CityFHEPS is significant step in the right direction, the pervasive problem of source of income discrimination still exists. CCHR is the only enforcement agency in the City that brings cases and/or interventions on behalf of individuals with vouchers. The agency is a key partner in Neighbors Together's work on source of income discrimination, and is often the reason that voucher holders are able to access a unit or application that they were previously denied. Currently, CCHR's Source of Income



# Neighbors Together

(SOI) Unit is operating at half capacity, which creates a significant bottleneck for processing the large volume of source of income discrimination complaints coming in to CCHR. This in turn slows down response time, and could discourage voucher holders from reporting, thereby keeping people homeless longer, and allowing bad actors to continue to operate and illegally discriminate. It is more important than ever that CCHR's SOI Unit be fully funded and staffed; the new influx of Emergency Housing Vouchers, the increase to the CityFHEPS payment standard, the possible increase of State FHEPS payment standards, the possible influx of new Section 8 vouchers under the Build Back Better plan, and most importantly, the expansion of source of income discrimination protections at the state level, all contribute to a significant increase in complaints to CCHR. Without fully funding and staffing the SOI Unit, New Yorkers will remain homeless longer, and discriminators will be empowered to continue breaking the law.

- **Better training and required reporting for housing specialists and case managers to CCHR:** Housing Specialists and Case Manager should be fully trained on identifying source of income discrimination and reporting it to the SOI Units at CCHR and the Human Resources Administration. This would help identify bad actors more quickly and potentially help get more voucher holders housed faster with the right interventions and funding support for CCHR.
- **Smaller caseloads for shelter workers:** One of the contributing factors to the housing challenges faced by homeless New Yorkers are that case managers and housing specialists at shelters and Department of Homeless Services contracted providers are almost always overworked with unreasonably large caseloads and underpaid. With fairer compensation and increased staff capacity, shelter workers and providers could more effectively work with homeless individuals to help find them housing and report source of income discrimination as it occurs.
- **Focus on building low-income affordable housing:** The city must shift its focus to investing in and building more low-income affordable housing. The right to shelter in New York City is critical. However, continuing to open shelters without addressing the root cause of homelessness, which is the lack of affordable housing in New York City, will not solve the crisis. New York City must immediately begin to create more affordable housing for extremely low-income New Yorkers on fixed incomes and working low-wage or minimum wage jobs.

## **Advocating for State Level Policies to Stem Homelessness**

The City must use its power to advocate for impactful policy change at the state level:

- **The Housing Access Voucher Program** would create a statewide voucher that would pay fair market rent and would be targeted to low-income and extremely low-income New Yorkers. Fifty percent of the vouchers will go to people who are currently homeless, and the other fifty percent



# Neighbors Together

will be used for eviction prevention. The Housing Access Voucher would also be the only voucher in the state that would cover undocumented New Yorkers.

- The State should invest **more funding for the Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act**, which converts distressed hotels and commercial properties into permanent affordable housing for low-income and homeless New Yorkers. The City should work with State to successfully bring projects to fruition.
- **Good Cause Eviction** would provide critical protections to unregulated renters. It would protect against unconscionable rent hikes, give renters the right to organize and the ability to ask for repairs without fear of retaliatory evictions, as well as lease renewal. Passage of the Good Cause Eviction bill is critical to stopping low-income and working-class tenants from falling into homelessness. It will help keep tenants stably housed, and will help stabilize if not decrease homelessness across the State, including New York City. The City Council should pass a resolution in support of the Good Cause Eviction Bill.
- The City should **advocate for the state to end 421a**, which is expiring in 2022. 421a has lost New York City billions of dollars in tax revenue which could be put to better use funding more affordable housing and programs to end homelessness. Developments built with 421a often don't create enough affordable units compared to the tax breaks they receive. Moreover, the developments receiving 421a do not build units targeted to the highest need groups; low-income housing for people at or below 50% AMI, and extremely low-income affordable housing for people at or below 30% AMI.
- The City should encourage Governor Hochul to sign the bill passed by the state legislature to increase State FHEPS payment standards.

Homelessness continues to be one of the greatest challenges facing New York City. The incoming mayor Eric Adams and the incoming City Council have the opportunity to implement the critical changes listed above and ensure that safe affordable housing is a right afforded to all New Yorkers.

Thank you for your time and attention, and for all of the Council's work to address this critical issue.

If you have questions about the testimony provided, please contact Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing & Policy at [amy@neighborstogether.org](mailto:amy@neighborstogether.org).

Testimony by the New York Legal Assistance Group,  
Oversight - State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC,  
Before the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
December 6, 2021

Chair Levin, Council Members, and staff, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak to the Committee on General Welfare on the state of single adult homelessness in New York City. My name is Deborah Berkman, and I am the Coordinating Attorney of the Shelter Advocacy Initiative at the New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG).

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

The Shelter Advocacy Initiative at NYLAG provides legal services and advocacy to low-income people in and trying to access the shelter system. 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 we offer representation at fair hearings.



Most of my clients are single adults experiencing street and sheltered homelessness. Based on my experiences working with them, I appreciate the opportunity to offer the following comments.

a. Many Clients Are Not Able to Stay in DHS' Single Adult Shelter

There is a common misconception that those who are experiencing street homelessness do not want to sleep inside. This is not the case. Most of DHS' single adult shelter system consists of congregate shelters which can have up to 100 people in a single dorm or room. Most of my clients experiencing street homelessness have stayed in DHS' congregate single adult shelters and have not been able to remain there due to assault and trauma they endured by other residents while staying there. Quite simply, they are too scared to go back.

Other clients cite different obstacles to remaining in single adult shelter. I have had numerous clients repeatedly lose their beds due to missing curfew and having no choice other than to sleep outside or to be bussed to an unknown location. Many of my clients report that residents are prohibited from bringing outside food into the shelter. As a result, almost all single adult shelter residents report being perpetually hungry, as meals in shelter are served during a narrow timeframe, in limited supply, and the portions and quality of the food are inadequate. Additionally, many residents with health issues and disabilities need to eat between meals or when taking medications.

Clients are also prevented from staying in single adult shelter because of the intense policing of shelters and the aggression of shelter staff and security towards residents. I have many clients who are forced into street homelessness because of

bad interactions with shelter staff, who have been known to verbally and physically abuse clients. Additionally, multiple clients have reported to me being beaten by DHS police.

Even purportedly “accessible” shelters are in fact inaccessible for clients with disabilities. Clients who use wheelchairs or other assistive devices often report broken elevators and facilities that are impossible to navigate in a wheelchair, even when the shelters are labeled “accessible.” Clients with mental health disabilities report that they are rarely, if ever, accommodated. Lastly, congregate single adult shelter is often impossible for homeless transgender or gender non-binary clients who experience extreme harassment from staff and other residents. All of these factors contribute to single adult street homelessness.

b. DHS Must Expand Safe-Haven/Stabilization Capacity

My most vulnerable clients are those who are experiencing street homelessness. As explained in more detail above, the vast majority of those clients stay outside because they cannot live in congregate shelter due to past trauma or mental illness (or both), not because they do not want to be inside. While sleeping outside, these clients are subject to dangers too numerous to retell. My clients are regularly robbed, assaulted, and raped while sleeping. One of my clients witnessed one of the other men he slept outside with have lighter fluid poured on his foot and set on fire. My clients are woken and harassed by police officers and are often arrested for trespass or other trivial offenses that essentially criminalize homelessness. They are food insecure and malnourished. Most are in chronic pain because they sleep on the ground. My clients suffer from skin conditions based on

their exposure to the elements. Many of my clients have severe dental deficiencies, and almost all of them have other chronic underlying illnesses. Moreover, if these clients did not suffer from mental illness prior to becoming street homeless, the trauma of sleeping outside and being constantly on alert has caused most of my clients severe anxiety.

However, most of my clients who are experiencing homelessness would come inside if they were offered a safe-haven or stabilization placement. Safe-haven and stabilization beds make up DHS' low-threshold shelter system. This is a system with private and semi-private rooms that has fewer rules and regulations than the single adult shelter system. Stabilization beds are safe-haven beds in hotels. Due to a lack of capacity, DHS has created a complicated eligibility structure for safe-haven or stabilization placements mandating that, to be eligible, people who are experiencing street homelessness must be spotted by the same outreach team<sup>1</sup> in the same spot five times. After meeting this requirement, the person experiencing homelessness is added to a waitlist for a stabilization or safe-haven placement to become available. My clients describe this as being an impossible feat.

---

<sup>1</sup> The street outreach efforts DHS makes (through contracted non-profit agencies) are largely ineffective. This is because the street outreach teams are equipped with very little to offer the clients. In fact, most of my clients do not want to interact with street outreach teams at all because they know the only "help" they will be offered is a ride to one of DHS' single adult intake centers. These clients are well aware of the location of the single adult intake centers, and if they were able to live in regular DHS shelter, they would not be sleeping outside. Street outreach teams do not hand out winter items or food or otherwise provide any incentive for those experiencing street homelessness to speak with them.

To alleviate this problem, DHS should increase safe-haven and stabilization placement capacity (so that street outreach can make placements) and provide street outreach with items that people experiencing street homelessness need, such as sleeping bags and clothing.

Additionally, my clients report that if they have presented at their assigned DHS single adult system shelter even one time over the past year, then street outreach teams have been instructed that such clients are precluded from a safe-haven or stabilization placement, regardless of the traumatic experiences or lack of accessibility that may have forced clients to abandon their previous assignment. This tracks with the DHS system of shelter assignment as single adults are assigned to a shelter for a calendar year after the last time they entered that shelter, even if they have not been back in months. This policy discourages clients from trying to return to their previously assigned shelter because they (correctly) believe this will preclude them getting a safe-haven or stabilization placement. DHS should not punish clients who attempt to stay in shelter and are unsuccessful by precluding them from a safe-haven or stabilization placement.

DHS must significantly increase safe-haven and stabilization bed capacity to meet the needs of those experiencing street homelessness.

c. DHS Intake Process Is a Barrier to Clients Coming Inside

Another barrier to people coming inside are the intake procedures to enter DHS shelter. Intake can take up to two days, with most of that time spent waiting in crowded waiting rooms. Clients are told if they leave even briefly at any point between the multiple appointments required for intake, they will need to start the process over again. Often clients are not fed and are thus not able to take essential medications. Clients report that staff at intake centers are extremely verbally aggressive and demeaning towards shelter applicants. Clients with disabilities are often not accommodated, particularly those with mental health disabilities. Many of

my clients report that DHS police at intake centers are physically aggressive. As a result, I have clients experiencing street homelessness who would be willing to go into shelter but cannot handle the intake process. These clients are willing to enter congregate shelter if they could participate in the intake process over the telephone, but DHS will not allow them to do so.

Every member of DHS intake staff must treat every intake applicant with respect and in no circumstances should they treat clients with hostility or aggression. To that end, all intake staff should be trained in trauma-informed practices and de-escalation. To ensure that clients do not have to wait for hours at the intake centers, clients should have timed appointments that allow them to leave the intake center if necessary. Clients who self-identify as having disabilities should be awarded immediate provisional accommodations (even without medical documentation) so that they can get through the intake process. Clients should be offered food and drink when they have to stay in the intake centers for long periods of time. Finally, telephone intake must be offered.

#### d. Transfers Between Shelters Should Be Permitted

DHS will not allow clients to obtain shelter transfers if they are unable to stay in their assigned shelter. DHS has a policy that clients are not able to pick their shelter, and although exceptions are made for “safety transfers”, without a lawyer’s intervention they are almost impossible to obtain. I have had many clients who were experiencing street homelessness even though they were willing to stay in DHS congregate shelter because DHS would not transfer them from the specific assigned shelter where they had a traumatic experience. If DHS allowed people to transfer

shelters when they have had a bad experience at a shelter, fewer people would be forced into street homelessness.

e. DHS Should Make it Easier to Re-enter Shelter

Once a client leaves single adult shelter, even for one night, it is very difficult for that person to re-enter shelter. Clients in DHS' single adult shelter are assigned to a shelter for one calendar year after the last date they slept there, or from the day they are assigned, whichever is later. Leaving for even one night results in a loss of a client's bed. If a client wants to return to shelter after they have been away for at least one night, they will not have an assigned bed to go to. That client must return to their assigned shelter at 9:30pm and if someone misses the 10:00pm curfew, the client will get the bed of the person that missed curfew going forward. If no one misses curfew, that client will be bussed to an overnight placement, and they have to come back the next night and try again. This pattern can go on for many days until a new bed can be secured. If a person experiencing street homelessness wanted to try coming inside, the difficulty of obtaining a new placement would no doubt deter them. Staying out of shelter for one night should not result in the loss of a bed, and a client hoping to re-enter shelter should be directed without impediment to an open bed.

f. Animal Companions Should Be Allowed in Shelter

Clients experiencing street homelessness often have animal companions that are not permitted into shelter. While Emotional Support Animals are at times permitted into shelter, clients must apply through the Reasonable Accommodation process for clients with disabilities, a process that most clients are unaware of and must have

medical providers to utilize. And pet owners who are experiencing street homelessness and who do not have a documented disability are currently prohibited from bringing their animals into shelter. Many clients will not go into shelter because they will not leave their pet behind. If DHS allowed animal companions to enter shelter, fewer people would be forced into street homelessness.

g. DHS Should Not Transfer Clients Without Cause

DHS transfers the clients out of specific shelters at the request of the shelter management when clients assert their rights to speak out against unsafe or unsanitary conditions. Generally, DHS does so via an “Administrative Transfer” that is not supposed to be used for this purpose, and that does not attach a right to appeal. Transfer is extremely destabilizing for clients and some clients are transferred up to several times in a year. DHS should not transfer clients without cause and these transfers should not be used in a retaliatory manner.

