

The Honorable Kathy Hochul
Governor of the State of New York
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

For more than forty years, New York's bedrock Right to Shelter has served as an inviolable baseline of decency, ensuring that those without homes are not relegated to sleeping on the streets, exposed to the elements. It is because of this critical right that New York City does not have the vast tent encampments seen in so many other cities around the country. Since 1981, the Right to Shelter has given hundreds of thousands of homeless individuals a way off the streets and a pathway to stability.

Simply put, the Right to Shelter saves lives, and is integral to the humanity of our community.

Furthermore, New York has, throughout its entire history, served as a welcoming home for people from all nations and cultures. This is because it is, always has been, and always will be a vibrant and tolerant place of opportunity, where new arrivals often already have family, friends, and contacts to help them resettle and start new lives.

We, the undersigned, are strongly opposed to any efforts to weaken or in any way undermine New York's legal Right to Shelter, and believe that doing so would put countless vulnerable individuals at risk of grave harm. We look to you to show true leadership as the Governor of a state with a proud history as a beacon of humane, practical, and progressive values, as reflected in Article XVII of the New York State Constitution from which the Right to Shelter derives, and which asserts:

The aid, care and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state and by such of its subdivisions, and in such manner and by such means, as the legislature may from time to time determine.

As you face the challenges of addressing the ongoing crisis of mass homelessness, which is being compounded by the current humanitarian crisis created by the influx of asylum seekers and other new arrivals, we ask you to adhere to these five basic principles:

1. The Right to Shelter must not be eroded in any way. No human being must ever be relegated to sleeping on the streets.
2. Families with children in need of shelter must always be provided with safe placements in facilities with private locking rooms.
3. All three levels of government must work together cooperatively to formulate, fund, and implement practical and humane responses to the current humanitarian crisis.
4. The influx of asylum seekers and other new arrivals to New York requires a comprehensive statewide decompression and resettlement plan using the full authority and resources of the Governor's office.
5. The Right to Shelter is a floor, not a ceiling. The only real answer to homelessness is housing.

We stand ready to work with you in furtherance of these principles.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Chloe Breyer, Executive Director, Interfaith Center of New York

Richard Buery, Chief Executive Officer, Robin Hood

David Giffen, Executive Director, Coalition for the Homeless

Marc Greenberg, Executive Director, Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing

George Gresham, President, 11999SEIU United Healthcare Workers East

The Rt. Rev. Matthew Heyd, Bishop Coadjutor, Episcopal Diocese of New York

Adriene Holder, Chief Attorney of the Civil Practice, The Legal Aid Society

Rabbi Margo Hughes-Robinson, NY Rabbinic Organizer, T'ruah: The Rabbinic Call for Human Rights

Jennifer Jones Austin, CEO and Executive Director, Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies

The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, PhD, Dean, Cathedral of Saint John the Divine

Rabbi Shuli Passow, Chief Program and Community Engagement Officer, B'nai Jeshurun

Jamie Powlovich, Executive Director, Coalition for Homeless Youth

David Jones, President and CEO, Community Service Society of New York

Christine Quinn, President and CEO, Win

Imam Ammar Abdul Rahman, Deputy Imam, Masjid Al-Haram USA

Lisa Rivera, President and CEO, New York Legal Assistance Group

Rob Robinson, Special Advisor, Partners for Dignity and Rights

Rev. Adriene Thorne, Senior Minister, Riverside Church

Rev. Kevin VanHook, II, Executive Director, Episcopal Charities

Onyx Walker, Co-Coordinator, Youth Action Board

The Rt. Rev. Dean E. Wolfe, Rector, Saint Bartholomew's Church