



Testimony of
Coalition for the Homeless

before the Fiscal Committees
of the NYS Legislature

NYS Executive Budget Proposal
For Human Services 2025

submitted by

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February 12, 2025

The Coalition for the Homeless (the “Coalition”) welcomes this opportunity to testify before the Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature. Founded in 1981, we are the court-appointed independent monitor of the New York City (“NYC”) Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system for single adults and the city-appointed independent monitor of the shelter system for homeless families, and plaintiff in the historic *Callahan v. Carey* case that first guaranteed the legal Right to Shelter. We are also the court-appointed independent monitor of the non-DHS shelters for asylum-seekers and other new arrivals under the March 15, 2024 stipulation of settlement in *Callahan*. For these reasons, coupled with over 40 years of providing innovative direct service programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers, we are uniquely situated to provide insight into the impact of the Governor’s proposed budget on the communities we serve.

The Coalition plans to submit testimony in various Fiscal Committee hearings addressing issues that impact unhoused people. As such, the testimony set forth herein relates solely to those issues that are before the Committee today.

New York State stands at a critical juncture in its long battle against mass homelessness, a crisis that derives from a severe lack of affordable housing and that has been exacerbated by a history of misguided public policies and systemic failures. Fundamental to New York’s frontline response to mass homelessness is the legal Right to Shelter, but New York City’s municipal shelter system is confronted with increasing demands and insufficient resources. The recent influx of asylum-seekers and other new arrivals has only highlighted and intensified existing shortcomings, underscoring the urgent need for better policies and meaningful investment in homelessness prevention, affordable permanent and supportive housing at a scale to meet the level of need, and a functioning social services infrastructure calibrated to meet the needs of homeless and at-risk individuals and families.

Longstanding Policy Failures Have Fueled Mass Homelessness

Shelter census data over time reflects a distressing trend: a consistent increase in the need for, and use of, the emergency shelter system over the past 43 years. In the past year, the crisis has been exacerbated by the continued depletion of housing that is affordable to those at the lowest income levels and policies that make it more difficult for homeless individuals and families to exit shelter into permanent housing. These factors have resulted in long shelter stays and a dwindling number of shelter vacancies that help explain why, in December 2024, there were roughly 124,000 people being sheltered in NYC, including 43,000 children.¹ A portion of the increase in the shelter census in recent years can be attributed to the influx of asylum-seekers and other new arrivals. However, the number of longer-term New York City residents seeking shelter increased by 11.5 percent between December 2023 and December 2024.

¹ Coalition for the Homeless. “Facts About Homelessness.” Accessed 10 Feb 2024.
<https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

Underlying this significant increase in the shelter census is a shortage of housing affordable to those at the lowest income levels. A recent study found that the vacancy rate for units renting below \$1,500 per month was less than one percent. By contrast, units with rents of \$2,300 or more had a rental vacancy rate of 13%. This asymmetry in housing availability appears to be worsening: Between 2017 and 2021 alone, NYC lost 96,000 housing units with rents under \$1,500, while gaining 107,000 units with rents of \$2,300 or more.²

Such a dramatic loss in the supply of apartments affordable to low-income renters, including those relying on a public assistance rental allowance, shuts many New Yorkers out of the housing market entirely. This trend is likely to continue, given that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development calculated that the Fair Market Rent (“FMR”) for a two-bedroom apartment in NYC is \$2,580 per month, while the public assistance rental allowance for a typical family of three with at least one child remains only \$400 per month. The FMR for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,330 per month, however, a single adult only receives a public assistance rental allowance of \$215 per month.³ This situation is not tenable. Real commitments are needed by the State to help reverse this trend.

Our Newest Neighbors

Since Spring 2022, more than 225,000 asylum-seekers and other new arrivals have come to New York City, with more than 45,000 currently residing in the City’s shelter system. While the State has sensibly allocated billions of dollars to help address the needs of these new New Yorkers, it is critical that (1) the State continue its investment to meet the needs of asylum-seekers and other new arrivals in New York City, and going forward, focus on permanent solutions, and (2) those funds are utilized in a way that best helps people move out of shelters, stabilize, and integrate into the community. Given the mass deportation efforts by the current presidential administration, it is incumbent upon New York to ensure that asylum-seekers and other new arrivals receive support to expedite exit from shelter into permanent housing and jobs and pursue any available immigration relief.

