

Safety Net

The newsletter of Coalition for the Homeless

Winter 2010

A NIGHT ON THE UPTOWN ROUTE



Port Authority

79th Street Boat Basin

86th and West End Ave.

Cathedral of St. John the Divine

THE CHANGING FACE OF HUNGER

Letter from Mary

I visited the Bellevue Men's Shelter recently and met many who waited in vain for a bed. There was a 19-year-old, who had just lost his job as a bus boy at Cipriani's. In the corner, an elderly man who had surgery a week earlier for a stomach disorder and needed his stitches removed at a hospital in the Bronx the next day. Men with obvious, serious mental illness roamed about, many with hospital bracelets still on their wrists. Dozens of exhausted, disheartened men, crammed in a small filthy room – virtually all had been given “overnight” placements for days on end. With no permanent shelter placement, they had no place to store their belongings, which they carried in large plastic garbage bags or tattered suitcases.

Their biggest complaint was that it was impossible to get more than two or three hours of sleep. They waited for hours for a permanent bed, but instead were taken after 2am to another shelter, only to be awoken and turned out on the streets at dawn. The bus boy was unable to make it to his new job training program. The gentleman with stitches had no place to rest and was being shipped that night out to



Brooklyn – virtually ensuring he would not make it to his doctor's appointment in the morning.

As we go to print with this edition of *Safety Net*, homeless and nearly-homeless New Yorkers are threatened on many fronts.

- In the midst of recent litigation filed by the Coalition, the City continues to leave scores of homeless men and women without a safe, stable bed. Giselle Routhier's article in this issue details what Coalition monitors have documented first-hand during this brutal winter.

- Governor Paterson has announced an \$88 million cut to fund shelters in New York City. His number crunchers declared that the shortfall could be made up by charging “rent” in the shelters. “Rent” in this case would mean deducting from the already meager public assistance many shelter residents receive, or garnishment of wages

for those lucky enough to have a job.

- One week before Christmas, the Bloomberg Administration informed over 2,000 people that the Section-8 certificates they were using to move into permanent housing were rescinded. Even though the City knew as early as May 2009 that funding from Washington was slashed and the attrition rate for vouchers was half what it was in 2007, the City continued to distribute bogus vouchers. Fully half of the people effected by the retroactive termination were formerly homeless families, who were in the midst of transitioning from a City-funded, short-term rental subsidy. They have now

been left without any way to pay their rent – worried that they will soon wind up back in the shelter system.

This arc – from frontline enforcement of the Right-to-Shelter, established by the Coalition over 25 years ago, to ensuring funding is in place for decent, life-saving shelter and permanent housing – underscores the breadth and importance of our advocacy work.

Your support of the Coalition gives a voice and hope to the thousands individuals and families entering the shelter system confused, intimidated, and ill-informed. You ensure they will not be forgotten.

Sincerely,

Mary E. Brosnahan
Executive Director

Safety Net

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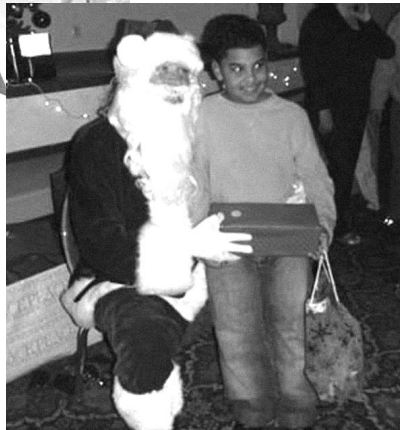
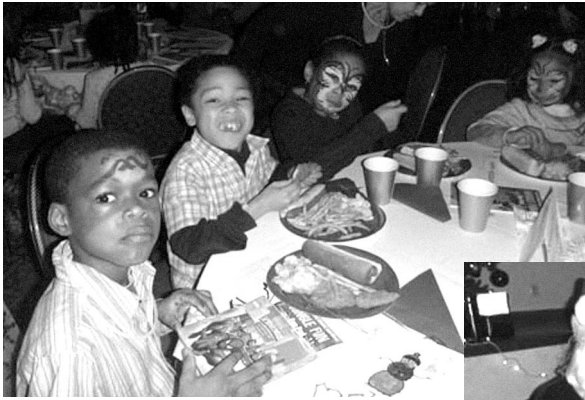
Toy Drive and Kids Holiday Party a Success!

