Senator Squadron Testimony About Family Income Contribution Requirement, June 24, 2009

DANIEL L. SQUADRON   June 23, 2009

TESTIMONY OF STATE SENATOR DANIEL SQUADRON BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE REGARDING RES. NO. 2002.

June 24, 2009

I would like to thank the New York City Council, the Speaker and the Committee on General Welfare for conducting a hearing on Resolution 2002, calling on the New York State Legislature to pass legislation such as S. 5605-A/A. 8353-D, which would amend the New York Social Services Law to ensure that recipients of temporary housing assistance do not have to pay rent for that assistance. I am the sponsor of S. 5605-A in the Senate. Assemblymember Keith Wright sponsors A. 8353-D, which passed the Assembly on June 22.

I introduced this bill in response to the New York City Department of Homeless Services' recent implementation of a 1995 state regulation requiring shelter residents to contribute a portion of their income to pay for temporary housing assistance. DHS implemented the regulation in early 2009 pursuant to a directive issued by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance.

Individuals and families who turn to the shelter system for temporary support generally do so because they are *unable* to pay rent and do not have incomes. For individuals and families in temporary shelter who do earn some income, they are generally trying to save so they can rent an apartment and work to become self-sufficient. This bill is intended to help individuals achieve this important goal.

The bill would amend Section 131-a of the New York State Social Services Law to state: " Notwithstanding any other provision of law to the contrary, in any social services district containing a city

having a population of one million or more, all earned and unearned income for applicants and recipients of temporary housing assistance shall be disregarded in determining eligibility for public assistance and temporary housing assistance in lieu of the disregards otherwise provided for in this section. No recipient of temporary housing assistance shall be required to contribute to the cost of temporary housing assistance."

S. 5605-A will:

• eliminate the requirement that a recipient of temporary housing assistance must contribute toward the cost of shelter as a condition of receiving such assistance (in New York City);

• enable a district to implement a savings plan for individuals residing in temporary housing; and

• enable temporary shelter recipients with earned income to use their income for critical expenses, such as childcare, as they work towards achieving self-sufficiency

This bill would undo the requirement that New York City seek a financial contribution from people in need of temporary housing while protecting other important priorities. It would leave unchanged the requirement that an applicant for temporary housing assistance or public assistance demonstrate an immediate need for such assistance. And the bill will not affect the amount of cash assistance that a family or individual may receive through the public assistance program.

At least 21 organizations have expressed their support for A. 8353-D/S. 5605-A, including Advocates for Children, Audre Lorde Project, Children's Health Fund, Citizens Committee for Children of New York, Citywide Task Force on Housing Court, Coalition for the Homeless, Community Service Society, Concourse House, Homeless Services United, Housing Works, Hunger Action Network of New York State, Information for Families, Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, Legal Aid Society, New York Asian Women's Center, New York Provincial Society of Jesus Office of Social Ministries, Queers for Economic Justice, Social Services Employees Union Local 371, Welfare Reform Network, West End Intergenerational Residence and Women In Need.

Thank you for the invitation to submit testimony today. Please do not hesitate to reach out to my office at 212-298-5565 for further information.