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

Respectfully submitted,

New York Legal Assistance Group



**Testimony to the New York City Council  
Committee on General Welfare  
Oversight: State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC  
Submitted by the Supportive Housing Network of New York  
December 6, 2021**

The Supportive Housing Network of New York (the Network) appreciates the opportunity to testify on the state of single adult homelessness in New York City, a preventable crisis with unacceptable human consequences that is continuing to expand. The Network is a membership organization, representing over 200 nonprofits statewide who develop, own and operate supportive housing. Supportive housing is deeply affordable housing with onsite, voluntary social services for people who have experienced homelessness and who have the greatest barriers to obtaining and maintaining housing – those living with a serious mental health diagnoses, people who use substances, youth aging out of foster care, veterans, survivors of domestic violence and others.

There were 18,236 single adults sleeping in Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters each night in September 2021, a staggering 97 percent more than a decade ago.<sup>1</sup> There is a much less accurate accounting of our community members sleeping on the street. Though the methodology is flawed, last year's Point in Time count identified 3,903 unsheltered adults in New York City.<sup>2</sup> Homelessness is a housing problem, a result of the fact that housing costs have increased beyond what individuals can afford to pay. Additional barriers to housing exist for people with disabilities, those with criminal legal system involvement, and those with rental vouchers as their source of income. Because of centuries of institutional racism, especially in the forms of housing segregation and redlining, and economic injustices, people living without housing are disproportionately Black and Latinx – 86 percent of single adults in DHS shelters in Fiscal Year 2021.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, an estimated 68 percent of single adults sleeping in DHS shelters have a disability.<sup>4</sup>

The lives of people experiencing homelessness are at risk. Multiple studies have documented the negative impact of homelessness on health and mortality rates. A 2019 study from Los Angeles found that the mortality rate for people experiencing homelessness was 2.3 times greater than the general population. The average age at death was 51 among people experiencing homeless and 73 among the general population.<sup>5</sup> New York City does not keep a public record of deaths of people without homes, but the nonprofits Care for the Homeless and Urban Pathways hold an annual Homeless Person's Memorial Day each year on the winter solstice. Members of the community send in names of people who have died. Each name is recited and many are eulogized. Names are still being collected for this

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>

<sup>2</sup> [https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC\\_PopSub\\_CoC\\_NY-600-2020\\_NY\\_2020.pdf](https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_NY-600-2020_NY_2020.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/tables/FYTD21-DHS-Data-Dashboard-Data.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/StateOfTheHomeless2021.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> [http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chie/reports/HomelessMortality\\_CHIEBrief\\_Final.pdf](http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/chie/reports/HomelessMortality_CHIEBrief_Final.pdf)



year's memorial, but last year 346 lost lives were honored at the event.<sup>6</sup> [See Appendix]. As of February 2021, DHS reported that 113 individuals died of Covid-19, 101 sheltered individuals and 12 unsheltered. According to the Coalition for the Homeless and Charles Cleveland, PhD, of New York University, the cumulative New York City mortality rate due to Covid-19 was 292 deaths per 100,000 people. For sheltered homeless New Yorkers, it was 436 deaths per 100,000 people – 49 percent higher than the New York City rate.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, due to the strain and isolation of the Covid pandemic, mental health needs related to anxiety, depression, and suicide ideation have all increased, along with alcohol and substance use and worsening of chronic health conditions.<sup>8</sup>

## **SOLUTIONS**

Supportive housing is uniquely positioned to comprehensively address the crises of homelessness, mental health, and substance use. It provides not only affordable housing where tenants pay no more than 30% of their income toward rent, but also voluntary and customized social services to help tenants stay in housing, meet their goals and reduce exposure to harm. While it is not the only solution for single adults experiencing homelessness, it is an important piece of the puzzle. Below are the Network's recommendations to expand and improve our supportive housing system in order to reduce single adult homelessness.

### **INVEST IN COORDINATED ACCESS AND PLACEMENT SYSTEM FOR HOUSING**

New Yorkers without homes are often connected to a dizzying number of systems: hospitals, mental health, substance treatment, the criminal legal system, homeless services, children's services, youth and community development, education, public assistance, etc. At worst, people experiencing homelessness can get caught in a vicious cycle of institutionalization and criminalization, through which they are shuttled from shelter to the streets to jail to the hospital, increasing their trauma and reducing the likelihood of retaining the one thing that could interrupt this cycle – permanent housing with support services. In a better but still insufficient scenario, they may be interacting with a number of case managers across City agencies and their contracted nonprofits, who lack the access and coordinated resources to secure them appropriate permanent housing.

To meet HUD requirements to streamline entry to permanent housing from homelessness, New York City launched the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) in October 2020. CAPS is a web platform that contains an assessment survey for clients experiencing homelessness, NYC's supportive housing application, and a vacancy control system to manage supportive housing vacancies so referrals can be made. In order to fulfill a vision of true coordination—in which all relevant City and City-contracted employees can help a client determine what housing resources they qualify for and complete an application—the program needs additional financial resources to expand and better agency coordination to share data sets.

---

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.careforthehomeless.org/events/hpmd-2020/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/age-adjusted-mortality-rate-for-sheltered-homeless-new-yorkers/>

<sup>8</sup> Panchal, N, Kamal, R, Cox, C, Garfield, R. (2021). "The Implications of Covid-19 for Mental Health and Substance Use." KFF. <https://www.kff.org/coronavirus-covid-19/issue-brief/the-implications-of-covid-19-for-mental-health-and-substance-use/>.

A recent survey conducted by the Network suggests that the vacancy rate in the existing supportive housing portfolio is 10%. This is unacceptable. As we work to create new housing opportunities, we need to simultaneously make sure that existing systems to refer and place people into permanent housing are functioning with maximal efficiency. This means reducing as many bureaucratic requirements under the City's control as possible, investing in the technological systems, and investing in the staff that manage these processes. Understaffing is a problem across City agencies and ensuring there are sufficient and qualified personnel to manage these processes at the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) is essential. Any hiring freeze still in place over a position related to moving someone from homelessness into housing must be lifted immediately.

### **IMPROVE NYC 15/15 INITIATIVE**

NYC 15/15 is New York City's commitment to creating 15,000 units of supportive housing in 15 years. Launched in 2016, the commitment is split evenly between single site residences and "scattered site" supportive housing (private apartments in which mobile services are delivered).

Despite many positive changes that came with NYC 15/15, the challenges of the scattered site model have persisted and pose a danger to the completion of the City's desperately needed program. While the separation of the rent and services budget lines was an improvement on older funding models, the rent lines continue to be well below the current Fair Market Rent (FMR), set by the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) every year. Finding available apartments for the program is difficult, and those that can be rented are often far from transit, not accessible and/or need maintenance work. NYC 15/15 social service rates are also far below rates for single site residences: budgets are \$10,000 for a single adult scattered site program, compared to \$17,500 for a single adult congregate program. This is illogical because providing services in a scattered site setting is more labor intensive than in congregate: staff have to travel constantly around the city, manage relationships with landlords, and get to know community services in a variety of different neighborhoods.

While highly successful, the program could benefit from adjustments, including:

- Reallocating the 50/50 split between congregate and scattered site to a 75/25 split, respectively
- Increase scattered site contract rates to align each year with Fair Market Rents (FMR) and increase service dollars to match those of congregate housing.
- Continue to prioritize nonprofit development and lifetime ownership of supportive housing

### **PRESERVE AND CREATE 1,000 ADDITIONAL UNITS EACH YEAR**

- **Preserve Existing Housing**  
There is an urgent need to preserve existing supportive housing. Of the 420 congregate residences in NYC, 160 are more than twenty years old. Many of these buildings were moderate rehabs of older buildings that need significant unit and building systems upgrades and need to be brought up to sustainability standards to meet the needs of our current climate crisis. The city must invest the resources necessary to preserve these units or risk losing them.
- **House Excluded Populations**  
NYC 15/15 is reserved for individuals and families that both cope with a disabling condition and who have been living in shelter or on the street for a year or more. This eligibility criteria

excludes people who, but for the long-term homelessness requirement, would be eligible for supportive housing including individuals recently released from jail or prison, survivors of domestic violence and those leaving long-term stays in hospitals. The City should expand its eligibility criteria to effectively meet the housing needs of the community with this additional 500-1,000 units a year.

## **MAXIMIZE USE OF PUBLIC SITES FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

Public sites are also a resource with tremendous untapped potential, especially in communities in which land prices are expensive. Because of the silo approach to housing and homelessness policy in New York City, many City agencies which have the skills and resources to contribute to the housing plan currently have no mandate to support it. While one of the greatest challenges to developing supportive housing is identifying affordable and appropriate land on which to build, only HPD, DHS, and Health and Hospitals (H+H) have examined their portfolios and allocated land to the cause.

Meanwhile, agencies such as FDNY, the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), and the Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS) all have potential sites that merit consideration for supportive housing development. A 2019 analysis of five public agencies' land found 66 sites primed for supportive housing development.<sup>9</sup>

## **SPEED AND COORDINATE DEVELOPMENT APPROVALS:**

- **Revamp land use processes**

Many supportive housing developments are significantly delayed by cumbersome land use and environmental review processes. The next administration should explore accelerating these processes for affordable and supportive housing. When a Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) is necessary, the City should also focus on creating an aggressive timeline for the pre-certification process, the only step with no time target.

- **Prioritize affordable and supportive housing for project approvals**

The City should create an Ombudsperson at City Hall to conduct interagency coordination to prioritize affordable and supportive housing in all necessary administrative approvals during development, particularly FDNY, Con Edison, DOT, DEP, and DOB approvals for construction, connections, and project closeout.

## **MODIFY THE ZONING RESOLUTION TO INCREASE DENSITY FOR ALL TYPES OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

A first step to ensuring affordable and supportive housing can be maximized equitably across the city is rationalizing zoning regulations. For example, currently, senior housing has an advantage compared to supportive and affordable housing via the Affordable Independent Residences for Seniors (AIRS) program. Modifying the Zoning Resolution to increase density for all types of affordable housing would make affordable and supportive housing more competitive with other uses and also accelerate the creation of much-needed homes.

---

<sup>9</sup> Amin, A, Kaikai, J, McIntyre, A, Nguyen, C, Sauer, R. (2020) "Supportive Housing in New York City." Urban Design Forum. <https://urbandesignforum.org/proposals/supportive-housing-in-new-york-city/>

## APPENDIX

### Lives Lost, Individuals Recognized at 2020 Homeless Persons' Memorial Day

*NB: The names below are people identified by the community as people experiencing homelessness who died in 2020. Their names were read at the 2020 Homeless Persons' Memorial Day, hosted by Care for the Homeless and Urban Pathways. <https://www.careforthehomeless.org/events/hpmd-2020/>*

	LAST NAME	FIRST NAME
1		"Big Dog"
2		Abas
3		Abdul
4		Abelardo
5	Woomer	Adam
6	Perdomo	Adriel
7		Ahamed
8	Katard	Ahmed
9		Al
10	Borowik	Aleksander
11	Anuforo	Alex
12	Torres	Alex
13	Cooper	Alfonso
14		Alfonso
15		Alfred
16	Perez	Alfredo
17		Allen
18	Grant	Allen
19		Alonzo
20		Alphonso
21		Alvin
22	Carter	Alvin
23		Ana Maria
24	Garcia	Ana Maria
25		Anabella
26		Andre
27	Steadman	Andre
28	Williams	Andre
29		Andre
30		Andres
31		Andrew

32		Angel
33		Angel
34		Angel
35		Angela
36	G.	Angelo
37	Henry	Angie
38		Angle
39	Huguet	Anthony
40	Fordham	Anthony
41		Ariel
42	Abreu	Arlette
43	D.	Arnetia
44	Villalobo	Augustin
45	Ohebshalom	Avraham
46		Beatrice
47	Crown	Becky
48		Benson
49		Betty
50	Walker	Bobbie
51		Bobby
52		Brett
53	J.	Bruce
55	Willis	Calvin
56	Armenta	Carleen
57	Wallace	Carlitos
58	Miyares	Carlos
59		Casimiro
60	Randall	Cesar
61	Penman	Charles
62	Jones	Charles
63	M.	Charles
64		Charlotte
65	R.	Christina
67	Lavan	Christine
68	Canale	Christopher
69	Tsang	Chun-Ming
70	Cox	Coco
71	Washington	Colette
72		Columbus
73	Pagan	Confessor
74		Cory

76	Isaac	Craig
77		Dave
78		David
79	Hernandez	David
80	Krass	David
81	Bodrick	Dennis
82		Dereck
83	Holland	Derek
84		Diane
85		Diane
86		Dlosseni
87	Seidel	Donald
88	Frederick	Donna
89	Jenkins	Douglas
90	Hill	Dwayne
91	Brown	Dwayne
92		Edward
93		Eliseo
94		Elnora
95		Emmanuel
96		Enrique
97	Sharp	Eric
98		Ernst
99	Davis	Eugene
100		Eusebio
101	Perez	Eusebio
102	R.	F.
103		Felipe
105	Valentine	Felix
106	Bizzaro	Felix
107		Fiordaliza
108	Billips	Fitzgerald, AKA "Vuitton"
109		Francisca
110	Gonzalez	Francisco
111	Lopez	Francisco Sierra
112		Frank
113	Santore	Frank
114		Franklin
115		Frederick
117	Mendez	Gabriel

