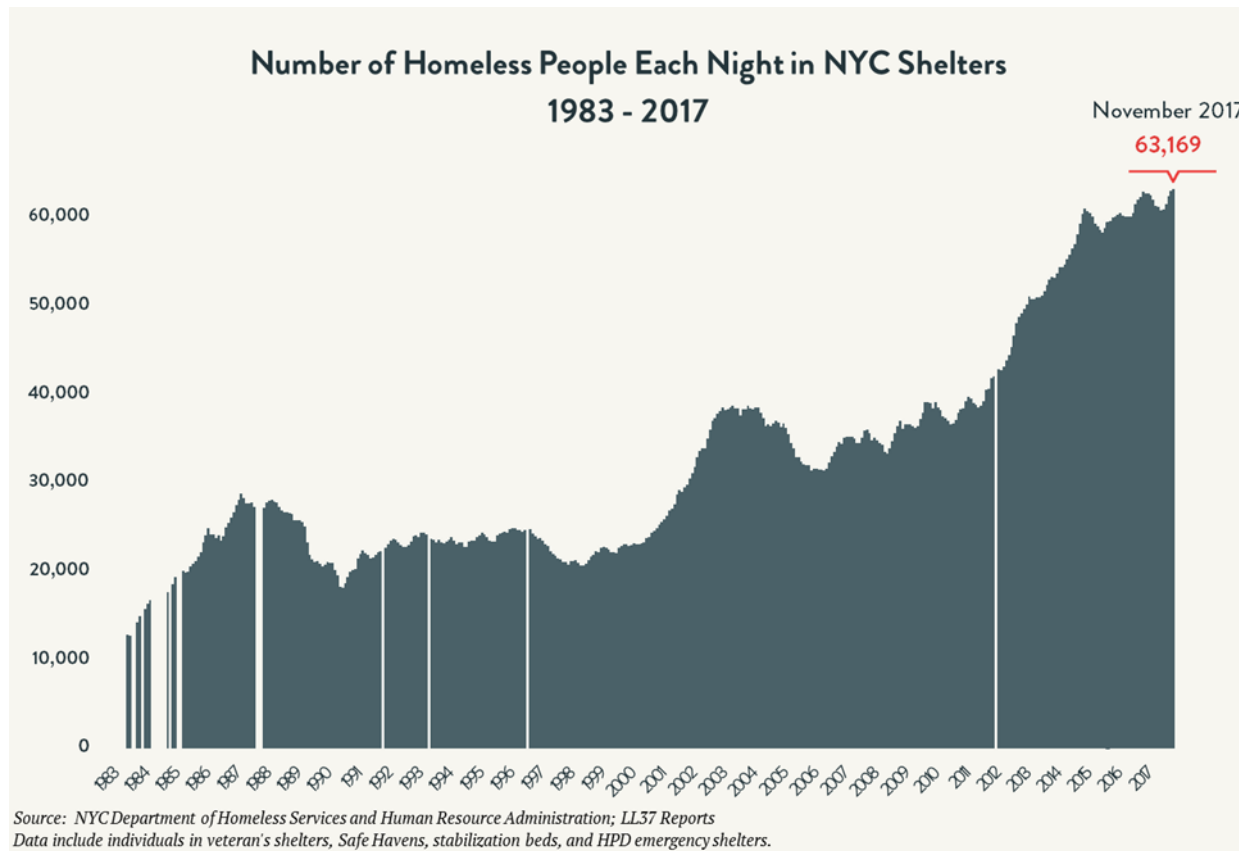


Testimony
Coalition for the Homeless
before the Fiscal Committees
of the NYS Legislature
NYS Executive Budget 2018