To date, there has been limited coordination and accountability to ensure that asylum-seekers and other new arrivals are on the path to employment and self-sufficiency. Such lack of a coordinated and coherent approach towards reception and relocation is underscored by the fact that tens of thousands of asylum-seekers and other new arrivals have no place to reside other than New York City shelters, despite the City spending \$3.75 billion on emergency shelters and some reception services in FY24 - with a significant portion of those costs reimbursed by the State.⁴ Many asylum-seekers and other new arrivals in shelters report that they have received little to no assistance from case managers, beyond questions about their plans to exit. Most people are simply handed flyers with lists of services for housing assistance, health care, benefits, or legal

² (2022) *2021 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings*, available at <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/2021-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

³ (2025) *FY 2025 Fair Market Rent Documentation System*, available at https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2025_code/2025summary.odn.

⁴ Office of the New York State Comptroller. “Asylum-Seeker Spending Report.” Accessed 10 Feb 2025. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/reports/asylum-seeker-spending-report>.

assistance – yet the groups providing these services are at capacity and often unable to assist. The City’s Asylum Application Help Center, which helps asylum-seekers and other new arrivals file for available relief such as asylum, Temporary Protected Status, and work authorization, runs out of funding at the end of March. The current haphazard approach fails to make best use of the State funds granted to New York City.

With strategic reallocations of the State’s FY 2024-25 investment of \$2.4 billion for Asylum-Seeker services, we can more quickly move asylum-seekers and other new arrivals out of shelters and set them on the path to contributing to the cultural and economic vibrancy of New York, as immigrants have always done. Helping immigrants enter the workforce, and exit shelters to permanent housing, will also help New York’s economy thrive in this uncertain era by filling unfilled jobs and contributing to the state’s tax base. Further, moving people out of shelters and into permanent housing reduces their risk of being targeted by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (“ICE”). This outcome benefits asylum-seekers and other new arrivals, New York City, New York State, the economy, and our communities.

Budget Recommendations for Resources for Asylum-Seekers and Other New Arrivals

1. Require the City to earmark funds for quality case management services designed to help asylum-seekers and other new arrivals over a sufficient amount of time necessary to achieve stability.

Quality case management is the linchpin to asylum-seekers and other new arrivals’ ability to address their immediate needs, get on the path toward employment, and exit quickly to permanent housing and long-term stability. The components of successful case management are well-established in New York, but to date have not been applied to help asylum seekers and other new arrivals exit shelters into stability.

- The level of case management needed to help people find stability and exit shelter cannot be accomplished in two or three meetings, as the City currently provides. Intensive case management is needed to help people move quickly out of shelter into permanent housing, and must be available after individuals exit shelter.
- Case management should be culturally appropriate, with reasonable caseload ratios of 1:30 and appropriate supervision staffing. The City’s RFP for HERRCs requires only one generalist case worker for every 100 residents, and has no minimum requirements for on-site social workers or supervision of case managers. From our own inspections of various sites, we have noticed similar ratios in some sites but in several others, no onsite case managers at all.
- Quality case management over six months would cost approximately \$5,775 per household. Providers experienced in case management for immigrants have capacity to deliver these enhanced services with the staffing noted above.
- There are approximately 22,000 households in the shelter system (as of the end of December), with approximately 450 households arriving each week (or an estimated

23,400 arriving in the next year) for a total cost of \$262,000,000. This total cost does not reflect what the City is already spending for case management services.

- Total Reallocation: \$262,000,000 less existing allocations for case management in current contracts.

2. Ensure that every Asylum-Seeker and Other New Arrival is screened for available immigration relief and work authorization through rapid-response services, while building the infrastructure of immigration legal services.

Expand upon the Asylum Application Help Center (AAHC) model and obligate the City to provide appointments for rapid-response services to every asylum-seeker and other new arrival.

