

win

MAY 2021

# Every Family Housed

A Blueprint to End  
Family Homelessness  
for the Next Mayor

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# Letter from the CEO

**N**ext year, a new mayor will arrive at City Hall to direct a recovery unprecedented in size and scope. The city will undoubtedly prioritize helping families torn apart by the lives we lost, workers displaced from businesses that closed forever, and neighborhoods that have been hardest hit by the pandemic. There will be a focus on bringing New York City back.

But, disturbingly, COVID-19 did more than damage us. It exposed what can happen when we allow inequality to persist. In this pandemic, our city's most vulnerable neighbors have suffered most acutely. Our death toll, our job losses, our vaccination rates, and our rates of school attendance are all tied to racial and socioeconomic gaps that are widening every day.

That's why this crucial moment calls for the next mayor to lead more than a comeback. New Yorkers don't want to go back in time. To rebuild our city to be stronger, we must focus on helping to close the inequities that COVID-19 revealed.

It's a road that starts with ending family homelessness. An average of over 19,200 kids went to bed with their families in a city shelter each night last year; and 94 percent of these families are Black or Latinx. The Barclays Center is not big enough to fit all of the kids who slept in shelter last year.

The pandemic did not create the homelessness crisis, it simply exacerbated the impact of New York City's broken approach to helping families in need. Here at Win, we often hear from families living in our shelters how they feel trapped in a terrible and traumatic cycle marked by housing instability, dehumanizing treatment from the social service system, and repeated stays in shelter. This cycle of homelessness has been shaped by systemic racism and a lack of resources for underserved communities, disproportionately impacting Black and Latinx families often headed by women.

The new administration needs to end the past approach of simply managing the number of families in shelter on a given night and, instead, address the structural forces that shape the paucity of our social service infrastructure and leave some families more vulnerable to housing instability than others.

In the pages that follow, we lay out a bold plan the next mayor can implement to correct errors of the past and create a city where every child, regardless of race, has a home and the opportunity to thrive. This includes a blueprint to: reorganize how city government is structured to end family homelessness, reorient housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers; recalibrate benefits and social services to prevent homelessness and create opportunity; and redesign homeless services to be customer service oriented.

Ending family homelessness will be an ambitious undertaking, but the families in shelter deserve nothing less. In a city as big-hearted as New York, it is our moral imperative to hold all the candidates and the next mayor to this standard.

**Sincerely,**



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Christine C. Quinn".

**Christine C. Quinn**

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# Introduction

**A**n average of over 19,200 children went to bed with their families in a New York City Department of Homeless Services shelter each night in 2020.<sup>1</sup> Ninety-four percent of these families are Black or Latinx.<sup>2</sup>

Those alarming statistics tell only part of the story. For many homeless families, that night was just one of many nights spent in a temporary place they could not call home. This is the crisis that New York City's next mayor faces: families experiencing a traumatizing cycle of housing instability that is characterized by years spent in temporary, insecure housing arrangements, and marked by costly, repeated stays in homeless shelter. And it is a cycle that disproportionately ensnarls and threatens the futures of Black and Latinx families.

The conditions of poverty that make Black and Latinx New Yorkers disproportionately vulnerable to experiencing and being trapped by homelessness are the tangible result of systemic racism and sexism. Communities of color have historically been and continue to be denied fair compensation, working conditions, and recognition for their role in generating wealth and providing needed services. And the tools for economic mobility, such as home ownership, are out of reach for many because of systemic disadvantages and deliberate policy choices. Not only have racism and sexism created the conditions for homelessness as we know it, they continue to be found in the distrust, moralistic judgments, and barriers and limitations on assistance built into the rules and processes of the very system set up to respond to homelessness.

The goal of the current system is to reduce the number of families in shelter. But managing the shelter census is the wrong goal for New York City. Focusing on shelter and on the numbers on a given

night masks the true, humanitarian nature of the family homelessness crisis: a traumatic, damaging, multi-year cycle of housing instability that deprives extremely low-income families of the security, safety, and consistency that every adult, child, and youth needs in order to thrive.

