



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness  
for Women and their Children

April 2, 2020

To Mayor De Blasio, Deputy Mayor Perea-Henze, and Commissioner Banks:

During this period of unprecedented uncertainty and instability for low-income New Yorkers, we urge New York City to take steps to ensure that people trying to leave shelter with a rental voucher are not derailed because of administrative and economic conditions outside of their control. There are a number of common-sense changes New York City can make now to CityFHEPS to ensure that access to rental vouchers is not disrupted during this emergency and its aftermath.

New York City should take immediate action to implement the following changes to the CityFHEPS rental voucher program.

- Waive the CityFHEPS employment requirement.
  - Mayor De Blasio is estimating that at least a half million New Yorkers will lose their jobs because of COVID-19.<sup>1</sup> During this time of substantial economic disruption, the CityFHEPS work requirement will only serve to prolong stays in shelter for families and individuals. As people face job losses and an uncertain economic terrain, and parents must be full-time caregivers to their children as a result of school closures, the CityFHEPS work requirement is simply untenable. If people are able to move out of shelter with the help of a voucher, they should not be thwarted by loss of employment or the inability to find a job at this time. This is not only in the best interest of these individuals, it also makes economic sense for the City, especially in light of the pressures the homeless services system is likely to face in the coming weeks and months.
- Automatically extend all CityFHEPS shopping letters (initial eligibility letters), to avoid the administrative burden and stress of the renewal process.
  - To lessen the burden on people experiencing homelessness, shelter staff, and HRA staff during this time, all shopping letters should be automatically renewed, and new letters should be issued without an expiration date. Voucher holders will still complete the final approval and budgeting process for the voucher when they find an apartment, and skipping this onerous intermediate step will save time and effort on all sides.
- Create a mechanism for on-going, timely unit inspections, so apartment lease-ups continue and people leaving homelessness are protected from subpar housing, including a procedure for virtual inspections.

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<sup>1</sup> Coronavirus: NYC Mayor Bill de Blasio says at least half a million New Yorkers will be unemployed. (2020, March 26). CNBC. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/03/26/coronavirus-nyc-mayor-bill-de-blasio-says-at-least-half-a-million-new-yorkers-will-be-unemployed.html>



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- While shelter operators are working with reduced staffing and are unable to physically visit apartments for inspections, the City should implement a mechanism to ensure that apartment inspections continue and are effective. Without such an intervention, the process for people moving with vouchers is likely to grind to a halt.
- Ensure that HRA processes CityFHEPS applications in a timely manner.
  - Despite the many challenges the agency is facing right now, it is critically important that HRA continues to process applications and issue checks in a timely fashion. Administrative delays that have been exacerbated by the public health crisis must be resolved so that people can move out to stable, permanent housing, and to relieve the burden on the shelter system as it manages this crisis. Now, more than ever, people who can exit shelter should be given as clear a path as possible to do so.
- Increase CityFHEPS maximum rents to 100% FMR.
  - More than ever, families attempting to leave shelter need every tool at their disposal to find permanent housing. Rental vouchers that pay less than market rent are ineffective as a tool for families seeking to exit. Unreasonably low voucher amounts result in extended stays in shelter, which are destabilizing and challenging for families and individuals, and will be particularly difficult for the City as shelter entrances increase due to the economic impacts of COVID-19.

The undersigned organizations urge you to consider taking these actions as part of a larger effort to ensure that this health crisis doesn't result in a prolonged housing crisis for New Yorkers currently experiencing homelessness.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine C. Quinn".

Christine C. Quinn  
President & CEO  
Win

Breaking Ground  
Care for the Homeless  
Citizens' Committee for Children  
Citizens Housing & Planning Council (CHPC)  
Close Rosie's  
Coalition for the Homeless  
Enterprise Community Partners  
Fair Housing Justice Center



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Gateway Housing  
Henry Street Settlement  
Homeless Services United (HSU)  
Housing Works  
Human.nyc  
Neighbors Together  
New Destiny Housing  
New York Housing Conference  
New York Legal Assistance Group  
Safety Net Activists  
Settlement Housing Fund  
Sisters of Charity Housing Development Corporation  
Supportive Housing Network of New York (SHNNY)  
The Legal Aid Society  
The Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center