



Testimony of
Coalition for the Homeless

before the Fiscal Committees
of the NYS Legislature

NYS Executive Budget Proposal
For Housing 2025

submitted by

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The Rise in Mass Homelessness Throughout New York

New York City (“NYC”) has one of the largest populations of unhoused people in the United States. In December 2024, there were 124,764 people sleeping in NYC shelters, 43,131 of whom were children.¹ While the recent influx of asylum seekers and other new arrivals has added to the strain, the core problem is homegrown: the number of New Yorkers entering the NYC shelter system continues to rise, even as the number of new arrivals in shelters decreases. Over the course of 2024 alone, the number of longer-term New Yorkers in shelters grew by more than 7,500 people – a 12 percent increase over the previous calendar year.

This staggeringly high figure does not even include the many thousands of people sleeping unsheltered in public spaces, or the tens of thousands temporarily sleeping doubled- and tripled-up in the homes of others. As such, the number of people without homes in New York has never been higher.

Such mass homelessness extends beyond NYC, affecting communities across the entire state. Homelessness in New York State grew by 53.1 percent from January 2023 to January 2024, more than four times the rest of the nation, according to a recent report from the New York State Comptroller.² Several areas in the state have seen their homeless populations double in the past two years. Some areas which previously had few homeless people have faced surges in homelessness in the last two years, mostly driven by increasing homelessness among families with children.³

Priced Out of Housing in New York

The aforementioned statistics are fueled by decades of underinvestment in permanent affordable housing for low-income communities and the failure of all levels of government to enact policies to meaningfully reverse this trend. The affordable housing shortage in New York, particularly for extremely low-income (“ELI”) households, is underscored by stark data revealing the depth of the crisis. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2024 report, “The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” there is a glaring disparity in the availability of affordable housing: for every 100 ELI households in New York State, there are merely 34 affordable and available rental units.⁴ In a state where the cost of living far exceeds national averages, and ELI households are defined as those earning at or below the poverty line or 30 percent of the area median income (“AMI”), this gap leaves a vast number of residents in precarious housing situations.

The worsening housing precarity in New York State is evidenced by the growing rent burdens borne by its residents. 74 percent of ELI households are severely rent-burdened (spending more than 50 percent of their income on housing).⁵ This financial strain severely limits the capacity of ELI households to afford other necessities, such as food, healthcare, and childcare. It forces many of them to live in overcrowded

¹ Coalition for the Homeless. “Facts About Homelessness.” Accessed 19 Feb 2025.
<https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

² “New Yorkers in Need: Homelessness in New York State” *Office of the New York State Comptroller*, 22 Jan. 2025, <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>.

³ “New Yorkers in Need: Homelessness in New York State” *Office of the New York State Comptroller*, 22 Jan. 2025, <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>.

⁴ National Low-Income Housing Coalition. *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*, at App. B. Mar 2024. <https://nlihc.org/gap>.

⁵ National Low-Income Housing Coalition. *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes*, at App. B. Mar 2024. <https://nlihc.org/gap>.

conditions – defined as having more than two people per bedroom or more than one person living in a studio apartment. In fact, nearly a quarter (23 percent) of New York City households with at least one child are overcrowded.^{6,7} Given that living in overcrowded conditions is frequently a precursor to homelessness, such statistics portend greater levels of mass homelessness if this affordable housing crisis continues.

The dynamics of New York’s real estate market have also exacerbated the affordable housing shortage. The city’s median rent has consistently outpaced inflation and income growth, creating an environment where affordable housing becomes increasingly scarce. Rent-stabilized units are particularly difficult to come by. Per the most recent Housing Vacancy Survey, the vacancy rate for rent stabilized units was less than 1 percent in 2023 – down from an already distressingly low 4.6 percent in 2021.⁸ More to the point, the vacancy rate for affordable apartments – those renting for less than \$1,100 per month – was only 0.39 percent. Effectively, there are no affordable apartments left in New York City for those who need them most.

Coupled with this is the fact that evictions have remained worryingly high, nearing pre-COVID levels. In New York City in FY 24, there were 126,236 eviction filings in city housing courts.⁹ The increase in evictions is particularly affecting low-income residents and communities of color and further straining the city’s social safety net. In addition, this surge in evictions, in conjunction with a near-total lack of available affordable housing, has made a substantial increase in mass homelessness in the city a near-inevitability.

Bold Initiatives That Could Make a Real Difference

This housing crisis will not abate without bold initiatives and wise investments similar to those that New Yorkers have employed historically to meet the moment. The Governor’s budget includes little that will alleviate the dire housing crisis for low-income individuals and families. We therefore urge the Legislature and Governor to implement the following:

- **Pass Housing Access Voucher Program (“HAVP”) (A.1704 /S.72):** A statewide rental voucher is critically needed to offset the increasing cost of housing. Receipt of a Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher or CityFHEPS voucher can often mean the difference between stability and homelessness. However, there are not enough existing vouchers to meet the growing need throughout the State for those with incomes below 50 percent AMI, particularly those whose immigration status or criminal record make them ineligible. Governor Hochul’s own Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, authorized in 2022 via

⁶ New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. *2021 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings*. 16 May 2022. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/2021-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

⁷ New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. *2023 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings*. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

⁸ New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development. *2023 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings*. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

⁹ New York City Office of Civil Justice, “FY24 Annual Report.” *Department of Social Services*. Accessed 27 Feb. 2025, https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hra/downloads/pdf/services/civiljustice/OCJ_Annual_Report_2024.pdf.

the Child Poverty Reduction Act, has included the creation of a statewide rental assistance voucher program as part of its recommendations, recognizing the importance of housing vouchers in reducing poverty in New York State.¹⁰ We strongly support HAVP and urge the Legislature to include \$250 million in the budget for FY26 to create up to 20,000 vouchers for New Yorkers.