Goals dictate actions. And the wrong goal has yielded the wrong actions on family homelessness. The wrong goal has left us a siloed government structure that is not equipped to end homelessness, and with overly bureaucratic programs and services that limit access to assistance instead of providing it. Managing shelter numbers has begotten a system that churns families through the cycle of homelessness, instead of providing the tools and services for breaking it. Rather than being led by shelter census numbers, the next mayor must focus on long-term stability for families. The interventions that flow from this goal will address the structural barriers and underlying forces that leave families vulnerable to the cycle of homelessness.



**Goals dictate actions. And, the wrong goal has yielded the wrong actions on family homelessness.**



New York City's next mayor can and must end family homelessness as we know it—it is an urgent matter of racial justice and equity; it is a humanitarian crisis. In the next pages, we lay out a bold and holistic plan

the next mayor can implement to correct errors of the past and create a city where every child, regardless of race, has a home and the opportunity to thrive. We ask the candidates: is status-quo the legacy you want to leave as mayor of New York City? If not, all the information you need to know can be found in this report.

## Report Sources

The information presented in the following pages is drawn from a variety of sources. External sources are cited at the end in the references section. Data presented on Win families is drawn primarily from CARES, New York City's homeless management information system, which is administered by the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS). To protect client privacy and confidentiality, access is limited, and service providers can only access information on the clients they serve. Win gathers additional information regarding income, employment, education, and participation in Win services and programs. These data are housed in the Win IMPACT Network, Win's comprehensive intranet data warehouse and metrics system.

In addition to these sources, Win's Policy and Planning department facilitated virtual insight groups with over 100 Win clients and staff to learn directly from the expertise and lived experience of those most directly impacted by homelessness and housing policy. In the groups, participants were asked to share their insights on the root causes of homelessness as well as their thoughts on what changes they would like to see from the upcoming mayoral administration.

Participation in these groups was completely voluntary and confidential. Participants were drawn from across Win shelters and from Win permanent supportive housing, and included a broad cross-section of personal histories and experiences. Client

participants each brought their unique perspective and experiences as parents struggling with housing, child care, employment stability, meeting their own and their children's health and learning needs, and of navigating various social service systems. Staff participants were drawn from all levels and seniority of direct service workers, and included case managers, social workers and clinicians, supervisors, and directors, and represented both newcomers to Win, as well as those with many years of service at Win. In total, four staff groups and five client groups, and over 100 Win clients and staff members, provided insights that shaped the recommendations in this report.

# EVERY FAMILY HOUSED



**Reorganize** how city government is structured to end family homelessness



**Reorient** housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers



**Recalibrate** benefits and expand services to prevent homelessness



**Redesign** homeless services to be trauma-informed and human centered

## ACCOUNTABILITIES

Reduce the number of families with children who apply for shelter by half.

Reduce the number of DOE students who qualify as homeless by half.

Increase the number of families who leave shelter for permanent, subsidized housing.

End the use of commercial hotels to shelter families with children.

Substantially reduce the number of severely rent burdened households in the city.

## GOAL

Every Family Housed



# Blueprint to End Family Homelessness



**Reorganize how city government is structured to end family homelessness.**

- Make ending homelessness a top priority.
- Direct the first deputy mayor to lead a cross-agency effort.
- Involve people who have experienced homelessness.



**Reorient housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers.**

## **Reform CityFHEPS:**

- Increase maximum rents to match Section 8 vouchers.
- Allow families to use CityFHEPS to save their homes.
- Make CityFHEPS easier to navigate.
- Root out source of income discrimination.

## **Target affordable housing resources to end homelessness:**

- Prioritize deeply affordable and supportive units.
- Invest to save NYCHA.



**Recalibrate benefits and expand services to prevent homelessness.**

## **Recalibrate benefits and expand services to prevent homelessness:**

- Recalibrate public benefit programs to create opportunity.
- Expand access to public assistance programs.
- Create a bridge out of housing vulnerability.
- Provide support to undocumented immigrants.

