

Testimony for the State Budget Hearing on Housing

On the

Need for Increased Funding and Permanence for the Housing Access Voucher Program

Every night, over 150,000 New Yorkers sleep in shelters or on the streets, with tens of thousands more doubled- or tripled-up. We know the bigger picture of the crisis is much broader, and there is not a precise, accurate count available of everyone impacted, unstably housed, or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

For people all over the state that struggle to stay in their homes, to get out of shelter, and to keep their families well, access to rental assistance can change everything. In New York, 46% of tenants are rent burdened and 20% percent are severely rent burdened, paying over half their income in rent. It's conditions like these that worsen cycles of chronic homelessness. Cuts by the federal government to not just housing, but healthcare and public assistance, exacerbate the problems that people with insecure housing face and can throw someone into brand new crises. The state has the opportunity and the responsibility to distribute resources to stop and prevent homelessness.

The Housing Access Voucher Pilot Program is a crucial tool for the state to connect New Yorkers with housing and it must be further invested in. The model, similar to the federal Housing Choice Voucher Program, will distribute vouchers to low-income individuals and families. This creates stable housing opportunities and prevents evictions. However, the fewer than 2,000 vouchers that can be distributed from the \$50 million budget allocation are nowhere near enough. The state must increase funding for the program's second year to \$250 million in this year's budget.

Unfortunately, the vouchers attributed to each county are dwarfed by the number of people experiencing homelessness and eligible for the assistance. Along with people barely hanging on in eviction court, those searching for ways to exit the shelter system, and those in upstate motels without supportive resources- there are the many populations who are ineligible for other housing programs that fall through the cracks. New Yorkers facing further complicated barriers in homelessness include victims of domestic violence, formerly incarcerated people, and many with mixed immigration status.

We know that housing security improves wellbeing and success outcomes at large, but studies also show that access to housing vouchers specifically as a vehicle for obtaining housing not only increases long-term housing stability but also physical and mental health outcomes.¹ We ask that lawmakers prioritize homelessness across the state like the emergency that it is and invest in this proven solution.

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¹ <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC9555591/#R21>