

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informed over 2,000 people that the Section-8 certificates they were using to move into permanent housing were rescinded.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

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