



**TESTIMONY OF COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS
BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY**

Committee on Housing

**Public Hearing
“Rent Regulation”**

January 20, 2011

**Submitted by Patrick Markee, Senior Policy Analyst,
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I present this testimony on behalf of Coalition for the Homeless, a not-for-profit organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. Since its founding in 1981, the Coalition has advocated for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which now continues into its third decade. The Coalition has also struggled for more than 25 years to protect the rights of homeless people through litigation around the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and appropriate housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates several direct-services programs that both offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers, and demonstrate effective, long-term solutions. These programs include supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS, a job-training program for homeless and formerly-homeless women, a Rental Assistance Program which provides rent subsidies and support services to help working homeless individuals rent private-market apartments, and two buildings in Manhattan which provide 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 more than 900 nutritious meals to street homeless and hungry New Yorkers each night. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention assistance, client advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits.

The Coalition also represents homeless men and women as plaintiffs in Callahan v. Carey and Eldredge v. Koch. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan in which it was 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 to physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter.” The Callahan consent decree (consolidated with the Eldredge case) also guarantees 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.

New York City's Historic Homelessness Crisis and Weaker Rent Laws

New York City is in the throes of a historic homelessness crisis. Indeed, New York homelessness is now worse than at any point since modern homelessness began in the late 1970s. (Please see the charts appended to this testimony.)

- Currently, more than 38,000 homeless men, women, and children bed down in municipal shelters each night, the highest number since modern homelessness began three decades ago.
- In addition, more than 9,500 homeless families are sleeping in the municipal shelter system on any given night, including 16,000 children – numbers that reached all-time record levels over the past year.
- Thousands more homeless people sleep rough each night on New York City streets or in other forms of shelter.
- Perhaps most alarming of all, the number of New Yorkers who experience homelessness over the course of a year has reached record levels.
- During the City's FY 2010, more than 113,000 different men, women, and children slept in municipal shelters, including nearly 43,000 children.

There is no question that New York's worsening housing affordability crisis is the major factor behind this historic rise in the homeless population. By every available measure, over the past decade New York City has lost tens of thousands of low-rent apartments affordable to low-income households. At the same time, incomes for working class and low-income New Yorkers have stagnated or even declined in real terms – and this was true even before the so-called "Great Recession" took its toll on New York's economy.

Weaker rent laws are one of the major factors behind the steady loss of affordable rental housing in New York City. And the shrinking affordable housing stock is the primary cause of record homelessness in New York. Contrary to myths propagated by the real estate industry and opponents of rent regulation, the vast majority of rent-regulated tenants are middle-class and low-income. Half of all rent-regulated households have annual incomes below \$38,000, and more than one in five have incomes below the poverty line. Indeed, more than twice as many poor New Yorkers live in rent-regulated housing (225,000 households) than live in public housing (93,000 households).

Simply put, the rent laws are essential to maintaining New York City's stock of affordable rental housing. And they are essential to stemming even further increases in homelessness. That is why Coalition for the Homeless is working alongside tenant organizations, organized labor, housing advocates, and others on efforts not only to renew the rent laws but to strengthen them.

We urge the New York State Legislature to renew and strengthen the rent laws and, most important, to do the following:

- Ensure that the State rent protection laws and the State coop/condo conversion protection laws, which will expire on June 15th, are renewed, and that they are renewed without any more weakening amendments;

- Repeal vacancy decontrol and re-regulate most of the apartments that were deregulated over the last 16 years; and
- Place apartments in former Mitchell-Lama and Section 8 buildings under rent stabilization, including those in buildings that have already left those programs and are now unprotected.