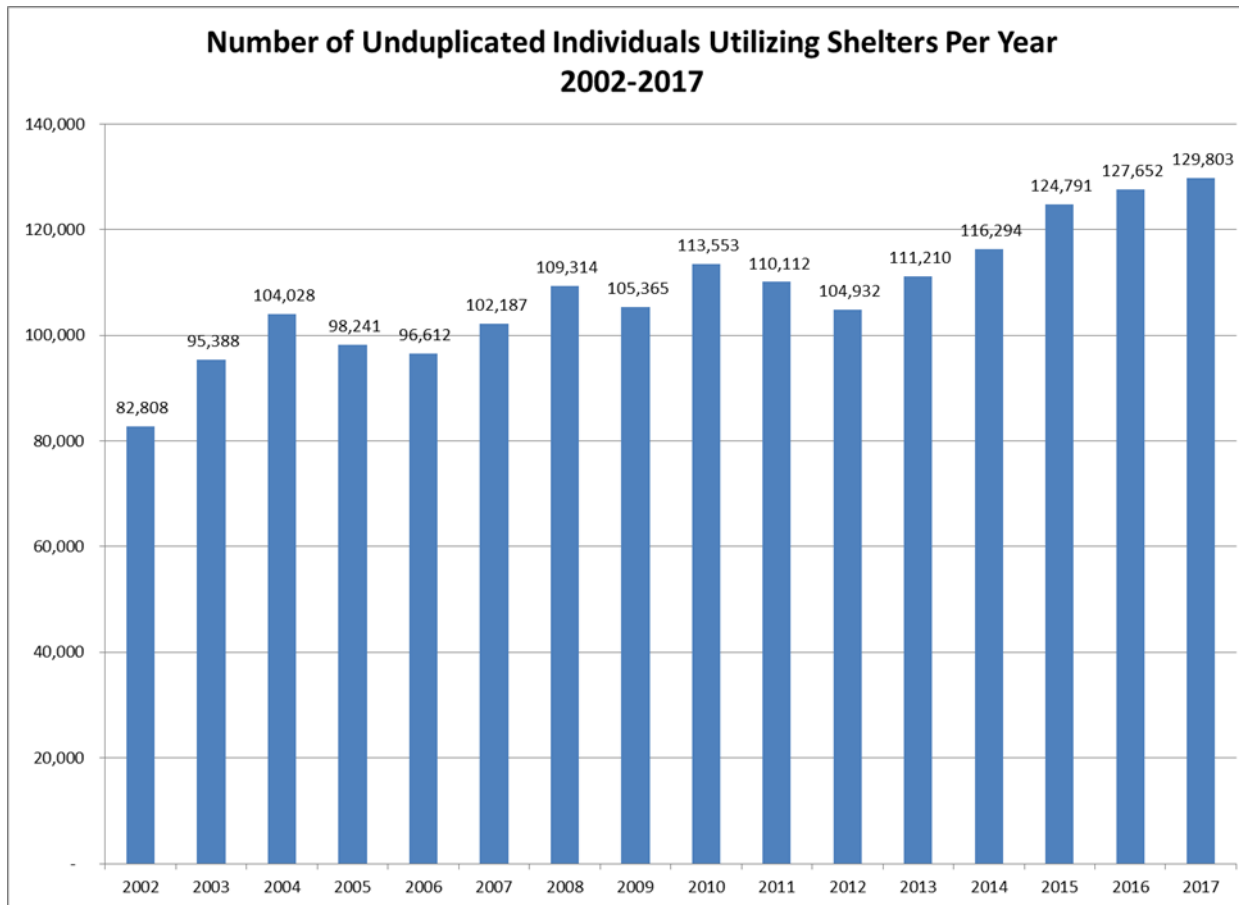
Presented by Shelly Nortz
Deputy Executive Director for Policy
February 6, 2018

- Good day. My name is Shelly Nortz, and since 1987 I have had the privilege of working for the Coalition for the Homeless in Albany to secure State support for programs and policies that prevent and address homelessness and the socio-economic problems that cause homelessness.
- Thank you for inviting us to testify today – I will summarize our testimony and save a few minutes for questions.
- The last year has seen many challenges, and some good news as well. Four years ago we began the Campaign 4 NY/NY Housing which culminated in promises from the Mayor and Governor to create a combined 35,000 units of supportive housing over 15 years, and in April you released the first \$1 billion in capital funds for the first 6,000 state units. We thank you!
- In addition, we (along with The Legal Aid Society, White & Case, and CIDNY) recently settled a very important federal disability rights case, *Butler v. City of New York*, through which reasonable accommodations and modifications to policy, services, property, and training will be made over the next five years to ensure adequate access to NYC shelters and services for homeless people with disabilities.
- Unfortunately, homelessness has only gotten worse.

