



Testimony of Women In Need in Support of Bridging the Gap Social Workers

Thank you to Council Member Dromm, Chair of the Finance Committee, and to Council Member Treyger, Chair of the Education Committee. My name is Jessica Yager, and I am the Vice President of Policy and Planning at Win. I'm here today to thank you for standing up for homeless students and to urge your continued leadership to bring 100 Bridging the Gap social workers to schools.

As one of New York City's largest providers of housing and services for homeless families with children, approximately 3,250 school age children and youth went to bed in a Win shelter last year. Win has nearly 35 years of experience providing the safe housing, critical services, and ground-breaking programs that help homeless families with children break the cycle of homelessness. Based on this extensive experience, Win has firsthand knowledge of the challenges homeless children and youth must overcome to stay on track in school, and of the critical importance of educational attainment for achieving housing stability later in life.

Thanks to the City Council's leadership and investment, Bridging the Gap Social Workers are in schools this year to help homeless students stay on course academically while they contend with the overwhelming and traumatic circumstances associated with homelessness that threaten their learning and socio-emotional well-being. The Council stepped up again this year under the leadership of Speaker Johnson, resulting in the important baselining of funding for a number of social workers. But given the unprecedented homelessness crisis, more is needed.

Last year in New York City, more than 114,000 students experienced homelessness.¹ Homelessness creates several impediments to attending and learning in school. New York City's shelter intake and eligibility process results in missed days of school as families negotiate the appointments, paperwork, and other requirements of ensuring a place to stay. Also, homelessness often means long commutes and disrupted transportation routines for students. Last year, with less than half of families placed in a

¹ See Shapiro, E. (2018, October 15). Homelessness in New York Public Schools Is at a Record High: 114,659 Students. *The New York Times*.

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shelter near their youngest child's school,² thousands of families had to make new arrangements for at least one of their children to get to school in the midst of their housing crisis.

In addition, homelessness often forces students to change schools in the middle year. The New York City Independent Budget Office found that students in temporary housing transfer from one school to another at a rate more than double the New York City average.³ School transfers not only mean loss of consistency in curriculum and academic content, they also mean disconnection from school programs and activities and loss of relationships with peers, teachers, and other school staff that support academic engagement and socio-emotional well-being. Frequent or mid-year transfers create challenges for learning and can leave students feeling isolated in and disconnected from school.

Finally, high residential mobility not only impacts the experience and relationship students have with school; it also impacts conditions outside of school that are necessary for learning. Homelessness interferes with students' ability to maintain study, sleep, and other routines needed for learning because students often have to adapt to the schedules and spaces of a shelter or of the home they are sharing with family or friends.

It is not surprising that homeless students often struggle academically, given how potentially traumatizing these experiences can be and the insecurity, stress, and anxiety of not having a permanent home. In New York City, only about 56 percent of homeless students graduate from high school, compared to an overall citywide graduation rate of 74 percent.⁴ The share of homeless students in third through eighth grade that met grade-level standards in English was less than half the rate for all children in the 2014-2015 school year (14% of homeless students performed at grade level in English compared to 31% of students overall).⁵

Bridging the Gap Social Workers are critical to helping students overcome these odds. School-based social workers in schools with high proportions of homeless students prepare students to engage with services and help children, youth, and families navigate bureaucracy to connect with services. Equally important, social workers can be the needed sources of support in school to help a child remain engaged or successfully integrate into a new setting. Bridging the Gap Social Workers provide students with a

² Mayor's Office of Operations. (February 2019). *Mayor's Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 2019*. Department of Homeless Services, pp. 187 -192.

³ NYC Independent Budget Office. (October 2017) *New York City by the Numbers: How many students either exit or transfer within the NYC school system in a single year?*

⁴ Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness (December 2018) *Bridging the Graduation Gap: Why school stability is key for homeless high school students*.

⁵ Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness. *On the Map: The Atlas of Student Homelessness in New York City*.

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safe place to explore and get help with the academic, social, and emotional challenges they face. For children and youth experiencing the instability and stress of homelessness, the value of this resource focused on supporting academic performance and well-being at school cannot be overstated.

Thank you again to the Council for your attention to this important issue.