



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Tony Avella

Senator Avella Chairs Task Force Public Forum on Current State of Homelessness in New York City

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(New York, NY) On Wednesday, October 7th, State Senator Tony Avella, Chair of the Task Force on the Delivery of Social Services in New York City, held a Public Forum entitled “The Current State of Homelessness in New York City.” Joined by Senators Liz Kreuger, Daniel Squadron, and Martin Golden, Senator Avella and his colleagues heard testimony from seven panels comprised of agency commissioners and homeless advocates. The various perspectives offered the Task Force insight into the challenges that homeless New Yorkers continue to face in seeking the City’s help. Senator Avella will be releasing a report in the coming weeks.

Commissioners Steven Banks and Gilbert Taylor, of the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), respectively, provided a detailed description of how their agency's have responded to the homelessness crisis. Commissioner Banks provided details on HRA's Living in Communities Programs (LINC), which provide rental assistance to those trying to move out of the shelter system. Commissioner Banks also noted that some LINC programs supply rental assistance to those facing eviction, arguing that the preventative aspects of LINC offers cost-effective means for keeping struggling New Yorkers in their home.

Commissioner Taylor's testimony addressed DHS' steps to make its intake centers more efficient by implementing various needs assessment tools for matching applicants to proper services and facilities. Taylor also made note of DHS' collaboration with other agencies to maintain shelter quality and expressed a need for more locations to sustain the current overwhelming demand.

Homeless advocates took issue with HRA and DHS' underreporting of the state of homelessness in New York City. For example, Catherine Trapani, HousingLink Director for New Destiny Housing, contradicted DHS' statistics of homeless people in shelters, arguing that DHS' numbers failed to include people in non-DHS locations, such as those living in shelters provided by HRA, religious organizations, the Department of Youth and Community Development, and more.

Many of the homelessness advocates who testified contended that HRA and DHS' programs do not address all of the obstacles that homeless New Yorkers face. Some contested DHS' ability to accurately assess and cater to the needs of people suffering from a mental or physical disability during the intake process. Others questioned the viability of LINC programs in a real estate market where private landlords are still refusing to accept rental assistance as a form of income, and require credit checks.

The Task Force also heard from several legal services providers, including Legal Services NYC and the Legal Aid Society, who emphasized, among other things, that effective legal representation decreases eviction - the number one cause of homelessness in New York City.

"I thank everyone who provided valuable insight into the current state of homelessness. Between the information provided by Commissioners Steven Banks and

Gilbert Taylor, and the passionate homelessness advocates, the Task Force has a full spectrum of perspectives to draw from as it moves forward in addressing this crucial issue.

The testimonies heard by my colleagues and I allow us to focus on the problems which have the greatest impact on people both in the shelter system, and those trying desperately to avoid entering it. I will be issuing a full report on the Forum and will be requesting follow-up information from HRA and DHS, including more accurate information on the population size of New Yorkers in shelters. I look forward to providing recommendations based on the testimonies so as to effect real change on the way we provide these services," **said State Senator Tony Avella.**

"Preventing homelessness continues to be a critical issue in our city. I thank the Task Force on the Delivery of Social Services in New York City for meeting in my district today, as well as the City and advocates for testifying," **said State Senator Daniel Squadron.**

"I was pleased to learn of the City's many new initiatives and significant investments in preventing people from needing shelter as a result of losing their homes. However, the number of people already in the system and on the verge of homelessness cries out for increasing the state shelter allowance, stronger tenant protections, a full NY/NY 4 agreement creating 30,000 new supportive housing units, and more specialized options for the elderly and disabled. I look forward to continuing to work with Commissioners Banks and Taylor, Governor Cuomo, and my legislative colleagues, to address the needs of people at risk of homelessness," **commented State Senator Liz Krueger.**