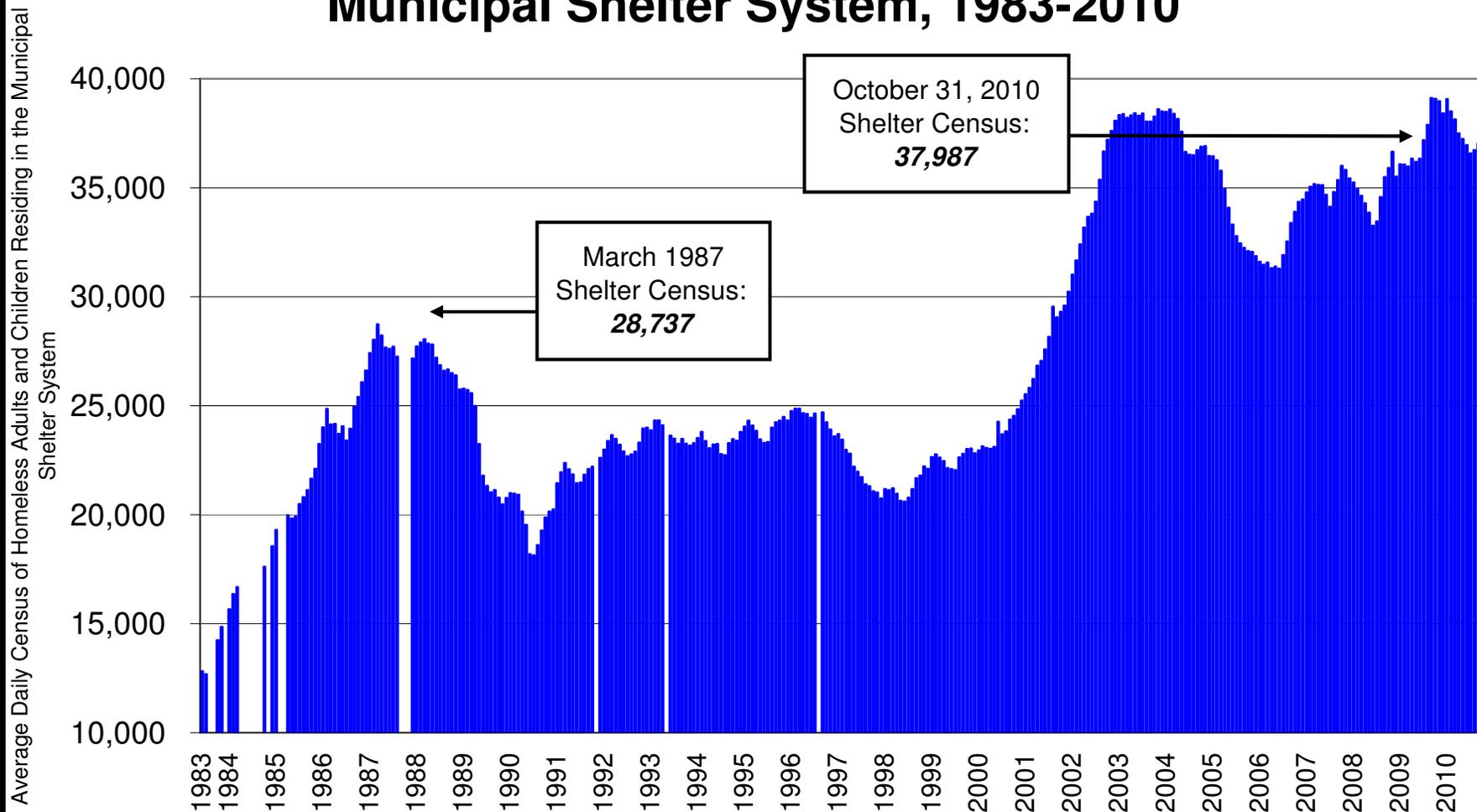
Stronger rent and tenant protections are essential to addressing the problem of homelessness. Simply put, most homeless New Yorkers once resided in rent-stabilized apartments. And when they leave shelters, most homeless New Yorkers will move into rent-stabilized apartments. If the rent-regulated housing stock in New York continues to diminish, the homeless population will grow to unimaginable levels.

Further weakening of the rent laws – including a renewal of the current laws in their weakened state – will only lead to more homelessness. And the outright elimination of the rent laws would lead to a wave of evictions and homelessness unseen in New York since the Great Depression.

We thank the committee, the committee chair, and the Assembly leadership for their commitment to protecting and strengthening rent regulation in New York, and we look forward to working with you in the coming months.

