



Testimony of
Coalition for the Homeless

before the Fiscal Committees
of the NYS Legislature

NYS Executive Budget Proposal
For Housing FY2027

submitted by

Alison Wilkey
Director of Government Affairs and Strategic Campaigns
Coalition for the Homeless

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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.

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.

The Rise in Mass Homelessness Throughout New York

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.¹

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 1968.² Rapidly increasing rent levels, wages that are not keeping pace with

¹ Coalition for the Homeless, "Facts About Homelessness," accessed February 25, 2026, <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/facts-about-homelessness/>.

² 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>.

inflation and housing costs, and increasing population³ 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,⁴ 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.⁵ However, a single adult receives a public assistance rental allowance of only \$215 per month. This situation is not tenable.

The housing crisis has been fueled by decades of underinvestment in permanent affordable housing for low-income communities and the failure of all levels of government to enact policies to meaningfully reverse this trend. The affordable housing shortage in New York, particularly for extremely low-income (“ELI”) households, is underscored by stark data revealing the depth of the crisis. According to the National Low Income Housing Coalition’s 2025 report, “The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” there is a glaring disparity in the availability of affordable housing: for every 100 ELI households in New York State, there are merely 36 affordable and available rental units.⁶ In a state where the cost of living far exceeds national averages, and ELI households are defined as those earning at or below the poverty line or 30 percent of the area median income (“AMI”), this gap leaves a vast number of residents in precarious housing situations.

The worsening housing precarity in New York State is evidenced by the growing rent burdens borne by its residents. In New York City metro area, seventy-three percent of ELI households are severely rent-burdened.⁷ This financial strain severely limits the capacity of ELI households to afford other necessities, such as food, healthcare, and childcare. It forces many of them to live in overcrowded conditions – defined as having more than two people per bedroom or more than one person living in a studio apartment. In fact, nearly a quarter (23 percent) of New York City households with at least one child are overcrowded.⁸ Given that living in overcrowded conditions is frequently a precursor to homelessness, such statistics portend greater levels of mass homelessness if this affordable housing crisis continues.

Real commitments are needed by the State to help reverse this trend. We therefore urge the Legislature and Governor to implement the following:

³ U.S. 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>.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ NLIHC Releases the Gap 2025: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, November 20, 2025, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report_2025_english.pdf

⁷ NLIHC Releases the Gap 2025: A Shortage of Affordable Homes,” National Low Income Housing Coalition, November 20, 2025, https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/gap/2025/gap-report_2025_english.pdf.

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “2023 New York City Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings,” 2023, pg. 53, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/about/2023-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>.

Increase Funding for the Housing Access Voucher Program (“HAVP”) to \$250 Million and Make the Program Permanent. HAVP is a critical tool to reduce homelessness across New York State. An expansion of HAVP from the current budget of \$50 million to \$250 million will allow cities and towns across the state to house approximately 10,000 homeless households. Although HAVP largely mirrors Section 8—the program guarantees that participating households pay no more than thirty percent of their income toward rent—it is more inclusive since it is available to people regardless of immigration status or criminal record and is currently not an entitlement program. In addition to stabilizing individuals and families, a permanent HAVP program would provide financial stability to building owners, ensuring a steady stream of rental income from low-income tenants.

Research shows rental vouchers reduce homelessness and housing instability⁹ and promote beneficial outcomes for family well-being, including halving intimate partner violence.¹⁰ Federal Housing Choice Vouchers reduce the poverty rate for recipients by 43 percent¹¹ and provide long-term benefits to households that previously experienced homelessness.¹² State and local rental assistance vouchers have a similarly stabilizing effect: in FY25, the number of families with children in New York City who exited shelter with subsidies – mostly with the City’s local rental assistance voucher, CityFHEPS – increased by 44percent compared to FY24.¹³ The number of subsidized exits for families with children was almost triple that of unsubsidized exits.¹⁴

Despite the wealth of evidence about the positive effects of rental assistance, there are not nearly enough federal and local vouchers to meet the need in New York. Only one in four eligible households receive Housing Choice Vouchers,¹⁵ and localities outside of New York City do not have their own local voucher programs, leaving households with little to no options to help them afford housing. Increasing funding for HAVP and making the program permanent will help address the dire need and give the State and localities more tools to weather federal funding cuts to housing programs.

