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TESTIMONY OF NEW DESTINY HOUSING TO THE NEW YORK STATE JOINT ASSEMBLY AND SENATE BUDGET HEARING ON HOUSING

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Thank you, Housing Committee Chairs Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblymember Rosenthal, Senate Finance Committee Chair Liz Krueger, Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair, Helene E. Weinstein, and members of the State Legislature for the opportunity to submit written testimony on the Governor's Fiscal Year 2023-2024 Executive Budget.

About New Destiny

Founded in 1994, New Destiny's mission is to end the cycle of domestic violence and homelessness for low-income families and individuals by developing and connecting them to safe, permanent, affordable housing and services. We build and manage supportive housing and through our innovative programs, we assist survivors in finding and retaining affordable housing. New Destiny is currently the largest provider of supportive housing for domestic violence survivors in New York and a leading advocate in the effort to obtain the resources needed to end family homelessness.

New Destiny is a co-convenor of the Family Homelessness Coalition, and a member of the Supportive Housing Network of New York and the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development.

Domestic Violence and Homelessness

In New York State, 1 in 3 women and 1 in 4 men will experience abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime.¹ Access to safe and affordable housing is one of survivors biggest and most urgent concerns, one that often determines whether they leave their abuser.² Survivors who can flee may spend years in shelter before securing appropriate housing and then face a myriad of challenges to keep it. In New York City, where domestic violence has been the leading cause of family homelessness for years, survivors with children in Human Resources Administration (HRA) domestic

¹ National Center for Injury Prevention and Control (2019). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey: 2010-2012 State Report. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

² Kulkarni, S., Hill, E., (2020). Understanding the Cycle of Housing Insecurity for Marginalized Survivors of Domestic and Sexual Violence.

violence shelter are nearly 8 times more likely to move to another shelter than to an apartment of their own upon reaching the state-mandated limit of 180 days.³ Unfortunately, the cycle of homelessness is often intergenerational, with more than 16% of head of households in DHS shelter reporting they were in shelter as children.⁴

Furthermore, over 94% of survivors are subject to economic abuse and isolation, which directly impacts their ability to heal and regain self-sufficiency.⁵ The dearth of affordable housing only heightens the barriers for survivors. There is not a single county or locality in New York State where a renter earning minimum wage can afford a one-bedroom apartment.⁶ Seventy percent of extremely low-income renters, whose incomes are at or below the federal poverty guideline, spend more than half their income in rent and there are only 36 affordable and available rental units per 100 households at or below extremely low income. Meanwhile, the cost of living continues to rise dramatically. Over the last 12 months, the Consumer Price Index for the Northeast Region of the country increased 6.4%.

Housing resources and low-barrier financial assistance, paired with support services, are critical for survivors. Governor Hochul and the State Legislature have taken major steps in recent years to assist survivors, such as increasing the state rental subsidy to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Fair Market Rent (FMR). It is imperative for our State leadership to take additional steps to ensure housing stability for survivors.

Passing the Housing Access Voucher Program and Expanding CityFHEPS to all Non-Citizen

Rental subsidies, such as Section 8, can be life-saving resources for survivors and for the millions of New Yorkers experiencing housing instability. Yet, only 1 in 4 eligible households receive Section 8, and for noncitizen New Yorkers, including survivors of domestic violence, access to housing resources is even more limited. New York State can take at least two legislative actions to provide this much needed housing assistance to all individuals and families in need. The Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) [A4021/S568](#) is a proposed legislation that would create a permanent, statewide Section 8-like rent subsidy available to all New Yorkers who meet the eligibility criteria, unhoused and on brink of eviction. The New York State Homes and Community Renewal's Housing Trust Fund Corporation would oversee HAVP, and State and local public housing agencies would administer the program. At least 50% of the resources would be designated for homeless New

³ New York City Department of Social Services. 2021 Annual Report on Exits from NYC Domestic Violence Shelters.

⁴ New York City Department of Social Services. Profile of Families with Children September 2022.

⁵ Postmus, J., Plummer S., McMahon, S., Murshid, N., & Kim, M. (2012). Understanding economic abuse in the lives of survivors. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*, 27(3), 411-430.

⁶ Aurand, A., Clarke, M., Emmanuel, D., Foley, E., Rafi, I., & Yentel, D. (2022). Out of Reach: The High Cost of Housing. National Low Income Housing Coalition.

