



My name is Milton Perez, I am a VOCAL-NY leader, thank you for accepting my testimony. I need your support in our fight to get every New Yorker into a stable home. I need you to pass the housing access voucher program (HAVP).

I have been in the shelter system for over 5 years, and in that time, I have seen the ways in which a system designed to help us move forward, often leaves us stuck in place. People get out of shelter with a voucher, only to be placed back in when the money for their program runs out. People struggle looking for jobs, because if they make too much money it may cost them their housing subsidy. Undocumented immigrants spend years in the shelter with no hope, because none of the current vouchers are available to them. Many, like me, spend years waiting for a voucher in the shelter system simply because there are so few vouchers to go around.

This is why I am demanding the state pass the Housing Access Voucher Program this year. The housing access voucher program is the best option on the table for our state.

It covers the largest number of units, and it covers the largest number of people. This voucher would cover apartments that rent at the current area median income, which is essential to making the subsidy attractive to landlords. Who is going to rent me an apartment for less than

they can rent it on the private market? We deserve a level playing field.

Its available to all New Yorkers, regardless of Immigration status. Undocumented immigrants have suffered disproportionately during this pandemic because they have not been able to access many support services. We cannot consider a voucher program effective if it excludes thousands of our homeless brothers and sisters simply because of they are undocumented.

It is a permanent program, not an experiment that will leave people out in the cold when the money runs dry. We have seen the extreme harm that can come when a housing subsidy is defunded when people have come to rely on it for years. Bills that propose experimental programs with short time tables are offering people in my position a false sense of security, and it's not ok. We need a permanent program, with funding that grows over time.

Despite efforts to curtail evictions, the shelter population is higher than ever before. There were record breaking nights at DHS intake shelters multiple times during the pandemic. Shamefully, for the first time in our cities history 20,000 men like me are housed in shelters. Even as more people were falling into homelessness, it was becoming more dangerous. New Yorkers without housing were 75% more likely to die due to COVID-19 than the city overall.

This has been a difficult year for New Yorkers without a permanent place to live. We are sick and tired of being told our needs are not a priority, or that they are too expensive. New York state has plenty of wealth- we need to tax the rich, and house the poor. We demand that you make the housing access voucher program a reality this year. New York State cannot afford to wait another year.

*Milton Perez is a leader with VOCAL-NY.*