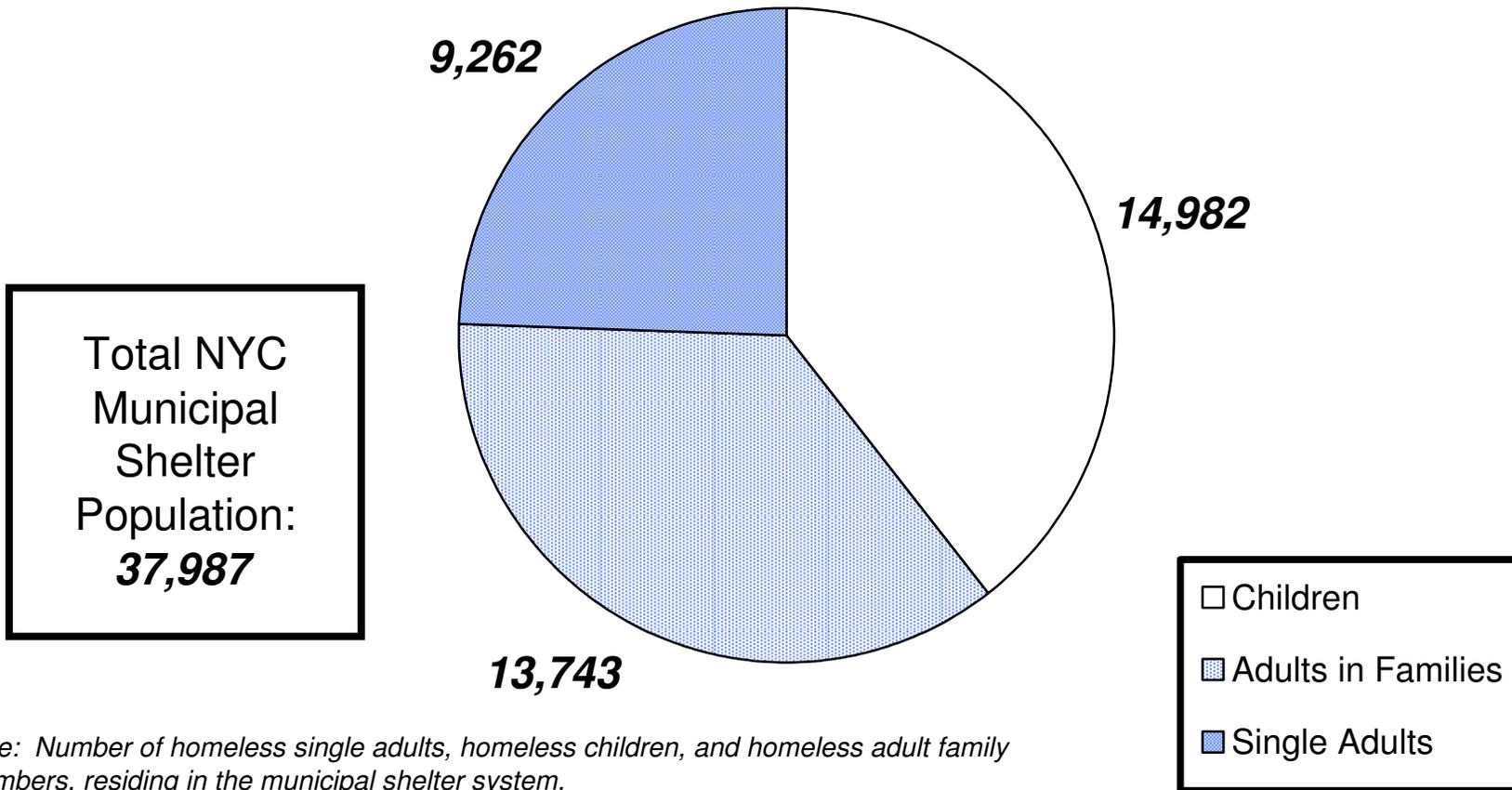
Thank you for the opportunity to present this testimony.