Yorkers and the remainder would go towards eviction prevention. **We urge the Senate and the Assembly to include [A4021/S568](#) in its One-House Budgets and fund HAVP at \$250 million this year, which would serve over 50,000 New Yorkers.**

Similarly, the Legislature can help undocumented and non-citizen New Yorkers by including [S1631](#) in its One-House Budgets, which would authorize New York City to expand eligibility of CityFHEPS, a city rental assistance program, to all who qualify, regardless of immigration status. Non-citizens, including survivors of domestic violence, lack equitable access to housing resources, as a result they face great risk of eviction and tend to stay in shelter for longer than average. During the pandemic, the State Legislature took direct, bold action to assist undocumented immigrants and their families by creating the historic Excluded Workers Fund. Now it is time to expand housing resources for them.

New Destiny also requests that the State Legislature support critical budget needs and legislative action that are administered through the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA). The ability to develop and operate housing for the most vulnerable New Yorkers depends on both the housing agencies and the social service agencies for the state. The programs are as follows:

- **Raising Shelter Allowance to FMR and Indexing Cash Assistance to Inflation**

New York State public assistance programs, overseen by OTDA, provide financial help to thousands of survivors of domestic violence who meet the eligibility criteria. Public assistance benefits are intended to cover food, utilities, and housing expenses, while clearing a path to economic stability. Yet, the amount of the benefits, which depend on the household's available income and the standard of need, has not kept up with rising inflation and fails to meet the needs of recipients.

Unlike Social Security benefits, which are indexed to inflation and increased by the federal government annually, public assistance benefits have not been raised for years, with some remaining stagnant for decades: the basic allowance, intended to cover food and other necessities, was last increased in 2012; the home energy allowance, which pays for electric and heating utilities, has not increased since the 1980s; and the shelter allowance has remained the same for adult-only households since 1988 and for families with children since 2003. Today the median monthly rent in New York City is \$3,267 yet, a single mother with two children residing in Manhattan is only receiving a shelter allowance of \$400 per month.

We urge the Senate and the Assembly to include [S2982](#) in its One-House Budgets, which would increase the shelter allowance to 100% of the FMR and help ensure that individuals

can access safe and stable housing. Similarly, the Legislature has the opportunity to help lift affected New Yorkers out of deep poverty in every community comprising our great state by increasing the basic needs allowance to keep pace with inflation, as [A9130/S9513](#) proposes.

- **Protecting Families in the First Generation of Supportive Housing**

Permanent supportive housing is among the safest and most cost-effective housing solutions for survivors of domestic violence. Created in the 1980s, the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP) is the oldest supportive housing program in the state and the first to pay for services, including critical onsite trauma-informed services and community re-building programs for survivors who have lost everything, including their support networks. Yet, NYSSHP rates have remained virtually the same for 30 years, providing \$2,700 a year for single adults and \$3,700 for families with children. On average that covers 1-1.5 direct service staff for an entire building and zero security. Close to 20,000 households are supported by NYSSHP programs in New York State, including hundreds of families in New Destiny's oldest 5 buildings.

The chronic underfunding of the program leaves organizations like New Destiny with painfully limited services for our vulnerable tenants, and a heavy reliance on donations and foundation funding for even the most basic of services – namely building security and case management. **New Destiny urges the Governor and the State Legislature to raise NYSSHP funding by \$148 million so that it covers the health and safety services it is supposed to for our tenants.**

- **Increase the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative**

The more recently created Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI) is the engine for new supportive housing across the state. Unlike NYSSHP, ESSHI provides both operating and service funding to support operating costs. ESSHI rates are five times the NYSSHP rate for social services and help cover rent costs for a total of up to \$25,000 per household annually statewide. Yet, the rates have not increased since the program's inception in 2016. Given rising costs of living, ESSHI must be raised to ensure the sustainability of the program and to protect the thousands of individuals and families who depend on it for stability. **New Destiny urges the Governor and the State Legislature to increase ESSHI to \$35,000 per unit in New York City and \$30,000 in the rest of the state.**

Thank you again for the opportunity to submit written testimony. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact Gabriela Sandoval Requena at gsrequena@newdestinyhousing.org.