We again had record homelessness in New York City in 2017: Over 63,000 men, women, and children staying each night in shelters.

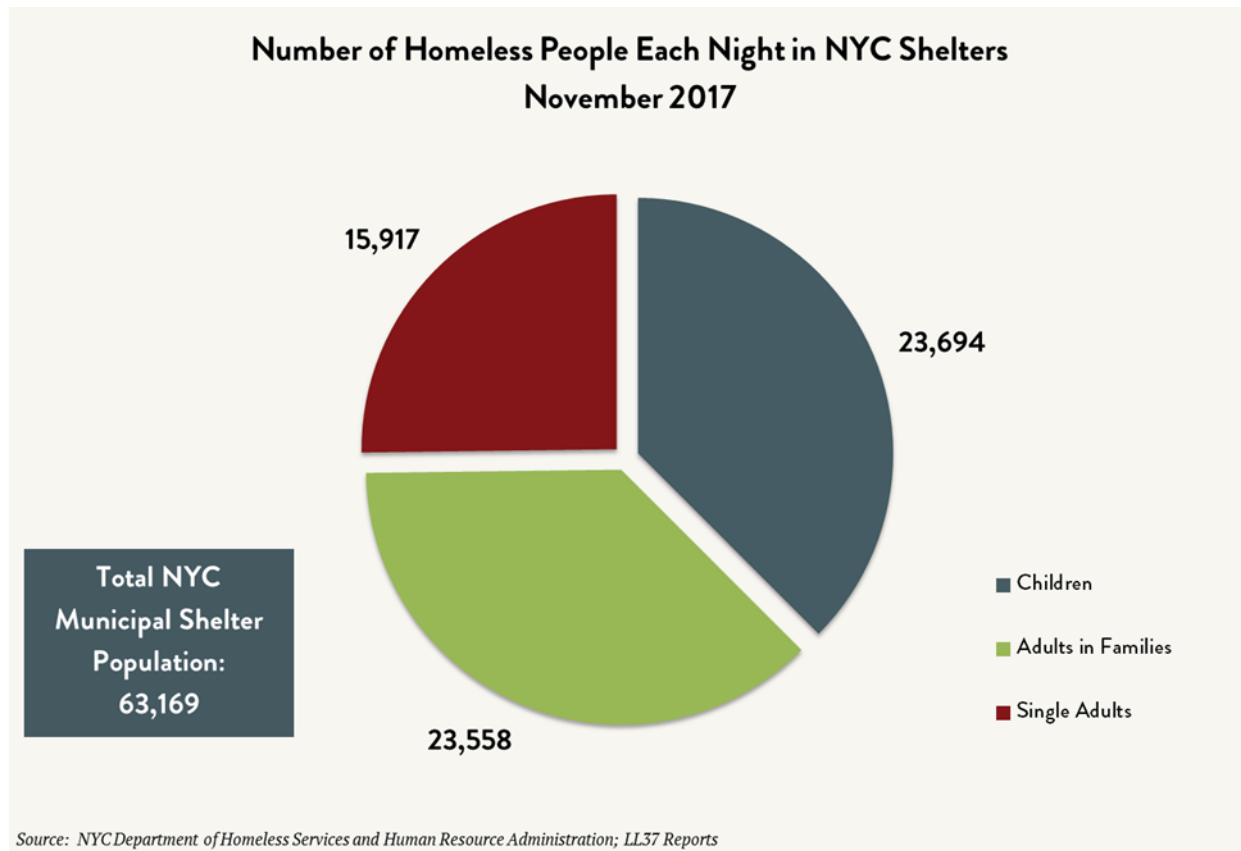


More people than ever before turned to NYC shelters: Nearly 130,000 in 2017.