New York City: Census of Homeless People in the Municipal Shelter System, 1983-2010



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration, shelter census reports
Prepared by Patrick Markee, Coalition for the Homeless, 212-776-2004

New York City: Census of Homeless People in the Municipal Shelter System, October 31, 2010

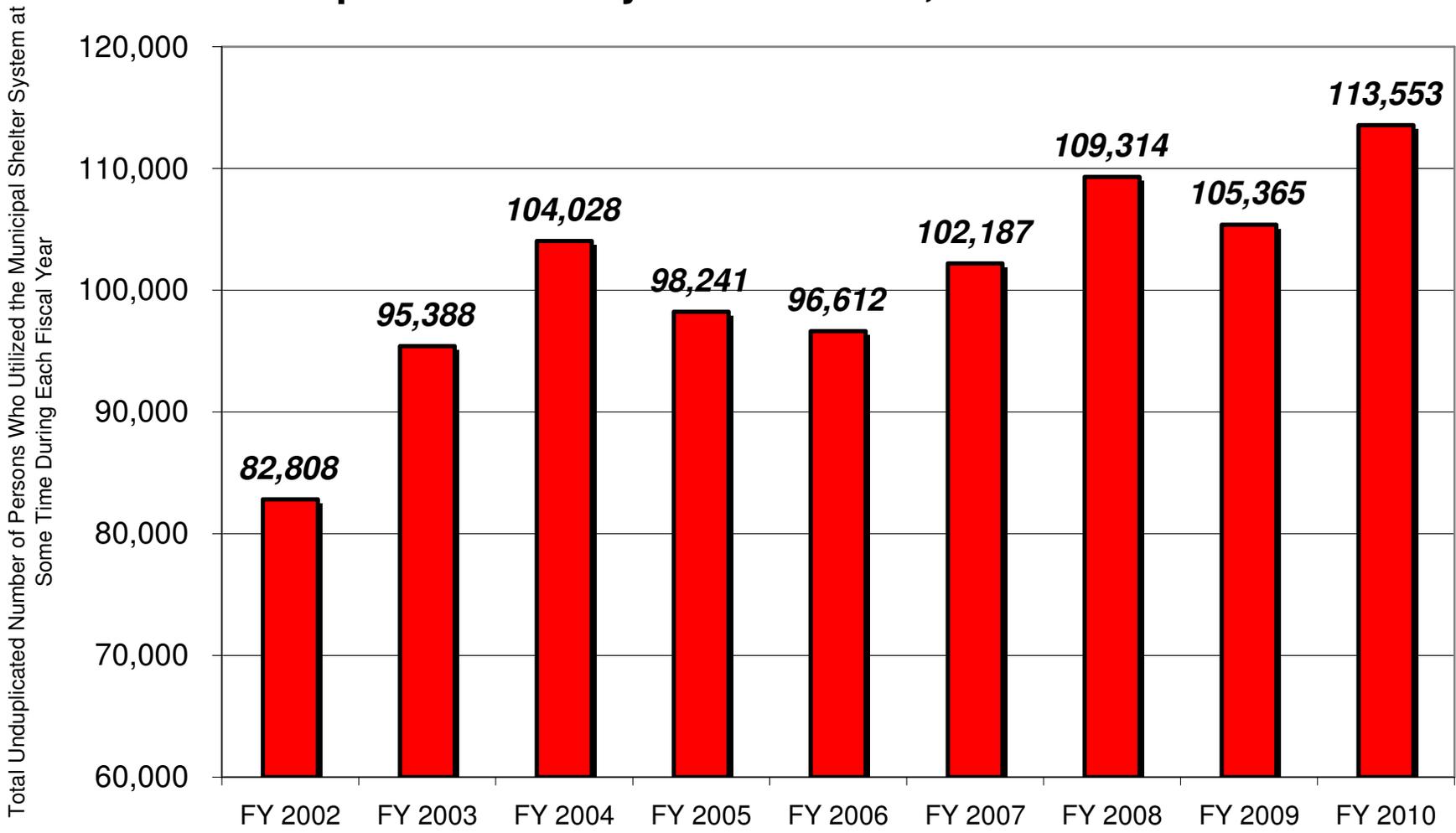


Note: Number of homeless single adults, homeless children, and homeless adult family members, residing in the municipal shelter system.

Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, shelter census reports

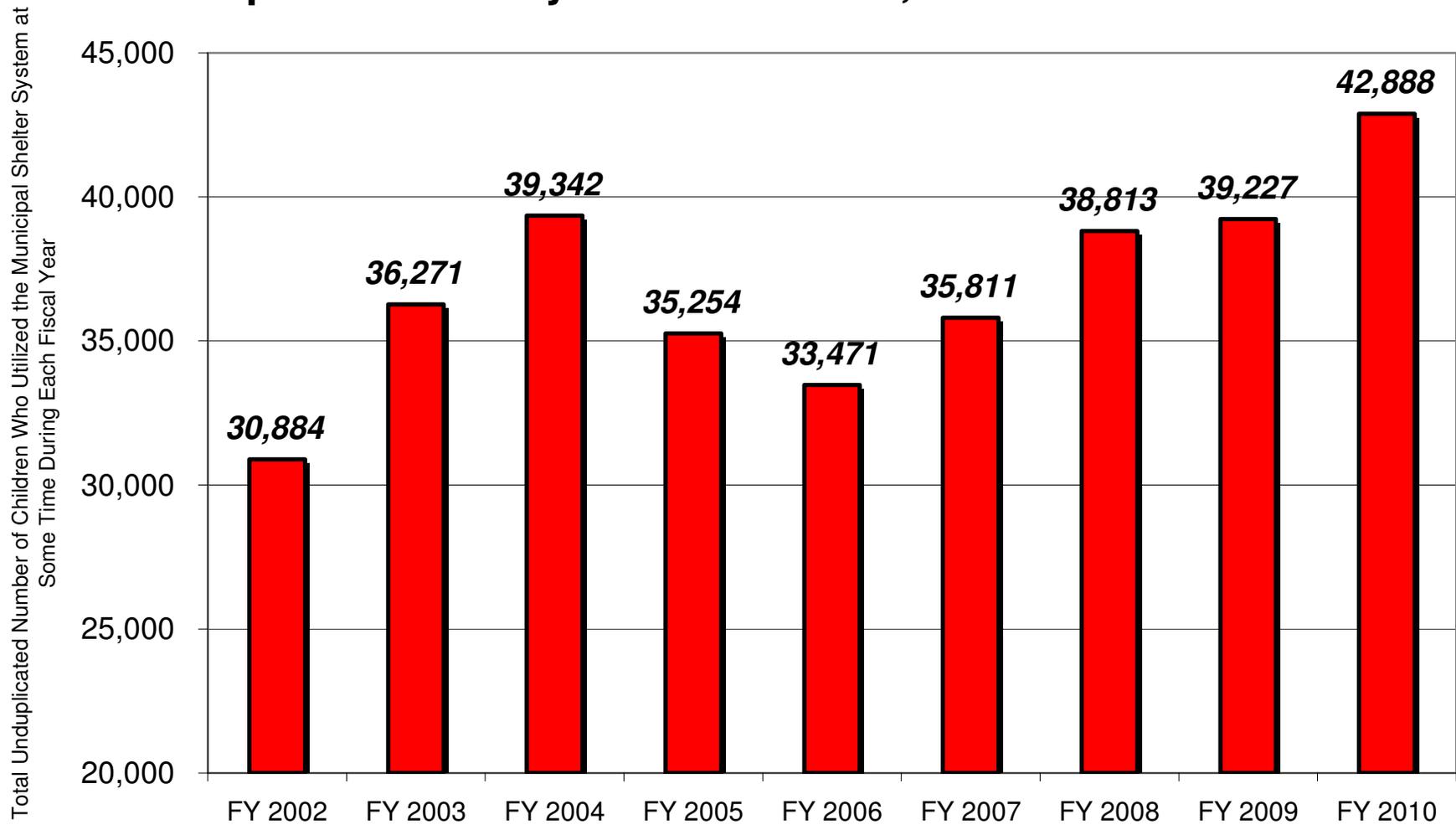
Prepared by Patrick Markee, Coalition for the Homeless, 212-776-2004

NYC: Number of Different Homeless Adults and Children Who Slept in Shelter System Per Year, FY 2002-FY 2010



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

NYC: Number of Different Homeless Children Who Slept in Shelter System Each Year, FY 2002-FY 2010



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports