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## **Testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing**

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Hi! My name is Kassi Keith, I am a leader with VOCAL-NY. Thank you for taking my testimony today.

I have been living in the DHS shelter system since February of 2019, I have been placed in the Kings hotel since September of 2021. In those 35 months, the city and state of New York have paid nearly 140,000 dollars to keep me in a shelter that offers no real services.

As of right now there is no program in place that can help get me out of the shelters because despite being a resident of this City for over 36 years, and having over 30 years of work experience, I am still not able to become a citizen of this country.

It is baffling to me that shelters cost almost 4,000 dollars a month, simply because services are not being provided to the clients.

We are being served frozen dinners and canned food every day. We end up getting sicker because of the food. Myself & others are constantly going to the emergency room due to chest pains, elevated BP, low or high blood sugar because the food is unhealthy and we cannot cook healthy meals for ourselves.

My current hotel room gets flooded every time we have heavy rain, 4 times since I moved in. They won't fix the window which is allowing the rain to come into my room. They won't change the carpet or deep clean it either, therefore I'm forced to live in a room filled with mold.

When donations come in, residents are the last to see them. Staff take what they want, and leave us the rest.

I joined VOCAL-NY to fight for the **Housing Access Voucher Program**, which would be the only rental subsidy program available to folks in my situation. If funded at 1 billion dollars It would allow everyone in the shelter system to access a market rate voucher, and ultimately save the state money as people left the shelter.



With a Housing Access Voucher I could get an apartment of my own, where I could cook my own food, come and go as I please, and have guests whenever I wanted. This means that I could focus on getting my mental and physical health in order and get back to work.

Not only would the state save money on the monthly cost of shelters, but I could also participate fully in my community. Without being forced to transfer from one hotel or shelter to another I could put down real roots, and contribute to the economy and civic life of this state in even greater ways, all for less than the cost of keeping me in temporary shelters.

If the state cannot get HAVP passed this year, it will force me to spend another year in a costly shelter, that provides food that is harmful to my health, and offers me no way to get myself into something permanent. Shelter residents have suffered greatly over this pandemic, and we are out of patience. We must prioritize passing and funding HAVP. We must prioritize the dignity and the safety of people like me.