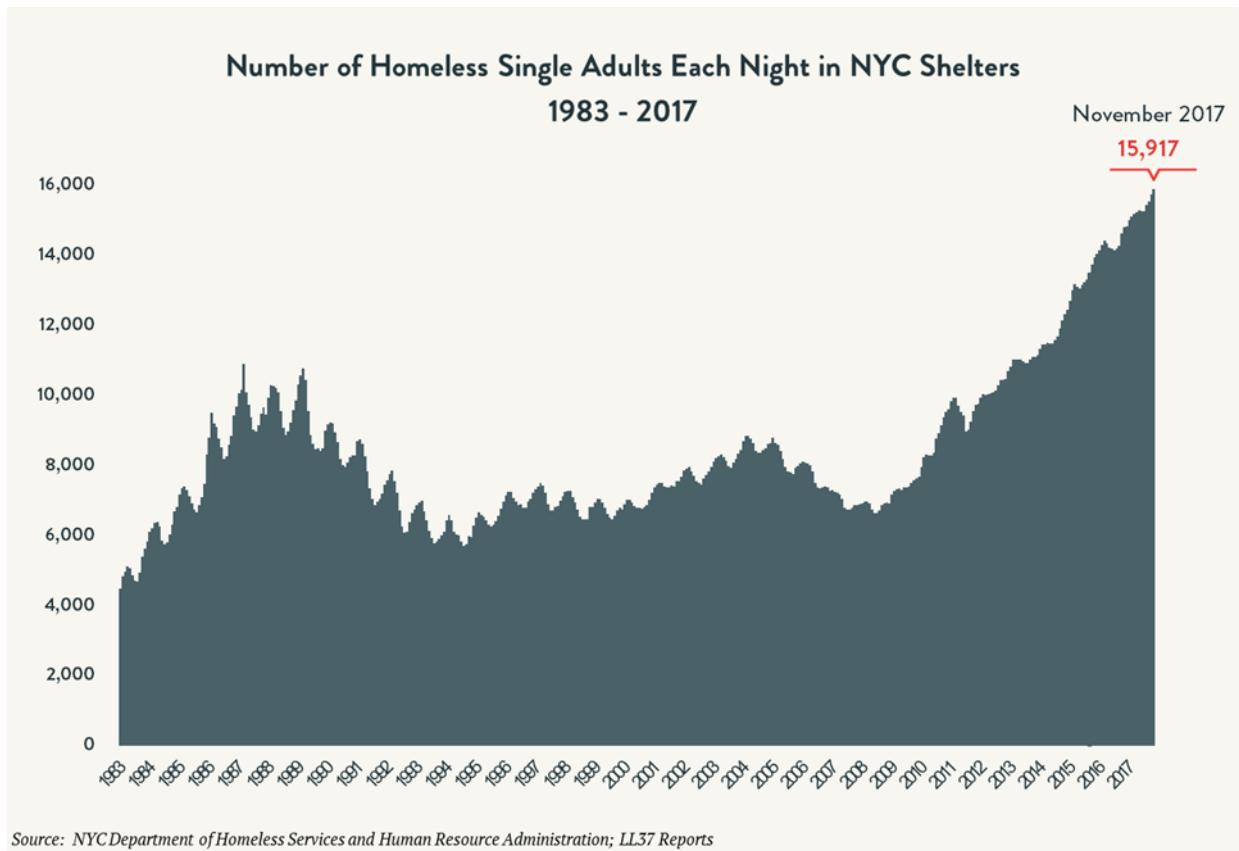


Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services

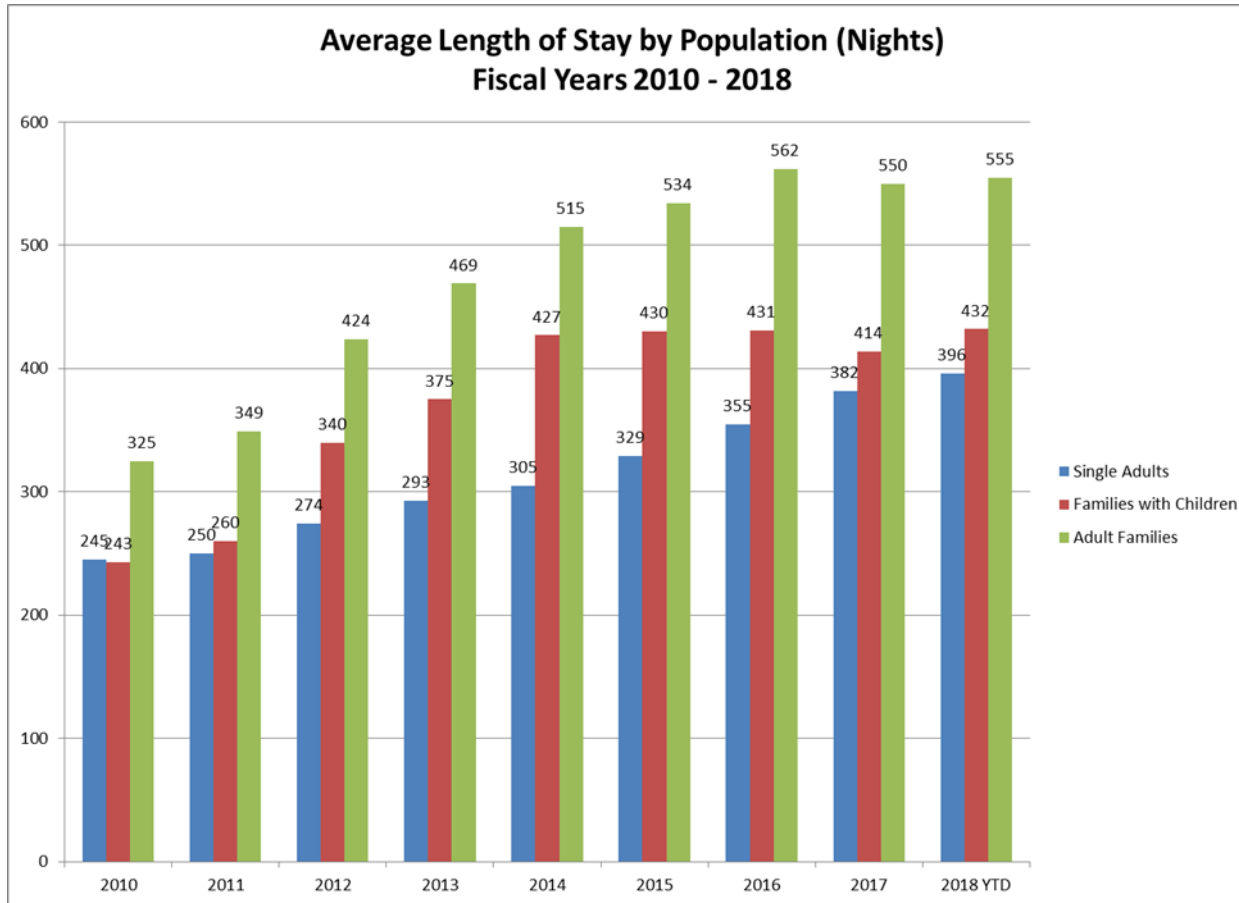
Most homeless people in NYC are members of families, including nearly 23,700 children...



...but the number of single adults in shelters also approached 16,000 for the first time.

