



## HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

307 W. 38TH STREET, 3RD FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10018  
T 212-367-1589  
www.HSUnited.org

### Homeless Services United's written testimony submitted to the NYS Assembly and NYS Senate

#### Housing Committees Joint Hearing on 2/14/24 on the 2024 Executive Budget Proposal

My name is Eric Lee and I'm the director of policy and planning at Homeless Services United. Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing 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 for holding this hearing and allowing me to submit testimony.

Homeless Services United is extremely grateful to Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh and Members of the Assembly and Senate for your steadfast leadership and commitment to improving and strengthening the social services safety net for needy New Yorkers and is excited to support legislation referenced below to achieve this critical goal.

HSU is extremely hopeful given the \$2.4 billion included in the Executive Budget for Migrant Services and Assistance to aid New York City in providing support services and shelter to migrants. Based on the recent cost reestimate by Mayor Adams, **we urge the legislature to further bolster the Governor's commitment by an additional \$400 million, in the Senate and Assembly One-House Budget Resolutions, bringing total funding for migrants to a combined \$2.8 billion in the FY24-25 NYS Budget. This substantial relief from the State is critical to helping the City avoid further cuts to shelter and homeless services.** DHS contracted shelter providers were already forced to cut 2.5% from personal services (PS) costs in their FY24 budgets, and their programs are now so lean that further cuts could result in reductions of services or shelter capacity.

While this aid is essential to addressing the overwhelming need of the migrant crisis in New York, we urge the State to also reexamine the Adult Shelter Cap which reimburses the City for the cost of Adult shelters and other services to unhoused people. The Cap has remained flat funded at \$69M since 2012 and represents less than 5% of the NYC DHS shelter and street outreach costs. The City's share has more than tripled from \$244.6M in 2013 to \$809.8M in 2022.<sup>1</sup> The State's additional funding for the migrant crisis is critical to meeting the immediate need, but in order to ensure sustainability of the homeless services safety net beyond the crisis, **the Adult Shelter Cap must also be increased to equitably split the cost of shelter between City and State. The legislature can correct this imbalance by amending the Aid to Localities to eliminate the cap and allocated necessary funds to equalize the State contribution. This will help all localities across the state, not just NYC.**

Over time the State has been decreasing the portion of support it gives to NYC, placing more and more burden on New York City. For many, many years, the amount the State provides to support the Safety Net program was 50/50. Today the state only contributes 29% to all districts across the state, and localities must contribute 79%. We must again return to the even split so that the State is paying its fair share.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/how-have-city-costs-changed-with-shifts-in-state-and-federal-support-for-homeless-shelters-march-2023.html>



## HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

307 W. 38TH STREET, 3RD FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10018  
T 212-367-1589  
www.HSUnited.org

HSU is heartened that the Governor's Executive Budget prioritizes developing and protecting affordable housing units throughout the state, including incentives for all localities to create more housing, as well as NYC-specific changes like tax-credits to ease office-to-residential conversions, lifting the floor area ratio for specific projects to build more units of housing, and easing the process to safely legalize basement apartments. While these measures can kickstart the development of new units of affordable housing in the coming years, statewide rental assistance vouchers are needed to immediately help extremely low-income New Yorkers to access and maintain permanent housing Statewide.

**HSU supports adoption of S.568B (Kavanagh) / A.4021A (Rosenthal) to establish the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) for statewide rental assistance for struggling individuals and families at risk of eviction or experiencing homelessness, and we recommend the Legislature include funding for HAVP as a top priority in the Senate and Assembly One-House Budget Resolutions.**

As Chairs Kavanagh and Rosenthal unfortunately know all too well, record numbers of tenants in New York City are facing evictions, with Homebase providers booking appointments months in advance and right to counsel legal services providers utilizing waitlists to manage the number of housing court cases. Simultaneously, the City's DHS shelter system is at capacity and beginning to implement 30- and 60-day length of stay limits for recently arrived immigrants, which is churning households through the shelter system. Providing timely access to permanent housing through rental assistance is an effective means to prevent homelessness and create much needed capacity within the emergency shelter system.

Passage of HAVP would help house New Yorkers across the state that currently have limited or no access to shelter or rent supplements who need help, given the limited housing supply but ever rising demand. HAVP would likewise bring more uniform access to residents in New York City who currently must navigate through a complicated overlay of local and state funded programs with varying eligibility criteria and separate application processes.

**HSU supports S.8493 (Hoylman-Sigal) / A.9129 (Cruz) to prohibit the length of stay at homeless shelters and emergency congregate housing operated by NYS agencies.** The 30 and 60-day length of stay limits being enacted at New York City's migrant facilities are arbitrary time limits which disrupt access to social services, schooling for children and uproot our newest New Yorkers from the community without any guarantee they can receive another shelter placement upon returning to intake. **Every forced exit from shelter is another chance for someone to spiral down and end up on the streets, hospitalized, or possibly worse.**

**HSU is calling on the State to rescue 9,000 units at risk of coming offline entirely, part of the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP),** by making a simple and logical funding formula conversion in the 2024-25 state budget. This much-needed change in the final spending plan will ensure that supportive housing providers have the resources they need to pay hardworking staff competitive wages and ensure tenants stay safely and successfully housed. We do not want any individual or family returning to homelessness due to lack of program funding.

**HSU supports A5512 (Rosenthal) / S2944 (Kavanagh) to prohibit needing a court proceeding to qualify for rent arrears or ongoing rental assistance. HSU also supports A5514A (Rosenthal) / S6181A (Kavanagh) to remove the requirement that rent arrears be repaid.** Both of these bills would ensure



## HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

307 W. 38TH STREET, 3RD FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10018  
T 212-367-1589  
www.HSUnited.org

that tenants experiencing housing instability can more easily preserve their housing. Waivers issued during the eviction moratorium demonstrated that verified rent demands are sufficient proof to demonstrate need while avoiding forcing a household's situation to further destabilize before qualifying for assistance. Moreover, requiring households to repay rent arrears 12 months after receiving assistance (which can easily exceed ten thousand dollars in the wake of the pandemic) is unrealistic and only serves to put households at risk of future arrears less likely to get the help they need to preserve their housing. Eliminating this requirement may also have unrealized cost savings for OTDA and DSS who devote administrative time trying to recoup money from rental arrears recipients.

**Inclusion of a 3.2% Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) costing approximately \$200M for all State funded human services staff is necessary to honor and value the work of lifesaving essential workers.**

While we are heartened by the inclusion of a COLA for some OCFS programs in the 2024 Executive Budget, we are hopeful that this year's budget will include a more comprehensive COLA of 3.2% for all human services staff as outlined by the Just Pay Campaign. Frontline heroes at homeless shelters, street outreach, supportive housing and other human services programs work everyday to safeguard the wellbeing of our most vulnerable New Yorkers yet themselves rely on the same safety net services needed by those in their care. High rates of burn-out and staff vacancies are hurting programs and the people we serve in those programs. We urge the Legislature to include \$200M in funding in the Senate and Assembly One-House Budget Resolutions to value the honor of all human services staff dedicated to keeping New Yorkers safe. In tandem with this funding, we urge the Legislature to **pass S.7793 (Persaud) / A.8437 (Hevesi) to include previously omitted programs to NYS' list of designated programs eligible for the COLA, and pass S.1291 (Brouk) / A.4096 (Gunther) to establish an annual COLA for human services programs indexed to inflation.**

As the number of evictions in New York continues to rise and the shelter census grows, this is a timely moment to take stock of where the public safety net could be further strengthened. Where prior changes helped lessen the reduction of assistance granted for households with earned income, the maximum Cash Assistance (CA) grant levels are wholly inadequate to meet a household's basic needs, pay for housing, or utilities, relegating people to survive in deep poverty far below 50% of the Federal Poverty Limit (FPL).

**HSU supports passage of S.5270A (Persaud) / A.5500 (Rosenthal) to increase Basic Needs and Utilities levels to keep up with inflation, and S.2982 (Kavanagh) / A.5543 (Rosenthal) to increase the shelter allowance to the actual rent cost up to 100% of the Fair Market Rent (FMR).**

Raising the Cash Assistance grant is the primary way in which New York State can reduce poverty and homelessness and increase long-term positive health and social outcomes for its residents. Insufficient public benefits perpetuate the cycle of poverty, poor health outcomes and food insecurity, which lead to a host of other poor outcomes including lower graduation rates, higher unemployment, and higher involvement with the criminal justice system. **Increasing public benefits levels invests in the future of New Yorkers and breaks the cycle of poverty and homelessness.**

While the pandemic exacerbated tenants' ability to make rent in New York City, stagnant Public Assistance levels have for decades forced New Yorkers to resort to living in substandard housing and fall



## HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

307 W. 38TH STREET, 3RD FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10018  
T 212-367-1589  
www.HSUnited.org

further into debt when unable to meet the cost of basic necessities. The Cash Assistance Basic Needs grant has not been increased since 2011, yet prices have risen by approximately 30% due to inflation. And while tenants are shocked by the surge in utility costs this year alone, the Home Energy Assistance (HEA) grant has not increased since 1981 and the Supplemental Home Energy Assistance (SHEA) grant since 1986! Rents continue to climb in New York, but the shelter allowance to pay rent for households with minor children hasn't increased since 2003 and for adult only households since 1988! The need for New Yorkers cannot be understated; 28% of renters in New York State, almost 971,000 households, are extremely low income, earning at or below the poverty guideline or 30% of their area median income (AMI).<sup>2</sup>

For example, a single adult in NYC would only receive \$158 for their basic needs, \$25.10 to cover the cost of their utility bills, and only \$215 for rent expenses. Even if you spent your entire Cash Assistance grant on rent alone and zero for any necessities or utilities, it would still be near impossible to find even a room anywhere in NYC for \$398. In the 1970s, the Cash Assistance grant was sufficient to help someone afford to live in a modest apartment in New York, and through passage of A.5500/S.5270 and A.5543/S.2982, public assistance recipients in New York would finally have that dream again.

### **HSU supports A.5507 (Rosenthal) to raise personal and special needs allowance for homeless shelter residents.**

People in shelter are in a state of transition and often need to replace personal items that were lost during the dehumanizing experience of homelessness, and this bill would provide the first increase since 1997 to the personal needs allowance for adults and families in shelters which provide meals.

### **HSU supports S.1631 (Kavanagh) / A.5513 (Rosenthal) to grant City and State discretion to extend housing benefits to non-citizens regardless of immigration status and A.160 (Cruz) / S.2839 (Persaud) to grant state and municipal discretion to extend all types of public benefits to non-citizens regardless of immigration status.**

Everyone should have access to permanent housing, regardless of their immigration status. S.1631 / A.5513 would enable New York City to expand eligibility for CityFHEPS to these households, offering another tool to help families and individuals to access and maintain permanent housing. By providing public benefits to any households that needs support, more families and individuals will be able to maintain stability within the community and lessen the number of households experiencing the trauma of homelessness.

The safety net must ensure both Adequacy of support provided and Access to it, to ensure successful outcomes. The City and State must both prioritize funding and hiring of front-line staff to keep the safety net and its nonprofit workforce strong. New York continues to set the example for being a sanctuary City and State, and Homeless Services United welcomes the opportunity to support Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh and members of the Housing Committees to advance these bills to address poverty, reduce homelessness, and help all New Yorkers towards a brighter future. If you have

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://nlihc.org/housing-needs-by-state/new-york>



**HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED**

307 W. 38TH STREET, 3RD FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10018  
T 212-367-1589  
www.HSUnited.org

any questions, please feel free to email me at [elee@hsunited.org](mailto:elee@hsunited.org). Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony.