



**Written Testimony
NYS 2026 Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing
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**Submitted by:
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Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on the needs of housing in New York State. My name is Cristina Abbattista, and I am the Policy Analyst at Urban Pathways.

Urban Pathways is a nonprofit homeless services and supportive housing provider serving single adults. Last year, we served over 2,500 unique individuals through a full continuum of services including street outreach, drop-in services, safe havens and stabilization beds, extended-stay residence, and permanent supportive housing in Manhattan, Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx. We also offer a wide range of additional programming to meet the needs of the people we serve, including our Total Wellness, Employment, and Advocacy Programs. We hold contracts with the Office of Mental Health for licensed residential programs and permanent supportive housing, both congregate and scattered site models.

The housing first approach is a core principle that drives the work we do at Urban Pathways. It is critical that we recognize secure housing and individualized support as the foundation upon which unhoused New Yorkers can improve their quality of life. With a staggering 53% increase in homelessness in New York State in 2024ⁱ, we have an obligation to strengthen this foundation in the State budget through the Housing Access Voucher Program, adequately compensating the human services sector, and modernizing the OMH residential system.

Expand the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) to \$250 million.

In January 2025, a report by the New York State Comptroller found that there were 158,019 people experiencing homelessness across New York State.ⁱⁱ It is not just unhoused New Yorkers who are experiencing housing instability; in 2025, there were a total of 192,156 eviction filings Statewide.ⁱⁱⁱ Addressing New York's homelessness crisis will require coordination and investment from all levels of government, but New York State can and must take immediate action to prevent this crisis from worsening by expanding HAVP in this year's budget to \$250 million to stabilize approximately 10,000 households.

Research shows rental vouchers significantly reduce homelessness and housing instability.^{iv} Federal Housing Choice Vouchers reduce the poverty rate for recipients by 43%^v and provide long-term benefits to households that previously experienced homelessness.^{vi} Despite evidence of the positive effects of rental assistance, there are not nearly enough federal and local

vouchers to meet the need in New York. Only one in four eligible households receive Housing Choice Vouchers and localities outside of New York City do not have their own local voucher programs, leaving households with little to no options to help them afford rent or escape homelessness.

The Housing Access voucher helps people experiencing homelessness find permanent homes or supports low-income New Yorkers at risk of becoming homeless. The program guarantees that participating households pay no more than 30 percent of their income toward rent. Although HAVP largely mirrors the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher, it is more inclusive as it is available to people regardless of immigration status or criminal record. In addition to stabilizing individuals and families, HAVP provides financial stability to building owners, ensuring a steady stream of rental income from tenants. Further, a report from Women in Need found that, once fully implemented at \$250 million, HAVP could come with significant cost savings by offsetting shelter and other costs associated with eviction and homelessness.^{vii}

New York State must strengthen this critical tool to reduce homelessness and housing instability. We urge the Legislature and Governor to expand HAVP to \$250 million to stabilize approximately 10,000 households in the FY27 budget.

Fund a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) to align with the Consumer Price Index.

Providing supportive housing and homeless services is not possible without the hard work and dedication of our frontline staff. Our programs rely on case managers to connect the people we serve with services and resources to achieve their goals, maintenance workers to keep buildings clean and well-maintained, security staff to ensure the safety of our residents, and cooks to prepare healthy meals. Unfortunately, many human services organizations including Urban Pathways are struggling to fill essential positions. Urban Pathways currently has a 16% staff vacancy rate. Ultimately, this reality has the most negative impact on the people we serve, as staff vacancies strain service capacity and limit our ability to deliver consistent, high-quality care.

Urban Pathways staff are part of an 800,000-person nonprofit human services workforce providing essential services to the most vulnerable New Yorkers on behalf of the government. This workforce, predominantly women (70%) and people of color (75%), makes 30% less than their government counterparts doing comparable work.^{viii} The average salary of core nonprofit human services workers in 2023 was \$36,688.^{ix} This places the human services sector as the third lowest paying industry in New York City, trailing low-wage restaurant and retail sectors.

A TII is essential for providing pay increases to the human services workforce in line with inflation. To ensure a fair and comprehensive cost of living adjustment for the human services workforce, the State must fund a 2.7% TII in the FY27 budget to align with the Consumer Price Index. This investment will ensure that the human services sector can fully staff our programs and take care of our workers who take care of New Yorkers in need.

Invest \$220 million to modernize OMH housing models.

Existing contracts with the Office of Mental Health (OMH) that provide licensed and permanent supportive housing programs for individuals with serious mental illness have long been underfunded. These models are outdated, with the oldest created in 1984. Since then, much has changed that impacts the operation of these models, however, there have been minimal changes to

the models to enhance their ability to serve those who live in OMH supportive housing. These challenges include a significant decrease in resources coinciding with a higher-needs population served within a more intensely regulated environment. The needs of individuals receiving services at these programs have increased as people are aging in place, leading to increased costs to ensure an appropriate level of care. The State must invest in the OMH residential system to address decades worth of change and support the dedicated staff caring for one of New York’s most vulnerable populations.

The OMH residential model must be enhanced by increasing the level of staff in programs to alleviate the burden of existing staff. This includes hiring qualified staff of nurses and certified nursing assistants to support with responsibilities and treat the medical conditions that come with aging. Reimbursement rates must be enhanced for all existing positions to pay current staff a living wage, which will positively impact staff recruitment and retention. The average statewide staff vacancy rate for housing providers is currently 30%, and the average staff turnover rate is close to 35%.^x Without the resources to provide workforce wage increases, these numbers will continue to increase and New Yorkers in need will not receive the critical services they so desperately need.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We look forward to working with you this session to expand the Housing Access Voucher Program, provide the human services sector with a 2.7% TII, and modernize the OMH residential system.

For questions or more information, please contact:

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ⁱ “The 2024 Annual Homelessness Assessment Report for Congress,” The US Department of Housing and Urban Development: Office of Community Planning and Development, December 2024. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/2024-AHAR-Part-1.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Thomas DiNapoli, “New Yorkers in Need: Homelessness in New York State,” Economic and Policy Insights, January 2025. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ NYS Unified Court System “State Wide Eviction Information,” 2025. <https://app.powerbigov.us/view?r=eyJrIjoizGEMwYTgzMyJ9>

^{iv} Ingrid Ellen Gould, “What Do We Know About Housing Choice Vouchers?,” The NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy, July 2018. https://furmancenter.org/files/fact-sheets/HousingChoiceVouchers_ige.pdf

^v Sophie Collyer, et. Housing Vouchers and Tax Credits: Pairing the Proposal to Transform Section 8 with Expansions to the EITC and the Child Tax Credit Could Cut the National Poverty Rate by Half,” Center for Poverty and Social Policy, Columbia University Population Research Center. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/Housing-Vouchers-Proposal-Poverty-Impacts-CPSP-2020.pdf>

^{vi} “Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families,” U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/family-options-study-full-report.pdf>

^{vii} Hannah Tager, Martin Gamboa, Chris Mann, “The Housing Access Voucher Program: Saving New York State \$200 Million and Preventing Homelessness for Tens of Thousands of New Yorkers Every Year,” Win. <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/HAVP-Report.pdf>

^{viii} “The Case for Ending Poverty Wages for New York City’s Human Services Workers,” Center for New York City Affairs at The New School, March 2022. <https://www.centernyc.org/reports-briefs/the-case-for-ending-poverty-wages-for-new-york-citys-human-services-workers>

^{ix} James Parrot, “Moving Beyond COLAs to Salary Parity for New York City’s Nonprofit Human Services Workers,” Center for New York City Affairs at The New School, January 2025. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/MovingBeyondCOLAstoSalaryParity.pdf>

^x “SFY 2025-26 New York State Executive Budget Testimony,” New York Disability Advocates, 2025. <https://nyassembly.gov/005715.pdf>