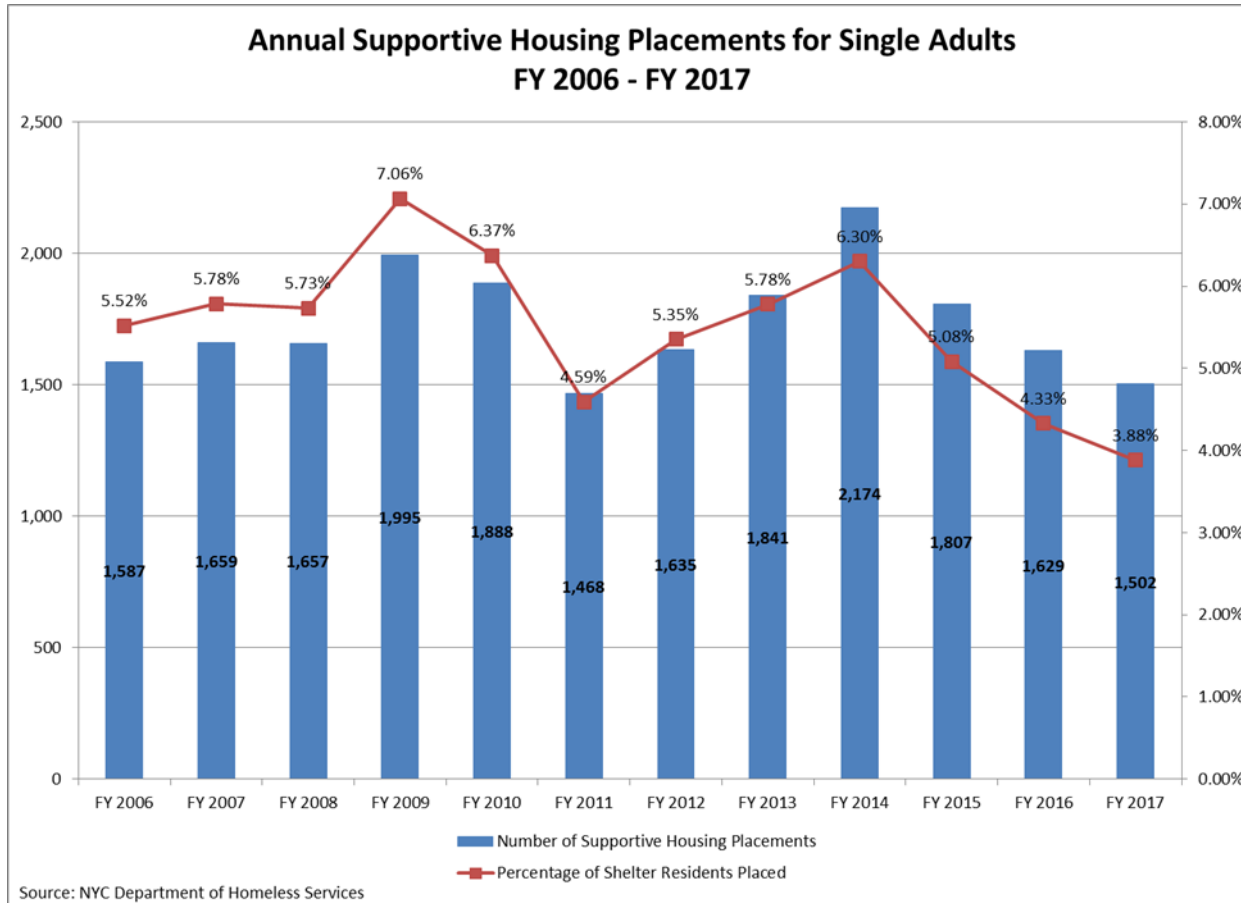


Average lengths of stay for all household compositions exceeded 12 months for the second year in a row.



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services

The percentage of single adults receiving supportive housing placements in 2017 fell to a twelve-year low: Fewer than 4 in 100.



Political disputes about the allocation of housing funds in recent years delayed new supportive housing development.

- The number of supportive housing placements for homeless single adults in NYC dropped to a six-year low of only 1,500 in 2017.
- There were almost a third fewer such placements last year compared with 2014 when almost 700 more men and women were able to obtain supportive housing placements.
- This contributes to greater demand for shelter and record homelessness as well as the presence of more people living on the streets desperately in need of a place to live with the on-site supportive services each needs to maintain housing stability.
- Also contributing to greater shelter demand are steeply rising rents paired with stagnant wages, domestic violence, and a substantial increase in discharges from hospitals and nursing homes.
- Further, the number of people being paroled from state prisons to shelters in New York City is rising, and at the same time, others are being held in correctional facilities inappropriately beyond their sentences due to a lack of SARA-compliant housing and shelter placements.

New York State continues to shift the costs of sheltering and housing homeless New Yorkers to localities including New York City.

- The effect of removing the state and local shares of TANF and shifting 71 percent of the cost of the Safety Net Assistance program to local social services districts has been to withdraw State assistance from sheltering and housing homeless New Yorkers and those at risk of homelessness, leaving the cost increases largely to localities.
- As our 2017 State of the Homeless report documented, the cost of sheltering homeless families and individuals in New York City rose by \$698 million, and the State bore only about 5 percent of that cost increase.
- Similar cost shifts have also affected many other social services districts with large homeless populations and costly rental housing as well as various rent supplement programs.
- The Executive Budget continues to single out NYC alone to contribute a 10 percent share of the costs for Emergency Assistance to Families.

The Executive Budget maintains the *status quo* in the face of unprecedented need...

- There are no new supportive housing investments despite the three-year lag in starting the new capital investments.
- The caps, cost-shifts, and other limits on funding for shelters and rental assistance remain as in prior years.
- And Governor Cuomo now promises a new fiscal penalty for services NYS doesn't even fund: An extraordinarily-ill advised withholding of public assistance funds for localities that fail to offer and adequately implement homeless outreach plans and services. We have no problem with planning for and doing outreach – we reach out with warm food, clothing, and offers of help 365 days per year. But for the State to withhold the small proportion of its own funds that localities receive to provide for the aid, care, and support of the needy required by the NYS Constitution as a penalty for failure to provide adequate homeless outreach planning and services is for the State to further shirk its own responsibilities under the Constitution.

...(continued)

- The Executive Budget removes \$9 million from a prior year's appropriation for NYC housing vouchers; allocates too little to help OMH-funded housing providers keep up with the rising costs of housing and services; and offers no new funding to local districts expected to plan and implement new homeless outreach programs.
- Gov. Cuomo also suggested in his State of the State address that he expects localities to forcibly remove homeless people from the streets to shelters or hospitals, an old idea that lacks any evidence basis. This approach is sure to drive people in need into hiding, thereby undercutting skilled outreach workers who know how to win the trust of those whom they visit to offer food, clothing, health care, and voluntary services including shelter placement and housing assistance.

Budget Recommendations

To address the unprecedented crisis of homelessness, we recommend the following:

OTDA

- **Implement the Home Stability Support** program outlined in A.8178 introduced by Assemblymember Hevesi, endorsed by the NYS Senate Democratic Conference, and recommended by the NYS Senate Independent Democratic Conference as well as dozens of state and local elected officials.
- **Increase the Personal Needs Allowance** for homeless individuals and families – for most, a paltry allowance of just \$22.50 twice a month provided in lieu of public assistance – that has not been increased in decades.
- **Reject plan to withhold public assistance funds** from localities related to homeless outreach plans and services.
- Require **NYS to participate equally** in the non-federal share of the costs of shelters and rent supplements to prevent and address homelessness.
- **Extend the NYC Shelter Savings law** in lieu of the Shelter Rent requirement.

...(OTDA continued)

- **Reject the requirement that NYC contribute 10 percent** toward the cost of **Emergency Assistance to Families**.
- **Support** the Executive's provision of **\$1 million** in general funds for **Emergency Homeless Needs**, and **restore the TANF line** for these needs targeted to groups with specified expertise at **\$1 million**.
- **Provide \$1 million for the Client Advocacy Program** (at one time annually funded in the budget by the Legislature) through which chronically homeless disabled people are assisted in securing Federal SSI/SSDI, veterans benefits, and housing.

Budget Priorities, Other Agencies

- **HCR:** Accelerate the Supportive Housing pipeline to complete 20,000 units in ten years to address pent-up need and record-low supportive housing placements. This will save costs by developing these units earlier as a hedge against rising land prices and labor contract inflation, and act as an economic stimulus proven to create jobs and tax revenue.
- **OMH:** Support increased funds for Crisis Respite and adequately fund community housing providers.
- **OCFS:** Raise Foster Care prevention, reunification, and independent living rent subsidies to \$600 per month; restore Close to Home funds.
- **SED:** Extend the exemptions for social services groups from the requirement to employ only licensed professionals including social workers to provide certain services including counseling, and the related requirement to obtain a waiver from the State Education Department in order to continue employing certain licensed professionals; and authorize children's camps to employ licensed social workers.

...(other agencies continued)

- **Congestion Pricing:** Exempt mobile food program vehicles delivering meals to homeless individuals – this will otherwise add over \$12,000 or more to our food program costs each year.
- **DOH:** Establish a regulatory framework/licensure statute to authorize the operation of medical respite programs to serve homeless people with medical needs that cannot be met in shelters, who do not require hospitalization or a nursing home level of care.
- **Rent Freeze/Real Property Tax Abatements:** Expand rent increase exemptions and related real property tax abatements to include families with a disabled child or other family member who is not the head of household, and low income tenants on fixed incomes.
- **Corrections:** Require proper discharge planning for parolees being released to the community so that they are not transferred to shelters, or kept in prison beyond their sentences.