



**Volunteers
of America®**
GREATER NEW YORK

NYS SFY 2026-27 EXECUTIVE BUDGET HEARING JOINT HEARING OF THE HOUSING COMMITTEES FEBRUARY 25TH, 2026

Introduction and Thanks: My name is Catherine Trapani, and I am the Assistant Vice President of Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). Thank you, Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh and members of the Assembly and Senate, for the opportunity to submit testimony.

About Us: VOA-GNY is a 130-year-old anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Thank you, Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh for your unwavering leadership on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers. As you both well know, housing is healthcare, and the work of your respective Committees is invaluable in ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to safe and stable housing, which facilitates better health, education, and employment outcomes to help people thrive. Affordability is a top priority for New Yorkers because so many people are unable to meet their daily needs and remain stably housed. We urge the Legislature to prioritize the following investments in the SFY 26-27 Budget to help widen access to shelter and permanent housing to New Yorkers statewide:

SFY26-27 Budget Priorities:

- 1. Pass the SAFE Shelter Act A.3264/S.7738 (Hevesi/Gounardes) to Provide Single Adults Access to Domestic Violence (DV) Shelter**

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness and the leading cause of

murder for women. Single adults fleeing abusive partners often find themselves without any access to safety due to the way the State's domestic violence shelter system is funded and configured. Passage of the SAFE Shelter Act will *immediately* save lives of single adult survivors of domestic violence by changing the way single adults may access shelter.

Without timely access to shelter, they are put at additional risk of being discovered by their abusers as they must call back day after day, hoping a single bed unit becomes available. Survivors are left with only tough choices- whether to stay with their abuser, to try to find someone willing to take them in, or to become homeless, sleeping on the streets or entering a DHS single adult shelter which is not equipped with the same specialized trauma-informed services or confidential spaces to safeguard them from their abuser.

Single adults are disproportionately turned away from DV shelters, compared to two-person households. In 2023, **approximately half of all DV hotline callers seeking shelter** placement to Safe Horizon in New York City **were single adults with no children**. However, **only 18% were matched with a placement**, compared to **26% of hotline callers who were families of two and placed in shelter 72% of the time**.

New York's funding model for DV shelter providers pays based on the number of people served ("heads in beds"), not households. So, when a single adult household stays in a room with two beds (a "one and one unit") instead of a 2-person household, providers only receive 50% of the funding even though it costs roughly the same amount to shelter and serve them. This fiscal penalty threatens the viability of the domestic violence shelter system for everyone.

By our own estimates, VOA-GNY's six DV shelters lost a combined \$1 million last year serving single adult survivors in our two bed units. While our funding shortfall is not insignificant, small residential programs of 9 beds or fewer which are typically in repurposed private homes serving upstate communities are even less able to absorb the cost, as one empty bed would cost them more than 10% of their budget. **We are already aware of one such DV shelter closing its doors because of partial reimbursement for vacant beds.** Passing the SAFE Shelter Act amends the funding formula to allow for the full, fixed cost of providing services for a single adult in a unit with two beds. DV shelters shouldn't have to consider whether their program can afford to serve a single survivor, they should be able to automatically say, "we have a room, you're safe now."

- 2. Expand funding for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) to \$250 Million per year and make the program permanent in the FY27 Budget**

Thank you Chair Kavanagh and Chair Rosenthal for your steadfast leadership and vision to pass HAVP with Governor Hochul in last year's Budget, establishing a \$50 million flexible statewide rental assistance program. **VOA-GNY, as a member of the Housing Access New York (HANY) coalition, urges the Legislature and Governor to expand funding to \$250 million per year, enabling New York to stabilize approximately 10,000 households statewide.** Local Social Service Districts will be able to distribute vouchers to help people experiencing homelessness find permanent homes or help low-income tenants at risk of homelessness to remain stably housed.

Although HAVP is similar to Section 8, it is designed to more flexibly fill eligibility gaps of Section 8 and other vouchers, as it is available to households irrespective of immigration status or criminal record. In addition to stabilizing families and individuals, establishing HAVP as a permanent program would provide financial stability for building owners, ensuring a steady stream of rental income from low-income tenants. In addition to stabilizing communities, data from Win shows that HAVP, once fully implemented, could provide significant cost savings by reducing shelter and other costs associated with eviction and homelessness. ⁱ

There are not nearly enough federal and local vouchers to meet the current need across New York, with only one in four eligible households receiving Housing Choice Vouchers, and exhaustion of Federal funding for Emergency Housing Vouchers which could destabilize thousands of New Yorkers if unable to transition to other rental assistance programs. While CityFHEPS is an invaluable tool for moving people out of shelter in New York City, both the City and State would benefit from the addition of HAVP which is a more flexible rental assistance voucher that can help unhoused New Yorkers in rural and urban areas to access permanent housing and tenants to remain stably housed.

3. **Fund a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) for all State human services contracts to expand funding nonprofits receive for program costs and worker wages.** *(The Governor added 1.7%)*

While we appreciate the Governor's support for the human services sector through her inclusion of a 1.7% increase in the SFY 26/27 Executive Budget, it falls short of the current need, both to cover increasing overhead costs and service needs, as well as to improve wages for our workforce, which is one of the lowest paid sectors in New York. A 2.7% inflationary increase will ensure VOA-GNY's state-funded supportive housing and domestic violence programs and staff are able to keep pace with rising costs and better resourced to meet the growing need.

4. **Increase funding for existing and new Supportive Housing Projects to help house New Yorkers experiencing homelessness.**
 - a. **\$62.1 million increase for the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP).**

- i. By increasing the State's investment to \$62.1 million for year two of a five-year plan to create parity among supportive housing units statewide, it will help address decades of State underfunding of NYSSHP which is the sole source of supportive services funding for nearly 10,000 supportive housing households. We also urge the State to allow NYSSHP funds to support both services and operating costs, as appropriate, to ensure safe, well-maintained housing and effective services.
- b. \$281 million total for the Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP) to build nearly 1,000 more units of supportive housing annually and stabilize older projects.**

- i. **Double the main source of HHAP funds to \$256 million (from \$128 million) to build more supportive housing.**

For the second year in a row, need is at an all-time high, forcing HHAP to close its main application window early. This program has a strong track record of building and revitalizing affordable and supportive housing, and the pipeline must be widened to meet the need, given it provides the sole capital funding in small rural projects, complementary funding in larger projects, and critical preservation funding.

- ii. **Maintain the \$25 million stabilization fund for property stabilization across the sector.**

Last year, the state established this \$25 million set-aside of low-barrier flexible funding available to existing HHAP projects with significant needs at risk of closure, with priority for programs with service funding through NYSSHP. This fund should be maintained as it is still receiving applications, with awards already made in NYC and the North Country.

5. \$2.5 million for YouthBuild programs in SFY26/27 Budget

YouthBuild is a critical workforce development initiative for young people ages 16 to 24, offering a comprehensive approach to youth workforce development to help young people get good-paying jobs and out of poverty and homelessness. The program combines education, workforce training, work experience, employment and leadership development with wraparound support and aftercare services to ensure young people have the tools they need to succeed. We urge the Legislature and Governor to continue to appropriate \$2.5 million in the State Budget to enable YouthBuild providers across the State to help more young people break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

SFY26-27 Legislative Priorities:

1. S7738/A3264 (Gounardes/Hevesi) Securing Access to Fair & Equal (SAFE) Shelter Act

VOA-GNY strongly endorses the SAFE Shelter Act which will help expand access to life-saving domestic violence shelter to single adult survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual violence. The existing reimbursement differential penalizes

providers for placing one-person households into units with two beds, resulting in single individuals who are fleeing dangerous situations unable to access DV shelter. We urge the State to pass and sign the SAFE Act into law, so that survivors of domestic violence, trafficking and sexual violence do not have to choose between returning to their abuser or becoming homeless.

2. S1580A/A2590 (Persaud/Hevesi) or S3669 (Persaud) to include programs left out of typical budget increases in the past to ensure all State-contracted human services programs receive this increase.

VOA-GNY supports a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase for human services programs and staff and urges the Legislature to adopt legislation which corrects the inadvertent exclusion of critical programs and staff such as Domestic Violence shelters funded through OPDV, OCFS and OTDA, as well as NYSHHP funded supportive housing programs and STEHP funded eviction prevention programs.

3. S3953/A5589 (Ramos/Bronson) to establish a Human Services Wage Ladder Board.

VOA-GNY supports this legislation which would establish a Human Services Wage Board would examine these pay disparities and offer recommendations on adequate and equitable wages. A recent study of NYC human services workers found that highly educated non-profit staff (four-year degree or better) earned 22% to 37% less than comparable positions within the public or private sector.ⁱⁱ Through exploring and addressing systemic deficiencies in how government contracts compensate human services workers, New York State can ensure a strong and well-staffed non-profit safety net to help all New Yorkers.

Thank you to Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh and Members of the Assembly and Senate for your leadership and commitment to supporting New Yorkers. In this time of uncertainty, the Legislature and the Administration are positioned to lead the way as shining examples to New Yorkers and the entire country of how government cares for the most vulnerable and in need. VOA-GNY looks forward to our continuing partnership with you to meet the needs of our communities.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Catherine Trapani.

For any questions, please contact me at ctrapani@voa-gny.org

ⁱ 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>

ⁱⁱ James Parrott, "Moving Beyond COLAs to Salary Parity", *Center for New York City Affairs at the New School*, January 2025, pg. 19. <https://www.centernyc.org/s/Moving-Beyond-COLAs-to-Salary-Parity-For-New-York-Citys-Nonprofit-Human-Services-Workers-FINAL-ntbw.pdf>