By Sarah Murphy

On Saturday, December 19th, the Coalition held its 13th Annual Holiday Party to benefit homeless boys and girls.

Set in the beautiful Alhambra Ballroom, each child was welcomed with goodie bags, a face painter, a professional DJ playing the latest hits, and characters from their favorite shows and movies. After a full lunch, the kids got a visit from Santa, who gave each a special present.

Their smiles were all we needed to know that this was truly a special day for each and every one of them.



Thank You Santa!

Dear Santa,
I just want to thank you for the gifts you brought for me. I really like the clothes and the Hanna Montana make up kit.
Thank you very much!
Kelly

Dear Santa,
I can't wait to play with my scooter when I move. I love my toys!
Love,
Shana

Dear Santa,
Thank you for the presents. I enjoyed them very much. I got everything I wanted.
On Christmas, I played with my Barbie doll.
Sincerely,
Kiona

This year was our most successful toy drive ever, bringing in nearly 1,000 toys and stuffed animals that went directly to our most needy clients. We greatly appreciate the support of everyone who participated. With your help, we were able to make the holidays a little brighter for so many children and families.

We would especially like to thank:

ANSAC
Association of Legal Administrators
Billie Cohen
Donald B. and Catherine Marron GUND®
Hall Capital Partners LLC
J.P. Morgan Chase
Justin Long
Long Island University
New York Life
Pillsbury Law
Shirley Miranda-Rodriguez
St. John's University
TATU, Millie Milz Rios, "CC"
Scollo, Mark Vigo, and all of the XMEN CREW
Toys of Hope
United Federation of Teachers

A Night on the Route: Seeing the Changing Face of Hunger

By Sarah Murphy

Harlem Hospital

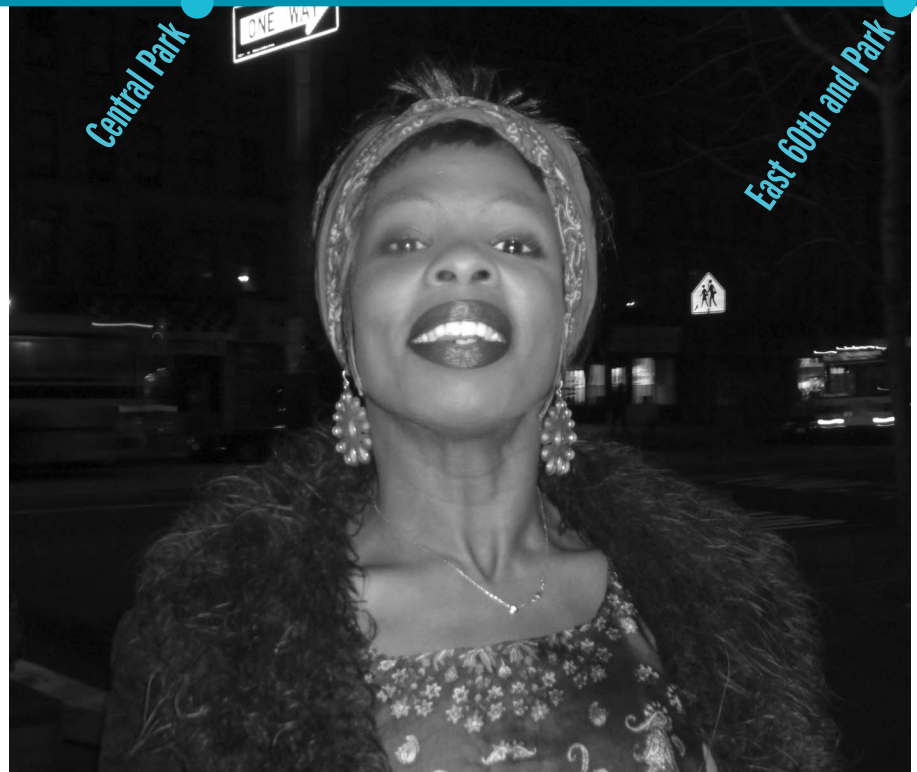
An estimated one in six New Yorkers don't know where they will find their next meal.