⁹ Ingrid Ellen Gould, “What Do We Know About Housing Choice Vouchers?,” *The NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy*, July 2018, https://www.furmancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/HousingChoiceVouchers_ige.pdf

¹⁰ Douglas Rice, Major Study: Housing Vouchers Most Effective Tool to End Family Homelessness, Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, July 2015, <https://www.cbpp.org/blog/major-study-housing-vouchers-most-effective-tool-to-end-family-homelessness#:~:text=Major%20Study:%20Housing%20Vouchers%20Most%20Effective%20Tool,to%20report%20of%20domestic%20violence;%20and>

¹¹ Sophie Collyer et al., "Housing Vouchers and Tax Credits: Pairing the Proposal to Transform Section 8 with Expansions to the EITC and the Child Tax Credit Could Cut the National Poverty Rate by Half," *Poverty and Social Policy Brief* 4, no. 9 (2020).

<https://povertycenter.columbia.edu/sites/default/files/content/Publications/Housing-Vouchers-and-Tax-Credits-CPSP-08-03-2023.pdf>

¹² U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research, "Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families," October 2016, <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/family-options-study-full-report.pdf>.

¹³ New York City Mayor's Office, *Mayor's Management Report*, September 2025, pg. 260 https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2025/2025_mmr.pdf.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, "Families Wait Years for Housing Vouchers Due to Inadequate Funding," accessed February 25, 2026, <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/families-wait-years-for-housing-vouchers-due-to-inadequate-funding>.

Remove Restrictions on How NYC Deploys State Rental Supplement Program (“RSP”) Money Retroactive to the Beginning of FY23: In an effort to end or prevent homelessness, RSP was explicitly designed to provide jurisdictions with a rental assistance option for those ineligible for other safety net programs. It is funded again at \$100 million in this year’s proposed budget.¹⁶ However, since the beginning of FY23, NYC has been required to use these funds to cover increases in the State Family Homelessness & Eviction Prevention Supplement (“FHEPS”) program. This effectively means there are fewer funds available for RSP’s intended purpose and in turn fewer households with 0-30 percent AMI receiving RSP to address astronomically high housing costs in NYC. Given that these funds have already been appropriated and are desperately needed, we insist that this restriction be immediately removed retroactive to FY23 and that funds already delivered to the State for FHEPs be restored for RSP use.

Expand Eligibility for State FHEPS and Increase Public Assistance Rent Allowances: Currently, FHEPS is only available to certain families with minor children receiving Cash Assistance who have recently been, or are currently, engaged in eviction proceedings. A limited resource, this tool greatly offsets increased housing costs for recipients given that the voucher covers housing up to 100 percent of FMR. Unfortunately, all other New Yorkers receiving Cash Assistance, including single adults, families without minor children and families with minor children for whom eviction is not an issue, are ineligible for FHEPS. Instead, to the extent such households are not able to access limited Section 8 or CityFHEPS vouchers, they are relegated to the State’s appallingly low public assistance rent allowance which in NYC is \$215 for a single adult or \$400 for a family of three that includes minor children.¹⁷ To address this misalignment with NYC housing costs, the State should allow all Cash Assistance recipients to be eligible for FHEPS or, at a minimum, increase the public assistance rent allowance in order that it also covers the cost of housing up to 100 percent of FMR.

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.

About Coalition for the Homeless (“Coalition”)

Founded in 1981, the Coalition is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless and at-risk New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to address the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fifth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, the right to reasonable accommodations for those with disabilities, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illnesses and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 12 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term, scalable solutions and include: permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals living with HIV/AIDS; job-

¹⁶ New York State. *Aid to Localities Budget*. Fiscal Year 2027, pgs. 544-45.

¹⁷ See N.Y. Comp. Codes R. & Regs. Tit. 18, § 352.3.

training for homeless and low-income women; and permanent housing for formerly homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributed nearly 400,000 hot, nutritious meals to homeless and hungry people on the streets of the city this past year – up from our usual 320,000. Finally, our Crisis Services Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms, and money for medications and groceries. Since the pandemic, we have been operating a special Crisis Hotline (1-888-358-2384) for homeless individuals who need immediate help finding shelter or meeting other critical needs.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right-to-shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981, the City and State entered into a consent decree in Callahan through which they agreed: “The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter.” The Eldredge case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The Callahan consent decree and the Eldredge case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as the independent court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless single adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor the municipal shelter system serving homeless families. In 2017, the Coalition, fellow institutional plaintiff Center for Independence of the Disabled – New York, and homeless New Yorkers with disabilities were represented by the Legal Aid Society and pro-bono counsel White & Case in the settlement of *Butler v. City of New York*, which is designed to ensure that the right to shelter includes accessible accommodations for those with disabilities, consistent with Federal, State, and local laws. During the pandemic, the Coalition worked with the Legal Aid Society to support homeless New Yorkers, including through the *E.G. v. City of New York* Federal class action litigation initiated to ensure Wi-Fi access for students in DHS and HRA shelters, as well as *Fisher v. City of New York*, a lawsuit filed in New York State Supreme Court to ensure homeless single adults gain access to private hotel rooms instead of congregate shelters during the pandemic.