



## Family Homelessness Coalition Policy Agenda

The Family Homelessness Coalition is made up of organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience in homelessness, united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelters, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

Family Homelessness Coalition strives to strengthen prevention and post-shelter services for at-risk families. We promote child and family well-being when shelter is unavoidable and advocate for the creation of more permanent housing resources for homeless children and their families.

Our policy priorities represent legislative and budgetary measures as well as operational reforms that in our collective professional and personal experience will have the greatest impact on reducing family homelessness in New York City. They fall into the following priority areas: improving prevention and aftercare, expediting housing placements, improving education continuity, and conditions in shelter including intake.

### Improving Eviction Prevention and Aftercare

- **Increase the Budget for Homebase by \$37.9mm to a Total of \$100mm.** Since the pandemic, Homebase providers have taken on tremendous increases in caseload as well as an ever-expanding set of responsibilities. This has not been accompanied by funding levels to match the new post-Covid reality. As a result, wait times have increased for critical Homebase services like help with eviction prevention, emergency rental assistance and obtaining benefits.
- **Establish a Dedicated Funding Stream Strictly for Aftercare Services.** Families who are placed in permanent housing from shelter require support in their period of transition to avoid the trauma of a return to homelessness. Establishing a strict separate funding stream for this essential work will ensure organizations can properly dedicate staff and tailor programs which will increase stability.
- **Release an RFP and Dedicate Funding for Organizations Beyond Homebase Providers to Process CityFHEPS.** Legal services organizations who have taken on this role on a temporary basis have been successful in speeding processing times and reducing overall burden on the system. Opening this opportunity further will reduce strain on Homebase providers and expedite processing.
- **Increase Funding for the New York State Solutions to End Homelessness Program (STEHP).** This modest pot of funding through OTDA funds rapid re-housing and emergency eviction prevention assistance. It is a helpful additional resource that allows community nonprofits and charities to do targeted eviction prevention work. A boost in funding will allow more families to be helped given the overwhelming number of households in arrears.
- **Fund the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) at \$250 million in the New York State Budget.** This fully State sourced rental assistance program, flexibly created to serve families both on the brink of homelessness or in shelter, and intended to fill service

gaps present in Federally-sourced voucher programs, would be hugely impactful for the estimated 13,000 households it would serve Statewide.

- **Pass the Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council Recommendations.** The Governor's Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council has recommended a series of steps to drastically reduce child poverty in New York that the Family Homelessness Coalition urges be implemented, including increasing benefit amounts to modern cost of living standards, expanding access, and establishing a new rental assistance program.

### **Expediting Housing Placements**

- **Implement the CityFHEPS Expansion and Reforms Passed into Law in 2023.** The series of reforms and changes to CityFHEPS passed into law in 2023 are now in legal limbo. We urge implementation of these important changes as a means to increase housing stability and reduce homelessness for more families citywide.
- **Adequately Fund the City Commission on Human Rights to Enforce SOI Discrimination.** We support \$4 million in additional funding for CCHR to a total agency budget of around \$18 million. This will help bring CCHR staffing back to 2019 levels and allow for greater enforcement of Source of Income Discrimination laws and implementation of new Fair Chance laws.
- **Reduce Barriers in Voucher Administration that Greatly Expedite Placement in Permanent Housing.** A number of recent streamlining measures and reforms have been implemented in homeless placements, voucher administration, and NYC Housing Connect lease-up. However, further steps are needed to greatly expedite placement and meaningfully reduce family homelessness. These include:
  - **CITYFHEPS - On Inspections:**
    - **Do Not Allow Minor Issues to Hold Up Move-In:** Apartment inspection processes should be standardized and include a hierarchy of issues, such that minor issues will not result in an inspection failure. Currently, minor issues, which can be immediately rectified, such as a missing light switch cover, may result in an inspection failure and a severe delay to the client's move-in date. This is modeled after NYCHA's approach to inspections.
    - **Reform Double Inspection Rule:** For units which require a DHS inspection (cellars and ground floor units), DSS requires both a DHS and a separate HRA inspection. We call for the secondary inspection to be limited to a fraction of the units as a secondary review/audit procedure but not policy for every unit.
  - **CITYFHEPS - On Income Verification:**
    - **The \$100 Rule:** The incomes presented in a voucher package must be within \$100 of the original shopping letter amount. With low-income tenant incomes often varying greatly week by week, this discrepancy often triggers a rebudgeting letter, which is a source of delay. DHS/HRA staff who are reviewing this should be allowed to reissue the tenant share with the new income numbers, and not require a separate rebudgeting process.
  - **CITYFHEPS - On Public Assistance Single Issuance:**