- As of mid-November 2024, the AAHC had filed 84,000 applications for asylum, TPS, or work authorization.
- If all eligible persons were able to apply soon after their arrival, they might receive work authorization months earlier, which puts people on the path toward economic self-sufficiency and contributes to the economy.
- Screen New Arrivals for all forms of relief including visas for victims of trafficking and other crimes, and Special Immigrant Juvenile Status.
- Total cost: \$170,000,000

Expand upon the AAHC model and obligate the City to provide appointments for rapid-response services to every New Arrival.

Invest in immigration legal services, recruitment, retention, training of legal teams, and infrastructure.

- There are not enough immigration lawyers to meet the need for representation. People who have lawyers or DOJ accredited representatives are far more likely to successfully secure immigration status and work authorization. Many people, and the communities in which they live, will not realize these outcomes if the capacity and infrastructure for legal services is not increased.
- Total Reallocation: \$65,000,000

Income Supports for New Yorkers

It is well-established that income supports help lift families out of poverty while also contributing to the overall health and well-being of recipients. Therefore, we support efforts that provide the resources unhoused and other low-income families need in order to achieve self-sufficiency. The Governor’s proposed budget once again fails to address Cash Assistance levels, and particularly certain types of Cash Assistance that have not been increased during the 21st Century despite changes in inflation and the cost of living. More specifically, certain clients we serve who live in NYC shelters receive personal needs or special needs grants in lieu of the basic Cash Assistance award. Inadequate at their current levels, these grants are intended to cover all of the recipients’ daily living expenses outside of food and shelter. The paltry sum received by some single adults under this program is \$45 a month – a figure that has not increased since

1997. A family of three does not fare much better, receiving only \$189 a month to cover any needs such as diapers, soap, over-the-counter medicines and clothing for children.

But even if an individual is eligible for basic Cash Assistance benefits, those amounts similarly are insufficient to address the recipient's basic needs or their goal of achieving self-sufficiency. For instance, a family of three not living in shelter would only receive \$389 a month, inclusive of money for utilities. The expectation is that such monthly payment should cover food and other daily necessities in addition to utilities in NYC. According to the United Way of New York City, the 2023 True Cost of Living in the least expensive borough of NYC is almost *13 times this amount*.⁵

The Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) recently recommended increasing cash assistance amounts to address the 800,000 children living in poverty in New York State.⁶ The CPRAC found that increasing the basic needs allowance by 100 percent would result in an 18.1 percent reduction in child poverty.⁷

Recommendations for Increasing Cash Assistance

1. Increase Cash Benefits to Reflect Increased Cost of Living - A.106 (Rosenthal)/S.1127 (Persaud)

- This bill would increase the basic needs allowance for Cash Assistance (including utility allowances called HEA & SHEA) which is supposed to cover necessities like clothing, diapers, hygiene products, over-the-counter medication, and transportation. At only \$389 per month for a household of 3, it is woefully inadequate. The basic needs allowance has not been updated since 2012, and has never kept pace with inflation.
- This bill increases the allowance to \$778 for a family of 3 and also indexes the benefits to inflation going forward.

2. Increase Cash Benefits for Homeless New Yorkers - A.108 (Rosenthal)/S. 113 (Cleare)

- This legislation would ensure that homeless New Yorkers receive the same Cash Assistance benefits as New Yorkers who are housed. Cash Assistance grant levels for homeless New Yorkers in some shelters have not been increased in decades, since 1997. It is not fair for New York to penalize homeless New Yorkers with even more inadequate grant levels than everyone else.
- Currently individuals and families who reside in certain shelters receive only \$45 per month (or \$1.50 per day) in assistance for a single individual and \$63 per month per household member for families with children. These current grant levels are so abysmally low families and individuals in these shelters cannot buy essential items like menstrual

⁵ See UNITED WAY OF N.Y.C., <https://unitedwaynyc.org/true-cost-of-living/> (last visited Jan. 30, 2024) (reporting that for the Bronx, the 2023 True Cost of Living was \$4977 per month (or \$2,866 per month excluding rent).

⁶ New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. "2024 Recommendations and Progress Report." <https://otda.ny.gov/cprac/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>.

⁷ See footnote 7 at 17.

products, underwear, diapers, and laundry detergent. Although some shelters serve food, that does not mean that residents need less assistance for their basic needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Legislature on the budget and other legislation to address the needs of those who are unhoused or precariously housed throughout the State.