



Safety
Net
Project

Testimony for the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2023 Executive Budget Proposal:
Topic Human Services

My name is Dinick Martinez and I am testifying today as part of the Safety Net Activists, a membership group supported by Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center. We fight for access to housing, food, and income for low income people. We have lived the trauma and frustrations of poverty and homelessness and demand a city that values human needs and human dignity over profits.

People who are living in shelters currently only get \$45 a month in cash from Public Assistance. That is my situation. I receive only \$22.50 every two weeks and am expected to survive on that as my only income.

Where do they get this idea that people are able to live on \$45 a month? Who told them that it is ok to live on \$45 a month? \$45 is not enough. I challenge you all to see if you could survive in a shelter on this amount of money. This comes out to just \$1.50 a day. That's enough to buy one coffee a day and nothing else. It's not even enough for a one way metrocard. People don't have money to buy the items they need, such as over the counter medications, clothing, hot food, transportation, or any other items that they need.

Minimum wage has gone up. Social Security benefits have gone up. Food stamps have gone up. Inflation and prices have gone up. Why haven't the Cash Assistance grant amounts gone up? Many of these grants haven't been increased since the 1980's or 1990's. That is inhumane and ridiculous.

These issues impact low-income people across the State - not just in New York City but in many parts of the State, including families, disabled people, and the elderly. It also particularly impacts Black and Latino people. If New York State thinks it's progressive, why have these amounts not been increased?

I see a lot of people who are affected by this in addition to myself. Many elderly or disabled people rely on Public Assistance while they are waiting to get approved for SSI benefits. Almost everybody gets denied when they first apply. It can take years to get approved. I know someone whose case took 13 years to get approved. I know other people who are seriously disabled but they still get denied. Some people eventually get approved for SSI but many other people never

get SSI because the process is so difficult. Instead, they are forced to survive on Public Assistance benefits that are so low that it makes it impossible to live.

Other states have been providing State stimulus payments to low-income people due to inflation and the pandemic. However, in New York, we are still waiting for the Governor and the State legislature to take action.

We also need to change the rent amounts for Public Assistance. A single person in New York City can only get \$215 in rent assistance each month even if they have no other income. This is completely wrong and incorrect. As we all know, rents in New York City are not \$215, they are above \$2,000. This is common sense and needs to be changed now.

Because the Public Assistance rent amounts are so low, many people are unable to keep their housing and end up having to go into the shelter. The shelter then costs the City and State anywhere from \$3,000 to \$10,000 per month. A lot of this could be prevented if the Public Assistance rent amounts were increased.

The Public Assistance grant amounts need to be raised as soon as possible. This would have a huge positive impact on millions of people.

We have spoken with City officials and they agree that the Public Assistance amounts need to be raised, but it is out of their hands. This has to be done by the State.

We call on the State legislature to treat this as the emergency that it is and to take action immediately to increase the grants. We need relief now so that people can survive.

Thank you very much for the opportunity to testify and please feel free to contact us if any other information is needed.