## **Ensure access to meaningful social services to prevent and overcome homelessness:**

- Create financial tools nonprofits need to develop shelters.
- Improve and expand workforce development programs.
- Increase supports for finding housing.
- Fund specialized, shelter services for children and youth.
- Provide mental health and psychosocial services.
- Ensure every family receives trauma informed care.
- Link families leaving shelter to supports in the community.
- Invest in the human services workforce.



**Redesign homeless services to be trauma-informed and human centered.**

- Reform shelter eligibility and intake for families.
- Make navigating NYC's social service agencies easier.
- Redefine the metrics DHS uses to measure success.

# The Family Homelessness Landscape the Next Mayor Will Face

Despite the focus on reducing the number of families in shelter, the number of homeless families and children remains unacceptably high because the current approach does not end the cycle of homelessness. While the census has dropped, the Barclays Center does not have the capacity to hold the nearly 29,000 children who slept in a DHS shelter on an average night in 2020. Below, we explore recent trends and outline the homelessness landscape the next mayor will inherit.

## Citywide Trends

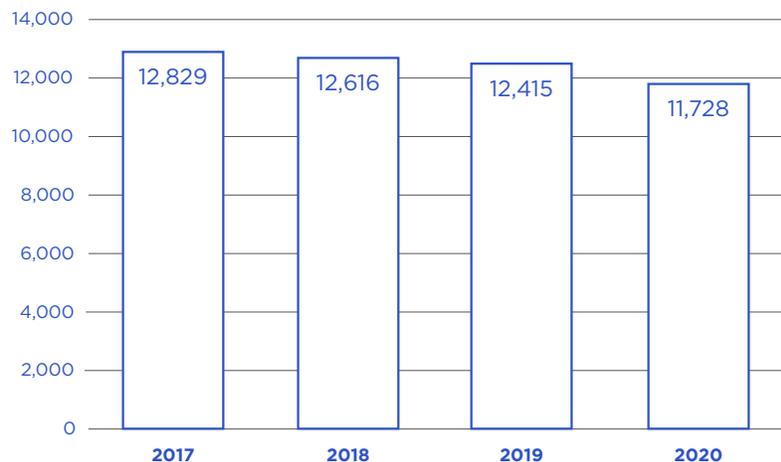
After three consecutive years of increases, we see the first decrease in the number of families in shelter in 2018. The number of families with children in shelter has decreased in each of the last three years (Figure 1). The average number of families in shelter each night was eight and half percent lower in 2020 than in 2017. Between 2019 and 2020, the downward trend in the family shelter census accelerated, likely attributable to concern about coming into shelter during a pandemic and to the eviction moratorium that has allowed people to stay in their homes. During this period, the number of families with children applying for shelter also decreased.<sup>3</sup>

Interventions put in place by the City Council and the de Blasio Administration have likely contributed to the decrease in the number of families in shelter since 2017, a measure that is a function of both how many families enter and how many exit.

The launch of Universal Access to Counsel, which greatly expanded tenant access to legal representation in Housing Court, has likely supported the decrease in entrances to shelter, given that eviction is among the most common reasons families enter shelter. However, the drop in shelter entrances was also likely driven by barriers to accessing shelter erected during the period; notably, in 2016, DHS reinstated the practice

FIGURE 1

## Number of Homeless Families with Children in DHS Shelter on an Average Night



Source: NYC Open Data, DHS Daily Report [dataset]. Note: Years refer to NYC fiscal years (July–June).

of investigating the housing history of families applying to shelter to identify previous residences they might return to instead of entering shelter. This “diversion” tactic creates additional documentation requirements, wait times, and other barriers to shelter placement. It is effective at reducing the number of families entering shelter, but is not conducive to ensuring families in need have access to housing that is safe or stable. This is one example of how the misguided focus on managing homelessness fails to end homelessness.

