

NEW YORK
STATE
SENATE



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FREDERICK J. AKSHAR, II
52ND SENATE DISTRICT

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MEMBER
RURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

March 9, 2018

The Honorable Eric T. Schneiderman
Office of the Attorney General
The Capitol
Albany, NY 12224-0341

Dear Attorney General Schneiderman:

It was recently brought to light that, under the NYC Department of Social Services' despicable "Special One Time Assistance" program (SOTA), New York City's relocating homeless residents to rural, upstate communities like Broome County.

I'm respectfully calling on you to fully investigate the legality of this morally bankrupt practice, as it appears to violate both the letter and spirit of §148 of the NYS Social Services Law.

Quite frankly, as elected leaders, I believe we have a moral obligation to take care of our most vulnerable residents, not uproot them from their homes, line their pockets with a year's rent and bus them to parts unknown, where they're forced to pick up the pieces and fend for themselves.

The people of the Southern Tier and Broome County support and take care of our own, in good times and bad. We don't ship our struggling neighbors elsewhere and hope for the best. And we shouldn't have to foot the bill for Mayor de Blasio's negligence, malfeasance and failure to provide New York City's indigent with the most basic of human services.

I've enclosed a copy of NYC's SOTA Program FAQs for your review. If you have any additional questions, please contact Broome County DSS Commissioner Nancy Williams at (607) 778-8850.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter.

All the best,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "F. Akshar II".

Frederick J. Akshar II
New York State Senator

Enc.

SPECIAL ONE-TIME ASSISTANCE (SOTA) PROGRAM FAQs

1. What is the Special One-Time Assistance (“SOTA”) program?

The SOTA program will provide one year’s full rent up front and will also allow DSS clients to move within New York City, to other New York State counties, or outside of New York State. SOTA can be accessed by working individuals and families and those who receive SSI, SSD, etc. as long as there is the future ability to make rent payments.

2. When will SOTA become available?

The program started on August 31, 2017.

3. Who is eligible?

Eligibility criteria include the following:

- The client must have entered shelter by September 1, 2017.
- The client must have been in shelter for 90 days or more.
- The client must be working and/or have enough income to make future rent payments. Income includes SSI, SSD, etc.

4. How does the landlord receive this incentive?

SOTA packets submitted to the Office of Client Resources (OCR) must indicate that the entire year’s rent is being requested, and HRA will include the funds in the leasing checks.

5. Can SOTA be used for room rentals?

No. SOTA can only be used for apartments.

6. Is an inspection required when using SOTA?

Yes. Shelter staff will need to conduct a walkthrough of the apartment as they do under CITYFEPS within New York City limits and neighboring New York State and New Jersey counties.

7. What if the apartment fails inspection?

If the apartment fails inspection and corrections are made in a timely manner, the SOTA funds can be received.

8. What resources can we use to coordinate aftercare to ensure permanency is sustained for moves within NYC?

When an individual or family moves within the five boroughs, let them know which Homebase office is located in their community.

9. What happens if a client leaves the apartment during the lease?

The landlord will be obligated to notify HRA within 30 days and return any funds in excess of the client’s residency. If funds are not returned, the City will pursue legal means of recoupment.



10. If a landlord in New York City tries to evict the tenant during the 12-month time frame, how can the tenant get help?

Tenants can be referred by HRA to a lawyer who can represent them in housing court. HRA will work with the lawyer to provide information on the City's rent payments to the court. If an eviction occurs, the landlord will be obligated to return any funds in excess of the client's residency. If funds are not returned, the City will pursue legal means of recoupment.

11. What if a DSS client returns to New York City shelter within the 12-month time frame?

DHS and HRA will work to divert the client back to the apartment. If the unit is viable (e.g., no health/safety issues), the client will be ineligible for shelter due to the existence of other housing.

12. What if an individual or family in NYC is unable to pay their portion after the 12-month time frame?

Only individuals and families who are able to afford their rent going forward will be able to move out using SOTA. If there is an employment set-back or another housing issue, the tenant can go to the local Homebase program or HRA Job Center.

13. How is the ability to pay rent determined?

In order to use SOTA, clients will be required to provide proof of income, and the rent must be at 50% or below of the income levels.

14. Can a client receive SOTA more than once?

No. DSS clients are only eligible for this rental assistance one time.