118	Jaman	Ganesh
119		Gary
120	A.	Genova
121		George
122	Smith	George
123		Georgianna
125	O'Neill	Gerard
126		Gerardo
127	McCallop	Gerry
128		Gilberto
129	R.	Gloria
130	Hale	Grace
131		Gregory
132	Floyd	Gregory
133	Raghubir	Harshram
135	Lee	Helena
137	Smallwood	Henry
138		Heriberto
139		Hiromitsu
140		Horace
141		Ignacio
142	Perez	Iliseo
143	Bellinger	Inez
144		Inez
145		Isac
146		Isaci
147	Vasquez	Ismail Mauricio
148	Ortiz	Israel
150		Jamal
151	Hamilton	James
154	Graham	James
155	Colon	Jason
156	Sacks	Jason
157		Jeffrey
158	Martinez	Jenny
159		Jeremy
160	Taylor	Jermaine
161	Cline	Jerome
162	Rubinstein	Jerome
163		Jerrel

164	McKenzie-Hamilton	Joe
165		Joel
168		John
169	Gugliotti	John
170	Royle	John
171	Sacco	John
172		John F.
173	Doe	John/Jane
174		Johnita
175	Williams	Jon
176	Williams	Jonathan
177	De Jesus	Jose
178	Rivera	Jose
179		Jose C.
180	Hernandez	Jose Guerrero
181	Perez	Juan
183	Jaquez	Juan
184	Martinez	Julie
185		Julio
186	L.	Justin
187	Jackson	Justine
189	Welch	Kareem
190		Kelly
191	Miller	Ken
192		Kennedy
193	Sermon	Kerri
194		Kitti
195		Kyley
196	Threats	Larry
197		Laura
198		Lavota
199	Taylor	Lawrence
200	Ward	Lennox
201		Leonard
202	Lara	Leonard
203		Leroy
204		Leroy
205		Leroy J.
206		Lillian
207		Lisa



208	Jenkins	Liyam and Liyah
209	Murray	Lonnie
210		Lorenzo
211	E.	Lori
212		Lucious
213	Bennett	Lynwood
214		Marcella
215	Smith	Marianne
216	Stevenson	Mark
217	Staniszewski	Martin
218		Martires
219	Thomas	Marvin
220		Mayra
223		Michael
224		Michael
225		Michael
226		Michael
227		Michael
228	Chisholm	Michael
229	Ligotino	Michael
230	Lamons	Michael
231	Caquias	Michael
232	Hernandez	Michael
233	Ellis	Michelle Pierre
234	Sanchez	Miguel
235		Mo
236		Mo
237		Montgomery
238	Hukill	Monty
239		Mudaba
240		Muhammad
241		Najib
242	Washington	Nancy
243		Nathaniel
244	Stryker	Nelson
245	DeLuca	Nicolas DeLuca
246		Nihal
247	Crooks	Norma
248	Armstrong	Nyhunta
249		Olivo
250	Cuevas	Orlando

251	Drame	Ousmane
252		Pam
253		Patricia
255		Paul
256	Webb	Paul
257	Monasterio	Paul
258		Pedro
259		Philip
260		Phillip
262		Prince
263		Quinton
264		Rafael
266	Moreno	Rafael
267		Raphael
268		Raul
269		Relan
271	Winslow	Renee
272	Nicdao	Reynaldo
273		Richard
274	Solano	Rigoberto
275	Mongual	Robert
278	Johnson	Robert
279	O.	Robert
280	V.	Robert
281	Glaner	Robert
282	Foley	Ronald
283	Jacques	Ronald
284		Rosa
285		Ruben
286		Rudolph
287	Mackie	Russell
288	Maggio	Ryan
289		Sade
290		Sal
291		Sandra
292	Samaroo	Sarojini
293	Reilly	Sean
294	Abesha	Selam "Roman"
295		Sergio
296	Gutierrez	Sergio
297	Alsayidi	Sharafeldi

298		Sid
299		Sophia
300		Sophia
301	Visconti	Stacy
302		Stanley
303	B.	Stanley
304	Trimble	Stephen
305	Kehoe	Steven
306	N.	Steven
307		Survelia
309	Ortiz	Susana
310	Walz	Suzanne
311	Becton	Tarsha
312		Theresa
314	Jones	Theresa
315		Tira
317		Tito
318		Todd
319		Trevor
320		Ulysses
321		Val
323	Griffin	Verna
324	D.E.	Veteran
325		Vicente
326		Victor
328	Gonzalez	Victor
329	C.	Victor
330	O.	Villain
332		Villian
334	Olivo	Villian
336	Lobb	Vincent
337	Olivo	Vivian
338	Tatarinovich	Vladimir
339	Tate	Wade
340		William
341		William
342		Williams
343		Winston
344		Yakov
346	Biasochea	Yolanda



Safety  
Net  
Project

Testimony of Urban Justice Center - Safety Net Project

Hon. Steven T. Levin

Committee on General welfare

Monday December 6, 2021

40 Rector St, 9th Fl, New York, NY 10006 Tel: 646.602.5600 | Fax: 212.533.4598

[urbanjustice.org](http://urbanjustice.org) | [@urbanjustice](https://twitter.com/urbanjustice)

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding Single Adult Homelessness in New York City.

This is a large and incredibly important subject, as it impacts the lives of many tens of thousands of people in New York City each year. Given the timeframe to prepare for this hearing, we are unable to fully comment on all of the components of this subject in a comprehensive way.

However, we would like to highlight the lack of humanity, indifference, cruelty, and violence that New York City has enacted on single homeless people during this administration, and offer some of our recommendations for what could be changed as this administration wraps up and a new one begins.

***SWEEPS HAVE DRASTICALLY INCREASED AND OUTREACH HAS BEEN TURNED INTO AN ARM OF POLICING***

- During the past administration, New York City transformed its DHS "outreach" teams - which continue to be chronically under-resourced in terms of being able to provide material assistance or housing options - into a piece of the Broken Windows strategy of policing. Creating "HOME-STAT" (an intentional reference to the controversial 'CompStat' system used by the NYPD), the City has implemented one of the most systematic efforts to disappear homeless people from the street in the history of modern homelessness.
- The sheer quantity of sweeps of homeless New Yorkers should shock the conscience: DSS coordinated more than 6,000 of them over the past five years. None of that helped people on the street get housed, even though virtually everyone agrees there is a crisis of street homelessness in New York City. In fact, the sweeps did the opposite, resulting the destruction of people's possessions and paperwork, traumatizing already vulnerable New Yorkers, and simultaneously destroying any possibility for a positive relationship with homeless outreach. **The City must immediately stop the sweeps. All resources should be directed toward helping people access permanent housing, providing material aid, and offering temporary private rooms for those who want them while their housing is being secured.**

***THE CITY'S RESPONSE TO COVID-19 SHOWED THAT CONGREGATE SHELTERS ARE UNDIGNIFIED AND UNSAFE AND THE CITY SHOULD PROVIDE PRIVATE ROOMS AND PERMANENT HOUSING***

- The use of hotels proved what homeless people have been saying for decades and what we should all know – that people need basic privacy and decent living conditions, and quick transitions into permanent housing. Living in crowded spaces with anywhere from one to 50 other people is not healthy, dignified, or safe. We fully support the right to shelter in New York City. **However, the City must move away from congregate shelter model and instead focus on dignified, private accommodation with individual kitchen and bathroom facilities and with quick access to permanent housing.**
- At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, the Administration had to be pushed to value the health of homeless people in a way that actually reduced their risk of contracting COVID-19 in shelters. The transfers to hotels happened because homeless people demanded it, and only after many homeless people had already died from the virus.
- In June 2021, the Administration's decision to evict 9,000 hotel residents and facilitate the dangerous repopulating of the congregate shelters led to one of the cruelest and most chaotic moments in recent City history, with levels of desperation that were palpable. People should

have moved from hotels to housing, instead they waited in hotels for over a year with vouchers that were virtually unusable, only to be sent back to the congregate shelters. **The institutional violence homeless people faced as they were forcibly displaced by the thousands cannot be forgotten or downplayed - because it cannot happen again.**

- At the current moment, the City's congregate shelters are fully operating, despite that fact that most shelters have not updated circulation systems, and we have entered a new state of emergency with the Omicron variant. **The City should immediately offer people private rooms and permanent housing to get as many people out of congregate shelter as possible.**

#### ***CITY BUREAUCRACY REGULARLY PREVENTS PEOPLE FROM GETTING PERMANENT HOUSING***

- The City has only distributed 821 of the 5,738 Section 8 Emergency Housing Vouchers that they received in June 2021. **The City must immediately simplify the process so that all 5,738 vouchers are distributed to homeless New Yorkers by the end of the year.**
- People with CityFHEPS vouchers who find apartments often wait months for their paperwork to be processed correctly due to unnecessarily rigid bureaucratic barriers, lack of trained staff, and a cumbersome process. As a result, many lose apartments that they had previously secured. Homeless New Yorkers and landlords have no way to directly contact the CityFHEPS unit to address these issues. **The process must immediately be streamlined so that CityFHEPS voucher packets can be fully processed in 1-2 weeks.**
- The addition of CityFHEPS utility allowances reduce the value of people's vouchers in the market, further limiting their chances to get apartments. They also add an additional layer of confusion and bureaucracy. We have already seen shelter residents lose apartments due to confusion over the utility allowance amounts. **DHS should immediately issue a new rule eliminating utility allowances and revert to the previous CityFHEPS practice of calculating rents without utility calculations.**

#### ***VERY FEW PERMANENT HOUSING UNITS ARE AVAILABLE AND MORE ARE URGENTLY NEEDED***

- Homeless New Yorkers shouldn't need to "win a lottery" in order to access permanent housing. In a time where NYC's homeless population is the size of a small city, HPD should not leave the housing of tens of thousands of people up to luck. **The City should utilize all vacant HPD apartments to house homeless New Yorkers as quickly as possible.**
- The current process for accessing HPD units is opaque, slow, and arbitrary. For many of the people we work with, it takes more than a year to move into an HPD unit. **The City must create a fair and transparent process so that homeless NYers in all shelter systems and on the streets can easily access affordable units.**
- Homeless New Yorkers with vouchers still face rampant source of income discrimination. **The City should dramatically increase funding for the Commission on Human Rights so that landlords who violate the law are held accountable and prosecuted.**

#### ***POLICIES IN SINGLE ADULT SHELTERS ARE INHUMANE AND CRUEL***

- The City regularly transfers people suddenly with little to no advance notice and no ability to contest their sudden evictions, regardless of DV, disability, access to critical care, resources, and networks. In many situations the City states that it is unable to tell people where they are going until the day of the transfer, sometimes not until after they get on a bus. Sometimes people are

handed a Metrocard and told to travel to remote parts of the City late at night. **The City must immediately revise transfer policies and avoid transfers not requested by shelter residents. If the City believes that a transfer is absolutely necessary, homeless New Yorkers must receive two weeks advance notice, access to a fair appeal process that stops the transfer pending the appeal decision, and must always be provided with transportation with their belongings and mail forwarding services. People in shelter should never be required to dispose of their personal belongings due to a transfer.**

- DHS's curfew policy is cruel and inhumane. Homeless New Yorkers have work obligations, friends, family, and lives just like the rest of us. **Homeless New Yorkers should be allowed to sign for their bed instead of needing to meet a punitive requirement that they be back by 10 pm.**
- Prior to COVID-19, most shelters forced all residents to leave during the day. While this policy was paused during COVID-19, it has resumed at some shelters in recent months. Homeless New Yorkers need to be able to access their rooms at any time, including if they decide to stay in their room during the day. **This policy is cruel and unnecessary and DHS must end it immediately.**
- The City has also failed to adequately serve LGBTQ New Yorkers in need of shelter. Homeless New Yorkers who are LGBTQ continue to face disproportionate harm and discrimination within the City's shelter systems. **DHS should immediately prioritize ensuring non-discriminatory and safe shelter access for homeless LGBTQ New Yorkers.**
- This past summer, thousands of homeless New Yorkers applied for Reasonable Accommodations (RA's) as the City threatened to throw them back into congregate shelters, regardless of their medical and mental health conditions. The process was chaotic, disorganized, inconsistent, and confusing. Many homeless New Yorkers never received notices regarding their RA's, had their medical documents lost by DHS, or were sent to locations that failed to meet their approved RA's. **DHS must immediately follow the RA process outlined in *Butler* and ensure that homeless New Yorkers are receiving access to a clear, fair RA process with support from DHS staff.**

## ***SUPPORTIVE HOUSING***

- There are more than 30,000 supportive housing units in New York City, and many officials continue to talk about new initiatives to build more supportive housing. However, these units often fail to provide the dignity and support that tenants need and deserve. Many are also in shared settings and fail to provide basic privacy. **The City must immediately shift toward providing private apartment units with private bathrooms and full kitchens. They must also take action to ensure that tenant rights in supportive housing are enforced and that residents receive the support they deserve.**
- Supportive housing is often hailed as the primary solution to single adult homelessness, often to the exclusion of other options. Many shelter residents are told that supportive housing is their *only* housing option, even if they don't have serious health issues or disabilities or would prefer independent housing. **DHS must ensure shelter residents are offered independent *and* supportive housing and that homeless New Yorkers who don't want or need supportive housing are not pushed into it.**

- The supportive housing application process is long, burdensome, and arduous, and homeless New Yorkers with the most significant disabilities are often the least likely to obtain access to housing. **The City must shift to a true Housing First model for supportive housing placement so that homeless New Yorkers are placed quickly into available units that work for them, without the current maze of rejections and barriers.**

***MORE STABILIZATION BEDS AND SAFE HAVEN BEDS ARE NEEDED***

- This administration has overseen the expansion of low-barrier safe haven and stabilization beds in the DHS system, in response to significant advocacy and activism, most specifically the refusal of many homeless people to enter traditional congregate shelters they found dangerous and unhelpful. Those expansions have been lifesaving for many.
- However, increasingly, more beds have been added into the rooms at stabilization sites and at least one site is being closed down, the Sleep Inn in Queens, bringing them closer to more traditional congregate dorms and causing some residents to go back to the street. **Closing stabilization sites and turning stabilization sites into congregate sites only breaks trust with residents and increases street homelessness.**

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. Please feel free to contact us should you have any further questions.



