



BRIEFING PAPER

The Bloomberg Administration Moves Forward to Reduce Emergency Shelter for Street Homeless New Yorkers

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After announcing a proposal this autumn to reduce emergency shelter and other vital services for street homeless individuals, the Bloomberg administration is moving forward with implementing its misguided policy. The final plan1, released on December 12th, calls for fewer overnight shelter placements for street homeless people and fewer places where homeless New Yorkers can access emergency shelter and other services.

This misguided plan comes on the heels of the Bloomberg administration's earlier proposal to relocate the sole intake center for homeless men from Manhattan - where the majority of street homelessness is concentrated - to the Crown Heights neighborhood of Brooklyn.2 Taken together, the two plans represent a dramatic shift in the City of New York's approach to street homelessness, and will sharply reduce access to emergency shelter and vital services for street homeless individuals.

Following are the highlights of the Bloomberg administration's misguided new plan to reduce emergency shelter for street homeless people:

Bloomberg Administration Plan to Reduce Shelter for Street Homeless Current vs. Planned Changes

Table with 4 columns: Category, FY 2008 Average, Max. Capacity Bloomberg Plan (June 2009), and Change. Rows include Drop-in Centers (overnight), Faith-Based Beds, 'Safe Haven' Beds*, 'Stabilization' Beds*, Total (all street homeless), and Total (homeless less than 9 mos.).

*Restricted to people homeless on streets for 9 months or more

Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services

- A sharp reduction in overnight shelter placements for street homeless New Yorkers. During the past fiscal year an average of 1,377 street homeless individuals were provided with overnight shelter in an array of different programs, including drop-in centers and faith-based shelters. Under the Bloomberg administration plan, the number of street homeless people provided with overnight placements will be reduced by 16.8 percent to a maximum of 1,145 people. In addition, the number of overnight placements available to homeless New Yorkers who've been on the streets for fewer than nine months will be reduced by 46.7 percent, from 929 people sheltered last year to a maximum of 495 people sheltered under the Bloomberg administration plan.

- **A reduction in the number drop-in centers serving street homeless New Yorkers.** Until this past summer there were 11 drop-in centers in New York City where street homeless people could access shelter 24 hours per day. But in June Mayor Bloomberg eliminated funding for two drop-in centers, leaving nine drop-in centers citywide still operating 24 hours per day. However, under the Bloomberg administration's new plan there will be only seven drop-in centers citywide. In Manhattan, where the majority of street homelessness is concentrated, the Bloomberg administration's plan reduces the number of drop-in centers from seven centers (before June) to a proposed three centers.
- **Eliminating overnight shelter and services at drop-in centers.** Currently drop-in centers operate seven days per week, 24 hours each day, reflecting the reality that many street homeless people seek help at all hours of the day and night. Indeed, street homeless individuals frequently seek shelter late at night when outdoor temperatures begin to fall sharply. The Bloomberg administration plan eliminates overnight hours and services at all drop-in centers, which will close at 8:30 pm. Under the new plan, at night there will be only one place in all five boroughs that street homeless men will be able to access shelter – the municipal shelter system's intake center, which the Bloomberg administration wants to move from midtown Manhattan to Crown Heights, Brooklyn.
- **Creating new bureaucratic barriers to entry for homeless individuals seeking help.** Currently homeless individuals can walk in to drop-in centers to seek help with few bureaucratic hurdles. Thus, drop-in centers provide vital "entry points" for shelter and other vital services. The Bloomberg administration plan abandons this successful approach and would impose a new requirement that clients must have a referral from outreach teams or other service providers in order to access services, or undergo a new "screening process." These new barriers would make it harder for homeless individuals get help. In particular, homeless individuals living with mental illness or physical disabilities will find it difficult to navigate these barriers and will be less likely to access vital services.

It is a fundamental and proven principle of assisting street homeless people that shelter and services must be easily accessible and have few barriers to entry. Most important, on cold winter nights, when securing shelter is literally a matter of life and death, emergency shelter must be located near to street homeless people.

In order to truly reduce the numbers of homeless individuals on our streets, Mayor Bloomberg and his administration should immediately halt plans to reduce and restrict shelter and services for street homeless New Yorkers and should halt plans to move the homeless men's intake center out of Manhattan.

For more information, please visit
www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.

¹ New York City Department of Homeless Services, Requests for Proposals to operate drop-in centers and respite beds for homeless adults (December 12, 2008), available at <http://www.nyc.gov/html/dhs/html/home/home.shtml>. Under the requests for proposals, bids are due to the City in January 2009, and contracts will be issued in the spring of 2009.

² The Bloomberg administration's plan to move the homeless men's intake center – currently located next to Bellevue Hospital in midtown Manhattan – to the Bedford-Atlantic Armory in Brooklyn, was first acknowledged by City officials in April 2008. Please see the Coalition's June 2008 briefing paper, "The Bloomberg Administration's Misguided Plan to Move the Homeless Men's Intake Center Out of Manhattan," available at www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.