



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Thomas K. Duane

Senator Duane Rallies with Elected Officials, Advocates to Oppose Plan to Charge Homeless for Shelter

THOMAS K. DUANE April 15, 2010

| ISSUE: **FAMILIES**



*Proposed Policy Would Create Steeper, Longer Path Out of Homelessness
Elected Officials Support Legislation to Prohibit Charging Homeless for Shelter*

New York, NY — City Council General Welfare Committee Chair Annabel Palma, State Senate Social Services Committee Chair Daniel Squadron, State Senator Tom Duane, Public Advocate Bill de Blasio, Council Member Brad Lander, State Senator Eric Adams, Comptroller John Liu other elected officials and homeless advocates gathered today to protest the NYC Department of Homeless Services' plan to charge homeless New Yorkers rent to stay in

shelters.

The elected officials expressed support for pending legislation in the State legislature, sponsored by Senator Squadron and Assembly Member Keith Wright, that would exempt New York City from the 1997 State requirement that homeless people contribute to the cost of shelter. The legislation passed the State Assembly last year and was included in the recent State Senate budget resolution.

Under DHS' proposed plan, thousands of families with children living in shelters in New York could be charged rent, to be calculated on a case-by-case basis depending on each family's income and circumstances, and using State public assistance budgeting rules.

At this afternoon's General Welfare Committee hearing, led by Chair Annabel Palma, the Committee will also be discussing DHS' proposals to change the Advantage rental subsidy program, including how the City will implement the new program and the likelihood that it will succeed. The new program requires Advantage participants to contribute higher amounts toward rent than they previously did in order to qualify for the subsidy, and to comply with more stringent work requirements. In today's economy few jobs are available, and those that do exist are likely low-wage. DHS' plans raise serious concerns about how useful the program will be in helping people achieve permanency, which the Committee will examine at today's hearing.

"Instead of helping to lift our city's most vulnerable out of the shelter system, contribution requirements create an institutional barrier for the homeless to move from shelter to permanent housing," said **Annabel Palma, Chair of the New York City Council General Welfare Committee**. "While I am pleased that the eligibility requirement has been lowered from 90 days to 60 days for the Advantage program, many questions remain as to how the program's contribution requirement will promote sustained permanent housing and not create a cycle of homelessness."

"The Council will be examining this and other new proposals at the General Welfare Committee hearing on Thursday, but at first blush, this appears to be a step backwards in the City's fight to reduce homelessness," **City Council Speaker Christine C. Quinn** said. "By definition, homeless people have very few, if any, resources. In the midst of a faltering economy and high levels of unemployment, it is deeply unrealistic to expect that homeless people can pay large amounts of money toward shelter."

"This misguided policy shift could not come at a worse time," said **New York State Senator Thomas K. Duane**. "The unemployment rate in New York City has more than doubled in the last two years and, despite the recession, our City's affordable housing stock continues to dwindle. It is hard enough for homeless New Yorkers to find jobs at all, let alone jobs that pay a living wage they can save towards a permanent home. It simply makes no sense that homeless families fortunate enough to have an income should have pay a substantial share for the privilege of living in a shelter."

"The goal of shelter is to get out of homelessness and into permanent housing — charging rent for shelter will make it harder for struggling families to get on their feet, leaving more children and parents without homes," **Senator Daniel Squadron** said. "I am proud that the Senate Majority's budget resolution included language to prohibit the City from charging rent to homeless people and I commend Assembly Social Services Chair Keith Wright for passing our bill through the Assembly last year. Together with Council Members Palma and Lander, Assemblymember Wright, Public Advocate de Blasio and my colleagues in the Senate Majority, I am confident that we can prevent this misguided policy from becoming a reality."

"We are in the midst of the most serious economic crisis since the Great Depression," **Senator Eric Adams** said. "The City's decision to extract rent from working families in homeless shelters will only tighten the economic stranglehold on the poor. Charging nearly \$12,000 each year to a family of three earning only \$25,000 will prevent them from saving enough

money to leave the shelter system. I fully support Senator Squadron's provision in the New York State budget to stop the City of New York from charging rents in homeless shelters."

"Charging rent in homeless shelters is one of the most damaging policies you could impose on impoverished New Yorkers," **Public Advocate Bill de Blasio** said. "It was a bad idea when DHS tried to implement it last year, and it is even worse this year when we have an alarming unemployment rate and record numbers of homeless families living in city shelters. I'm also concerned that this policy could end up causing longer stays at shelters, as families will put less money toward savings for their own housing."

"This policy does not create incentives to work; in fact, it does the exact opposite," **Council Member Brad Lander** said. "This is an Administration whose homelessness policy has failed, that is presiding over the biggest homeless crisis in NYC history, and is out-of-touch with how badly the recession is hitting neighborhoods like East New York, Harlem, and the South Bronx. How can Mayor Bloomberg travel to Washington to ask for relief for Wall Street banks, while threatening to put 10,000 low-income families in the streets by cancelling their Section 8 certificates, and now looking to charge people more than \$900 per month for being homeless?"

"Charging rent at a homeless shelter is like kicking the uninsured out of an emergency room: it's cruel and completely counterproductive. If the Bloomberg Administration won't rethink this misguided policy, Albany should shut it down," said **Dan Cantor, executive director of the Working Families Party**.

"The vast majority of homeless New Yorkers are families with children struggling with unemployment and low wages," said **Patrick Markee, Senior Policy Analyst for Coalition for the Homeless**. "The Bloomberg administration's push to charge these families upwards of \$900 per month to stay in a homeless shelter in the middle of the worst recession in decades will make it impossible for them ever to save enough to leave shelter and will ultimately force

some families onto the street. Coming only weeks after the Bloomberg administration announced plans to revoke thousands of federal Section 8 rental assistance vouchers, you have to wonder if Mayor Bloomberg is blind to the economic reality facing millions of New Yorkers struggling in the current economy."

"In the midst of the continuing economic downturn and the current high level of unemployment, it makes far more sense to permit those few homeless families who are to obtain low wage work to use their meager earnings to secure permanent housing rather than pay rent in emergency shelter, which will only prolong their time in shelter at far greater cost to the City. A year ago, The Legal Aid Society threatened to sue the City and the State over the same plan, which led to the suspension of the rent payment plan at that time, and, if necessary, we are prepared to seek court relief again," said **Steven Banks, the Attorney-in-Chief of The Legal Aid Society.**

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