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New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing
February 25, 2026

My name is Kristin Miller, and I am the Executive Director at Homeless Services United. Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing over 55 mission-driven, homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for the expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers. HSU promotes effective solutions to end the crisis of homelessness in New York City. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Over 150,000 New Yorkers are without a home, and 175,000 households are at risk of eviction.¹ Between January 2023 and January 2024, homelessness in New York State increased by 53.1% – more than four times the average rate in the rest of the country.² Not only has federal aid and eviction protections from the pandemic lapsed, but new risks exist as the federal administration makes cuts to the social safety net. HSU is urging the state to play a leading role in protecting New Yorkers from attacks from the federal government by making meaningful yet tactical investments to end homelessness.

Amend the Aid to Localities to eliminate the Adult Shelter Cap and equitably share the cost of shelter between New York State and localities.

The Adult Shelter Cap reimburses New York City for the cost of adult shelters and other services to unhoused people. The Cap has remained flat funded at \$69 million since 2012 and represents less than 5% of the NYC DHS shelter and street outreach costs.³ The City's share has more than tripled from \$244.6 million in 2013 to \$1,181 billion in 2024. Over time, the State has been decreasing the portion of support it gives to NYC, placing a larger burden on New York City. For many years, the amount the State provides to support the Safety Net program was 50/50. Today the state only contributes 29% to all districts across the state, and localities must contribute 71%. Equitably sharing the cost of shelter will ensure sustainability of the

¹ Mann, Chris, and Hannah Tager. "HAVP (Housing Access Voucher Program)." *Win*, April 2025, <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/HAVP-One-Pager.pdf>

² New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. *New Yorkers in Need: Homelessness in New York State*. January 2025, <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>.

³ Salant, C. (2023, March). *How Have City Costs for Homeless Shelters Changed With Shifts in State and Federal Support?* New York City Independent Budget Office. <https://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/how-have-city-costs-changed-with-shifts-in-state-and-federal-support-for-homeless-shelters-march-2023.html>

homeless services' safety net, as it is not just the responsibility of the locality but of all levels of government.

Include a 2.7% Targeted Inflationary Increase (TII) across the human services sector for FY27.

For many crucial housing programs to work, the nonprofits that supply the services and staff have to be able to survive. The Governor's Executive Budget only includes a 1.7% TII for human services program. However, a more comprehensive TII is needed to alleviate the financial strain workers are experiencing throughout the sector and reflect an increase in costs. New York State is experiencing a social services workforce crisis. In a sample survey of HSU members, we found that salary was the highest named reason as to why they were losing qualified shelter staff. What this high-turnover means is that homeless service provider organizations are short staffed due to contract-imposed low wages that do not reflect today's cost of living. Ultimately, this leads to larger caseloads and staff-client ratios.

In addition, we must ensure that this TII applies to the entire human service sector – and not just certain sub-sectors. This can be accomplished by including S1580/A2590 in the enacted budget. We thank the legislature for their previous support and hope the legislature will continue to champion human service workers who safeguard the wellbeing of our most vulnerable New Yorkers.

Invest \$250 million for the Housing Access Voucher Program.

Last year, NYS made an incredible headway with an initial investment of \$50 million for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP), a statewide Section 8-like voucher program that New Yorkers at risk of or experiencing homelessness can use. However, this initial investment can only cover 2,500 vouchers across the entire state. A full investment of \$250 million would provide 13,000 vouchers and could assist up to 30,000 New Yorkers without some of the restrictions that can make Section 8 inaccessible.

Per the NYS Comptroller, over half of all New Yorkers who are tenants are rent burdened (52.4%) and evictions in New York exceed the national average.⁴ This will be an invaluable tool to reduce the number of New Yorkers currently experiencing homelessness, thus creating capacity in our shelter system and preventing more New Yorkers from entering homelessness.

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, and localities outside of New York City

⁴ New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli. New Yorkers in Need: The Housing Insecurity Crisis. February 2024. <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-york-housing-insecurity.pdf>.

do not have their own local voucher programs, leaving households with little to no options to help them afford rent.

We urge the Legislature and Governor to expand HAVP to \$250 million and make the program permanent in the FY27 budget.

Include the Proposed SEQRA changes in the FY27 Budget.

We support the changes to SEQRA laid out in the FY27 Executive Budget. SEQRA imposes significant time and cost, even for categories of projects that are consistently found to have negligible environmental impacts. The proposed changes will speed up the development of new and affordable housing in New York City where it is desperately needed most.