

New York State Senate and Assembly Joint Budget Hearing on Housing

Written Testimony submitted by West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing
February 14, 2024

Thank you to Assemblymember Rosenthal and Senator Kavanaugh, and to the Housing committee for considering this testimony. Many of you are longtime allies of supportive housing and know that supportive housing saves the lives of New York's most vulnerable people.

West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing (WSFSSH,) founded in 1976, develops and operates low-income supportive housing for formerly homeless individuals, with a focus on housing for older adults. Many of our buildings also serve people with serious mental illness, those struggling with substance use, frail elderly, people living with physically disabling conditions, and grandparents raising grandchildren.

Our ability to provide this essential, safety-net housing depends greatly on the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP) – but NYSSHP is drastically, and increasingly, underfunded. NYSSHP was created in the 1980's and today provides essentially the same amount of funding per unit as it did in the 80's. As a result, the older programs funded through NYSSHP are in serious jeopardy.

WSFSSH urges you to adopt a plan to transform (NYSSHP) by merging it with the current Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI.) ESSHI, created in 2016 to address New York State's supportive housing goals, provides a more robust funding package with a 2% contract escalator, covering both supportive services and rental assistance.

WSFSSH operates multiple buildings and programs funded through NYSSHP. One such building is WSFSSH's Grandparents Family Apartments, which consists of 50 units of housing for grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. This model program, opened in 2005, responded to the urgent needs presented by senior center participants who were raising their grandchildren. As you can imagine, the service needs for the residents of this building are many. Both services that cater to seniors, as well as services that are geared towards children and youth are needed. Our grandparents need assistance navigating Medicare programs and dealing with medical issues that often accompany aging, while grandchildren need after school programming. The sole program funding mechanism for this program is NYSSHP. Because of NYSSHP's totally inadequate funding, we struggle to provide the basic services to support healthy aging and child-rearing.. Staff turnover is high. By contrast, newer buildings funded through ESSHI are able to provide adequate services, and unsurprisingly have far better outcomes. The difference in the amount of funding between the outdated NYSSHP and the modernized ESSHI is drastic, and it matters enormously. Our seniors and children deserve better than to be stuck with the abandoned NYSSHP funding stream.

For this reason we urge you to adopt the plan supported by Assemblymembers Maritza Davila, Linda Rosenthal and Andrew Hevesi and Senator Kavanah to convert the 9,000 at-risk NYSSHP units to ESSHI through a five-year, phased-in approach.