- Time Frame: The current time frame is 30 days but often the process for applying and getting the voucher is longer and requires the single issuance to be resubmitted. We recommend a 90-day time frame.
- Add Option for Access HRA: There is currently no process on Access HRA to signify that an application is for single issuance public assistance. This results in many applications being treated as ongoing public assistance. This should be a distinct option on Access HRA to avoid confusion.
- **CITYFHEPS – Process Improvements:**
  - Electronic Paperwork: Application packet forms should be readable/fillable PDF forms that can be signed electronically and emailed back, while still allowing for a paper process.
  - Outreach: If a client’s application is missing documents, DSS should not wait to contact that client via mail or phone call. DSS should also reach out to clients via text or email which to have the best chance of successfully connecting with clients. DSS often calls to detail this type of information from an unknown number, so clients may not pick up, and then they miss the opportunity to talk about their application. Then, DSS’s next step is to send a letter to the client in the mail. The letter should be clear about what information is needed via the AccessHRA portal. Additionally, if a DSS staff person does call a client for this purpose; they should leave a call back number, along with hours of availability.
  - Family Moves Within Shelter. When families are transferred into new shelter locations, the application process should not begin again. When this has occurred, it has added significant time delays. Applications should maintain even when families move locations.

### **Improving Education Continuity**

- **Stop the Implementation of Shelter Stay Limits for New Arrival Families with Children.** With the pace of new arrivals slowing and a frightening federal landscape potentially on the horizon for immigrant families in New York City, we oppose the threat of eviction and re-placements for families with children in shelter. The City should eliminate the requirement that families with children in grades K-6 be forced to move shelters after their initial 60-day placement and should eliminate any shelter moves for families with children in school, no matter the grade level.
- **Increase the Percent of Families DHS Places or Re-Places in Shelter in the Same Borough as Where their Children Attend School.** In the most recent Mayor’s Management Report (MMR), there was small progress made in increasing the number of families DHS placed in shelter in the same borough as the family’s youngest school-age child. But almost 40% of families in shelter continue to be placed in a different borough from where their youngest child goes to school. Further progress should be made in this area through more deliberate policy, such as integrating conversations into the intake and Independent Living Plan processes about the possible availability of a shelter transfer closer to children’s schools and helping parents pursue education-related shelter transfers when desired by parents.

- **Implement the Recommendations of the Students in Temporary Housing Transportation Taskforce.** This task force created through Local Law 158 developed a set of [recommendations](#) that the city should promptly implement to ensure school stability and regular attendance for students in temporary housing.
- **Increase Access to Early Childhood Education for Children in Shelter.** The percent of age-eligible children in shelter who participated in Pre-K was around 50% in the most recent publicly stated numbers, a 10-percentage point decrease from pre-Covid numbers. The City should make greater efforts to connect age-eligible children in shelter to Pre-K and 3-K by continuing to make automatic offers for 3-K and Pre-K to families in shelter who did not participate in the application process and ensure that 3-K and Pre-K outreach efforts include a targeted approach to increasing access to and participation in early childhood programs for children in shelter (e.g., personalized outreach calls, shelter-based staff talking to all parents of age-eligible children about whether they want to enroll in 3-K and Pre-K, designating a point person to troubleshoot early childhood enrollment issues).

### Conditions in Shelter

- **The City Should Commit to a Capital-Needs Assessment of the Entire Shelter Portfolio.** Building conditions at both the City’s shelter sites and sites owned by homeless services organizations vary wildly, and in many instances conditions at properties are poor. While shelter is and should be temporary, conditions at the worst sites do not meet minimum acceptable standards, particularly for families with children. An overall assessment of the entire system would help to identify the most pressing needs and allow for a plan to direct capital funds to address them.
- **Pass S4675/A8937 to create a New York State Wage Board.** This board will investigate and give recommendations on adequate and equitable wages for the human services sector. Without adequate and equitable wages, these positions are challenging to hire and retain in shelters, leading to poorer conditions for residents overall.
- **Increase the Pay of Shelter Staff to Establish Parity with Comparable Settings.** Difficult-to-hire titles such as social workers are particularly difficult to retain to when there is disparity between pay and comparable settings, such as NYC H+H Hospitals. Bring pay for these roles in line with the comparable roles.

### Intake Into Shelter and PATH

- **Reduce the Housing History Requirement for Intake from 2 Years to 1 Year and Allow Self-Attestation After a Denial.** Two years’ worth of housing history documentation is a difficult barrier for families seeking shelter. Reducing the requirement to 1 year and allowing self-attestation to homelessness after a denial would reduce barriers to entry.
- **Commit to Appointment Times for Intake Interviews.** Particularly for families, traveling to intake centers without the security and predictability of an appointment time is a barrier and does not allow for families being able to schedule around their obligations. As with other government entities that have moved to appointment times like the NYS Department of Motor Vehicles, this process should be modernized.