- **Require that local social services agencies ensure that any homeless person who is involuntarily transported to a hospital by police or outreach teams be connected to housing upon discharge, utilizing the proven Housing First approach:** Too often, homeless people with serious mental illness are discharged from the hospital without being connected to ongoing care or housing, and so end up back on the streets. The Housing First approach is an evidence-based model proven to successfully and quickly move unsheltered people off the streets and into permanent housing by eliminating barriers or unnecessary pre-conditions, while connecting people with mental health services to achieve long-term stability.
 - o There are 4,000 vacant supportive housing beds in New York City that could be leveraged to house homeless people with serious mental illnesses sleeping in public spaces.
 - o New York City functionally eliminated veterans' homelessness through a similar approach,¹¹ which immediately connected homeless veterans to housing units and supportive services.
- **Expand CityFHEPS Eligibility (A.1503/S.958):** Grant New York City the discretion to issue vouchers to undocumented families who have been in shelter the longest. Undocumented families often remain in shelter for long periods because they are ineligible for many benefits. Given changes underway in federal policy, such shelter stays will be further protracted and the ability to secure permanent housing will become even more difficult unless safety net options are available that do not rely on federal funds. Federal law allows for a state or its locality to deem undocumented persons eligible for public benefits "through the enactment of a State law . . . which affirmatively provides for such eligibility."¹² This bill would affirmatively provide such eligibility for undocumented persons to receive vouchers that are fully funded by NYC.
- **Remove Restrictions on How NYC Deploys State Rental Supplement Program ("RSP") Money Retroactive to the Beginning of FY23:** In an effort to end or prevent homelessness, RSP was explicitly designed to provide jurisdictions with a rental assistance option for those ineligible for other safety net programs. It is funded again at \$100 million in this year's proposed budget.¹³ However, since the beginning of FY23, NYC has been required to use these funds to cover increases in the State Family Homelessness & Eviction Prevention Supplement ("FHEPS") program. This effectively means there are fewer funds available for RSP's intended purpose and in turn fewer households with 0-30 percent AMI receiving RSP to address astronomically high housing costs in NYC. Given that these funds have already been appropriated and are desperately needed, we insist that this restriction be immediately

¹⁰ New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. *2024 Recommendations and Progress Report*. Accessed 25 Feb 2025. <https://otda.ny.gov/cprac/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>.

¹¹ Department of Veterans' Services, New York City. "Ending Chronic Veteran Homelessness in NYC." <https://www.nyc.gov/site/veterans/initiatives/ending-chronic-veteran-homelessness.page#>

¹² 8 U.S.C. § 1621.

¹³ New York State. *Aid to Localities Budget*. Fiscal Year 2025 at 595-96 (2025).

removed retroactive to FY23 and that funds already delivered to the State for FHEPs be restored for RSP use.

- **Expand Eligibility for State FHEPS and Increase Public Assistance Rent Allowances:** Currently, FHEPS is only available to certain families with minor children receiving Cash Assistance who have recently been, or are currently, engaged in eviction proceedings. A limited resource, this tool greatly offsets increased housing costs for recipients given that the voucher covers housing up to 100 percent of HUD’s Fair Market Rent (“FMR”). Unfortunately, all other New Yorkers receiving Cash Assistance, including single adults, families without minor children and families with minor children for whom eviction is not an issue, are ineligible for FHEPS. Instead, to the extent such households are not able to access limited Section 8 or CityFHEPS vouchers, they are relegated to the State’s appallingly low public assistance rent allowance which in NYC is \$215 for a single adult or \$400 for a family of three that includes minor children.¹⁴ To address this misalignment with NYC housing costs, the State should allow all Cash Assistance recipients to be eligible for FHEPS or, at a minimum, increase the public assistance rent allowance in order that it also covers the cost of housing up to 100 percent of FMR.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Legislature on the budget and other legislation to address the needs of those who are unhoused or precariously housed throughout the State.

¹⁴ See N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. Tit. 18, § 352.3.

About Coalition for the Homeless: Coalition, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to address the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fifth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 11 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-training for homeless and low-income women; and permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributed nearly 400,000 hot, nutritious meals to homeless and hungry people on the streets of the city this past year – up from our usual 320,000. Finally, our Crisis Services Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms, and money for medications and groceries. In response to the pandemic, we are operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right-to-shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981, the City and State entered into a consent decree in *Callahan* through which they agreed: “The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter.” The *Eldredge* case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The *Callahan* consent decree and the *Eldredge* case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed independent monitor of municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor the municipal shelter system serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by Legal Aid and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws. During the pandemic, the Coalition worked with Legal Aid to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure Wi-Fi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic.