



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Alessandra Biaggi

Senator Biaggi Joins Community Activists And Legislators To Advocate For Free Internet Access In All Homeless Shelters Across New York

ALESSANDRA BIAGGI November 30, 2021



BRONX, NY – Today, State Senator Alessandra Biaggi joined Shams DaBaron, aka Da Homeless Hero, community leaders, activists, and elected officials to advocate for internet access in all homeless shelters across New York State. Community members shared their experiences living in shelters without internet access, and the group advocated for the inclusion of [S3593A](#) (Assembly number forthcoming) in the 2022-23 Enacted State Budget. The legislation, sponsored by Senator Biaggi and Assemblymember Karines Reyes, would

provide internet access to all individuals receiving temporary housing assistance across the State.

According to a 2020 survey of New York City shelter residents by the [New York City Bar Justice Center](#), only 6% of residents in homeless shelters were able to access the internet through their shelter. As the result of [recent litigation by the Legal Aid Society and Coalition for the Homeless](#), New York City agreed to install wireless internet in over 200 shelters that serve school-aged children. However hundreds of shelters in New York City and across the State still lack connectivity. Without internet access, New Yorkers experiencing homelessness are unable to search for jobs or permanent housing, access benefits and social services, participate in remote learning, or connect with their families and loved ones. As more of the world transitioned online during the pandemic, internet access has become even more urgent.

“For New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, access to internet is a lifeline — helping them access opportunities and resources, and stay connected with loved ones. If we want to give New Yorkers experiencing homelessness the support they need to live with dignity and ultimately transition to permanent housing, providing internet access in all shelters is the bare minimum. As the COVID-19 pandemic continues, the need for internet connectivity has only become more urgent. We must include S3593A in the 2022 State Budget to provide internet access to all residents in temporary housing. I hope Governor Kathy Hochul will join us in working to close the digital divide in our shelters this year,” **said State Senator Alessandra Biaggi.**

“Access to the internet is a basic human right. The switch to remote learning during the pandemic demonstrated the critical need for high-speed internet access in New York. Access to the internet unlocks a limitless potential that should not be limited to those who can afford it. Everyone regardless of their housing status should be able to access the

information stream that has endless possibilities to empower them during difficult times,” **said Assemblymember Karines Reyes.**

"New York's shelters overwhelmingly lack internet access, an essential service which could reduce the length of residents' stays and facilitate their entry into permanent housing. Just last week, a constituent living in a shelter got in touch with my office because lack of access to the internet was proving to be a barrier to their progress. This digital divide is not a new problem, but it has grown more dire with the COVID-19, especially for our neighbors in shelters. I am proud to cosponsor Senator Biaggi's bill that would help ensure people living in shelters have the opportunity to access online resources. We must do the right thing and pass this legislation in the upcoming session," **said State Senator Robert Jackson.**

“Having access to Wi-Fi means having a lifeline to the outside world, and the lack of internet access in shelters is a major barrier to exiting homelessness. It is an inhumane policy that increases the digital divide among the predominantly Black and brown people who dominate New York's shelter system. New York has a responsibility to not only provide temporary shelter to its people, but to end the cycle of homelessness, help people find permanent, stable housing and reduce the amount of time people spend in shelters. By denying shelter residents something as basic and necessary as Wi-Fi, our government is failing us. We must fix this in the upcoming legislative session,” **said Shams DaBaron, aka Da Homeless Hero.**

"It is time that we stand on the side of the people, stand in solidarity for our most vulnerable, uplift and fulfill the needs of our State's residents and MAKE SURE that all people in shelters, temporary housing and all in between have unfettered access to wifi. This will ensure that folks at least have equitable access to potential resources to level the playing field. We have failed our people time and time again, ensuring S3593A is passed and included IN the budget allows us to right some of those wrongs. Isn't that what we ought to be doing? This is a common sense bill,” **said Shanequa Charles, community activist and Executive Director**

of Miss Abbie's Kids.

"We have seen the incredible impact access to WiFi has had on our clients in New York City's family shelters and we are thrilled to support a bill that would extend this access to all New Yorkers experiencing homelessness across the state. No other jurisdiction should have to sue the government to gain access to this vital utility that opens doors to a myriad of resources and support. We encourage the passage of S3593A in the upcoming State Budget," **said Beth Hofmeister, Attorney in the Homeless Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society.**

"Our City Bar Justice Center found that only 6% of homeless shelter residents were able to access the internet, a critical tool that could reduce the length of residents' stay and facilitate their exit into permanent housing. Impacted individuals and families are unable to search and apply for permanent housing and jobs, reliably participate in remote schooling, apply for government benefits or obtain necessary medical care. S3593A would represent a huge step towards closing the digital divide by ensuring that all shelter residents across New York State are finally guaranteed reliable internet access," **said Katharine Deabler, Chair of the New York City Bar Association's Social Welfare Committee.**

"The Coalition for the Homeless is very pleased to support this legislation as a crucial means of bridging the digital divide for homeless New Yorkers. We have fought in court to ensure the delivery of internet access for homeless students, and believe that everyone should have such access in the shelters and hotels that serve as their temporary residences. We are grateful to Senator Biaggi for her leadership," **said Shelly Nortz, Deputy Executive Director for Policy, Coalition for the Homeless.**

S3593A would require all local social service districts to provide internet access for all individuals residing in temporary housing in their district. That includes, but is not limited to, family shelters, shelters for adults, domestic violence shelters, runaway and homeless youth shelters, and safe houses for refugees. 100% of the cost will be reimbursed by the

State.

###