

# KNOW YOUR RIGHTS

## A GUIDE TO YOUR RIGHTS WITHIN THE NEW YORK CITY SHELTER SYSTEM

**In New York City, you have a legal right to emergency shelter if you have nowhere else to stay.** The right to shelter was established by the **Coalition for the Homeless** in a 1981 lawsuit called Callahan v. Carey. This summary of your rights is intended to help you understand what you can (and cannot) expect from the New York City shelter system. It also offers suggestions in the event that your rights are violated by the shelter system, shelter security, or by anyone else. Knowing your rights is an important part of survival in New York City, especially if you have nowhere else to stay.

If you are denied shelter in New York City because the City decides that you are not "in need" of shelter, you are entitled to challenge that denial.

Shelter staff can only enforce rules that are set out in writing and clearly posted. You cannot be disciplined except for violation of the established shelter rules.

You have the right to organize and meet with other shelter residents, to voice complaints, and to advocate for changes in the shelter without any interference from the City. Any retaliation against you because of those activities, including transferring you to another shelter, is illegal.

You have the right to be represented by persons of your own choosing. **The Client Advisory Boards (CABs)** are independent bodies working in the interests of residents. The **Coalition for the Homeless** is working to make sure that the CABs have the freedom and resources to be strong advocates for the shelter residents they represent. Please participate – if you want to change shelters for the better, think about starting a CAB in your shelter.

### ***IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS WITH...***

**Physical conditions.** Each shelter has, or you can pick them up at the **Coalition for the Homeless** office, copies of the minimum standards set by the Callahan case that New York shelters are required to meet. Let them know of your complaint. Any problems that cannot be resolved within the shelter can be referred to the **Coalition for the Homeless**. We will take them up with the City.

**Punitive transfers and/or unreasonable disciplinary actions.** If you feel you are being wrongly disciplined, visit the **Coalition for the Homeless** at the address below.

**Being transferred out of a shelter against your will.** Contact the **Coalition for the Homeless** immediately. You must be given written, 48-hours notice of a transfer. Unfortunately, the right to shelter does not mean a right to a place in any particular shelter, and we may not be able to fight every single transfer. But if you are being transferred in retaliation for speaking out about problems in the shelter, or for any sort of political activity, or if you receive an inappropriate transfer, we should be able to help.

**Getting benefits or getting into programs.** Ask your caseworker about public assistance or any other benefits you think you should receive, or about shelter-based programs. If you are not satisfied, ask to see a supervisor, or come to the **Coalition for the Homeless** office.

The Coalition for the Homeless is a non-profit organization that advocates for homeless New Yorkers. If you need to speak to a Crisis Intervention counselor, please come to our offices Monday through Friday. Come early as we only see a limited number of clients each day.

### **The Coalition for the Homeless**

129 Fulton Street, 4th Floor ♦ New York, New York 10038  
A, C, 2, 3, 4, 5, M or Z train to Fulton Street