---

**From:** TempleResurrection <vvcmax@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, December 9, 2021 10:42 PM  
**To:** Levin, Stephen; Testimony  
**Cc:** TempleResurrection  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Wendy O'Shields Testimony T2021-8249 Oversight - State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC Department of Homeless Services December 6, 2021

Please submit my Testimony for the record.



T2021-8249  
Oversight - State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC  
Department of Homeless Services  
Shelters, Safe Havens, Drop-in Centers,  
Faith Based Beds, Respite Beds, COVID-19 Beds, or  
Veterans & Criminal Justice Short Term Housing  
December 6, 2021

<https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=907744&GUID=01C21F2F-037A-4C00-9813-8F9AEADFC62&Options=info%7C&Search=>

DHS NYC Council Hearing  
<https://council.nyc.gov/livestream/#virtual-room-2>  
December 6, 2021

My name is Wendy O'Shields and I am a Homeless Rights and Housing Advocate in New York City. I am the Co-Founder of the Urban Justice Center Safety Net Activists. I support NYC Legislation T2021-8249 Oversight - State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC Department of Homeless Services Shelters, Safe Havens, Drop-in Centers, Faith Based Beds, Respite Beds, COVID-19 Beds, or Veterans & Criminal Justice Short Term Housing.

## LET THE RECORD SHOW

New York State governs the New York City DHS Single Adult Men's Shelters under Callahan v. Carey, No. 79-42582 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County, Cot. 18, December 5, 1979) & the subsequent Callahan Consent Decree 1981.

New York State governs the New York City DHS Single Adult Women's Shelters under Eldredge v. Koch Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, First Department December 20, 1983 98 A.D.2d 675 (N.Y. App. Div. 1983).

Robert Callahan v. Hugh L. Carey/Louise F. Eldredge v. Edward I. Koch Decided June 4, 2009 Steven Banks Appeal.

"New York City Mayor Edward I. Koch, his Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and his Director of the Shelter Care Center for Men (the City defendants). The parties subsequently resolved this lawsuit with a "Final Judgment by Consent" dated August 26, 1981; in 1983, this consent decree was extended to cover homeless woman living in the City (see Eldredge v Koch, 98 AD2d 675 [1stDept 1983]).

Paragraph 11 -- which is key to this appeal -- states in its entirety that "[p]laintiffs' representatives shall have full access to all shelter facilities, central intake centers and satellite intake centers, and plaintiffs' counsel [the Legal Aid Society] shall be provided access to any records relevant to the enforcement and monitoring of this decree" (emphasis added)."

In addition, paragraph 10 directs the Commissioner of HRA to "appoint qualified employees with no administrative responsibility for providing shelter to monitor [the City defendants'] shelter care program . . . with respect to compliance with [the] decree"; and make twice monthly written reports to the Commissioner, which "shall be made available to [the Legal Aid Society] upon reasonable notice."

The City of New York and the Department of Homeless Services Shelters are not Prisons. The Single Adult Resident shall have an open area to meet with family or friends. The Single Adult Resident shall have a private area to meet with an Attorney, Legal Counsel, Therapist, or Parole Officer.

## DHS SINGLE ADULT SHELTER PROCESS

1. Upon first contact at the City of New York DHS Single Adult Assessment Shelter Intake Staff shall complete a mandatory New York State Shelter C16-Housing-Plan and begin the Resident's Housing profile. The Resident's "**Length of Stay**" shall not be reduced per each Shelter Transfer and per each new Shelter residency.
2. At Intake the DHS Single Adult Assessment Staff shall inform the DHS Single Adult Resident of their Right to bring a Grievance against a Shelter with an Advocate or Attorney present at their New York State Fair Hearing.
3. At Intake the DHS Single Adult Assessment Staff shall inform the DHS Single Adult Resident of the definition of a DHS Administrative Transfer and the emergency nature of this process.

A specific reason/s detailed in writing on the Transfer form explaining why the Single Adult Resident is being Administratively Transferred. DHS staff shall stop writing "To a Shelter that can better accommodate your needs." and write an explanatory reason/s.

4. At Intake the DHS Single Adult Assessment Staff shall inform the DHS Single Adult Resident of the definition of a New York State 491.15 Involuntary Transfer. The Involuntary Transfers shall not be performed

without the 48 hour written notice, on Holidays, Holiday Weekends, unless a delay will pose a risk to the health or safety of such individual or Staff.

A specific reason/s detailed in writing on the Transfer form explaining why the Single Adult Resident is being Involuntary Transferred is mandatory.

5. DHS calculates the Single Adult Congregate Shelter stays generally as per HUD McKinney-Vento 24 Month maximum **"Length of Stay."** DHS typically issues an Administrative Transfer every 2 to 3 years to hide their Long Term Shelter Stayers which reside in Shelter typically 5 to 15 years prior to housing themselves.

DHS Long Term Shelter Stayers statistics are not reported to HUD, NYS OTDA, HPD, and other pertinent Homeless or Housing agencies.

HUD McKinney-Vento (29) TRANSITIONAL HOUSING.—The term 'transitional housing' means housing the purpose of which is to facilitate the movement of individuals and families experiencing homelessness to permanent housing within 24 months or such longer period as the Secretary determines necessary.

6. A DHS Executive Staff practicum shall be established which will expose them to inner workings of the DHS Shelter System. The Executive Staff shall begin by reporting to the DHS Assessment Shelter for Intake, then await transported by prison bus to a Congregate Single Adult Shelter for Intake, then await a Bed assignment, abide by the DHS Shelter "Code of Conduct," return to Shelter by the illegal 10 PM Curfew. DHS Executive Staff shall return to a different DHS Single Adult Congregate Shelter every Month, and sleep 3 consecutive nights.

Thank you,  
Wendy O'Shields, Independent Advocate  
Co-Founder Safety Net Activists

## ENDNOTES

Callahan v. Carey, No. 79-42582 (Sup. Ct. N.Y. County, Cot. 18, 1979)

<https://www.escri-net.org/caselaw/2006/callahan-v-carey-no-79-42582-sup-ct-ny-county-cot-18-1979>

New York State The Callahan Consent Decree which Established a Legal Right to Shelter for Homeless Men in New York City 1981.

<https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/CallahanConsentDecree.pdf>

Eldredge v. Koch Appellate Division of the Supreme Court of New York, First Department December 20, 1983 98 A.D.2d 675 (N.Y. App. Div. 1983)

<https://casetext.com/case/eldredge-v-koch-1>

Robert Callahan v. Hugh L. Carey/Louise F. Eldredge v. Edward I. Koch Decided June 4, 2009 Steven Banks Appeal

<https://law.justia.com/cases/new-york/court-of-appeals/2009/98opn09.html>

New York State Shelter Oversight and Compliance  
Client Forms New York State Shelter C16-Housing-Plan

<https://otda.ny.gov/programs/shelter/forms.asp#forms>

New York State Regulations Shelter Oversight and Compliance OTDA Laws

<https://otda.ny.gov/programs/shelter/regulations.asp>

New York State Part 491 Shelters for Adults: Browse - New York Codes, Rules and Regulations

[https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Browse/Home/NewYork/NewYorkCodesRulesandRegulations?guid=I81a57f30b80f11dd9190c387f1d75965&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=Default&contextData=\(sc.Default\)](https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Browse/Home/NewYork/NewYorkCodesRulesandRegulations?guid=I81a57f30b80f11dd9190c387f1d75965&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=Default&contextData=(sc.Default))

New York State 18 CRR-NY 491.15 Involuntary discharge and transfer. View Document - New York Codes, Rules and Regulations

[https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/I3b2f58bb4cbd11ea8d93b997b3141206?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=\(sc.Default\)&bhcp=1](https://govt.westlaw.com/nycrr/Document/I3b2f58bb4cbd11ea8d93b997b3141206?viewType=FullText&originationContext=documenttoc&transitionType=CategoryPageItem&contextData=(sc.Default)&bhcp=1)

## **LENGTH OF STAY FOR CONGREGATE SHELTER SINGLE ADULTS**

The McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act

As amended by S. 896 The Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009 1

SEC. 103. [42 USC 11302]. GENERAL DEFINITION OF HOMELESS INDIVIDUAL.

(a) IN GENERAL.—For purposes of this Act, the term “homeless”, “homeless individual”, and “homeless person” means—

[https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HAAA\\_HEARTH.PDF](https://www.hud.gov/sites/documents/HAAA_HEARTH.PDF)

Donald Glassman  
66<sup>th</sup> Road  
Rego Park, NY 11374-5221  
December 5, 2021

Re: Oversight Hearing: "State of Single Adult Homelessness in NYC"

Dear New York City Council Committee on General Welfare:

As public servants responsible for addressing New York City's housing crisis in the epoch of COVID, you ought to know what the New York City Department of Homeless Services is doing under your oversight to perpetuate this crisis, even as it pretends to work to cure it.

Hear my horror story of trying to rent to a tenant with a FHEPS voucher, residing at the time in a New York City homeless shelter. In early January of this year, I finally finished renovating my sister's old bedroom in my single-family house in Rego Park, where I grew up and where I currently reside part-time. After putting an ad online, the first serious inquiry was from a resident of the Main Chance Multi-Service Drop-In Center in Manhattan, who asked if I would accept a FHEPS voucher in the amount of \$800 a month. Although the room is worth \$1,500 in good times, \$1,200 in bad, the stability of the rent subsidy & my desire to help somebody down on their luck--an Afro-Canadian immigrant with no local family--outweighed my impatience to finally get more of an income out of this house than I pay in property taxes.

My prospective tenant came to Rego Park a few days later, loved the room, & shortly thereafter (mid-January) I sent a copy of the proposed lease, security deposit voucher acceptance form, & the rest of the requisite paperwork to the housing coordinator at the shelter, who told both me & my prospective tenant to get ready for move-in as soon as the 2 required steps were completed: "clearance" of the property (confirming that I own it & it's not encumbered by liens or major violations) & inspection by the Department of Homeless Services. But on 1/28, the 1<sup>st</sup> clearance failed, because the housing coordinator erroneously reported that the room was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor even though the house has only 1 floor.

On 2/17, the 2<sup>nd</sup> clearance failed, because DHS couldn't handle the fact that I'd called the room "East Bedroom" rather than giving it a number. So I changed it to Room #2 on the lease & all the other paperwork.

But on 2/22, the 3<sup>rd</sup> clearance failed, because "LANDLORD DON'T MATCH DEED" according to DHS reviewer Perry Rabalais's notation--an error on his part, either because he was looking at the

wrong deed or the wrong property, which I explained to the housing coordinator.

But on 3/10, the 4<sup>th</sup> clearance failed, because Perry Rabalais searched the wrong address, block, and lot number. I called the housing coordinator again & begged him to intervene, as did my prospective tenant.

On 3/12, the 5<sup>th</sup> clearance failed, because the housing coordinator erroneously identified the room as "Apt. 2" rather than "Room 2".

On 3/16, the 6<sup>th</sup> clearance went through, & I was ready for the inspection. But this is only the beginning of my DHS horror story.

The inspection coordinator called me to announce that the inspection would be virtual & that I'd have to purchase a digital thermometer gun & a GFCI outlet tester to help the inspector perform it. The equipment set me back 40 dollars, but I was grateful that I'd finally have my bedroom rented on April 1<sup>st</sup>, as it had now been lying fallow for 2 months while I'd turned several non-voucher tenants away. But it was not to be! The room failed the inspection on 3/26--not because of any actual impairing condition, but because of the following 7 **bogus** "impairing conditions":

- 1) a 2-prong outlet in the living room with a desk lamp plugged into it.
- 2) "inaccessible outlet" in the living-room, because no one told me that I'd have to test **every outlet in the house**, & in any event I'd have had to hire 2 or 3 brawny movers to shift the 500-pound cabinet concealing the outlet far enough away from the wall that I could video myself plugging the GCFI tester into it, & then have them move it back again after the inspection.
- 3) "inaccessible outlet" in the bedroom, because I asked the inspector (Jason Tsang) if he wanted me to move a small file cabinet out of the way so I could test it for him, & he told me **not to bother**.
- 4) "non-GFCI outlet next to the kitchen sink": In fact, the 1 next to the sink **IS** GFCI, & I tested it for Mr. Tsang to prove it. But he failed me anyway because there's a non-GFCI outlet **4 FEET** from the sink. In order to get that outlet wet, one would have to turn the kitchen tap on full blast & **shoot the sprayer at the outlet, & it probably still would not reach even if you angled it at the ceiling to spray the maximum distance**.
- 5) "no hot water in bathtub": Here Mr. Tsang outright falsified his report. After the kitchen tap tested at 120 degrees and the

bathroom sink tap also tested at 120 degrees, the bathtub tap tested only in the 90's, partly because the other 2 taps had just been running hot water at full blast, & partly because that particular tap just doesn't run as hot, possibly for safety reasons or to conserve energy; I'm not sure, but I had had the bathtub plumbing including the shower body completely replaced a year and a half before at a cost of \$2,800 & my tenant occupying the other bedroom, who uses it every day, said it gets plenty hot for his showers. (After the inspection, I retested it & it remained steady at **103 degrees--plenty hot** for a bath or shower.) But the inspection report says "no hot water in bathtub" which is & was **false**.

6) "double cylinder lock on front door": It's true that you need a key to unlock the front door from the inside, for the simple reason that the 1938 oak door--which I had repaired & reinforced in 2012--has a small leaded-glass window at the top, which an intruder could simply punch through & be able to open all 3 locks to gain entry to the house, if at least 1 of those locks was not key-operated. I make sure that all my tenants get this key, & I make sure that a copy of this key is always on a hook right next to the door. In other words, with that kind of door, **the only responsible choice is to prioritize the major security hazard over the minor fire hazard, especially since one can escape the house just as easily by unlatching and stepping through either the kitchen or the living-room window; but if an intruder enters the house, all bets are off**. I explained this to the inspector, but he simply brushed it off, saying "it's a rule". On the night of 4/29/21, an intruder **did** punch through said leaded-glass window, while my tenant watched in horror from the living-room, but fortunately failed to gain access to the house, thanks to the double-cylinder lock on the front door. (The intruder was arrested & charged with criminal mischief, but the charge was dropped by DA Melinda Katz's office a few months later without any explanation, & without any restitution being paid to me.)

7) I saved the most outrageous one for last: "drop ceiling in kitchen". Just as no one at DHS ever told me about the 6-foot rule for outlets in the kitchen or that I'd be expected to expose & test every outlet in the living-room, no one at DHS ever told me that if there is a drop ceiling **anywhere in the house**, I was **permanently disqualified** from renting any room in that house to a voucher tenant. In this case, it consists of a steel lattice with foam panels, with a fluorescent light fixture embedded in the center panel.

At the end of the inspection, after telling me some but not all of the reasons that I'd fail (as we've seen, he actually fabricated 2 of the "impairing conditions"), Mr. Tsang advised me to call "DHS Housing Support" at 212-232-0560 (which turns out to be a mere switchboard) to ask if any city funding was

available to enable me to replace my front door with a windowless one with new locks (\$1,000-\$2,000 & aesthetic degradation); to replace the bathtub plumbing again with a fixture that's biased more towards the hot water side (\$3,000); to replace 3 outlets between 4 & 6 feet of the kitchen sink (\$200-\$300); to replace a handful of 2-prong outlets left in the house (which are NO hazard) (\$300-\$500); & to demolish the drop ceiling in the kitchen, refurbish the sheetrock ceiling & moldings, & install a new light fixture in place of the existing one (which works perfectly) (\$4,000-\$5,000). Of course, the kitchen would be inaccessible to my existing tenant and to me (since I live here too) for the 2-4 days that the latter job would take.

No one picked up at the DHS switchboard for most of the day on 3/26, but eventually I reached a receptionist who assured me that a "superior" from DHS would call me back "within 48 hours". I must admit, I was not optimistic that anyone from DHS would credit me that 2 of the "impairing conditions" were falsified by the inspector, and either grant me a waiver for the other 5 "impairing conditions" or agree to foot the bill for the \$8,000-\$11,000 in renovations that it would cost to cure them. But it makes no difference what I hoped or didn't hope, because, more than 8 months later, DHS still has not called me back, which is why I am compelled to bring these facts to the members of this committee.

So what do you expect me to do: Spend \$8,000-\$11,000 out of my pocket for the privilege of renting to an \$800-a-month voucher tenant?

When I told the housing coordinator at the shelter about the inspection failure, he said (paraphrasing) "Them's the breaks--there's nothing I can do." But my prospective tenant was completely crushed; begged me if there was anything I could do to change the outcome ("Maybe you can get a new inspection?")--not having found, in **4 months of searching**, any other \$800 room in the city whose owner would accept a FHEPS voucher.

All I could muster in response was: "I'm sorry that DHS did this to us, friend; especially to you." Meanwhile, it took me until November to find a substitute tenant--**NON-VOUCHER, OF COURSE**--while my renovated, beautiful spare bedroom with a garden view in Rego Park sat vacant for **ten months**, and while a homeless New Yorker continued to occupy a bed in the Main Chance Multi-Service Drop-In Center in Manhattan.

Is it any wonder that homelessness persists in the City of New York?

Yours truly,



A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Donald Glassman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Donald" and last name "Glassman" clearly distinguishable.

Donald Glassman

917-441-2106 (home)

718-414-4408 (mobile)

P.S. Upon request, I would be delighted to furnish documentation to back up every detail in the above account my 3-month effort to house a homeless New Yorker, frustrated at every turn by the New York City Department of Homeless Services.

## *Fannie Lou Diane*

---

271 Cadman Plaza East P.O Box 24715 Brooklyn NY 11202 |646-547-6592| Fannieloudiane@gmail.com

December 9, 2021

To The City Council General Welfare Committee,

I am submitting my testimony to add to the oversight hearing that you had on December 6 on the state of single adult homelessness in NYC.

My name is Fannie Lou Diane, and I am a member leader at Neighbors Together, member leader at UNLOCK NYC and a member of Housing Justice for All.

To be single, black, female and homeless is the equivalent to being punished for being poor, being childless, and unhoused. There are programs for individuals with children, those who formally incarcerated individuals, those who identify as LGBTQIA, and individuals under the age of 18 but rarely any programs for single women. Your help is attached to a comma and not that fact that you are in need and most of the time at the last end of your rope if you have no choice to ask for assistance.

In July of 2019, I was illegally evicted by my landlord because I battled my former landlord over my right to have a healthy, safe and viable living environment. I dealt with **dust, black mold throughout my whole apartment, leaks, illegal wiring, cockroaches, several mice infestations, several long-term bedbug infestations, and lack of heat.** I've lived through **three bed bug infestations and two mice infestation where the department of health had to take over from lack of response from the landlord. Having survived all these horrible indignities, going to a shelter exacerbated my fears even more that I would be around this again in the s the New York City Shelter system.**

After my eviction, I went to the main Bronx shelter, Franklin Women's Shelter which was deplorable and not livable for any human being. I dreaded going into that nightmare my foreboding was a correct response and not a response of hoping to receive the help I needed.

The Franklin Women's Shelter was the equivalent to going to prison. As soon as you walk in the shelter you are stopped and frisked by the security guards. The sleeping quarters were an open concept, so there is very little privacy, and you are lumped in with everyone from every walk of life you can imagine. They give you a slip and you are supposed to hold on to that until you see a case manager. They give you a towel and some toiletries, in my case they gave me a wash rag as they ran out of towels. They have lockers to put your things, but they weren't the best to put your things in without feeling like someone will pick the locks and rob you.

The bathroom is equivalent to the bathrooms in the train stations filthy and all kinds of illicit behavior when I was there takes place in the restroom. The shower stalls offered little to no privacy. This still haunts me.

After that horrifying experience, I've bounced around to family members and friends while still facing physical and mental challenges. My housing situation right now is still precarious because my landlord wants me to leave

to make room for her family which would put me out on the street again. With Covid-19 being a global pandemic for me it's dangerous to be out in the street because of my existing underlying conditions of being immune compromised and having asthma. I've been impacted with trauma after trauma, and therefore why I am submitting my written testimony.

**These are my suggestions to make things better for single adults:**

**1. What you think DHS, the mayor, and City Council did that was good?**

I want to start by giving all three entities the applause for raising the City Fheps voucher rate, as that was a positive step forward. However, the 90 days wait time to relieve the voucher while being in the shelter is a horrible idea. It's as if you are dangling candy in front of a child. We are single homeless individuals, and we shouldn't have to feel like we are competing in the Squid Game Olympics just to receive something that should be a human right. The PATH process has to change into a more holistic process as you treat the individual first and not the other way around. Individuals should have access to mental health counseling, domestic abuse support, drug counseling and access to more financial support.

**2. What you think the city needs to fix or improve?**

The approach of one size fits all has to be abolished, as soon as individuals become homeless, they are ushered into PATH like cattle. There should be dormitories for those who become homeless where they have their own room and disband the 90 -day wait period to be placed in a more comfortable situation. That should be immediate.

For those out of community (not in the shelter) the huge issue are the conduits that issue vouchers like CAMBA, Catholic Charities and Hombase. These organizations need more oversight from the city as many of these organizations are operating with a laissez-faire attitude because they know that the city isn't really checking them like they should. The eligibility criteria for receiving a voucher for those out in community must change as well. If you are experiencing hardship, you should receive a voucher period. A person shouldn't have to wait till they are in the court system to get assistance and or still be eligible for a voucher even after the two years from the set date of their eviction. Why put individuals through the mental gymnastics to get access to housing?

**3. Cash Assistance Increase**

The cash assistance amount should increase, giving individuals who are severely economically impacted 123.00 twice a month barely covers personal expenses like toiletries, co-pays for medication, transportation and other aspects of self-care. An increase in cash assistance must happen in order to help and assist individuals to stand tall on their own.

I thank you for this opportunity and I am hopeful that some of my suggestions can be taken into account as we strive to make New York City the beacon for a fair and humane example of how we treat our most vulnerable populations.

Thank you,

Fannie Lou Diane  
Neighbors Together  
UNLOCK NYC  
Housing Justice For All

Hello. My name is Katrina Corbell and I am currently housed (2 years this week, majority spent on covid quarantines/shelter-in-place), though am at risk of re-entering the shelter fiasco system again. I live in alleged “supportive” housing and am a member of numerous organizations such as Supportive Housing Organized and United Tenants (SHOUT), Coalition for the Homeless’s Client Advisory Group (CAG), and Rise and Resist (RAR).

For the ongoing, as referred to in earlier testimonies over the years, domestic violence/intimate partner violence (DP/IPV) and court protection orders, I will not call out the name of the building I live in. I do like to be poetical though, as you will see. I have heard the point of this State of the Homeless, Single Adult Shelters meeting of the General Welfare committee is to review the past 8 years and the accomplishments as well as what needs to be done. I can only provide what I have experienced and witnessed, as I am in the midst of assisting two friends, each with a child under 2 years old, try to navigate transitioning from street homeless and “other” life such as couchsurfing and other non-leaseholding survival means to any and all possible alternatives to family shelter and shelter altogether based on the atrocities many of us have experienced and this very week the same things are happening that I went through 3 years ago and yelp 1 star reviews are up from 2011 and 2014!

I landed in NYC 10 years ago, Nov 10<sup>th</sup>. I was going to stay for a week (a school related conference, couchsurf but at \$35/night; not how we couchsurf in California!) or 2 (if I dared to enter Zuccotti! Well, had been helping online advocacy for a few cities picked on by the cops or/and mayors, so was getting myself ready to), but the destruction of Occupy Wall Street by NYPD and NYDS also blocking out all ground and air media made me prepare myself for what all of my psychology and humanities and sociology and anthropology and Chicana/o/x studies and Native American studies and a few special art professors too all prepared me for years (and tons of student debt!) earlier. To just drop any and everything I had planned to do to care for the wellness of those who had experienced a very, very traumatizing event. Who were not only without shelter, but who had tried to have their livelihoods, community, identity shaken, destroyed, demolished. “Sanitized.”

I participated in the N17 events, unions forming a human chain protecting us marchers, protesters from the NYPD. Overpass Light Brigade projecting onto a \*certain\* building messages of solidarity from around the world. So much more. That night comrades I had not met before offered me shelter in a spare room in Staten Island with another marcher. The next night I was one of the watchers, keeping an eye over a few who tried to stay awake in Zuccotti, so that the cops trying to arrest people would keep returning to awake people. Why is sleeping illegal? Hence began my long lasting love of street

homelessness, aka urban camping and countless other names. Catching up on naps at the Staten Island Ferry Terminal Building, finding housesits, peers negotiating with churches to house hundreds of us for the winter cold months...

When I realized NYC had grown on my soul much like mold grows/ I'd never shake it off, I went to HRA to begin the transition. I was able to switch and get an EBT card, but it took 6 weeks before I was able to move my then-open SSI case. I had kept going back to CA for graduate school once a month, hence deemed not a NYer as not in NY for 30 days. Finally in July, 2012 I was grounded. SSA changed my address to the general delivery address HRA introduced me to. HRA said they could not assist with housing unless I went to live in the shelters, because I was on SSI and SSI is federal, HRA is not. They also suggested I enter the housing lottery. SSA said they don't do housing and were unsure why I was sent to them for housing by the HRA. They only directed me to the HUD website, which stated how to apply for things like first time homebuyer loans or HPD type lotteries. As this was before a certain lawsuit, lotteries all did not have the asterik noting that those of us with federal subsidies may still apply even if we did not meet income guidelines. So, I kept waiting for a studio or 1 BR for someone on the approx.. \$760 a month SSI.

I was introduced to CIDNY in 2012, the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York. They are who first introduced me to Supportive Housing. They explained I was eligible based on my "two or more conditions," following earlier HASA successes, with my two easiest-to-document being asthma and epilepsy. But that they had to work with other non-profits who did the housing, and by 2013 their new partnership was Bailey House. This took a couple of months, but we finally got the intake started. Nothing ever ended up happening. New staff, fluctuating interns, etc., or, that's what I am guessing.

Also in 2012 was a mix of hotels when post-tourist season rates (and more student loans usable for housing) were available, and then various sidewalk occupations/protests around the city; a trip to Chicago for NoNATO in May, Occupy Trinity throughout the summer and early autumn; Tampa and Charlotte for the respective Occupy the RNC and DNCs August and September followed by Occupy Goldman Sachs near Columbus Circle (and Sandy!) ...when winter 2012-13 hit, that's when I couchsurfing with friends (missing any national night counts). This lasted until March '13 with a few 24 hr McDonalds in between for overnight stays, some more gracious than others. I then met St Luke's Lutheran Church and the pastor introduced me to someone who knew someone at a private shelter, so I tried that for what turned out to be 3 months. It lasted until I was threatened to be thrown out of a 4<sup>th</sup> floor window by a guest, someone who had usually been nice and caring. Didn't want to stay where I might be thrown out of a window by someone you'd least expect, you know?

