



BRIEFING PAPER
Five Years Later:

**The Failure of Mayor Bloomberg’s Five-Year Homeless Plan and the
 Need to Reform New York City’s Approach to Homelessness**

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On June 23, 2004 – five years ago today – Mayor Bloomberg released “Uniting for Solutions Beyond Shelter,” his plan to reduce New York City homelessness by two-thirds over five years. While the ambitious goals of the plan were initially praised by a wide array of advocates and service providers, it is now clear that the Mayor’s flawed plan has failed to accomplish those worthy goals.

	Bloomberg Takes Office (January 2002)	Bloomberg Unveils Five-Year Homeless Plan (June 2004)	Bloomberg Plan Five-Year Targets (June 2009)	Bloomberg Plan Five Years Later (May 31, 2009)
Total Homeless Shelter Population	31,009	36,642	12,210	36,218
Number of Homeless Families	6,921	8,712	2,900	9,538
Number of Homeless Children	13,081	15,361	5,120	15,147
Number of Homeless Adults in Families	10,061	12,849	4,280	13,722
Number of Homeless Single Adults	7,867	8,432	2,810	7,349

Five years later:

- Mayor Bloomberg’s homeless plan has resoundingly failed to achieve its primary goal of reducing New York City’s homeless shelter population by two-thirds.
- The number of homeless families is actually 9 percent higher than when Mayor Bloomberg unveiled his plan – and is 229 percent higher than the plan’s goal.
- The total homeless shelter population is essentially the same as when the Mayor unveiled his plan – and is 197 percent higher than the plan’s goal.
- The number of homeless children is essentially the same as when Mayor Bloomberg unveiled his plan – and is 196 percent higher than the plan’s goal.

Compared to when Mayor Bloomberg took office in January 2002:

- The total homeless shelter population is 17 percent higher – there are now more than 5,000 more homeless New Yorkers sleeping each night in municipal shelters than when the Mayor took office.

- The number of homeless families is 38 percent higher – there are more than 2,600 more homeless families sleeping each night in municipal shelters than when the Mayor took office.
- The number of homeless children is 16 percent higher – there are more than 2,000 more homeless children sleeping each night in municipal shelters than when the Mayor took office.

In the June 23, 2004, speech unveiling his five-year homeless plan, Mayor Bloomberg referred several times to “accountability” – saying, for instance, that “[a]ccountability also extends to public agencies and providers,” and that his plan shows “our Administration’s commitment to hold ourselves accountable and govern based on the facts...” The Mayor also said that, “Our work will be research-driven.”

However, the primary failure of Mayor Bloomberg’s five-year homeless plan is that it not “research-driven” and that it fails to build on the growing body of research showing that affordable housing assistance, like Federal Section 8 vouchers, are a proven way to reduce family homelessness. Another major failure is the lack of accountability in the plan. Despite the resounding failure of the plan to reduce New York City’s homeless shelter population, Mayor Bloomberg and administration officials have repeatedly failed to acknowledge the plan’s numerous flaws and have refused to change course.

Amidst the worsening economic recession, as more and more New Yorkers are losing their jobs and homes, Mayor Bloomberg must abandon his flawed plan and embrace policies that genuinely address the housing affordability crisis affecting growing numbers of families and individuals. In the near term, Mayor Bloomberg can take the following immediate steps to reduce homelessness.

1. Target Federal Housing Aid to the Homeless:

- In 2005, the Bloomberg administration cut off homeless New Yorkers from longstanding priority for Federal housing programs, including Section 8 vouchers and public housing.
- This year the City will distribute more than 12,000 Section 8 vouchers and more than 5,000 public housing apartments will be available to rent – but virtually none to the homeless.
- Numerous studies show that Section 8 vouchers successfully reduce family homelessness.
- Reversing the City’s misguided policy will move thousands of homeless families to permanent housing – and will save City taxpayer dollars spent on emergency shelter.

2. Accelerate Construction of Permanent Supportive Housing:

- In 2005, the City and State signed a ten-year agreement to provide permanent supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other special needs.
- However, more than half of the newly-constructed supportive housing – 3,276 units of the planned 6,250 new units – will not be built until at least 2011.
- City and State officials should accelerate the development of supportive housing for homeless people with special needs.

3. Halt Referrals of Homeless Adults to Illegal Dwellings:

- City has referred hundreds of homeless adults – including many living with mental illness – to more than 120 unsafe, illegal boarding houses.
- City inspectors have issued vacate orders to at least 15 illegal boarding houses due to health and fire safety risks – forcing the residents to return to shelters or the streets.
- City officials should halt referrals of homeless adults living with mental illness or other disabilities to illegal boarding houses.

Note: All homeless population data and information about Mayor Bloomberg’s homeless plan is from the New York City Department of Homeless Services. For more information, please visit

www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.