



Joint Legislative Hearing on Fiscal Year 2022-23 Executive Budget Proposal

Housing

January 31, 2022

Introduction and Thanks:

My name is Patrick Boyle, and I am the Assistant Vice President for Public Policy at Volunteers of America-Greater New York. We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank the Chairs and all the members present here today for the opportunity to provide the following testimony in response to the Executive Budget proposal.

About Us:

VOA-Greater New York is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York by 2050 through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 11,000 adults and children annually through 66 programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio of award-winning permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties, transitional shelters and Single Room Occupancy (SRO) residences—with more in the pipeline.

Funding and Budget Items:

VOA-GNY applauds the funding levels in the Executive Budget related to housing and encourages the Legislature to maintain those levels. Access to permanent housing is a key component in our fight against homelessness. With rising unaffordability, pandemic-related economic disruptions, and the end of the eviction moratorium all conspiring to create enormous challenges to the clients we serve, it is critical that this new 5-year housing plan come with funding commitments needed to meet the challenge.

We are particularly supportive of the following budgetary items:

- **Create and Preserve 10,000 Supportive Housing Units** – The capital funding commitments in the budget for the creation and preservation of supportive housing will be critically important in addressing the homelessness and mental health crises which are so connected.
- **\$300 million Senior Housing** – VOA-GNY recently completed its first-ever senior affordable housing project, the East Clarke Place Senior Residence, providing 122 low- and very-low income senior citizens with permanent housing. For those 122 units, we received more than 26,000 applications, 200 of them handwritten. As our population ages, senior housing funding streams will become all the more important.
- **\$250 million Electrification** – There are a number of buildings in our portfolio that we would like to retrofit for safer, cleaner and more efficient electrification. We encourage this pot of funding to have the flexibility to use for the existing building stock, not merely to comply with mandates on new construction.

- **\$128 million HHAP** – The Homeless Housing Assistance Program is a vital source of funding for nonprofits offering shelter and housing to those experiencing homelessness.

Finally, we join in other advocates in again arguing for the **Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)**, which would be transformational for our clients. HAVP would fill gaps left by Public Assistance and the FHEPS program and be a critical lifeline for many people experiencing homelessness. Robust rental assistance must come in partnership with new housing construction and preservation to truly tackle our persistent housing and homelessness crisis. This program would be one of the most versatile tools in our toolbox to do so.

Policy Items:

In addition to the above-mentioned critical funding streams, we would like to signal our support for several important policy priorities outlined in the Executive Budget proposal. First, we want to quickly call out smart, pro-growth policies on transit-oriented development and reform of the residential Floor Area Ratio (FAR) cap. We are also encouraged to see this budget take a step forward on compassionate “fair chance” language in housing applications that will make it easier for individuals touched by the criminal justice system to find stable and secure housing.

In greater detail, we offer the following reaction to an issue of importance to the organization:

- **Hotel Conversions** – Converting struggling and underutilized hotels into residential properties to tackle the housing crisis is sensible policy. As has been documented, regulatory challenges have made these conversions infeasible in most instances. The proposed language in the Executive Budget to allow use of the existing Certificate of Occupancy for a conversion into residential housing would be an important step for nonprofits like us who are interested in exploring this mission-driven development opportunity.

Closing and thanks:

On behalf of Volunteers of America-Greater New York, I would like to thank the Chairs and all the members present for the opportunity to submit this testimony. We are grateful for the leadership of the Governor, the Senate and Assembly on these important issues and urge that housing and homelessness issues be front of mind as this budget is reconciled.

Respectfully submitted by:

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