

New York State Senate and Assembly Joint Budget Hearing on Human Services
Testimony in Support of NYSSHP Increases & Fair Pay for Supportive Housing Staff

By Loretta Glover

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Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

My name is Loretta, and I am tenant at the Woodstock, a supportive housing residence operated by Project FIND and funded by the New York State Supportive Housing Program. I've been living in supportive housing for seven years, and I am X years old.

I'm here today because supportive housing has allowed me to live with independence, safety, and dignity, but all of that is now being threatened by years of chronic underfunding.

Before moving into my current home in New York City, I lived in Westchester. But as I got older, Westchester became very difficult for me. I stopped driving. I needed to be somewhere I could move around, access services, and afford to live. Prices kept going up, and I didn't have many options.

I was fortunate to get into supportive housing. It gave me stability when I needed it most.

But here's the truth: the building is struggling – and so are the people who work there.

This is my third year joining the Supportive Housing Network of NY's annual lobby day calling for equity among the supportive housing programs. Last year, it was wonderful to see the Governor and Legislature invest nearly \$18 million in increases to NYSSHP – the largest in the program's nearly 40-year history. I was so proud to be part of that advocacy.

But it is not enough.

The increase fell far short of the \$32 million needed annually as part of a 5-year plan to bring NYSSHP in line with newer supportive housing programs – many of which were modeled after NYSSHP, a first-of-its-kind funding formula.

At the Woodstock, we still don't know what our increase from last year's funding increase will be, but we already know it won't meet our needs, which are great. Though that is far from ideal, we are, in fact, lucky, because at many other supportive housing buildings across the state, the funding came too little, too late. These buildings have merged, sold, or closed their doors altogether.

This is not a theoretical debate. The fact is that when funding falls short, tenants like me pay the price.

Last year, the ceiling in my bathroom collapsed. Thank God I was in another room. If I hadn't been, I could have been seriously injured.

This is what happens when buildings are aging and maintenance is continually deferred due to budget deficits - there isn't enough funding to make necessary repairs and upgrades to keep tenants safe.

We also have people coming in straight from the street, people who have already been through so much and deserve a clean, safe, place to work on getting their lives back on track. Instead, they're being given old, used mattresses. That is not care. That is not dignity. That is an insult to humanity.

To be clear, this is not happening because the staff don't care. It's because they don't have the resources they need.

Staff Are Essential — and They Are Being Left Behind

The staff in my building are working as hard as they can to help people survive. They check on us. They help us navigate health care, benefits, and crises. They are the reason many of us are still housed.

And yet, NYSSHP-funded programs are excluded from the State's Targeted Inflationary Increase and other cost-of-living adjustments that the Woodstock staff deserve and need to support themselves and their families.

That means:

- Staff are underpaid and sometimes forced to work other jobs to make ends meet
- Turnover is high
- Tenants lose trusted relationships

You can't provide stability when the people doing the work can't afford to stay.

This Is About Humanity

We have to start acting like human beings again and taking care of one another.

This is not about politics.

It's about human dignity.

When we stop paying attention to suffering, when we ignore unsafe housing, underpaid workers, and people living without dignity, history shows us that things can go very wrong.

But when we care for one another, when we invest in people instead of neglecting them, we build stronger, safer communities for everyone.

What I'm Asking You to Do

I am asking you to:

1. Increase funding for the New York State Supportive Housing Program so buildings like mine can be safe, well maintained, and humane.
2. Include NYSSHP programs in any COLA or Targeted Inflationary Increase because staff deserve just pay and tenants need stability.
3. Protect and preserve existing supportive housing as well as investing in new construction - especially now, when federal funding is uncertain and at risk.

Supportive housing works. I am living proof of that.

But it only works if we fund it properly and if we value the people who live and work in these buildings.

Please take care of your fellow human beings.

Thank you for listening.