



**Department of
Social Services**

Human Resources
Administration

Department of
Homeless Services

Steven Banks
Commissioner

**150 Greenwich Street
New York, NY 10007**

929 221 7315

W-1
Rev. 12/16

May 4, 2018

Senator Terrence P. Murray, NYS 40th District
Senator George A. Amedore, Jr., NYS 46th District
Senator Catharine M. Young, NYS 57th District
Senator Frederick J. Akshar, II, NYS 52nd District
Senator James N. Tedisco, NYS 53rd District

Dear Senators:

We write in response to your recent letter, in which you request certain information about New York City's Special One Time Assistance Program, also known as SOTA.

Below are answers to the specific questions you have posed:

Can you provide a general overview of how the SOTA program operates and is the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) the City agency making rent assistance payments?

SOTA is a program that homeless households may use within New York City or, if they choose, to relocate outside the city, either within New York State or to other areas out of state. Please see the attached SOTA FAQs. The New York City Human Resources Administration (HRA) is the City agency that issues the one-time SOTA payments to landlords on behalf of program participants. The SOTA program does not pay ongoing rental assistance.

What is the SOTA program's funding in New York City's Fiscal Year 2018, and what amount of funding does the SOTA program receive from New York State?

The SOTA program is currently funded exclusively by City tax levy dollars. From its launch in September 2017 through March 2018, HRA made \$19.6 million in SOTA payments on behalf of 1,217 households.

How many rent assistance payments have been made since the SOTA program's inception in August 2017?

See above.

Is there a monetary cap on the rent assistance payments made under the program?

There is no cap on the amount of the rent as long as the household has the future ability to pay the rent in that the household's rent will not exceed 50% of the household income.

How many of these payments have been made for housing arrangements in New York State, and to the extent that the privacy of SOTA participants can be respected, can you provide a breakdown by county of such housing arrangements?

Of those who have received SOTA to move out of shelter, about one-third have found housing within the five boroughs of New York City; another ten percent have found housing within New York State beyond the five boroughs; and just over half have found housing outside of New York State. A county-by-county breakdown of where SOTA recipients who are using their grants in New York State outside of New York City is attached as an excel document. Please note that only 115 households out of 1,217 have chosen to use their SOTA grant in New York State outside of New York City. By contrast, as you will see from the additional data we included in the excel document, more than 1,600 households currently in DHS shelter reported a last known address in New York State but outside of New York City.

How do you determine the county in which a SOTA participant is placed?

SOTA is a voluntary program and participants are not "placed" in any particular area or housing. Households who are potentially eligible choose where they wish to view housing options and where to use their grant.

Is a SOTA participant who moves to another county still eligible for the initial rent voucher for placement in the receiving county?

The SOTA program does not provide participants with a voucher for ongoing rent. Once a SOTA participant moves out of New York City, they are no longer eligible for ongoing rental assistance from the City. The SOTA payment is a one-time payment in an amount equivalent to one year of rent, and the household is responsible for the ongoing rent that is due thereafter. Only households whose rent will not exceed 50% of their income are approved for the program.

What procedures are in place to foster coordination between New York City and the county receiving a SOTA recipient, and is the receiving county notified of the SOTA recipient's arrival prior to or at the time of placement in that county?

The City makes any required notifications, for example in certain child welfare cases. At the same time, homeless New Yorkers, like any other New Yorkers,

have a constitutional right to relocate outside the City without notifying officials in their new jurisdiction.

Does the SOTA application process contain a criminal background check, and if so, is there coordination between DHS and the receiving county's law enforcement agencies?

Homeless New Yorkers, like any other New Yorkers, have a constitutional right to travel. There is no criminal background check performed for SOTA participants. As with any other client who informs DHS that they desire to leave shelter for another jurisdiction, in the event a SOTA participant has any residential restriction due to parole or probation, DHS will work with the New York State Department of Correction and Community Supervision (DOCCS) to obtain approval of their move prior to assisting the client to relocate.

We appreciate your interest in the SOTA program. We look forward to working with the Legislature to address the problem of homelessness in our State. While SOTA has proven to be an effective tool for addressing homelessness in New York City, as we have previously noted, this program could be improved by enactment of the Home Stability Support program (A. 8128 2017) that would establish a portable State-funded rental assistance benefit.

If you have any further questions, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Banks', written in a cursive style.

Steven Banks
Commissioner



Human Resources
Administration
Department of
Homeless Services

SPECIAL ONE-TIME ASSISTANCE (SOTA) PROGRAM FAQs

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

The SOTA program provides one year’s full rent up front for eligible DHS 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 based on the household’s rent not exceeding 50% of the household’s income.

2. Who is eligible?

Eligibility criteria include the following:

- Families with children: The household must have been in shelter for at least 90 days.
- Single adults and adult families: The household must have entered shelter on or before March 31, 2018.
- The household must be working and/or have enough income to make future rent payments based on their rent not exceeding 50% of household income. Income includes employment or SSI, SSD, etc.

If the household is moving within New York City (only), it must not be eligible for any federal, State or City rental subsidy.

3. 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 not be more than 50% of household income.

4. How does a household in shelter apply for SOTA?

Case managers and housing specialists identify clients who may be eligible for SOTA. In addition, clients may reach out to their case manager or housing specialist if they believe they may be eligible. Housing specialists assist clients with their housing search and clients may also identify units on their own.

5. Can SOTA be used for room rentals?

No. SOTA cannot be used for room rentals.

6. Is there an apartment review required when using SOTA?

DHS or provider staff conduct walkthroughs if the unit is within New York City. DHS or provider staff will also conduct walkthroughs in neighboring counties where they have identified units or facilitated viewings.

7. What if the apartment fails the review?

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

8. **What aftercare resources are available to clients moving out with SOTA?**

When an individual or family moves within the five boroughs, they are referred to the Homebase office in their community.

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

Per the terms of the SOTA landlord agreement, 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 first year, 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. As per the terms of the landlord agreement, 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 based on the fact that their rent will not exceed 50% of their income will be able to move out using SOTA. If the tenant is in NYC and there is a loss of income or an issue with the housing, the tenant can go to the local Homebase program or HRA Job Center for assistance.

13. **Can a client receive SOTA more than once?**

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

Number of Cases from New York State Counties Outside New York City, March 31, 2018 Census	
NY County	Cases
Albany	32
Broome	21
Cattaraugus	19
Cayuga	22
Chautauqua	11
Chemung	9
Clinton	31
Columbia	6
Delaware	1
Dutchess	174
Erie	33
Essex	10
Franklin	70
Fulton	6
Genesee	4
Greene	55
Herkimer	1
Jefferson	32
Kings	1
Livingston	27
Madison	1
Monroe	16
Nassau	163
Niagara	1
Oneida	112
Onondaga	15
Ontario	1
Orange	53
Orleans	26
Otsego	3
Putnam	16
Rensselaer	6
Rockland	22
Saint Lawrence	44
Saratoga	1
Schenectady	23
Seneca	23
Suffolk	89
Sullivan	40
Tioga	1
Tompkins	2
Ulster	78
Warren	1
Washington	23
Westchester	287
Wyoming	44
Total	1,656

Notes: Counties are based on zip codes from address that clients identify as their last known address (LKA) on DHS temporary housing application (THA).

Destination of SOTA Case moves to New York State Counties Outside New York

NY County	Cases
Albany	2
Broome	8
Delaware	1
Dutchess	7
Erie	1
Herkimer	1
Nassau	2
Oneida	3
Onondaga	1
Orange	4
Oswego	1
Schenectady	1
Suffolk	1
Sullivan	2
Ulster	1
Westchester	79
Total	115