Back to CIDNY, I was unofficially nudged or “what-iffed” to get jobs for another 8 or so years, so that I had enough work units so that my SSI would transition to SSD, and then I’d be earning enough for all these housing lotteries. It didn’t make sense to me, but neither did sleeping on the streets for over 2 years and not finding ever any case worker to help us or assess us. I had tried Oliveri Street’s overnight shelter—then only for women, but also not ADA accessible and take a look at that staircase to keep having to use. They also hadn’t had any beds avail, and were open about how the same one body may be referred to their center 6 times in one night, and all 6 times be turned away because as of 5p.m. everyone knew the shelter was full. But, the non-profits referring keep making or exceeding quota (likely earning bonuses?), referring new potential guests to accept an offer for shelter, and then there is no shelter available. How many times will this happen to the same individual—promises of a bed and food, showers and then being told no, never mind; go back to where nypd will arrest you for loitering—before the person(s) are going to distrust said case / outreach workers? A few came to try and assess or document friends, but they were in youth focused programs (back when the age was changed to 23 from 26, or enforcement became strict on kicking kids out the day of their birth—happy birthday, now you’re on the curb?), not for other adults.

(Also, HRA was giving me the minimum amount of SNAP benefits, around \$14 a month at the time? Obligated to as an SSI recipient under some law. I was told to be gracious by CIDNY when I received a bonus right after Sandy, but I was furious after doing google searches to learn what the SSI benefits were in NYC, including the monthly SNAP amounts. Despite CIDNY saying I should be grateful (hint: major retriggering of fundamentalism religious abuse, ie PTSD and why nonprofits need to be not only non profit and non-partisan, but person, client-centered and trauma-focused) for that temp benefit, I was able to apply for a fair hearing. It took five or six months, and when that came around, my judge was a “borrowed” judge from Albany because of how many cases and overflow NYC had. HRA sent a rep, I was by myself. The judge asked HRA rep’s why she only gave me the \$14-16 per month in SNAP and she clarified she was only the rep, it was not her decision, and she had not seen my case before that hearing that day. But, that (back then, at least) it was standard to presume that a homeless person had \*no living expenses\* hence had \*nothing else to spend their SSI money on than food,\* so they (we, I) did not need more than the \$14-16 to eat.

Gratefully, not only did I win my case, but the judge apologized to me. He also had only black and white copies left of the cover of a Medicaid Matters magazine that showed the lawsuits or/and legislation declaring years prior that houseless people having living expenses be calculated into whatever formulas and spreadsheets are used when determining our monthly allowance. He also apologized that HRA could only be held

accountable for 12 months of wrongdoing, as this had been longer than that. I still remember that day, that moment, 8 and a half years later.

Towards the end of 2013 a temp agency was able to help set up interviews for me, per that unofficial idea, and my first job was at ComicCon! Not only was I sleeping on the sidewalk at night (cardboard is essential, and find the warm subway grates) and working 11 hour shifts, wearing the same jeans thanks to febreze, but the vendor who hired us also submitted a letter to the temp agency that I and one other were the top two employees. (Likely helped I hadn't read comics and really wanted to come back to work the next day, and others were likely excited to walk through comic con during all breaks and excuses they could find, but, eh?!) Hoping that helps shatter your stereotype of homeless person?

You should see the housed people in my neighborhood. And why I am desperate to relocate.

I continued playing the HPD lottery game throughout 2013-present, but it was my main thing until 2016. I also housesat, pet-sat, visited friends in the tristate area, saved funds for hostels-converted into-alleged-hotels, and rented rooms from people who promised leases or subleases, but never followed through. (Somewhere I couchsurfed at is where I picked up my cat, Lucky, who later became my Emotional Support Animal when the tenant died unexpectedly, and I learned how emotional some animals can become! Having her deal with the DHS process has been something else, too.)

In 2016 I lost the SSI; as I had been eligible for SSD in 2015 under a surprise loophole from a parent, claiming me as an adult dependent all these years (yet I'm on the streets?). I submitted forms to SSA including the Plan to Achieve Self Support (PASS), paid the USPS for the certification and confirmation, and waited. In late December 2015 I received a letter stating they had received it in Dec 2015 after the 30 day deadline in June 2015. I confirmed with USPS it had been delivered less than a week after I had mailed it, and just did not know what to do, except start over, and start alone.

Feb 2016 My temp job terminated as well. I was grateful as although it looked like it paid almost \$40,000 annually, there was no studio or 1 BR for 33% of that price, and I was expected to pay almost \$800/month for health insurance plus have a \$5000 annual deductible for the bronze level Affordable Care Act. Hint: That health insurance far exceeded nine percent, and I could not find a bedroom that would be satisfied with that \$20/hour job. (And this was before Occupy's chants of Raise the Wage and Fight for 15 finally became true in NYC, btw!)

By the end of 2016 I learned of Urban Justice via the West Side Campaign Against Hunger, at St Paul and St Andrew's in UWS—one of the places where OWS Housing Working Group had secured temp housing for people the winter of 2011-2012! They were able to help with some benefits and such, but was told the classic housing wasn't what they could do/ they could offer me the assessment shelters, same old, same old.

As I have testified about in other hearings re the food, shelter staff denied me housing in the holidays 2018 after their own lunch sent me to urgent care, urgent care sent me to the E.R., I called the case manager (4th floor I think?), she called the shift supervisor on 1st floor-they didn't answer. E.R. called at 10:15 pm insisting they knew my shelter very well and I'd be fine/ e.r. doc had forgotten to call before and I was getting a CT at the 10:00 hour. I was cleared and discharged around 2am? Back to shelter and they had not only given up my bed, but also removed my ESA (cat, Lucky) and "jokingly" told other MICA shelter residents they could have her for the night/ that she had become a shelter cat (took 48-72 hours to get my bed back, and may have added 30-90 days to my entire 2010e process/may also have just been shelter staff bologna, who knows? (Well, DHS and Project Renewal, but we'll likely never find out, as we won't hear the results from my ombudsman complaint that did result in apparently feathers getting ruffled and my case manager upset I hadn't told her (!—or had she not been told? Had she not listened? Sis the staff not report what they pulled?), and one staff being removed. Ideally fired, but at least not with us there to "teach valuable lessons" — his lingo for why my bed was pulled, again, from the cafeteria food they served at lunch and I was sent to the ER by an urgent care for suspected emergent if not also contagious issues an urgent care could not handle.

And that later, same month they denied me the right to attend midnight mass for Christmas. Same case manager says she didn't get the request, but I gave it to the only staff I was allowed to. Did they not give it to her? Too busy with winter festivities on other days, too? Who do we the clients need to request DHS and all nonprofits complies with the law? Can we receive a stipend for such things? Do we get to add it to our resumes? "Trained DHS staff, Project Renewal staff, Help Women's Center staff, BRC, HousingWorks, Bailey House, Urban Outreach staff, et cetera on constitutional laws and how to uphold and follow through with respecting them?" Am I like lawyers where I bill by the hour for doing a few minutes work? Again, an OWS /s moment. (Make donations to Urban Justice or/and SHOUT. 😊 )

After Franklin insisted I was going to have to give up my ESA during an "observation period" of approximately 7-10 days while they decided if I needed my ESA, a friend from St Luke's offered to let me stay with her. I worked with Goddard Riverside to try and do a 2010e to be able to apply for supportive housing, as I had a background of being



street homeless and was presently homeless, and rejected by DHS despite Callahan. They said they needed to witness me being homeless. Despite my surviving by not being in one spot. We agreed for one night I would be at a particular church and they said they'd try to have their workers fib/observe me. Before they did, two very inappropriate men did. I was able to call 911 and gratefully one guy left and the other passed out from something. 2 female officers tried to write it off as what he said, that nothing happened and he was walking by the sidewalk and I started screaming at him or something like that. I was able to calmly reiterate what \*did\* happen and show those 2 and the initial officers the local security cameras to back up his fast paced turn up 8 or so steps to where I had been sitting and eating a Dunkin' Donuts sandwich for dinner, with coffee to stay awake for the night. (I did note I was waiting for a case worker, but had been sitting there eating like any NYer would have.) The 2 trying to not have to work IMHO had to call it in and their Sergeant made them arrest him and take my statement. A year or so later NYPD detectives used the same cameras to gather footage for a burglary that happened. Likely knew they were there already, being detectives, but on that note, how many houseless persons would have accepted the cops saying—"let's not write this up cuz he says he didn't do anything, 'k?"

July 2018, my ex I was trying to get away from throughout all of this but also trying to not mess with the Restraining Orders involving NYPD re-enters my housing scene/ my life. He managed to coerce friends to sway me to let him "catch up on sleep" at a room I was sharing that I had found via a friend of a friend and HRA's \$215/month type subsidy. Instead of sleeping on the spare bed, I experienced the utmost scariest level of DV/IPV that I had thought my doctors and I had prepared and planned for in a preventative way. Two months later another nonprofit, gratefully not a housing provider but closely affiliated with many, had this ex chaperone the NYC bus to DC's Cancel Kavanaugh march/protest specifically focusing on drawing attention to the #MeToo movement and ending sexual harassment and sexual assault. The fact a key then-staff member knew and that still happened, and then that they offered me a free ticket home versus staying for the protest I had been there

Also highlighted a sexual assault/attempted sexual assault I experienced in Times Square waiting to be observed as street homeless before I could have my 2010e written as I had been street homeless already. But how good would be being earning housing if getting killed in the process? Why can't street and subway outreach workers realize that women/womxn, trans\* and other vulnerable people need to guise their vulnerability (that they are homeless hence prey) simply to survive, but then we look like mere subway or restaurant commuters/consumers...

(Another nonprofit claimed to help with my 2010e, but said I could not bring my ESA in, and asked if I would just leave her, a cat, tied to a tree for the 1-2 hour appointments I had. Their housing providers also claimed to not accept even service animals, and yes, I made sure to report them to legal advocates! I also ended my relationship with them when they came to a church I used as an address, but only tried a gate entrance instead of an office door or calling the church. For months my doctor's office tried to cancel them as my "health homes" provider for other services, and they constantly refused. Never found out how much they made off of me.)

Deborah Berkman's testimony of the intake process is very raw and very valid. It nearly retraumatized me and I still have a pending lawsuit so I didn't know what I could and could not say about my scenario from 2018. (There is also a pending lawsuit from an accident that happened in 2019 at my home shelter placement leading to personal injuries and a broken rib following staff's directions.) I attempted to enter at Franklin in May 2018 and was denied entry by Franklin. However, they never issued me a client number hence 311 could not investigate it as there was no record to investigate. I noted I had an ambulance take me from Franklin to Lenox Hill's ER to treat sleep deprived seizures et al, so I do have proof of where I had been! There still was not a complaint made. How many other non- or yet-to-be-recorded complaints, grievances are there? (Some of my grievances were returned to me unsigned with no resolution by the shelter staff, with no follow up, too! Almost as though the grievances are worth exactly that, nothing; empty.) Coalition for the Homeless helped reiterate my legal right to shelter in October 2018, taking between 2 and 3 weeks instead of the 5-7 days for a "Reasonable Accommodations" request to be granted. In the months prior, I contacted so many organizations claiming to prevent homelessness or shelter prevention; to try and utilize my years of street homelessness to validate my homeless experience to not need to re-enter and re-experience homelessness (as I was already back to street homelessness for a few months by then...). I was always too homeless/ too late for intervention, or not homeless enough because it takes HRA 3 cycles or 7.5 weeks to stop rental assistance, so that entire time some homeless prevention will not work with you because HRA insists you are still housed...while you are sleeping on streets, subways... with cats, dogs, etc.

I was in the shelter for 420 days but know people 2 years later who are still there, who were there before I entered same shelter.

DHS kept stressing the average 315 days "but working people stay an average of 56 days." How does this not violate ADA?! Especially if some of us with disabilities unable to work still engage and volunteer with other organizations, were denied work benefits

like the ability to sleep in during the day even though we were out at meetings, hearings, events until curfew or similar times, often with prominent speakers or other voices who would be our advocate, we were denied. Did not have a paycheck, again, which would have jeopardized SSI, SSD benefits, etc. Even those who are less active than me should not be subject to 6-10 times the wait for housing merely because of their health status.

Rather than having backgrounds in social work, sociology, urban studies, et cetera housing specialists were not attached to their jobs; some had dreams of becoming restaurant chefs (so why didn't they pursue working in the food area of the shelters for practice at least?!). Why are people in such high positions, influential positions, determining who is up for interviews, et cetera, not devoted to social work, sociology, psychology? At least a B.A. if not higher or being enrolled in school; or even have PT employees there in the evenings as evenings are when shelter residents are likely to be there after dinner. Why not have support groups there for late night after the curfew when all need to be accounted for? Help people then. I was literally told to sit in the cafeteria from 9 am to 5 pm M-F in case a case worker got a call for an apartment and needed to find someone to send. I called bologna. We all do.

I am hearing rumors shelters are becoming trauma-focused and person centered, so I expect to see better outcomes pronto. And, why not follow models of like Community Access of having at least 50% or 51% hired (paid!) staff be Peers, and not the ones that may claim to be homeless ("I know what you're going through;" or "Why don't you get a job like me?" despite those of us with disabilities, or who may not want to be in an environment where security officers are ridiculing other security officers who happen to be homeless and living in the same shelter hence are always teased) b/c they are 24 or 26 and still living with family, often at nycha and not paying their genuine rent, yet ridiculing us for being "shelter homeless."

When around Spring of 2019 some of us CAG members were \*maybe\* trying to get shelter meetings going again, like in old days, the staff at my shelter did all they could to squash it. Declared the "Thursday Housing Meetings" all that was needed to discuss any and all concerns, like ones with staff. The staff right there at the meeting with their boss. But here's my favorite, as I love math and numbers, maybe because of my seizures: keep saving the 30% because then you'll be able to pay for rent and get out of the shelter. And yeas—you bet my hand was up to call malarkey on that one. 30% of \$16.50 every 15 days is going to save up to pay rent for a studio, a 1 BR, an SRO or even a room for rent, when? Picturing how much the hotel taxes are, think of how long it will take to save for a night at a hotel here! But, stay at a hotel because you want a real

bed or real bath, and your days in the shelter allegedly clock back to 1 and you begin again.

Any time I tried passing out flyers about other things like free coats or free back to school supplies it was better. Weekly CAG meetings were okay to promote, but I was always told the shelter residents wouldn't go. The minute I began trying to discuss with shelter residents on each floor how to have an in house union of sorts, that was when the shelter reacted. (Sort of like some coffeeshops et al? Hmm?)

We have been able to accomplish a lot though, such as the ending the 3 or 4 months rent at lease signing, and the source of income discrimination, and more pending. I kept using ones I remembered \*and CALLAHAN!\* as examples for why we have to fight, and why DHS and shelters and the city keep resisting. Like, have you ever seen the size of a "standard" bed? It is in between a toddler and a twin. And, since Callahan was written, U.S. / NY's average body size and weight I am betting has gone up. Some have mattresses like camp ones, designed for a week, not 300, 400, 1600 days. Hence our bodies are falling apart! These are more examples for why many people prefer to stay in converted motels/hotels, too. Better bedding.

I also mentioned the ongoing rumor of \$4k per month per homeless person, so much more than housing vouchers! If it's to include the staff, why not have such staff be at the housing locations? Why do so many shelter residents charm their way through interviews and turn out to be a whole different persona when housed? (As in, admit to people this is what their case worker told them to do for quicker placement, yet now they are arguably housed in not-the-adequate-level-of-support facility.

Also with that much funding, at least begin to build quality efficient housing that is stable, not ones like the "supportive" building I live in where my upstairs neighbor has flooded my apartment 4 times (landlord knows he does this, a stain was already present!), the next door neighbor I hear threatening phone calls all night long and her music, etc. Mainly 6 a.m. to 3 a.m. I need more than 3 hours to sleep. I am not supposed to go onto the subway to sleep because my housing is bad. (Though, is that now the way to do it as HPD and DOH and DHMH all don't know what to do?)

One major red flag is how HRA, DHS also neglected to ever follow through with the assessment for DV. I was owed a DV placement and support but was never placed in one. Likely because I had no children or there was no space. A friend with a child was recently denied entry to one despite ongoing assaults. I was denied a private one b/c of my credit score. The city's pitch is these have more support and safer place to heal and recover, but so far it seems like there are too few, too scattered, filthy, making people

sick, some that you can find on google even have 1 star reviews from clients. Other shelters are the same, so unsure what I may have missed. I can't travel in time to know.

And that arguably NYC cost me losing my SSI in Jan 2016, losing SSD eligibility prior, and losing Apr 2017 through Mar or May (still being negotiated) 2020 – approx. 36 months of around \$760 a month, all because there was inadequate housing, lack of support, because I did not have HIV/AIDS despite having other chronic health conditions since 6 months and 11 months old, and countless ones that have developed since including 2010 and 2012 here in NYC.

The safe haven / transitional shelters were originally only for men who didn't want to enter traditional congregant shelter. I said in 2018 to case workers be ready for discrimination lawsuits!

I was also told that no longer was street homeless an option; that all had to start in the shelter homeless model. However, I can find the resources on nyc.gov that contradict this, and meet men, of course, who are able to complete their 2010e applications and go on supportive housing interviews having never spent a night let alone 56 or 315 or 420 or 840+ in NYC shelters.

Shelter staff seemed to not like that I could present facts, aka my rights, to them. This came from basic survival skills, key part of surviving domestic violence/abuse, and also being a person with PTSD and cPTSD. They keep implementing the hierarchy model, power model. Strive for moving up, going to the top. I laugh when news breaks about things like the recent Bronx men's shelter director busted for stealing 2-3 million (who knows how much wasn't caught, what other shelters weren't found yet; tons of stories have been submitted about how shelters take the food and feed their clients other stuff. It repeats.). I prefer the community-model, and it is part of my Indigenous heritage. Speaking of, no one asked me my culture/race/ethnicity. I found out the \*incorrect\* answer on my DHS form and my shelter case worker said I had to go down to DHS to fix it. (30 Beaver? 33 Beaver? It's been so long. Sigh.) So, I did. Another afternoon devoted to correcting other's mistakes. The best part? Finally talking to a worker there, they called back to my shelter to explain to the shelter how they were to correct it in their database they have access to. I wasn't supposed to have spent a day doing this. Yet again, unpaid advocate work merely to be authentic and accurate. Why not ask people what their ethnicity is? Why presume? Presuming is pre-judging, pre-judging in prejudice... prejudice is a no-no. Judging is a no-no, for that matter. /s (more sass than sarcasm. Another survival tactic for the system overall)

Under Bloomberg's mayorship, friends in shelter explained those of us on SSI would have to pay 30% for housing. I asked an HRA worker and they never clarified or explained, merely noted I would have shelter. But this 30% is the same as someone with a section 8 apartment. Why would someone in a 16 or 90 bed congregate shelter and curfews, risks of others taking their things as even showers aren't locked, etc. pay the same amount as someone receiving a 1 or 2+ bedroom apartment? Many with utilities or/and wifi, some also meals included (and much better than the shelter meals!).

Barrier Free Living's DV shelter was closed in 2018, c. April? Or, at least no longer accepted new clients. Help Women's Center aka 116 Williams St is not ADA Acceptable. Franklin is, so why was I then transferred to 116? After waiting well over the 5-7 business days for the Reasonable Accommodations request where I had to request that DHS follow the Fair Housing Law? Why wasn't I assessed as a street homeless person as NYPD saw me at Occupy events over the years and in the summer at my assault and on the subways and when one hotel refused to let me in because hotels feel exempt from the Fair Housing Law so they called the police when I asked for a copy of their exception from the law, and an immediate cash refund to use for same night shelter. (All during the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in 2018 DHS was denying me shelter while they pondered if they were going to allow me in, during which I accidentally followed CIDNY's advice where my ex offered a hotel room leading to more sexual assaults/ why non profits should not recommend DV/IPV/any and all abuse victims should NOT go back to their abuser and a safe shelter should be available.

Why didn't anyone, ALL THIS TIME, ever mention NYCHA has its own application process? That I learned of at my current supportive housing placement, which took 8 months for them to admit they were supportive housing but the lack of support hasn't changed since.

I was "Accepted" into DHS shelter at the end of Oct, 2018 (re \_\_\_\_\_'s testimony, triggering), left mid Dec 2019. Moved into a poor quality building ironically newly built, but already the original occupant died and the 2<sup>nd</sup> had been relocated to a building with more support, code word for more security to limit the selling and buying of drugs.

(\*1)

I have been trying to leave since Feb 2020, before the covid-19 pandemic made the media's attention at least, then general community's attention, back when we weren't even told which borough the initial case(s) were at. Nostalgia. /s

I have been told a wide array of things. One, that I am never leaving this place. Despite moving in to large water stains in the ceiling due to my upstairs neighbor flooding his apartment because “he likes to fix things, be his own handyman. He makes things break, flood so he has something to fix. Just can’t.” I was also a victim of the switcheroo. Showed apartment 2B, loved it, then stuck in 2A. “It’s the same” only it’s not. The walls are different, one additional neighbor, she doesn’t have an upstairs neighbor who floods her apartment, we’ll never know if I would wake her up blasting music (I don’t, but betting sound only travels one way?) or the phone calls I am stuck overhearing at 3 am, 11 pm, 1 am where sometimes she calls the same person repeatedly and hangs up on them so then when they are able to call her back she screams at them for harassing her, denying she called them. (She does all of this on speaker, and again, the walls make me hear this even if I am wearing ear plugs or ear phones. Yes, complaints have been filed, no supportive housing is doing nothing and 311 only led to me suggesting my supportive housing take her to mediation. I’m not the one being subsidized to do their job. I also hear what she did to get in this housing, or what her case workers did to move her out of their responsibility... skirting the system? Skating the system? Not properly assessing someone and finding out what their genuine needs were for the welfare of all at hand.)

There are nights between those two neighbors I look into my rights. Formerly homeless people are supposed to have more assistance in their/our initial 3 years after leaving the shelter system. Why in my first 3 months was I told by 3 different agencies including Coalition for the Homeless that this is where I was stuck? Of course if you ask the landlord, The Bridge, they’ll say things are fine. I was also told I was not in “Supportive Housing,” I was in “Independent Housing,” so therefore I wasn’t “in need of” any of the things I expressed needing in my interview and were in my 2010e application. I later found out that the people at my studio are not trained in PTSD or patient-centered services, helping professions. They are trained in data entry and office management. Usually once out of shelters you work with Homebase. I was looped into Homebase doesn’t work with supportive housing, keep working with Coalition for the Homeless or/and your landlord. Honestly? I do less with Coalition for the Homeless because their attitude is be grateful you have a roof over your head, and the landlord loves to slack because I have yet to/ am in the process of finding out how to hold them accountable. They likely are misbilling Medicaid, btw, and am finding out how to carefully prove this to help win my right to a new housing provider. Claiming I’m on drugs I am fatally allergic to is a low blow, but helpful for me proof-wise.

Speaking of PTSD, I was placed in a Veterans building. Why? I am not a veteran. Veterans are more likely to have PTSD, and I have PTSD, but this building and these staff members are not trained in PTSD. I keep modeling and educating them on PTSD and cPTSD (again, no cost. Long live Occupy Wall Street! /S, as /s is what has kept me sane and going through all of this!). The most, IMHO, efficient supportive housing models themselves have between a 5 and 8 year waiting list! Let alone any section 8, NYCHA, or HPD wait lists!

[https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/outreach/street-outreach.page\\_describes\\_improvements\\_since\\_2014](https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/outreach/street-outreach.page_describes_improvements_since_2014), but so many unhoused shelter resistant people have yet to be seen or

documented by a street outreach worker. I only see BRC workers aboveground, usually in their vans, and they are the only ones allowed to monitor the entire subway system including all stations. With how large the city is, how is that not monopolizing it? Maybe if/when we get to a shortage of homeless? Maybe when I see outreach teams claiming dibs on who is working with one of the dozens of unhoused, street homeless people I still pass in bank lobbies or on church steps, in McDonalds (pre-covid at least, or door-openers, like at 7-11s) and oft on top of the best subway grates—one tactic I was taught. Cardboard piles, usually strategic to blend in when possible, other times blunt. Sometimes expressive art/ visually spoken word. Where are all of the various exclusively territory based street outreach workers? I hear rumors they wait until after 1, or after 4, or after 5. Sometimes after a 6 a.m. shift change? So what did the prior shift do? By 6 a.m. many of us were seeking warmth in the subways, starbucks, etc. having just been sleeping outside for the whole night.

Again, I might be sideling referring to 9 years ago instead of 8, but that was when Occupy Goldman Sachs protestors were warned by nypd that if we didn't get to the Red Cross shelters, we were going to be taken to the St. Luke's Roosevelt E.R. for the minimum 72 hour psyc eval in preparation/anticipation of Hurricane / Superstorm Sandy. One comrade even dubbed a chalkboard where we were OccupySandy, not knowing what OWS colleagues in Brooklyn were concocting. Instead of being helped further, we were rushed out as Bellevue endured its post-storm power surge and our shelter was where Bellevue patients were brought. Chances I had at housing, gone. But, yes, a chance to be indoors during a wondrous storm that many underestimated.

I love sharing these stories, my experiences. But it reminds me of the case workers' failed attempts at developing rapport with clients. So much that they likely didn't realize it. One time was a desperate plea of how their own story to save their kids from a neighboring state, hence why couldn't I just do what she did. (A second time a couple of months later she made a comment of how she was grateful she didn't have any kids because of the patience they would take, didn't I agree with her? I didn't call her out, I did raise my eyebrows. Ironically she soon left our shelter for a \*family shelter\* project, so then I had one of those \*head implode\* moments not even trying to make sense.)

Answers I was able to come up with instantaneously—and she had known me for a while: She went back to work, I was applying for SSI due to my seizures, neuropathy, repeat brain surgeries, fibromyalgia, overactive bladder, tear in my right hip, osteoarthritis et al. Did she have any job that had unlimited paid sick time, paid healthcare, and all of the other accommodations I needed, as I had even been fired



(indirectly/ federal loopholes at hand) from a NY City based AmeriCorps VISTA position following an injury at a NYC DOE school and 3 months later the work site itself, across the street from 2 very important OWS addresses for those who know their OWS stats. If the federal government was refusing to over ADA accommodations, why would anyone else (and no, at the time I did spend the allotted 3 years searching for a lawyer to sue the nonprofit and CNCS and the placement nonprofit, but everyone shrugged between NYC and DC and Atlanta; afterwards is when I met and learned the value of the NYC Commission on Human Rights who would have been able to deal with all 3 agencies at hand, and allow me the right to return to my paid-volunteer assignment. But, then I would not have been able to become the peer advocate and witness that I am today... If I bite into an apple I'll consider that as well as remind myself the apple was not one of the first four fruits hence was not what Eve ate. 😊

There are so many other things I wished I had time to reminisce over and add, but the deadline has arrived. On a positive note, I have now helped place 5 people in transitional safe haven and domestic violence shelters, because of new opportunities that exist or/and networks I have made over the years so of better places to reach out than 311 or sending someone to BRC where they claim one has to be documented x times in y days before earning their services. (Yes, they've been reported for that and the client did receive shelter, via Safety Net Alliance and Breaking Ground and other organizations with space available, not BRC.) I completed an ELCA diakonia program and have one course left in the NY State Peer Counseling initial stage, if I wish to seek licensing. I am still looking for a way to integrate the two, really. I also am with SHOUT as we also start to eye Albany for more resources for more support including with HARP and accountability at their level. I also currently volunteer-run the Shower Blessing's at St. Luke's Lutheran Church (a partnership with Adventist Community Services). This all reminds me of what the needs are that do remain, and that one day, I dream, NYC will be like the rumored places that do offer shelter first, or, housing first to all who need it, and then build up from there. Not pay industries thousands of dollars—five times more than what a person is given for room rental, by the way—to keep them in shelters.

Thank you for this hearing and for these past few years (and, maybe a banner drop or two!).

Katrina Corbell

(eBanner Drop. Last dash of the /s sass. Thanks for trying to patch some of these holes. Covering up with a slab of something doesn't stop the core cause from growing, sort of like mayoral candidates staying over in NYCHA houses way back when? Has anything changed?)

NOTES | NOVEMBER

\$PASS  
INTROS  
256E

---

**From:** Starlite Harris <starluvsbrian95@aol.com>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 8, 2021 4:11 PM  
**To:** Testimony  
**Subject:** [EXTERNAL] Additional testimony & Statements

Good afternoon Council Members

My name is Starlite Harris and I was the first person to testify on Monday at the Committee on General Welfare Oversight: Single Adult Homelessness in NYC

I will start by saying that I was very thankful for the opportunity to enlighten DHS on the horrors of the shelter system and I need to discuss more about my particular case

I have been transferred to six different locations and was initially scheduled to go from the second shelter which was The Mansfield Hotel located at: 12 W 44th Street, operating under Black Veterans for Social Justice (Zawadi House) directly to an RAR which I was told by my caseworker had been approved only to find out two days before everyone was being relocated on June 25th back to the original site in the Bronx where I can't go because of domestic violence and was informed on June 23rd that the request for an RAR had been denied

After waiting for a few hours and after everyone and everything was moved I was subsequently transferred to Broadway House, operating under CAMBA, a congregate shelter in Brooklyn which I was informed by one of the case workers who didn't want to do my intake that 95% of the residents there had severe mental issues or were drug/alcohol users and asked me who sent me there and why.

The entire staff was very disrespectful rude unprofessional and uninterested and the way they spoke to the clients was like nothing I had ever seen or experienced and the conditions were absolutely deplorable with roaches and bad odors emanating from everywhere

I felt safer on the street which is where I was before I initially entered the shelter system, which is where I had been sleeping and couch surfing until my health got increasingly worse and which because my caseworker didn't do her paperwork correctly I was immediately transferred to that congregate setting where I ended up getting sick with a Coronavirus (Pneumonia) at which time I was transferred to the COVID-19 hotel in Queens only to be told that I did not have COVID-19 but I had a Coronavirus and when they tried to transfer me back to the hotel but had the wrong address, Tillary Street we realized upon our arrival that location had been shuttered at which time upon my return back to the hotel in Queens I spoke to my advocate and Ms. Yvonne Ballard from DHS who apologized for the way I was being treated and shuffled from place to place and she spoke to a staff member who she informed to put me back in the room and allow me to stay there until after my doctor's appointment the following day and that did not happen as I stayed there that night but was abruptly and rudely awoken by the next Case Manager on site who rudely announced that there was a vehicle waiting to take me to the next location and I needed to be ready in 15 minutes because I had to leave immediately so I missed my doctor's appointment which I was able to reschedule for later that day and when I arrived at the temporary Provisional Grant RAR they wanted to do an intake but my advocate requested that they complete the intake upon me returning from my doctor's appointment to which they obliged

I resided at the Metropolitan Hotel located at 437 Union Avenue, operating under Acacia Network from July 9th until November 15th at which time I was transferred to the sixth location where I am now located in the Metro Inn (Casa Esperanza) located at: 144-36 153rd Lane, Jamaica operating under VIP Services but prior to being sent to my current location they tried to send me to another location in Jamaica as well but that didn't happen as I waited for a response to get me relocated and then Mr. John Hammond is the individual who along with DHS schemed and plotted to send me to my current location

The area surrounding this location is an Industrial Park off the Belt Parkway on S Conduit and it is very desolate and isolated and the Sanitation Department is located directly across the street and there are no grocery stores drug stores laundromat or other necessary facilities located nearby and so it seems as though they are basically saying that homeless people are garbage

It takes me 2 hours and cost me 2 fares to travel to my medical teams located in Brooklyn and Manhattan and it is a 15 minute walk to get to the bus in addition to being immunocompromised and disabled I injured myself on the bed at the prior location where I sprained my ankle on my right foot and broke a toe on my left foot  
I signed documentation that stated I was granted an RAR which this certainly is not and other documentation which stated that I would also be receiving a specialized bed because of the spine problems and the other issues I suffer with which I still have not received and I have made every effort to be transferred which in itself has been a battle because the staff continues lying to me and my Case Manager and requesting documentation that they already have to be able to put in a request for a transfer and they told my Case Manager I was on the 1st floor when I am actually located on the 4th floor because they are still under renovations and they don't even have a Housing Specialist there to help and the case worker they assigned me is new and still in training I can not impress upon you all the stress of being at this location has caused.

I really believe that is highly unprofessional of a director of a facility to make a statement that they are more men than women that are homeless and that men will take a cot and sleep anywhere and women are just too picky and the only thing I can say to that is because they are safety issues involved when being in certain areas and men can defend themselves more easily. I have also seen random lewdness outdoors such as grown men urinating and women performing sexual acts in cars with men, really disgusting  
It also can't go unnoticed that the men are being put in luxury hotels throughout the city because I have read about this in different articles that I have come across and I know this to be a fact because I know of a gentleman who is in one of those hotels located in Manhattan on Lexington Avenue & 30th Street and I also know that after years of fighting the neighborhood loss the fight to prevent the shelter from being put where the old Park Savoy Hotel is located on Millionaires' Row, 58th Street, which is also a men's shelter so there is no way that women should be put where they are now located across the street from the sanitation department in an isolated area far away from any type of community, transportation or where they have access to certain things that men don't need or use  
I have been threatened by several men in particular that walk up and down what they call "The Strip" because they make rude disgusting cat calls to me and when I don't respond in kind they call me disrespectful names and threaten to stab me the next time they see me I also had an altercation with the Case Worker Mr Randall who is at that location and now feel traumatized and very unsafe and do not trust the staff here  
I am physically disabled, suffer with PTSD and Panic Disorder and a victim of domestic violence and have been brutally raped in an area that resembles the area that I'm am now being forced to reside in as well as being told that if I don't complete the intake process and fill out all of the paperwork I can be removed for up to (90) days  
I am having nightmares and it disheartens me to say that with every door I knock upon it is closed in my face and my repeated request for an immediate transfer keep getting denied and when my case manager spoke to Ms Patricia Britton she was greeted with hostility and rudeness and told that I was in my permanent RAR and couldn't or wouldn't be relocated  
I have sent emails to Commissioner Banks, The Mayor, Senator, Governor, and Public Advocate as well as several people at DSS DHS and HRA but yielding zero responses

I will finish by saying that congregate shelter settings are inhumane and unsafe and that the mask we wear on our faces have already stripped away our identities and now these shelters are stripping away our dignity as well

Thank you for you time

Sincerely

Starlite Nichelle Harris

## **Finding My Way (Home)**

By: Winston Tokuhisa

When I first exited the shelter system [and homelessness] just over two weeks ago I was excited, but quickly I found that excitement gave way to anxiety. While I trust the staff at the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and the Human Resource Administration (HRA) - whom I typically refer to as “[the] Three-Letter Agencies” - performed their duties to the letter, more should have been done to ease my transition.

For example, a couple of days before my move out furniture money was deposited onto my Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) card. As much as some people like to refer to a benefit card as a poor person’s “credit card,” regrettably it is not. In order to be able to use the funds, I commuted to a Chase Bank [to avoid the withdrawal fee] where I was only able to withdraw 500 out of over a thousand dollars and was charged \$7.55 anyway.

No matter who you are moving is messy and inconvenient, so why is it that what should be a help to those in need is made a hindrance by hoops and hurdles? If the entire move out process takes about a month from start to finish, why not make a portion of the funds available sooner? Better yet, why not dispense the funds in such a way that makes them immediately accessible in their entirety, like an Electronic Fund Transfer (EFT) or prepaid debit card?

For another example, I had the misfortune of my public assistance case closing [without my knowledge] just a few days before I signed my lease. Fortunately, I reapplied and was awarded emergency food stamps the same day. Unfortunately, I was also expected to make one month’s ration last for two months; a tall order made taller by the harmful food offerings of my shelter. If it was not for food pantries [and furniture money], I do not know how I would have made it through November.

I remember when my housing specialist, Ms. Utsey, at what was previously a [Core Services](#) Group run shelter, mentioned intentionally scheduling move outs to coincide with benefit pickup dates. As someone who has now moved out, I have a newfound appreciation for this wisdom and cannot help but ask why this appears to have occurred to no one else. The only thing better would be to provide upcoming benefits in advance and sync to the new date, or better still just provide an additional pickup as a “one-time” bonus.

Which brings me to my final example, I just received my benefits for the month and I only received a paltry \$22.50 and I honestly have no idea what “the Three-Letter Agencies” expect me to do with that. One of the first things I did after moving into my apartment was to apply for the Emergency Broadband Benefit (EBB) program with Spectrum. Even after applying for the fifty dollar discount, I am already on the hook for a [WiFi](#) router rental and [“requisite” landline](#) at a total of about seventeen dollars a month. Fortunately, I still have a little bit of furniture money left, but it will only go so far.

I remember when I first learned of all the [mental gymnastics](#) that goes into not paying poor people which does nothing to resolve poverty. If we can increase food stamps on account of the pandemic, how can we not give cash a chance?

While the emergence of COVID-19 has created an unprecedented crisis, it also creates an unparalleled opportunity to rectify long-term, historic injustices. I am confident that beginning with the end in my mind by increasing access to move out funds, making sure individuals have ample food stamps and increased levels of cash assistance available upon move out are instrumental in ensuring permanency and stability. Thank you.



# Homeless State testimony

---

Tuesday, December 7, 2021

2:26 PM

As a formerly homeless person who managed several jobs and volunteer projects who has worked in outreach and supportive housing who also currently works with people in encampments, in shelters and what are left of hotels I simply would like to review toward goals of redirecting resources toward housing and safety!

A) Our current outgoing administration failed to follow US CDC guidance to allow those on street to shelter in place and provide support to maintain hygiene. This policy was meant to save lives and reduce infection rates. Effectively, transmission rates rose as those on street were pushed from one area to the next and support for hygiene was withheld. Get rid of Pop-up concept!

B) Within congregate shelters with less than 2.5 Feet between beds; advocacy to utilize underutilized hotel space was less than halfheartedly responded to in midst of airborne pandemic where people were generally required to keep distance of minimum of six feet.

C) DHS Cleanups increased to level of 6000+ within period of <4 months in 2021 utilizing resources of NYPD, NYC Department of Sanitation, NYC Department of Homeless Services and its contractor for Street Outreach. The result being people losing belongings and paperwork essential to access buildings where resources are available (vaccination records) access housing and general assistance (birth records income documentation) employment (SS cards, records of immigration status) These same documents are required for Housing.

D) In supportive housing and congregate shelter rates of exposure to pandemic rose. We cannot afford to follow the bang for the buck theory, ie: Congregate settings in a world of ongoing airborne pandemic pathogens.

E) Even within Hotel system people were and still have their belongings packed up sometimes with essential paperwork discarded and items stolen or discarded for curfew violations.

F) During halfhearted effort to decongregate shelter somehow the idea to make the structures safe with renovations to ventilation systems, creating access to sunlight and bringing sites up to minimum codes to decrease likelihood of infection.

What can be done?

Stop DHS Cleanups uselessly wasting the time and cost of Department of Sanitation, NYPD and DHS contracted Outreach. Reason: Crime flourishes, Opportunities for employment, housing and simple access to needed resources are thrown out.

Congregate shelter is not a safer more viable option.

Redirect Outreach to support hygiene and survival with supplies, connection to storage making essential documents safe and an engagement tool towards working toward housing.

Move people out of Congregate shelters and renovate into livable spaces promoting health, hygiene and living skills development.

Mandate Housing goals and steps taken toward such goals part of Independent Living Plans to be reviewed by mandate for adherence on part of staff as well as person being billed upon.

Prioritize assessment for Emergency Housing Vouchers, City FHEPS Vouchers and streamline processing for use through training and accountability with DHS and HRA with review by HRA regarding DHS and HRA by DHS to collaborative streamline. (This is to apply to both Street and shelter based systems.)

Have public accounting of usage of Homeless Set Asides and process. Creating transparency.

Lastly, consideration of public health mandates people housed or living in uninhabitable situations be able to access means to maintain hygiene, safety and protection from extreme harmful elements. Without this as has been exemplified by efforts of outgoing administration to hide the reality and of Homelessness, disorganized and dysfunctional bureaucracy and misdirection of resources.

The solutions to housing crises is investment in getting people housed (streamline process) and utilization of unsafe space by making it safe.

Cease to invest in creation of more obstacles to housing by hunting people like ferret prey. Cease never-ending transfer policy geared to save money by creating instability and more obstacles to housing!

Peter Malvan Homeless Advocate.