

Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless

On

Int. No. 1123 – In relation to feminine hygiene products in NYC shelters

Presented before

The New York City Council  
Committee on Women's Issues

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The Coalition for the Homeless welcomes this opportunity to testify before the Committee on Women's Issues regarding access to feminine hygiene products in New York City shelters.

### **The Homeless Shelter System and Access to Feminine Hygiene Products**

Currently, over 60,000 men, women, and children sleep in the DHS shelter system each night. This includes 3,800 single women, as well as 14,700 family households. The vast majority (over 90 percent) of the family households are headed by women. Over 1,000 additional households, many of whom are headed by women, reside in New York City's HRA and DYCD-run shelters.

Feminine hygiene products are a basic and critical need for women. While they are made available in some shelters throughout the DHS shelter system, access is often unreliable or inadequate. Feminine hygiene products should be easier to access and made available in those shelters not currently providing such products. Typically, women in single shelters are given only a few products at a time and have to request products from staff regularly. We support Intro 1123 as an effective method to expand access to feminine hygiene products to all homeless women. We would also encourage the bill language to be expanded to include drop-in centers, safe havens, and stabilization beds, which serve the most vulnerable women living on the streets who are least likely to have access to a regular supply of feminine hygiene products. Products should also be made available at men's shelters to meet any demand from transgender residents.

We thank the Council and the Committee on Women's Issues for their leadership on this issue and look forward to working together in the future.

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### **About Coalition for the Homeless**

Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which now continues past its third decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation around the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 11 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term solutions and include: supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS; job-training for homeless and formerly-homeless women; and permanent housing for formerly-homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributes over 900 nutritious meals each night to homeless and hungry New Yorkers across the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk

households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms and money for medications and groceries.

The Coalition was founded around the effort to bring the landmark litigation on behalf of homeless men and women in Callahan v. Carey and Eldredge v. Koch and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan through which they agreed that, “The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter.” The Eldredge case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The Callahan consent decree and the Eldredge case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults.