



HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

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Homeless Services United Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing

on 2020-21 Executive Budget Proposal: Housing

February 5th, 2020

Respectfully submitted by Eric Lee, Director of Policy and Planning

Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing the mission-driven, homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers. Thank you Chair Krueger, Chair Weinstein, Chair Cymbrowitz, Chair Kavanagh, and members of the Legislature for your continued leadership to aid New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Under your leadership, New York State has implemented a number of critical tenant protections, as well as initiatives to stabilize households on the brink of homelessness.

While heartened by these accomplishments, Homeless Services United and our members are deeply troubled by the near-record-high numbers of homeless New Yorkers throughout the State. **With 150,000 children facing the trauma of homelessness in New York State every year, HSU asks that the Finance and Ways and Means Committees prioritize funding in the FY 2020-21 Budget for the creation of a Statewide rental voucher. Continuing the Legislature's steadfast commitment to housing equity, HSU hopes both houses will pass Chair Hevesi's Home Stability Support (HSS) A.1620/S.2375 and Chair Kavanagh's Housing Access Voucher Program (A.9657/S.7628).**

Statewide housing vouchers will be an effective tool to combat the effects of gentrification and rising rents, gaining access to a much larger swath of housing stock Statewide. Families and individuals with CityFHEPS and FHEPS "shopping letters" are unable to find apartments whose rent levels are low enough to qualify. People living in shelter can search for months to over a year for an apartment, given the extremely low vacancy rate for lower rent units. **In order to effectively be utilized, housing voucher rent levels must be tied to Fair Market Rent (FMR).** HSU is heartened that both Home Stability Support and Housing Access Voucher Program include this core recommendation, with HSS allowing for localities to supplement additional funds to raise rent levels up to FMR, and Housing Access setting a band rent levels at 90 to 110% FMR.

HSU applauds Chair Kavanagh's proposal (A.9657/S.7628) for not mandating households have an active Public Assistance case to qualify for a voucher. Public Assistance (PA) requirements for other vouchers have been a barrier to housing for undocumented immigrants, a bottleneck for applications, and even a destabilizing for tenants. Plagued by systemic inefficiencies and errors and archaic bureaucratic procedures, households can see their public assistance cases erroneously sanctioned or closed, and as an immediate result have their rental assistance halted. **Vouchered households should not be at risk of losing their housing due to fluctuations or changes to their public benefits.** Additionally, HSU supports the renewal **eligibility criteria that ensures households can continue to increase income up until they are no longer "rent burdened"**, when the rent equals only 30% of their income.

Homelessness is an expansive social injustice touching hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, and the as such, the solution is not cheap. But to do any less will not cure this ill, only its symptoms. **Homeless**



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Services United urges the Legislature to fully fund and pass Home Stability Support A.1620/S.2375 and Housing Access (A.9657/S.7628), and we are committing to standing with you to ensure that statewide rental assistance becomes a reality in New York.

With the shelter census for Single Adults reaching a new record high one year ago, there is also an unprecedented need for supportive housing. **To ensure the future creation of supportive housing units remains uninterrupted, we urge the Legislature to hold Governor Cuomo to his previous commitment and include the following in the 2020-21 Budget:**

- 1. A capital appropriation to fully support the 14,000 supportive housing units yet to be funded from Gov. Cuomo's commitment to provide 20,000 units of supportive housing Statewide, accompanied by annual service and operating fund allocations for to support the units as they come online**
- 2. Accelerate the supportive housing pipeline as NYC did last year (they increased the annual commitment by 200 beds per year)**

Through these initiatives, the Legislature would deliver the keystone necessary to build a viable pathway out of shelter and back into permanent housing and further cement households' ability to retain their housing when at risk of becoming homeless. Creating a Statewide housing voucher and upholding the promise of creating much needed supportive housing is not only the morally just choice, it makes good fiscal sense, resulting in cost-savings to both New York State and tax payers, reducing evictions and the need for emergency shelter and homeless services.