

Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless  
And  
The Legal Aid Society

On

Oversight – Department of Housing Preservation and Development, NYC Council Fiscal Year  
2018 Preliminary Budget

Presented before

The New York City Council  
Committee on Housing and Buildings

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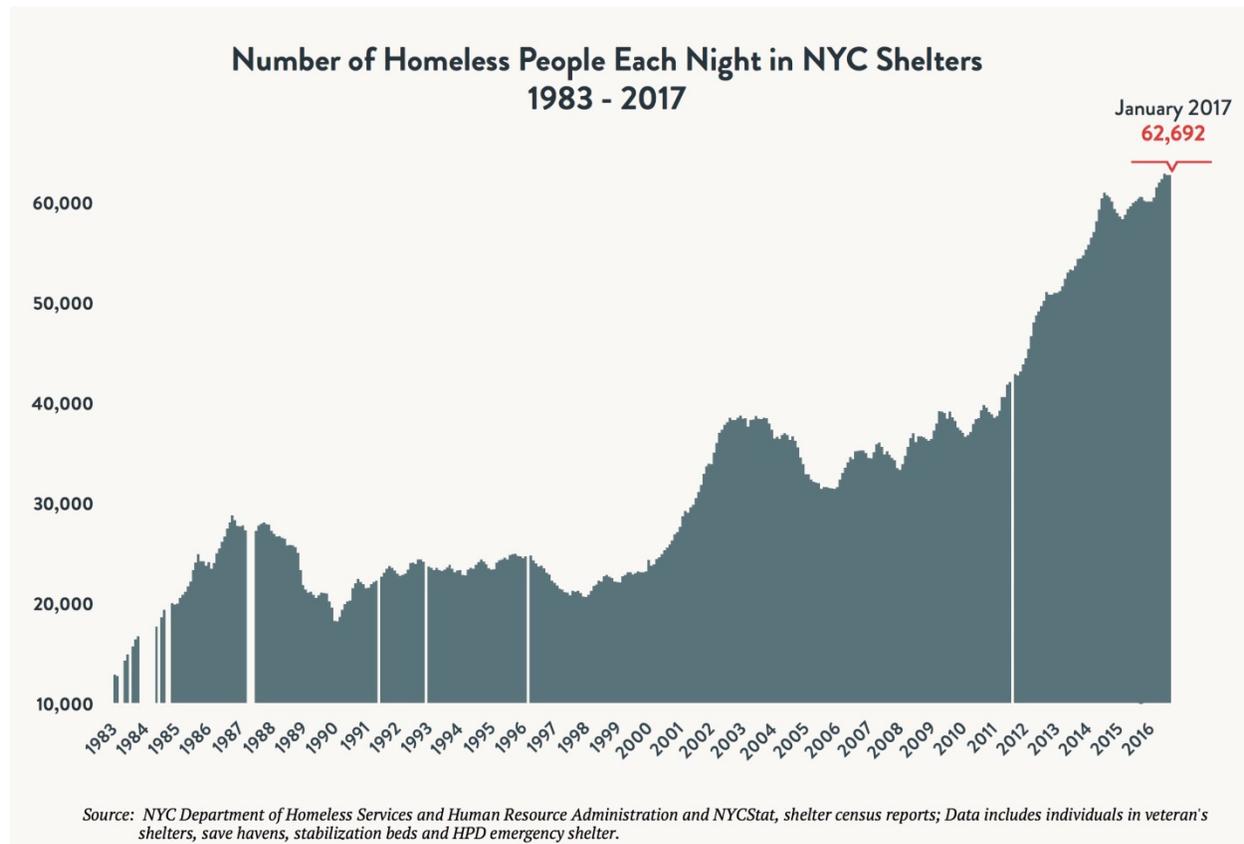
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Coalition for the Homeless and The Legal Aid Society welcome this opportunity to testify before the Committee on Housing and Buildings regarding the preliminary budget and HPD’s role in addressing homelessness.

