



Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless

before the General Welfare and Finance Committees  
of the New York City Council

on the

General Welfare Committee – Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2027

submitted by

Alison Wilkey  
Director of Governmental Affairs and Strategic Campaigns  
Coalition for the Homeless

March 18, 2026

The Coalition for the Homeless (“Coalition”) welcomes this opportunity to submit testimony to the New York City Council’s Committee on General Welfare. As the court- and City-appointed independent monitor of the Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system and party in the historic *Callahan*, *Eldredge*, and *Boston* cases that created the right to shelter in New York City (“NYC”), we are uniquely situated to provide insight into the impact of proposed funding for the shelter system and related programs serving all unhoused New Yorkers.

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 44 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 fewer housing options for low-income families. As a result, in the month of January 2026, there were an average of 100,437 people sleeping each night in all shelter systems in NYC, including 33,217 children.<sup>1</sup>

Underlying this significant increase in the shelter census is a shortage of housing affordable to those at the lowest income levels. New York City’s vacancy rate for apartments renting for under \$1,100 per month is less than 0.4 percent, and the overall vacancy rate is 1.4 percent – the lowest it has been since the City began measuring it in 1968.<sup>2</sup> Rapidly increasing rent levels, wages that are not keeping pace with inflation and housing costs, and increasing population<sup>3</sup> are all contributing to a worsening shortage in affordable housing – especially for those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

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 the NY metropolitan area is \$2,910 per month,<sup>4</sup> 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 \$2,655 per month.<sup>5</sup> However, a single adult receives a public assistance rental allowance of only \$215 per month. This situation is not tenable.

The housing crisis has been fueled by decades of underinvestment in permanent affordable housing for low-income communities and the failure of all levels of government to enact policies to meaningfully reverse this trend. The affordable housing shortage in New York, particularly for extremely low-income (“ELI”) households, is underscored by stark data revealing the depth of the crisis. According to the

---

<sup>1</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness," accessed February 25, 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, "New York City's Vacancy Rate Reaches Historic Low of 1.4 Percent, Demanding Urgent Action," press release, February 8, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/news/007-24/new-york-city-s-vacancy-rate-reaches-historic-low-1-4-percentdemanding-urgent-action-new#/0>.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “Growth in Metro Areas Outpaced Nation,” Census.gov, March 13, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/population-estimates-counties-metro-micro.html>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "FY 2026 Fair Market Rent Documentation System – New York, NY HUD Metro Area," 2026, accessed January 29, 2026, [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2026\\_code/2026summary.odn](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2026_code/2026summary.odn).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2025 report, “The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” there is a glaring disparity in the availability of affordable housing: for every 100 ELI households in the New York City metropolitan area, there are merely 35 affordable and available rental units.<sup>6</sup> In a state where the cost of living far exceeds national averages, and ELI households are defined as those earning at or below the poverty line or 30 percent of the area median income (“AMI”), this gap leaves a vast number of residents in precarious housing situations.

The worsening housing precarity in New York State is evidenced by the growing rent burdens borne by its residents. In New York City metro area, seventy-three percent of ELI households are severely rent-burdened.<sup>7</sup> This financial strain severely limits the capacity of ELI households to afford other necessities, such as food, healthcare, and childcare. It forces many of them to live in overcrowded conditions – defined as having more than two people per bedroom or more than one person living in a studio apartment. In fact, nearly a quarter (23 percent) of New York City households with at least one child are overcrowded.<sup>8</sup> Given that living in overcrowded conditions is frequently a precursor to homelessness, such statistics portend greater levels of mass homelessness if this affordable housing crisis continues.

The crisis extends beyond those in shelters to include unsheltered homelessness, which presents its own significant challenges. According to the last HOPE estimate published in 2025, an estimated 4,504 individuals experienced unsheltered homelessness in one night.<sup>9</sup> However, there is no reliable estimate of the total number of those sleeping unsheltered. The City’s annual HOPE survey, mandated by the Federal government, underestimates the true size of this population due to flawed methodology, and as a point-in-time survey, it fails to capture the dynamic nature of unsheltered homelessness. Whatever figure is reported by the City, we can safely assume the true number of homeless people sleeping unsheltered is far higher.

## **Housing is the Solution**

Ensuring that every household has access to housing they can afford is the only solution to the decades-long homelessness crisis that shames our city. While the Coalition will continue to vigorously defend the Right to Shelter, our ultimate goal is to make shelters unnecessary.

*Expand CityFHEPS to New Yorkers in All Shelters and Households At-Risk of Eviction*

CityFHEPS remains the primary pathway enabling people to exit shelter to stable, permanent housing. According to the Mayor’s Management Report, subsidized exits to permanent housing increased in Fiscal Year 2025 for the third year in a row, with 8,149 single adults, 781 adult families, and 12,336 families

---

<sup>6</sup> NLIHC Releases the Gap 2025: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, November 20, 2025, [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report\\_2025\\_english.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report_2025_english.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> NLIHC Releases the Gap 2025: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, November 20, 2025, [https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report\\_2025\\_english.pdf](https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report_2025_english.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, “2023 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings,” 2023, pg. 53, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

<sup>9</sup> New York City Department of Homeless Services, “Homeless Outreach Population Estimate 2025 Results,” <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/hope/hope-2025-results.pdf>.

with children exiting shelter with a housing subsidy.<sup>10</sup> These improvements were largely driven by coordinated efforts between DHS and contracted shelter providers to expedite housing placements.

However, over 100,000 people still reside in shelters, not counting those who are unsheltered or doubled or tripled up in others' homes.<sup>11</sup> Mayor Mamdani made a campaign promise to expand CityFHEPS and drop the litigation with City Council and the Legal Aid Society initiated by his predecessor. Since taking office, he has reneged on that commitment, citing budget concerns. While the budget for CityFHEPS has grown, it is because CityFHEPS is working to house homeless New Yorkers. It is the primary tool the City uses to help people exit shelter and stay housed.

The City Council must remain firm on expanding CityFHEPS to everyone in shelters, including runaway and homeless youth shelters and those in transitional housing contracted through the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice. It is also critical to expand CityFHEPS as an eviction prevention tool. The number of people sleeping in shelters will not decrease unless the City is deploying resources to prevent evictions. Many households in rent-regulated or other low-rent apartments are still struggling to pay the rent because of growing income inequality.<sup>12</sup> Investment in the housing sector targeted to low-income households, using vouchers and other tools, is necessary to reduce the shelter census.

Successful expansion of the CityFHEPS program depends also on fixing the unnecessary delays and hurdles that plague every step of the process. Clients of the Coalition experience extended delays in processing their applications for CityFHEPS, approvals of apartments, and payments to landlords. Such extreme delays and processing issues are commonly experienced by people who are trying either to leave shelter and find permanent homes or to avoid eviction. More staff are needed at several critical points in the process: processing applications and issuing shopping letters, review of CityFHEPS packets and apartment clearance review, the rental assistance line, and processing of and assistance with renewals.

#### *Fund Affordable Housing Creation for Homeless and Extremely Low-Income New Yorkers*

The Mamdani Administration will soon release its housing plan and it is critical that the City Council ensures that the administration is producing sufficient affordable housing for homeless and ELI households. From 2014 to 2024, on average, only 2,000 units a year were financed for extremely low-income and homeless households—four times fewer than higher-income households.<sup>13</sup> Over the next five years, building an additional 6,000 apartments for homeless households and 6,000 apartments for ELI households per year would go far toward addressing the imbalance in the City's historic "affordable" housing production.

---

<sup>10</sup> New York City Department of Homeless Services, *Mayor's Management Report* (New York: City of New York, 2026), accessed March 13, 2026, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2026/dhs.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness," accessed March 13, 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

<sup>12</sup> Maximilian Buchholz et al., "Inequality, Not Regulation, Drives America's Housing Affordability Crisis" (working paper, 2026) International Inequalities Study, London School of Economics and Political Science. <https://researchonline.lse.ac.uk/id/eprint/131070/>.

<sup>13</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, "Build from the Bottom Up: Affordable Housing for Homeless New Yorkers," January 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/build-from-the-bottom-up/>

In December 2025, the Council passed new mandates requiring that 30 percent of all new affordable housing production is set aside for ELI households, inclusive of the existing requirement that 15 percent of units are set-aside for homeless households, and an additional 20 percent must be set aside for very low-income households.<sup>14</sup> Now, the City Council must ensure that there is sufficient capital funding to support the production of those units, and that this important mandate does not stall affordable housing production.

## **Meeting the Needs of Unsheltered New Yorkers**

### *Low-Barrier Safe Haven Shelters*

The City must invest in more low-barrier shelter beds, such as Safe Havens and Stabilization beds. The extreme winter weather that killed at least several homeless New Yorkers this year highlights the gaps and shortcomings of the City’s approach to outreach to unsheltered people. Soon, we will experience extreme heat and Code Red notifications that will endanger the health of people who have nowhere else to sleep but public spaces, and potentially Code Grey alerts relating to dangerous air quality. There is real urgency to reform how the City performs outreach by focusing on meeting the short- and long-term needs of unsheltered individuals.

Safe Haven and Stabilization shelter beds offer fewer restrictions, more privacy and security, and better staffing and social services to meet the needs of our unsheltered neighbors. The City recently claimed that there are 4,200 low-barrier shelter beds.<sup>15</sup> However, shelter census data from March 13, 2026, on file with the Coalition for the Homeless, shows that total capacity for Safe Haven and Stabilization beds is 3,960. Further, when taking into account beds that are offline, actual capacity is only 3,710. Rather than ensuring that we have a sufficient number of these critical beds, the City has reinstated encampment sweeps and outreach methods that do not meet unsheltered people’s needs. As a result, we will continue to see few people connected to shelter, let alone permanent housing.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the City must allocate \$98 million to add 2,000 new single-occupancy Safe Haven beds for unsheltered New Yorkers which while not sufficient to provide beds for all unsheltered individuals, will be a meaningful step in addressing a critical need.

## **Addressing the Closure of the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Shelter Intake**

The Coalition has serious concerns about the closure of the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Intake site for single adult men and the proposed new site identified by DHS at 8 E. 3<sup>rd</sup> St. Based on the most recent population analysis from DHS provided to us pursuant to our consent decree in *Butler v. City of New York*, almost 16% of single adult men in have a mobility-related disability. At the Preliminary Budget Hearing on March 17, 2026, Department of Social Services Commissioner Erin Dalton testified that, “We believe the sites we have chosen offer comparable and better intake and assessment, accessibility.” As currently configured, the site

---

<sup>14</sup> New York City Local Law 66 of 2026.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara Russo-Lemon, "NYC Has to 'Better Explain' How Its Funding Is Helping to Combat Homelessness, Which Is Increasing This Year Even as Outreach Expanded, According to a NYS Comptroller's Office Report Released on Wednesday," *amNY*, accessed March 13, 2026, <https://www.amny.com/news/nyc-homeless-increase-spending-dinapoli/>.

<sup>16</sup> City of New York, Department of Homeless Services, “Local Law 34 of 2024 Quarterly Interagency Reporting on Encampment Cleanups and Aided Removals, CY25Q2,” [https://www.nyc.gov/site/dhs/a\\_bout/stats-and-reports.page](https://www.nyc.gov/site/dhs/a_bout/stats-and-reports.page).

has serious accessibility issues that are not comparable to the 30<sup>th</sup> Street site, and we have serious doubts that the issues can be remediated by May 1, 2026.

DHS hired an accessibility consultant to review the site in 2019. That assessment concluded that there were numerous accessibility issues. None of those issues have been remediated in the intervening years.

Our own inspection of the site raised the following concerns:

- Ramp and “accessible” entrance: the ramped entrance to the basement significantly exceeds the slope measurements to be ADA compliant and has other access barriers noted in the accessibility assessment. DHS said they were planning to reduce the gradient and address other related access barriers to meet ADA accessibility standards, but this plan would involve significant construction, unlikely to be completed prior to May 1, 2026.
- Elevators: access to the only functional elevator is impeded by a box-out, presumably of a beam, at the basement and third floors (we didn’t observe the other floors of the building). The box-out significantly impacts the landing area immediately outside the elevator doors by several inches and means the maneuvering space for mobility devices is limited to less than ADA accessibility standards allow. The other elevator has been out of service for several years.
- Bathrooms: there is currently no bathroom stall at the site large enough to fit a wheelchair. The one bathroom with grab bars is far too small to fit a wheelchair and installing or remediating the bathroom to be ADA compliant would require significant construction.
- Privacy: sleeping areas are visible from other floors, affording no privacy to residents.
- HVAC: In the past, clients at 8 E. 3d St. have been moved during periods of extreme heat because of the challenges of properly cooling the site.

These concerns must be addressed to keep the Right to Shelter intact and ensure that single adult men in need of shelter – especially those with disabilities – are able to access the shelter system.

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

## **About Coalition for the Homeless**

Founded in 1981, Coalition is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to address the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fifth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 12 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-training for homeless and low-income 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 distributed nearly 400,000 hot, nutritious meals to homeless and hungry people on the streets of the city this past year – up from our usual 320,000. Finally, our Crisis Services 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. Since the pandemic, we have been operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

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 the independent court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor the municipal shelter system serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by Legal Aid and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws. During the pandemic, the Coalition worked with Legal Aid to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure Wi-Fi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic.