

Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless  
And  
The Legal Aid Society

On

Oversight – Supportive Housing

Presented before

The New York City Council  
Committee on General Welfare  
Committee on Housing and Buildings

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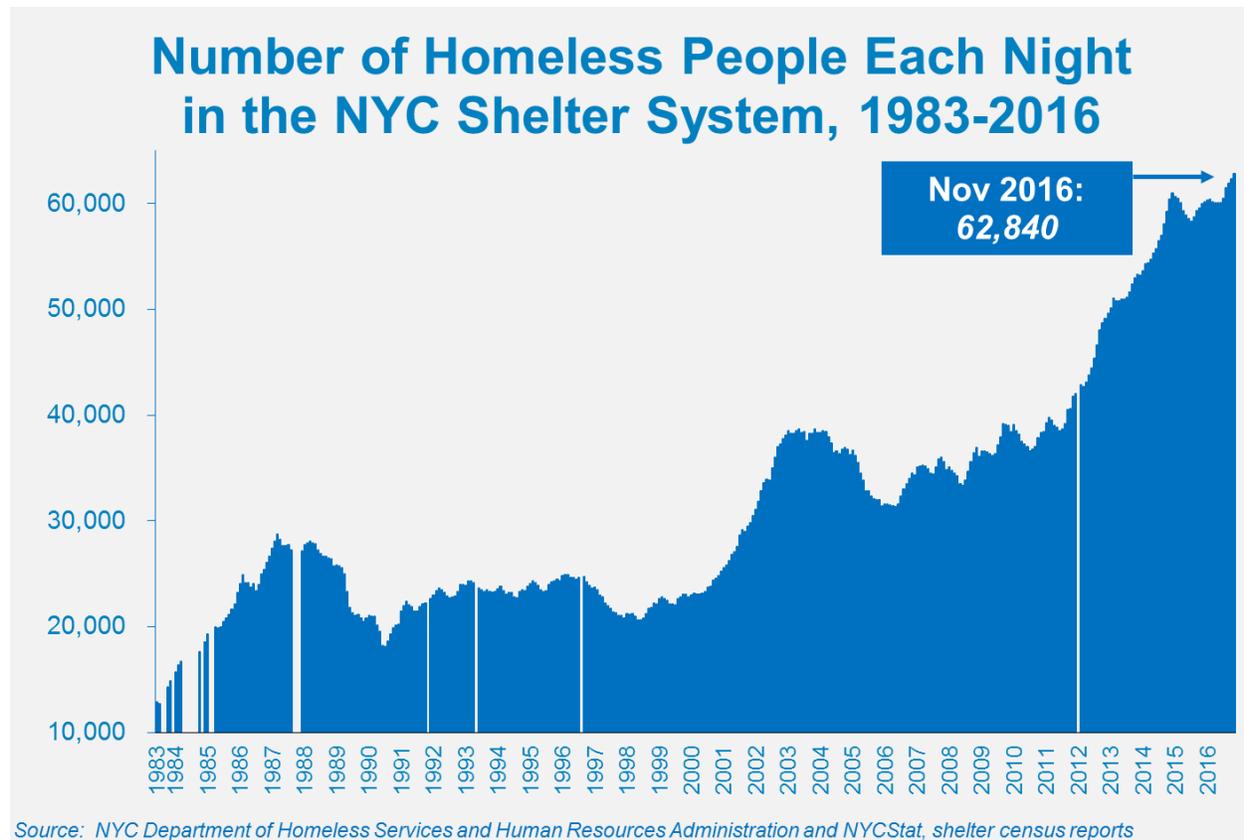
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Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society welcome this opportunity to testify before the Committees on General Welfare and Housing and Buildings regarding supportive housing.

### **Background: Homelessness in NYC and the Critical Need for Supportive Housing**

New York City remains in the midst of the worst homelessness crisis since modern mass homelessness began. In November 2016, an all-time record 62,840 men, women, and children slept in shelters each night on average. The number of people in shelters now is roughly double what it was in the years preceding the Great Recession.



Homeless individuals experience increased rates of severe mental illness compared with rates within the general population.<sup>1,2</sup> A quarter of all homeless individuals suffer from severe mental illness, and rates are significantly higher for those that are chronically homeless. Among families, mothers experience extraordinarily high rates of depression and posttraumatic stress disorder.<sup>3</sup> Homeless children also experience higher rates of emotional and behavioral problems than low-income children living in permanent housing.<sup>4</sup> There are more individuals in homeless shelters with severe mental health needs than available placements in shelters augmented with onsite mental health services designed to assist them. Even more urgent, less than one in five eligible homeless applicants for supportive housing will find an available unit.

Supportive housing is a proven cost-effective solution to homelessness for individuals and families living with a disabling mental illness or other disability. Supportive housing provides

stable, permanent housing with onsite support services for these individuals and families in need of extra support. But in addition to saving lives, it also provides financial savings of over \$10,000 per unit through reduced use of shelters, hospitals, psychiatric facilities, and jails, as well as improving neighborhoods and property values for areas adjacent to new supportive housing developments.

### **City and State Commitments to Supportive Housing**

The creation of most of the supportive housing in NYC has been funded under a series of multi-year City-State agreements referred to as the “New York/New York Agreements.” Indeed, these agreements were initiated as New York distinguished itself as the birthplace of supportive housing. The third of these agreements, NY/NY III, expired in 2016 and placements into supportive housing have reached an all-time low as a percentage of all single adults in shelters.

Through the steadfast advocacy of hundreds of our partners in the Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing, including the great majority of elected state and City legislators and hundreds of faith leaders, we succeeded in winning promises from both Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo last year to create a total of 35,000 units of supportive housing in the next fifteen years. The City has already awarded 550 scattered site units toward the Mayor’s 15,000 unit commitment. Additionally we are awaiting the imminent release of a services and operating RFP for congregate units.

While the State has made some conditional awards for some of its units as well, Governor Cuomo has thus far failed to follow through on the commitment he made a year ago to fund a long-term commitment of 20,000 supportive housing units over the next fifteen years. Nearly \$2 billion was allocated in last year’s budget for the first 6,000 of these units, but it was unnecessarily subjected to a Memorandum of Understanding to be signed by the Governor and legislative leaders. Because of this unnecessary and self-imposed obstacle, the Governor has yet to follow through and fulfill his promise. We continue to call on the Governor and legislative leaders to release this money immediately so the critical work of building state-funded supportive housing can begin in earnest. Record homelessness highlights the extreme urgency of the need and the necessity of the immediate release of the promised funds.

We thank the Council for the opportunity to testify. We look forward to working together on our mutual goal of ending homelessness in New York City.

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## About Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society

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 is now in its fourth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving 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 hot meals each night to homeless and hungry New Yorkers on 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, and 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 in concert with landmark right to shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*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: "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, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor other facilities serving homeless families.

The Legal Aid Society: The Legal Aid Society, the nation's oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City – passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of more than 1,100 lawyers, working with some 800 social workers, investigators, paralegals and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26

locations in New York City, the Society provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

The Society's legal program operates three major practices — Civil, Criminal and Juvenile Rights — and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by the Society's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of more than 300,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload of 300,000 individual cases and legal matters, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits more than 1.7 million low-income families and individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the Callahan and Eldredge cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the McCain/Boston litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to homeless families.

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<sup>1</sup> SAMHSA. (2011). Current Statistics on the Prevalence and Characteristics of People Experiencing Homelessness in the United States

<sup>2</sup> National Institute of Mental Health (2014). Serious Mental Illness (SMI) Among U.S. Adults. Available online: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/prevalence/serious-mental-illness-smi-among-us-adults.shtml>

<sup>3</sup> SAMHSA. (2011). Current Statistics on the Prevalence and Characteristics of People Experiencing Homelessness in the United States

<sup>4</sup> Routhier, G. (2012). Voiceless Victims: The Impact of Record Homelessness on Children. Available online: <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/BriefingPaper-VoicelessVictims9-25-2012.pdf>