### **Background: Near-Record Homelessness in NYC and the Critical Need for Affordable Housing**

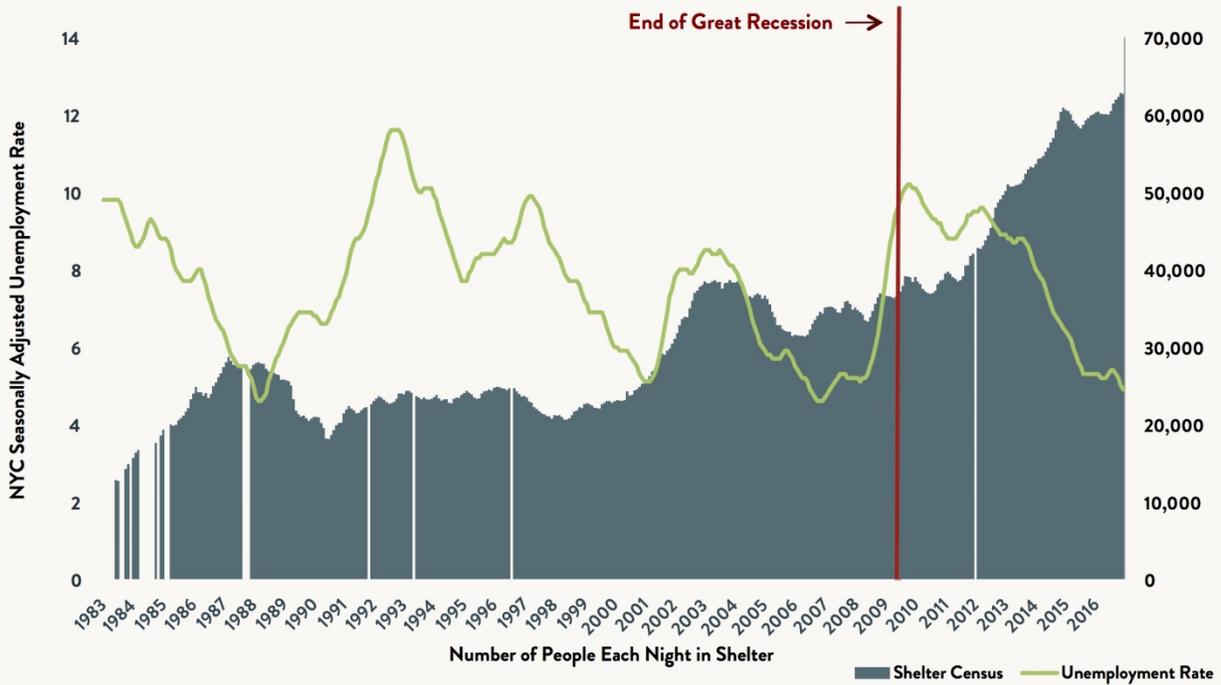
New York City remains in the midst of the worst homelessness crisis since modern mass homelessness began. In January 2017, a near-record 62,692 men, women, and children slept in shelters each night on average. The number of people in shelters now is roughly double what it was in the years preceding the Great Recession.



The City has made laudable progress on placing homeless families in permanent, affordable housing and has stepped up prevention efforts in a large-scale, meaningful way. However, in order to match the scale of the unprecedented need, the City must both accelerate and bring to scale its affordable housing production pipeline.

Economic recovery alone is not proving sufficient to help those displaced in the Great Recession, and nothing has been done to make up for the 32,000 stable housing placements for homeless families that were never made in the nine-year span when they were all but eliminated. The lowest-income households in our city are being pushed out of the housing market entirely.

## NYC Unemployment Rate and Number of People in Homeless Shelters



Source: NYC Department of Labor and NYC Department of Homeless Services

The City cannot succeed in turning the tide and achieving meaningful reductions in homelessness until the Department of Housing Preservation and Development becomes a full partner in addressing homelessness. As part of a Citywide comprehensive plan to permanently house homeless families and individuals, HPD must 1) greatly increase utilization of its existing housing resources for homeless families, including increasing stable housing placements from shelter with Section 8 vouchers and HPD-financed units to at least 2,500 placements per year, up from less than 1,000 currently; and 2) create a new capital development program to finance construction of at least 10,000 units of affordable housing for homeless households over the next five years.

In addition to a desperately-needed increase in the number of NYCHA public housing placements for homeless families, the City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development must also play a much more prominent role in combatting homelessness. The only way for the City to actually reduce homelessness is for all of the relevant housing agencies to bring the production of permanent housing for homeless families and individuals to the fore. The status quo, slow, and anemic efforts to provide new permanent affordable apartments for homeless New Yorkers have proved ineffective given the scale of the problem and the economic underpinnings of record homelessness. New York can do much better.

We thank the Council for the opportunity to testify and 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.