



Testimony of  
Coalition for the Homeless

before the Fiscal Committees  
of the NYS Legislature

NYS Executive Budget Proposal  
For Human Services FY2027

submitted by

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The Coalition for the Homeless (the “Coalition”) welcomes this opportunity to submit testimony to the Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature. Founded in 1981, the Coalition is the court- and City-appointed independent monitor of the Department of Homeless Services (“DHS”) shelter system and plaintiff in the historic *Callahan*, *Eldredge*, and *Boston* cases that created the right to shelter in NYC. We are actively engaged in assisting and defending the rights of homeless New Yorkers and advocating for the resources needed to end mass homelessness by ensuring access to permanent housing. For these reasons, coupled with over 40 years of providing innovative direct service programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers, we are uniquely situated to provide insight into the impact of the Governor’s proposed budget on the communities we serve.

The Coalition plans to submit testimony in various Fiscal Committee hearings addressing issues that impact unhoused people. As such, the testimony set forth herein relates solely to those issues that are before the Committee today.

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Fundamental to New York’s frontline response to mass homelessness is the legal Right to Shelter, but New York City’s municipal shelter system is confronted with increasing demands and insufficient resources. Federal funding cuts and rule changes have only intensified existing shortcomings, underscoring the urgent need for better policies and meaningful investment in homelessness prevention, affordable permanent and supportive housing at a scale to meet the level of need, and a functioning social services infrastructure calibrated to meet the needs of homeless and at-risk individuals and families.

### **Longstanding Policy Failures Have Fueled Mass Homelessness**

Shelter census data over time reflects a distressing trend: a consistent increase in the need for, and use of, the emergency shelter system over the past 44 years. In the past year, the crisis has been exacerbated by the continued depletion of housing that is affordable to those at the lowest income levels and policies that make it more difficult for homeless individuals and families to exit shelter into permanent housing. These factors have resulted in long shelter stays and fewer housing options for low-income families. As a result, in the month of November 2025, there were an average of 101,978 people sleeping each night in all shelter systems in NYC, including 34,393 children.<sup>1</sup>

Underlying this significant increase in the shelter census is a shortage of housing affordable to those at the lowest income levels. New York City’s vacancy rate for apartments renting for under \$1,100 per month is less than 0.4 percent, and the overall vacancy rate is 1.4 percent – the lowest it has been since the City began measuring it in 1968.<sup>2</sup> Rapidly increasing rent levels, wages that

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<sup>1</sup> Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness," accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

<sup>2</sup> New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, "New York City's Vacancy Rate Reaches Historic Low of 1.4 Percent, Demanding Urgent Action," press release, February 8, 2024, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/news/007-24/new-york-city-s-vacancy-rate-reaches-historic-low-1-4-percentdemanding-urgent-action-new#/0>.

are not keeping pace with inflation and housing costs, and increasing population<sup>3</sup> are all contributing to a worsening shortage in affordable housing – especially for those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Such a dramatic loss in the supply of apartments affordable to low-income renters, including those relying on a public assistance rental allowance, shuts many New Yorkers out of the housing market entirely. This trend is likely to continue, given that the US Department of Housing and Urban Development calculated that the Fair Market Rent (“FMR”) for a two-bedroom apartment in the NY metropolitan area is \$2,910 per month,<sup>4</sup> while the public assistance rental allowance for a typical family of three with at least one child remains only \$400 per month. The FMR for a one-bedroom apartment is \$2,655 per month.<sup>5</sup> However, a single adult receives a public assistance rental allowance of only \$215 per month. This situation is not tenable. Real commitments are needed by the State to help reverse this trend.

### **Income Supports for New Yorkers**

It is well-established that income supports help lift families out of poverty while also contributing to the overall health and well-being of recipients. Therefore, we support efforts that provide the resources unhoused and other low-income families need in order to achieve self-sufficiency. The Governor’s proposed budget once again fails to address Cash Assistance levels, and particularly certain types of Cash Assistance that have not been increased during the 21<sup>st</sup> Century despite inflation and the significant increase in the cost of living.

More specifically, certain people we serve who sleep in NYC shelters because of the lack of affordable housing receive personal needs or special needs grants in lieu of the basic Cash Assistance award. Inadequate at their current levels, these grants are intended to cover all of the recipients’ daily living expenses outside of food and shelter. The paltry sum received by some single adults under this program is \$45 a month – a figure that has not increased since 1997. A family of three does not fare much better, receiving only \$189 a month to cover any needs such as diapers, soap, over-the-counter medicines and clothing for children.

But even if an individual is eligible for basic Cash Assistance benefits, those amounts similarly are insufficient to address the recipient’s basic needs or their goal of achieving self-sufficiency. For instance, a family of three not residing in a shelter would receive only \$389 a month, inclusive of money for utilities. The expectation is that such monthly payment should cover food and other daily necessities in addition to utilities in NYC. According to the United Way of New York City, the 2023 True Cost of Living in the least expensive borough of NYC is almost *13 times this amount*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> US Census Bureau, “Growth in Metro Areas Outpaced Nation,” Census.gov, March 13, 2025, <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2025/population-estimates-counties-metro-micro.html>.

<sup>4</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, “FY 2026 Fair Market Rent Documentation System – New York, NY HUD Metro Area,” 2026, accessed January 29, 2026, [https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2026\\_code/2026summary.odn](https://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2026_code/2026summary.odn).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> United Way of New York City, “True Cost of Living,” accessed January 29, 2026, <https://unitedwaynyc.org/true-cost-of-living/>. (Reporting that for the Bronx, the 2023 True Cost of Living was \$4977 per month (or \$2,866 per month excluding rent.)

The Governor’s Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (“CPRAC”) recommended increasing cash assistance amounts to address the 800,000 children living in poverty in New York State last year.<sup>7</sup> The CPRAC found that increasing the basic needs allowance by 100 percent would result in an 18.1 percent reduction in child poverty.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, we urge the legislature to take action by including the following bills in the budget:

**1. Increase Cash Benefits for Homeless New Yorkers - A.108 (Rosenthal)/S. 113 (Cleare)**

- This legislation would ensure that homeless New Yorkers receive the same Cash Assistance benefits as New Yorkers who are housed. Cash Assistance grant levels for homeless New Yorkers in some shelters have not been increased in decades, since 1997. It is not fair for New York to penalize homeless New Yorkers with even more inadequate grant levels than everyone else.
- Currently individuals and families who reside in certain shelters receive only \$45 per month (or \$1.50 per day) in assistance for a single individual and \$63 per month per household member for families with children. These current grant levels are so abysmally low families and individuals in these shelters cannot buy essential items like menstrual products, underwear, diapers, and laundry detergent. Although some shelters serve food, that does not mean that residents need less assistance for their basic needs.

**2. Increase Cash Benefits to Reflect Increased Cost of Living - A.106 (Rosenthal)/S.1127 (Persaud)**

- This bill would increase the basic needs allowance for Cash Assistance (including utility allowances called HEA & SHEA) which is supposed to cover necessities like clothing, diapers, hygiene products, over-the-counter medication, and transportation. At only \$389 per month for a household of three, it is woefully inadequate. The basic needs allowance has not been updated since 2012 and has never kept pace with inflation.
- This bill increases the allowance to \$778 for a family of three and also indexes the benefits to inflation going forward.

**Wi-Fi in Shelters**

Reliable internet connectivity is a necessity, not a luxury, for all aspects of our modern life. This is no less true for people living in homeless shelters. Giving people consistent access to reliable high-speed internet is one of the easiest things we can do to increase opportunities for people living in shelter to help them move to stable, permanent housing. Without reliable internet access, shelter residents cannot search and apply for permanent housing or jobs, participate in remote classrooms or complete assigned homework, apply for government benefits, stay connected to friends and family, obtain necessary medical care, or access critical legal services.

In a recently published op-ed, Troy W., a member of the Coalition’s Community Leadership Collective, wrote, “Every step we need to take to get out of the shelter system involves using the

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<sup>7</sup> New York State Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council. “2024 Recommendations and Progress Report.” <https://otda.ny.gov/cprac/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* at 17.

internet to access resources, apply for jobs, and submit rental applications. You might think shelters would provide us with a Wi-Fi connection. You'd be wrong.”<sup>9</sup>

In the words of Denton H., another Coalition Community Leader who has lived in shelter for over six years:

In a world that has evolved from landline phone service to mobile phones, smartphones, apps, social media, and now artificial intelligence, there's a segment of our population who are languishing without regular access to the internet. This population, over a hundred thousand people, is living in homeless shelters. Why does this segment of our population find themselves in this position, you might ask? The simple answer is that they don't have the means to afford data plans and shelters are not required to provide access to Wi-Fi. Just about everything these days is internet driven. The "Independent Living Plans" that the Department of Homeless Services requires us to follow require the internet to access associated social services. How can we follow the plans and make progress toward leaving shelter if we don't have access to Wi-Fi?

Many other clients of the Coalition have struggled to find permanent housing because of the lack of internet access. Case management staff at shelters provide only limited help and carry large caseloads. Residents in shelters without Wi-Fi are unable to regularly access outside housing resources because most are only accessible online. New York City's Housing Connect portal is only available online and residents without consistent access to the internet to communicate with potential landlords and brokers frequently miss opportunities. While many try to use public resources, like libraries, not all shelters are close to libraries and other community resources. Even when those resources are near, hours and access are limited. Public assistance benefits are insufficient to cover even transportation to and from the library each day.

During the pandemic, the Coalition successfully brought a lawsuit, *E.G. v. City of New York*, to secure Wi-Fi in all New York City shelters for families with children. This secured equal access to education and connectivity for all families with children in the New York City shelter system. But not all adults living in shelter have access to Wi-Fi, though some shelters for adults in New York City already provide Wi-Fi access to residents. Based on our monitoring, we estimate that 40% of shelters for adults in New York City lack Wi-Fi. This creates a disparity in access based solely on where someone gets placed. The lack of Wi-Fi is especially challenging to people with mobility issues or other challenges that make traveling difficult, thereby creating a greater need to be able to access services online.

The biggest barrier to providing Wi-Fi is the installation costs. In ConnectALL's first Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment proposal, homeless shelters were identified as important Community Anchor Institutions – but thus far, shelters have incomprehensibly been left out of the funding to expand broadband access. ConnectAll is receiving \$20 million from Verizon as part of the approval of Verizon's petition to take over Frontier by the Public Service Commission. Funding for the infrastructure to support Wi-Fi expansion could be supported with only a portion of these one-time funds from the State's ConnectAll Program. ConnectAll already

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<sup>9</sup> Troy Walker and Reynaldo Medina, "Opinion: Wi-Fi Isn't a Luxury," City Limits, November 6, 2025, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://citylimits.org/opinion-wi-fi-isnt-a-luxury/>.

funds internet connectivity in affordable housing. Expanding Wi-Fi in shelters is squarely part of its mission to close the remaining digital divide, which “is critical because having universal access to high-speed broadband in our digital economy is as essential as having heat, clean water, and reliable electricity.”<sup>10</sup>

We urge the legislature to pass A.1755 (Reyes) / S.8026 (Gonzalez) in the budget, which will provide Wi-Fi access to all individuals residing in temporary housing throughout New York State.

Granted, the primary reason for ongoing mass homelessness in New York and the main obstacle to moving people out of shelters and off the streets is the lack of affordable and supportive housing. Without adequate supply – and specifically, supply that is targeted to homeless and extremely low-income households – the situation will not improve. But increasing supply alone will not be sufficient if existing barriers to accessing available units are not addressed. The fiscal and structural limitations discussed above deprive households of the resources needed to exit shelter and, as such, are a critical part of the solution to mass homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony. We look forward to working with the Legislature on the budget and other legislation to address the needs of those who are unhoused or precariously housed throughout the State.

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<sup>10</sup> ConnectALL, "About ConnectALL," New York State, accessed January 29, 2026, <https://broadband.ny.gov/about-connectall-0>.