



## TESTIMONY OF NEW DESTINY HOUSING TO THE NEW YORK STATE JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON HOUSING

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Thank you, Senate Finance Committee Chair Liz Krueger and Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Helene E. Weinstein. Also, thanks to the Chairs of the Housing Committees, Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal and Senator Brian Kavanagh, for championing the fight to protect domestic violence survivors living in New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP) buildings by addressing a major service funding gap.

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 permanent housing and remaining stably housed.

New Destiny is the only organization in New York City solely dedicated to the solution of permanent housing for survivors and a leading advocate in the effort to obtain the resources needed to house survivors. To learn more, [see our policy recommendations](#). 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 (ANHD).

### **DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND HOMELESSNESS**

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that [1 in 3 New Yorkers](#) across the state will experience abuse by an intimate partner in their lifetime. New York State reported the [highest demand for domestic violence services in the country](#) in the latest survey. However, not all survivors are able to access the resources and services they need, especially when it comes to permanent housing. In fact, the majority of the unmet requests for services from domestic violence survivors in New York State are housing related.

Survivors who can flee to a shelter may spend years in the system before securing a home of their own, and then they often 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 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.

Permanent affordable housing, coupled with support services, is [critical for domestic violence](#) survivors to rebuild their lives and thrive. Governor Hochul and the State Legislature have made strides in recent years, such as creating a new state program to provide flexible funding to survivors and committing to increase the amount of supportive and affordable housing. While these are significant steps, it is imperative for our State leadership to advance additional measures to ensure the long-term housing stability of survivors and their families.

## **PROTECTING SURVIVORS IN NYSSHP SUPPORTIVE HOUSING**

Supportive housing is one of the safest and most cost-effective housing solutions for survivors of domestic violence. Yet, NYSSHP, on which thousands of survivors rely on, has been shockingly underfunded for decades. Created in 1987 and administered by the state Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), NYSSHP provides funding specifically for direct services tied to housing. More than 20,000 households across the state – all of whom are homeless or at high risk – live in NYSSHP housing. Because of virtually flat funding for nearly 40 years, nonprofits are no longer able to provide the level of security and services that our vulnerable families need to remain safe and stably housed.

We raise this important issue at today's Housing hearing because it relates to the Supportive Housing Preservation Program capital funding under the New York State Homes and Community Renewal. The Supportive Housing Presentation Program provides financing strategies for the preservation and improvement of our aging supportive housing stock. However, NYSSHP sites are struggling to access this funding, and therefore they are unable to make much-needed repairs and upgrades, many of which are decades, if not centuries, old. State housing agencies have invested hundreds of millions of dollars to develop these NYSSHP buildings, we are asking members of the Housing Committees to support fighting for the preservation of these units, which housed New York's most vulnerable residents. Tenants and staff pay the price of leaky roofs, faulty elevators, and recurrent floodings. We must protect them and the State's investment in supportive housing.

New Destiny opened its first NYSSHP building in 2008 and we are still operating with annual service rates of \$2,736 for single households and \$3,672 for families. This is 20% of what providers receive under the newer supportive housing program, the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), which began in 2016. ESSHI funds \$25,000 per household annually, of which usually half (or \$12,500) is used for direct services. Additionally, an automatic 2% escalator is included in each contract. The disparity between the NYSSHP and ESSHI programs is indefensible.

At New Destiny, NYSSHP provides about \$86,000 per building – 25% of what's needed to provide 24-hour building security and deliver the services the program needs to help survivors and their families. The NYSSHP rate pays the equivalent of \$5.18 per hour, 33% of the [minimum wage](#), while ESSHI pays an average of \$29 per hour.

Like the other 126 nonprofits participating in the program across the state, we are forced to constantly fundraise from private donors to try to offset the state's disinvestment and bridge the shortfall to pay staff a livable wage and benefits. Yet, it is impossible to make up the difference. This is not a sustainable solution. Our staff and tenants deserve better.

On average, NYSSHP covers one case manager for an entire building and zero security. With case managers handling double or triple caseloads, employee burnout is nonstop. We experience significantly higher staff turnover in our NYSSHP buildings, leaving an even larger burden on the staff that remains.

Survivors in NYSSHP buildings deserve the same access to the health and healing resources that those in other supportive housing can access. It is time for our state leadership to step up

and create parity between the two programs. The supportive housing community proposes a 5-year, phased-in approach to reach parity over five years, with a budget increase this year of only \$32 million.

The Governor's budget included a small increase of \$2.8 million to fund hundreds of homeless programs at OTDA, including NYSSHP contracts. This is not enough for nonprofit providers, like New Destiny, to pay for a single extra security guard or case manager.

We urge the Legislature to support our full proposal for a \$32 million increase in FY 2024-25 and ensure that our most vulnerable neighbors, including survivors of domestic violence, have a place to live safely, heal, and thrive.

### **PASSING THE HOUSING ACCESS VOUCHER PROGRAM**

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. For noncitizen New Yorkers or those in mixed-status households, where at least one member of the family is not a U.S. citizen or eligible immigrant, it can be difficult – if not impossible – to access sufficient housing support. This includes countless [immigrant survivors of domestic violence](#).

The Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) [A4021A/S568B](#) would create a permanent, statewide Section 8-like rent subsidy available to all New Yorkers who meet the eligibility criteria, unhoused and on the brink of eviction. This affordable solution will provide up to 20,000 vouchers and help as many as 50,000 New Yorkers avoid the trauma of homelessness. 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 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 in FY 2024-25.

### **GRANT NEW YORK CITY DISCRETION TO EXTEND HOUSING BENEFITS TO NEW YORKERS REGARDLESS OF IMMIGRATION STATUS**

In addition to HAVP, the Legislature can help undocumented and non-citizen New Yorkers, including domestic violence survivors, by incorporating [A5513/S1631](#) in its One-House Budgets. This legislation would authorize New York City to expand eligibility of CityFHEPS, a city rental assistance program, to all who qualify, regardless of immigration status. Non-citizen survivors lack equitable access to housing resources, as a result they face great risk of eviction and tend to stay in shelter for longer.

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.

We urge the Senate and the Assembly to include [A5513/S1631](#) in its One-House Budgets.

## **INVEST \$250 MILLION IN EMERGENCY PRESERVATION FUNDS**

The economic impact of the pandemic has not yet disappeared. Across the State, more than [175,000 households are at risk of eviction](#). Unpaid rental arrears that have accumulated since the pandemic, compounded by increased costs, such as building insurance, have put tremendous pressure on nonprofit affordable housing providers. We must work to stabilize low-income New Yorkers so that we do not further worsen our already untenable homelessness crisis. New Destiny joins ANHD in urging the State Legislature to work with mission-driven nonprofit affordable housing developers to remedy these arrears.

We specifically urge the Legislature to include \$250 million in emergency rental relief in the budget to prioritize nonprofit developers, like New Destiny. If we do not help resolve rental arrears, we are at risk of losing thousands of deeply affordable housing homes.

Thank you for your leadership and for the opportunity to submit testimony.