While our city is fortunate to have dozens of soup kitchens and food pantries, many men, women, and families with children cannot make the trek to them. Larry has spent much of the last seven years on the street and travels up to 200 blocks every day to find food. Others are not so lucky. The Coalition's Grand Central Food Program (GCFP) is unique in its ability to engage the hungry who aren't as mobile as Larry, including those who are ill, disabled, and with limited resources for transportation.

When the GCFP originated 25 years ago, the purpose was to bring sandwiches directly to homeless people where they lived: in the subways, train terminals, alleyways, and street corners. Over time, it emerged into one of the largest food programs in the city, delivering up to 1,000 nutritious meals every night on three routes throughout upper and lower Manhattan and the Bronx.

We rely on a dependable team of over 100 volunteers each week who drive our vans; help us greet the men, women, and children waiting in the line; and distribute food. Some volunteers are new; others have been with the Coalition for over 15 years. GCFP Director, Juan de la Cruz, pointed out that our ranks include bankers, business professionals, students, current and formerly homeless people, and many others. Courtney, one of our regular Thursday night volunteers, says, "This is my favorite day of the week. You get to interact with a mixed group of volunteers and clients. I like meeting new people and checking in on old clients to see how they are doing."

Over the years, the Coalition has seen our population change. At first, it was nearly all street homeless men. Later, we saw older women lining up, and fam-

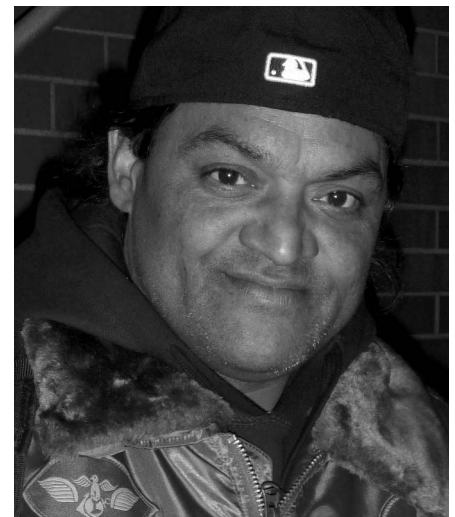


ilies just trying to keep their heads above water. Recently, we have seen a dramatic increase in the number people who have housing, but simply cannot afford food on top of their rent and living expenses.

The Uptown Route

On a chilly January night, we loaded into the van headed for the uptown route.

At 7:15 pm, we arrived at our first stop at West 51st and Broadway. There, I met Dave. Dave was familiar with the difficulties of the streets. Having been homeless for nearly 12 years, he spoke with regret of the troubles he faced. "I think programs like these help with crime. People get hungry and they get desperate and they do things they wouldn't normally do." For Dave, that is a thing of the past. He recently moved into a subsidized apartment and is starting to get back on his feet. I asked him why he returned to the van, and he replied that even with his new housing, it is impossible to get by on his own. He needs programs like GCFP to stay

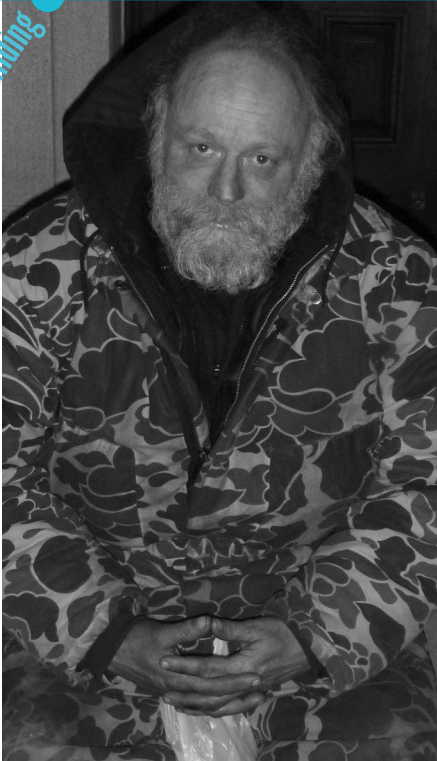


nourished and healthy.

At each of the following stops, we saw faces of every age and gender. Some ragged from years on the streets; others had just gotten off of work. I met Edith, an older woman in a wheelchair who waits diligently outside of her NYCHA apartment every night because her assistance check is not enough to cover food, medication, and rent; Jose, a young messenger, who hadn't eaten

... we have seen a dramatic increase in the number people who have housing, but simply cannot afford food on top of their rent and living expenses.

SONY Building



“I remember every day to be grateful and stay positive. You have to be. I hope to one day give back and share my blessings.”
—Dionne, GCFP client

anything all day; and Danny, a day worker who lives with a friend, who has been visiting the vans for about a year after construction work dried up. He is close to being forced onto the streets, but is hoping to hang on until the spring when there are more jobs.

At Cathedral Park, a volunteer eagerly introduced me to Rosa, a regular for years. She lives in a public housing unit nearby and has great difficulty getting around. She greeted each of us with a huge smile and a hug. They talked about the happenings of the past week, and we walked her back into her building. Without any close family or

5th Ave. and 55th Street



Citigroup Center

friends, the daily interaction she gets from our volunteers is truly the highlight of her day. She told us repeatedly how much she loves the volunteers.

At Harlem Hospital, a younger woman stood in line, dressed in bright colors and laughing. Dionne has a disability and lives in supportive housing, using soup kitchens and programs like ours for the past three years to help her cover expenses. I asked to talk to her, and she reminisced about the struggles she’s faced throughout her life, but smiled again, thankful of the generosity of others. “I remember every day to be grateful and stay positive. You have to be. I hope to one day give back and share my blessings.”

It was getting much colder as we turned onto East 60th and Park. The men sleeping on the steps of the 60th Street Baptist Church were bundled up with blankets, trying to keep warm in their boxes. I spoke to Mike, who after a brief stay in shelter, has been living on the streets for three years. He is thankful that groups like ours come to visit the church with food and warm clothes for him and the others huddled together. The Coalition reaches out to men like Mike, urging them to come in out of the cold for additional services, but they are often intimidated by the shelter

system either because of its complexity or the dangers they once faced in such close living conditions. It might sound strange, but Mike calls the church steps his home, and would prefer to stay there than risk the shelters.

Around 10:00 pm, we reached the end of our route. The crates full of soup and milk were gone. Tomorrow, another group of volunteers will run the same route and encounter many similar faces, some old, some new, all desperately looking for something warm to eat. This critical lifeline, at one time only for our homeless neighbors, now is a safety net for low income New Yorkers who have housing, but have fallen on hard times. Hunger no longer haunts just the man sitting on the subway platform surrounded by his belongings. It gnaws at the woman going to a minimum wage job trying to feed her children, the man on disability unable to return to the workforce, and countless others struggling to make ends meet.

To learn more about the Grand Central Food Program or the Coalition’s other direct service programs, go to www.coalitionforthehomeless.org. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the Program Director, Juan de la Cruz, at volunteer@cft homeless.org.

Protecting the Right to Shelter: Challenging the Capacity Crunch

By Giselle Routhier

Amidst frigid winter weather and the lingering effects of the economic downturn, the City of New York has run out of shelter beds for homeless men and women. After months of dialogue, warnings and letters, the Coalition for the Homeless was forced to file litigation to ensure that all homeless New Yorkers obtain safe, decent shelter.

The number of homeless single adults in the New York City shelter system has risen dramatically over the past year, largely as a result of rising unemployment and the continuing shortage of affordable rental housing. Even before the onset of winter, the number of homeless men seeking shelter had increased by eight percent from the previous year.

As early as last summer, Coalition for the Homeless saw the impact of rising need for shelter on the municipal shelter system's capacity and communicated these concerns to City officials. Without enough beds, the City would be at risk of failing to meet its legal obligation under the 1981 consent decree in *Callahan v. Carey* to provide shelter to all homeless men and women. Unfortunately, City officials failed to heed the Coalition's warnings and did not develop a plan to expand shelter capacity. At the onset of winter, Coalition monitors witnessed first-hand the shelter system reach the breaking point, with new entrants still streaming in and the peak winter census still months away—leaving many vulnerable men and women without a safe, decent shelter bed.

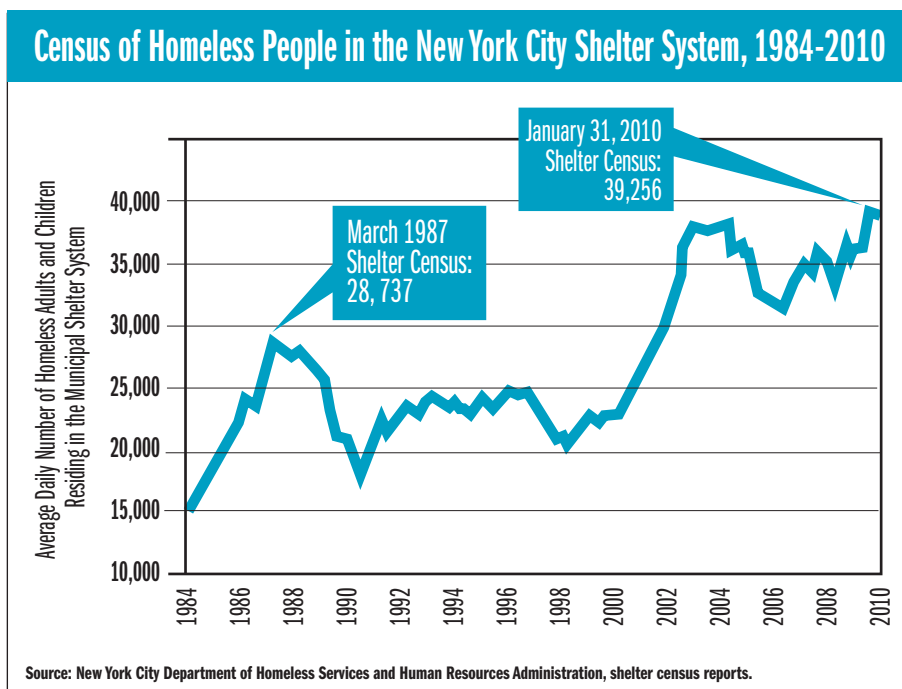
In response to this dire shortage, in December the Coalition for the Homeless and Legal Aid Society filed a motion in *Callahan v. Carey* against the City of New York requesting relief on behalf of all homeless men and women. We called for the City to fulfill its obligation to provide shelter by increasing capacity and abiding by the

minimum standards for health and safety of the residents.

The Coalition witnessed terrible conditions, including dozens of men sleeping on the floors of dirty and crowded waiting rooms night after night. At the same time, women were continually transported by bus as late as 2am from an intake center in the Bronx

who lost her job and suffers from kidney disease was bused from the Bronx to Brooklyn several nights in a row, only to arrive in Brooklyn close to 2am and then awoken at 6am and told to return back to the Bronx.

In response to our litigation, as of late January the City had added some urgently needed shelter capacity. But



After months of dialogue, warnings and letters, the Coalition for the Homeless was forced to file litigation to ensure that all homeless New Yorkers obtain safe, decent shelter.

to overnight-only beds in Brooklyn, only to be awoken a few short hours later and told to go back to the Bronx to wait again for a shelter bed.

Steven Marin, a 40-year-old man who suffers with severe depression and diabetes, was left to sleep on a bench in a shelter waiting room for two nights in a row. A 43-year-old homeless woman

many homeless men and women were still left with either no beds or continual one-night placements. The Coalition will continue to press forward with the litigation until the rights of all homeless New Yorkers are protected.

In the long term, the Coalition continues to urge the Bloomberg administration to accelerate the development of permanent supportive housing for homeless individuals living with mental illness and other special needs, and also to restore the successful policy of prioritizing homeless New Yorkers for Federal housing assistance.

Do you want to learn more about how you can get involved with the Coalition? Sign up for our e-advocacy alerts at:
www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/

15th Annual ARTWALK NY Raises More Than \$700,000

By Rachel Edelman

Skylight Studio was overflowing with art lovers, collectors, socialites, celebrities, and Coalition supporters at the 15th annual ARTWALK NY on Tuesday, November 17th. Honoring artist Pat Steir, a record 800 guests attended to bid on artwork, enjoy tastings from some of New York's top restaurants, mingle among guests, and support the Coalition's life-saving work.

The event was co-chaired by Alec Baldwin and Carey Lowell, and raised more than \$700,000 to benefit the Coalition's programs and advocacy efforts. The event honored renowned artist and long-time Coalition supporter, Pat Steir, whose art work, *Vibrating Blue and Red Waterfall*, was the highlight of the live auction.

Guests had the opportunity to bid on more than 140 works from their favorite artists in the live and silent auctions, including Steir, Jeff Koons, Ed Ruscha, Spencer Tunick, Jenny Holzer, Cindy Sherman, and Yoko Ono, among many others. Sotheby's Vice President of Business Development, Eliza Osborne, led the enthusiastic live auction, which recorded some of its highest sales in the event's history.

Sponsored by media partner *Time Out New York*, the event also featured food from some of New York's top restaurants, including Da Silvano, Scuderia, Indochine, and Michael's. Guests sipped on specialty gin cocktails from Bulldog Gin, beer courtesy of Stella Artois, and wine and champagne from Bubble Lounge and South Pacific Wines. Guests also enjoyed décor courtesy of Ron Wendt Design, and music from DJ 3SKI, which kept the crowd energized throughout the evening.

The Coalition is grateful for the generous support of the many sponsors, artists, Benefit Committee and Junior Committee members who helped make the event a tremendous success. Please stay tuned for details on ARTWALK NY 2010!



Board of Directors Howard Furst, Andrew Kramer, Barry Berke, Michael Friedman, David Giffen, Rich Russo, and Executive Director Mary Brosnahan



Junior Committee Chairs Peter Davis, Bettina Prentice, and Valerie Boster



Alec Baldwin and Pat Steir

The Coalition is grateful to the many sponsors who helped make ARTWALK a great success. We couldn't have done it without you!

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The **16th** Annual

WOMEN MEAN BUSINESS LUNCHEON

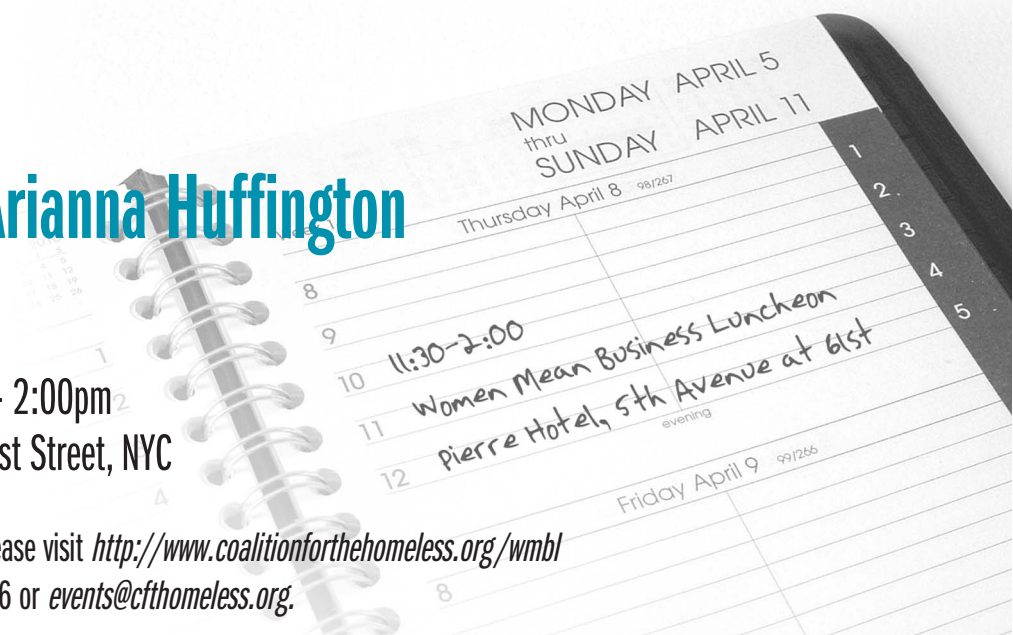
Benefiting the **First Step** Job Training Program

Honoring **Credit Suisse**
Featuring Speaker **Arianna Huffington**

SAVE THE DATE:

Thursday, April 8, 2010, 11:30am - 2:00pm
The Pierre Hotel, Fifth Avenue at 61st Street, NYC

To purchase tickets at an **Early Bird** rate, please visit <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wmb/>
For more information, contact 212.776.2056 or events@cfthomeless.org.



Heroes for the Homeless

Every year homeless New Yorkers' lives are affected by policies adopted by City, State and Federal officeholders, and by budget decisions. Coalition for the Homeless applauds lawmakers who look out for the needs of homeless, low-income and disabled New Yorkers, even when they receive criticism for their actions. Here is a shout out to State officials who made heroic efforts to help the neediest New Yorkers in 2009:

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver defended seniors and disabled New Yorkers from day one and defeated Governor Paterson's ill-advised proposal to cut State benefits for SSI recipients.

Senator Daniel Squadron and **Assemblymember Keith Wright** introduced legislation (passed by the Assembly) to stop the NYC Department

of Homeless Services from forcing homeless families to pay "rent" to stay in homeless shelters.

Assemblymember Keith Wright and scores of his colleagues in both houses supported restoration and expansion of programs that support a number of the 11 direct service programs operated by Coalition for the Homeless (and other charities).

Assemblymember Rory Lancman introduced legislation to penalize hate crimes against homeless New Yorkers.

Assemblymember Jonathan Bing and **Senator Liz Krueger** advanced legislation (opposed by the Office of the Mayor of the City of New York) to fix the inequity in the income cap for the Disability Rent Increase Exemption Program.

Senator Tom Duane and **Assemblymember Deborah Glick**

advanced legislation (passed by the Senate after a powerful speech by Senator Duane) to institute a 30 percent cap on rents for HASA clients with AIDS and HIV.

Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver, Senators Liz Krueger, Tom Duane, Jose Serrano, and Eric Schneiderman, and Assemblymember Jonathan Bing designated legislative funds to support Coalition programs.

Governor Paterson, Assemblymembers Joe Morelle and Peter Rivera, and Senators Shirley Huntley, Neil Breslin and Tom Duane won passage of legislation making Timothy's Law (mental health insurance parity) permanent.

Thanks to ALL of our heroes and their colleagues who fight for our homeless neighbors!