



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

January 6, 2020

The Honorable Corey Johnson
Speaker of the New York City Council
250 Broadway
New York, NY 10007

Dear Speaker Johnson:

The 43 undersigned organizations urge you to support Int. No. 146 to increase the CityFHEPS rent levels to the federally established Fair Market Rent. This change will meaningfully widen the door out of shelter for tens of thousands of homeless New Yorkers by significantly expanding the number of neighborhoods and apartments available to homeless families. With this reform, the CityFHEPS program will become an effective tool for addressing New York City's homelessness crisis—a tool that we desperately need.

At a time when New York City struggles with record level homelessness and a severe affordable housing shortage, an effective rental assistance voucher is sorely needed to help homeless New Yorkers afford a permanent home. Families who leave shelter with a housing subsidy rarely return—only 1.3 percent of families returned within a year, compared to 21.6 percent of families who left for unsubsidized housing. The CityFHEPS rental assistance voucher was launched to help the tens of thousands of New Yorkers currently living in shelter achieve housing stability. However, the program is failing to live up to its potential because its rent levels are set far below the market cost of housing. Instead of quickly leaving for permanent housing, thousands of homeless families spend months in shelter with a CityFHEPS voucher in hand while searching for the nearly non-existent apartments that fall within the program's unrealistically low rent levels.

In August of 2019, there was no neighborhood in the city where the median asking rent for a two-bedroom apartment was affordable at the current CityFHEPS level of \$1,580/ month for a family of three or four people. Not only do families unnecessarily spend months in shelter searching for one of the few apartment vacancies that meet the program's rent levels, many families who cannot secure housing with a CityFHEPS voucher end up leaving shelter for unstable housing options that put them at high risk for returning, including temporarily living with family or friends, known as "doubling up." This continued housing instability carries a fiscal cost and takes a significant toll on family well-being that can be avoided.

CityFHEPS can help families leave shelter more quickly and permanently by increasing the program's allowable rents. Int. No. 146 would increase the CityFHEPS rent levels to the Fair Market Rent (FMR), the federally calculated cost of housing. At the FY2020 FMR of \$1,951/month for a two-bedroom apartment in New York City, the typical homeless family would have access to a larger portion of the rental market. Instead of offering an empty promise, a revised CityFHEPS program would offer families seeking to leave shelter a more effective tool to navigate the rental market and unlock new housing options.

In addition, by making it possible for some families to leave shelter more quickly or avoid a return to shelter, a revised CityFHEPS voucher will substantially decrease shelter spending.



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If a typical homeless family finds an apartment even one month sooner because of the expanded options resulting from a higher paying voucher, the city would save \$6,114 in shelter costs. That savings could pay for over 16 months of the increase in the voucher amount for that family. If a family uses the voucher rather than leaving for a less stable housing option, the city would avoid the cost of an entire new shelter stay for some families (a savings of \$91,170 on average). The shelter costs saved in this case would fund the increase in the voucher amount for over 20 years. Although harder to quantify, the human and social benefits of a stable, permanent home are no less important.

Supporting Int. No. 146 will reduce the number of people in shelter and make a meaningful difference in the lives of tens of the thousands of homeless New Yorkers struggling to find a permanent home they can afford. We are calling on the City Council to exercise its leadership by investing in this proven tool for addressing homelessness.

Sincerely,

Christine C. Quinn
President and CEO, Win

CC: The Members of the New York City Council



Muzzy Rosenblatt
CEO & President
Bowery Residents' Committee
(BRC)



Brenda Rosen
President and CEO
Breaking Ground



Scott Auwarter, LMSW
Assistant Executive Director
BronxWorks



Janelle Farris
Executive Director
Brooklyn Community Services



George Nashak
Executive Director
Care for the Homeless



Beatriz Diaz Taveras
Executive Director
Catholic Charities Community
Services, Archdiocese of New
York



Jennifer March
Executive Director
Citizens' Committee for
Children



Kelly Grace Price
Co-creator
Close Rosie's

win

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David R. Jones
President and Chief Executive
Officer
Community Service Society of
New York



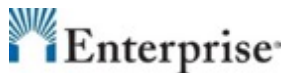
Tony Hannigan
President & CEO
Center for Urban Community
Services



Michelle Neugebauer
Executive Director Cypress
Hills Local Development
Corporation



Reggie Miller
Director
Emergency Shelter Network



Judi Kende
Vice President and New York
Market Leader
Enterprise Community
Partners



Fred Freiberg, Executive
Director
Fair Housing Justice Center,
Inc.



Raysa S. Rodriguez
Assoc. Executive Director for
Policy & Advocacy
Citizens' Committee for
Children



Michelle de la Uz
Executive Director
Fifth Avenue Committee, Inc.



JoAnne Page
President & CEO
The Fortune Society



Emily Miles
Chief Program and Policy
Officer
FPWA



Ted Houghton
President
Gateway Housing



Roderick L. Jones, Ed.D
Executive Director
Goddard Riverside



David Garza
President & CEO
Henry Street Settlement



Catherine Trapani
Executive Director
Homeless Services United



Jose Lopez
Deputy Director
Make the Road



Mary Kay Orr
Executive Director
Nazareth Housing Inc.



Ann Shalof, Executive
Director
Neighborhood Coalition
for Shelter, Inc



Denny Marsh
Executive Director
Neighbors Together



Peter B. Gudaitis, M.Div.
Executive Director & CEO,
New York Disaster Interfaith
Services



Rachel Fee
Executive Director
New York Housing Conference

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Elizabeth Gaynes
President & CEO
The Osborne Association



Áine Duggan, President and
CEO, The Partnership for the
Homeless



Danielle Minelli Pagnotta,
LMSW
Executive Director
Providence House



Mirtha Santana
Vice President of Empowerment
RiseBoro Community
Partnership



The Safety Net Activists

The Safety Net Project at the
Urban Justice Center



Heath I. Bloch, LCSW
Executive Vice President,
Community Health Systems
SCO Family of Services



Laura Mascuch Executive
Director
Supportive Housing Network of
New York (SHNNY)



Matthew Janeczko, Executive
Director & CEO
Sisters of Charity Housing
Development Corporation



Michael Grinthal
Supervising Attorney
Take Root Justice



Michael Mulgrew President
United Federation of
Teachers



Frederick Shack, LMSW
Chief Executive Officer
Urban Pathways



Paulette Soltani
Political Director VOCAL-NY



Paul R. Freitag
Executive Director, Westside
Federation for Senior &
Supportive Housing
(WSFSSH)