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**Moving families out without the supports needed for long-term success perpetuates the cycle of homelessness.**

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On the exit side of the census equation, the increase in exits can likely be attributed to various rental assistance programs launched during the de Blasio administration in response to the record-breaking number of families in shelter, which took off with the Bloomberg administration’s discontinuation of the Advantage rental assistance voucher. However, many of the programs are structured to get families out of shelter, but do almost nothing to ensure that families can maintain stable housing permanently. The Special One Time Assistance program (SOTA) and Pathway Home (launched as LINC VI) are examples. Both programs provide 12 months of rental assistance, along with incentives for landlords and hosts to participate in the program. At the end of the 12 months, the family becomes responsible for the entire rent amount. The implicit assumption is that a homeless family will improve their financial situation within 12 months so as to be able to afford rent when assistance ends. Yet neither program provides income building supports, child care subsidies, or other social services that would make

this possible. Not surprisingly, Win families who left using SOTA in 2019 were six times more likely to return to shelter than families who left with other subsidies. Moving families out without the supports needed for long-term success is one of the ways that the current system’s myopic focus on short-term census reductions perpetuates the cycle of homelessness. This is the devastating outcome of being guided by the wrong goal of managing homelessness instead of setting out to end it.

Yet the Mayor’s performance metrics do not tell this story. Another symptom of the short-sighted approach to family homelessness, the official return to shelter rate only counts families who return within one year of leaving. Therefore, a family who returns *after* 12 months of rental assistance is not captured in the performance metrics as a return and, as such, a reflection of the approach’s failure to support housing stability. On the contrary, the move out of shelter into a “permanent” home is reflected as a program success. But the failure is laid bare by this fact: over 82 percent of families in Win shelter have been in a city shelter before.

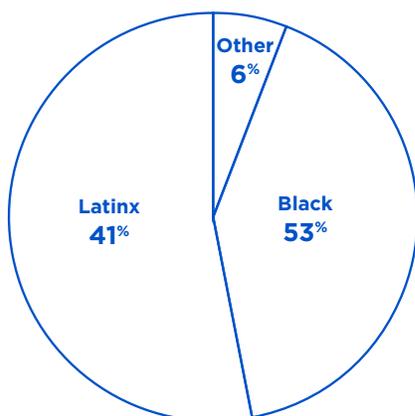
Performance indicators the city reports in the Mayor’s Management Report also bring concerning news: the outlook for finding permanent housing has worsened for families in shelter. The average length of stay in shelter for families was nine percent longer in 2020 than in the previous year, meaning that families with children in shelter now can expect to be there for an average of almost 15 months,<sup>4</sup> a time that spans more than one school year. This is particularly concerning given that the average school attendance rate of students in shelter has dropped to 71 percent during the pandemic,<sup>5</sup> a level that seriously compromises learning, threatens academic progress, and contributes to the cycle of homelessness. And for the nearly one third of children in Win shelter who are too young for school, a 15-month stay is at least a third of their entire life experience.

Length of stay in shelter may be increasing because leaving for permanent housing has gotten more difficult, as additional indicators imply. The number of families who left shelter for a permanent home in 2020 decreased by 12.5 percent when compared to 2019, and a significantly smaller percent left for subsidized housing (60 percent of those who left for permanent housing did so with a subsidy in 2020, compared to 75 percent in 2019).<sup>6</sup> The implications of this can be devastating for families, and for the city; families who leave shelter for unsubsidized housing return to shelter in less than a year at a rate nearly twenty times higher than families who leave with a subsidy.<sup>7</sup>

The city does not include an important indicator in its city-wide reporting of performance: the racial demographics of families in shelter; instead, these data are found in a separate, DHS specific “Data Dashboard.” Since data were first made available in 2012, more than half of the families in shelter have been Black and over a third Latinx.<sup>8</sup> Over time, the proportion of Black families has decreased slightly, as the number of Latinx families has increased almost proportionately. As of December 2020, 53 percent of families in shelter were Black and 41 percent were Latinx (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2

### Share of Families with Children in DHS Shelters by Race, December 2020



Source: NYC Open Data. DHS Data Dashboard. [dataset]

## Win Families

In addition to looking at system-wide performance and demographic data, when crafting solutions it is also important to understand the circumstances of homeless families—for this we look to Win data about the families we serve. The vast majority of families in Win shelter are headed by a single mother. The typical Win mom is in her late thirties, has a high school diploma or less, and is raising two children. Nearly three-quarters of families had been at their previous address for less than a year, and more than half (57 percent) of families came to Win from living with family or friends; only 23 percent came from a home of their own. A startling 82 percent of families in Win shelter in 2020 had been in a New York City homeless shelter before.

Families in Win shelter are extremely low-income; not surprisingly, most commonly finding work in the low-wage occupations of home health care, food service, and retail. The leading reason Win families were found eligible for shelter in 2020 was domestic violence (33 percent), followed by eviction (25 percent), overcrowding (18 percent), and returning to shelter less than 30 days after leaving (11 percent). More than half of Win moms have a diagnosed medical or mental health condition, and nearly a quarter are found to be dealing with one or more: moderate to severe depression and/or anxiety, and/or PTSD. Families arrive in shelter in financial, psychosocial, and housing crisis.

These data make plain that family homelessness is a gender and racial justice issue. Black and Latinx New Yorkers are the most vulnerable to homelessness because of systemic racism and sexism in our economy and housing market. This race-based economic vulnerability has been even further exacerbated by the pandemic. Women and low-income Black and Latinx workers of color have lost income and unemployment as a result of the pandemic at a higher rate than white workers.<sup>9</sup>

In New York City, 68 percent of Latinx residents and 67 percent of Black residents reported losing income as a result of the pandemic, compared to 45 percent of white residents.<sup>10</sup> The preexisting inequality and need, magnified by the COVID shock, has resulted in almost unimaginable housing instability. It is estimated that between 640,000 and 1.18 million households are at risk of eviction in New York State.<sup>11</sup> Much of the pandemic's impact on the homeless services system may still be to come as the protections against evictions lift. The housing and homelessness landscape facing the next mayor could not be more dire

As the experience of Win families shows, homelessness is a cycle of housing instability and trauma that entraps families, the majority

of whom are Black and Latinx and headed by women. The institutional racism and sexism that lead to homelessness manifest in all facets of the systems that touch the lives of homeless families: exclusionary dynamics in the housing market, public benefits premised on the concept of the "deserving" poor, the distrust and dehumanizing treatment levied on families applying for shelter, and countless other policies and everyday microaggressions.

These glaring truths reveal the distressing state of (in)equity in New York City. The next mayor must reckon with the failures of past approaches and the damage done by them, and begin the process of healing by ending family homelessness.

## The Cycle of Homelessness

### Families in Win shelter in 2020

#### TEMPORARY ARRANGEMENTS

**56%**

of families came to Win from staying with family or friends

**16%**

came to Win from another shelter

#### FREQUENT MOVES

**62%**

of families had been at their previous address for less than a year

Nearly **33%**

had been at their previous address less than 3 months

#### REPEATED SHELTER STAYS

Nearly **82%**

of families had been in a NYC shelter before

# How the Next Mayor Can End Family Homelessness as We Know It

New York City's response to family homelessness had been misguided in its focus on shelter, and ineffective in its fractured and parsimonious approach, providing short-sighted interventions that prove inadequate and cost more in the long run. In short, the city's goal has been to manage homelessness rather than to end it.

As the homeless census grew, so has the political focus on bringing that census down. Because the political story and focus have been whether the number of families in shelter went up or down last night, month, or year, government's focus has been on short-term and short-sighted shelter reductions. At the same time, the city has struggled to meet the demand for beds, and thereby meet its legal obligation to provide shelter. This obligation has been another substantial pressure toward policies that provide band-aid solutions. This short-term focus is manifest in shelter policies that turn away people in need, benefits that can only be accessed when shelter is imminent, and incentives to move families out of shelter, even if it leaves them vulnerable to future homelessness. As a result, many families cycle in and out of shelter, never getting the assistance they need to remain stably housed.

Given the structural and political forces that favor quick fixes, it will take long-term vision and leadership on the part of the next mayor to lead a new response to homelessness—one that is laser focused on helping families retain or regain stable, permanent housing they can afford. In other words, we must dismantle the system of churning and prolonged housing instability that has plagued low-income New Yorkers for far too long.

The next mayor must end family homelessness by correcting the fundamental problems with the past approach:



**Reorganize how city government is structured to end family homelessness.**



**Reorient housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers.**



**Recalibrate benefits and social services to prevent homelessness and create opportunity.**



**Redesign homeless services to be trauma-informed and human centered.**

These corrections will require leadership and commitment from the next mayor. Restructuring how the government responds to homelessness will require breaking down silos and changing how work is done, which will be met with resistance. Reorienting housing solutions and recalibrating benefits and services will both require investment of city dollars, which will meet opposition from budget conservatives and will entail the arduous work of securing additional state and federal funding. And redesigning homeless services to be human centered and trauma-informed will require changes to ways of doing business that are familiar and comfortable to those working in the system. Ending family homelessness amounts to no less than a paradigm shift of a multi-billion dollar system.



## Reorganize how city government is structured to end family homelessness.

The reorganization of how city government is structured around homelessness is the jumping off point from which all other changes can be successful. The first step the next mayor must take is a fundamental shift at the highest levels of city government, which is the prerequisite for changes and investments in the rest of the system. This shift must do two basic things: 1) prioritize ending homelessness and 2) recognize that this must be a cross-agency effort. In short, the next mayor must make ending homelessness a top goal and must establish a new paradigm for interagency collaboration to achieve it.

Currently, a family at risk of homelessness or experiencing homelessness likely interacts with a wide range of government agencies—the Human Resources Administration for assistance with government benefits; the Department of Homeless Services for shelter; NYCHA and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development as they apply for affordable housing; the Department of Education and the Department of Youth and Community Development for education and other resources for their children; the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene to access health and healthy food programs; Health & Hospitals Corporation for medical care; the municipal court system for housing court and family court cases, among others. These agencies and systems are siloed. Even the housing agencies and the Department of Homeless Services report to different deputy mayors. Each of these agencies has a critical mandate. But, those mandates become much harder to achieve, in every instance, when a family is homeless or housing insecure. Housing stability is the foundation of educational success, health, job security, and financial well-being. Thus, these agencies have an opportunity and an incentive to help families avoid homelessness. Each agency must be part of the solution.

In the next administration, each agency that interacts with low-income families must be called into the shared goal of ending homelessness. And, each touchpoint between these government agencies and low-income communities—schools, employment centers, health clinics, Homebase sites, family and housing courts, to name some—should be able to identify people who are at risk of homelessness to connect them to public benefits and prevention resources as well as holistic social service supports to ensure long-term stability and address all facets of risk.

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**The next mayor must direct the first deputy mayor to end homelessness as we know it and deputize them to lead a cross-silo effort to achieve this.**

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While each agency that regularly works with families on the brink of homelessness must be part of this solution, this is only feasible and efficient if they work together actively towards this goal. The next mayor must direct the first deputy mayor to end homelessness as we know it and deputize them to lead a cross-silo effort to achieve this. City Hall should create a cross-agency team to help each agency incorporate addressing housing instability into its mandate and support agency cooperation to further this goal. This cross-agency team should not be an emergency taskforce or short-term working group. It should be a permanent cross-agency collaboration that results in holistic and long-term solutions. The team should be comprised of relevant deputy mayors, agency heads, and key staffers. The mayor, working with this cross-agency team, must set a holistic agenda for policy

reform and budgetary requirements to achieve this goal, charge agencies with enacting that agenda, and ensure implementation as well as course-correction as the plan moves forward. The team must also direct and monitor the administrative work necessary to ensure the success of this effort, including establishing both individual agency and cross-agency goals for this effort; determining what metrics will be used to measure needs and outcomes and to fine-tune and adjust; reorienting existing government metrics and contracts to focus on ending, rather than simply managing, homelessness; and identifying what resources are needed to support this effort.

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**People who have experienced homelessness must be trusted partners in this effort**

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People who have experienced homelessness must be trusted partners in this effort, and compensated as expert consultants, special advisors, or staff members, for their work toward a better homeless services system. They have the expertise needed to identify gaps and failures in the current system, and can provide invaluable insight about what is needed to help families and individuals avoid homelessness, and where those interventions will be most successful. And, government agencies need to start seeing themselves as accountable to their customers. In general, this results in more effective services and a better user experience, which will translate into better outcomes. Developing a meaningful role for people with lived experience in both the work of the cross-agency team described above and the on-going monitoring and refining of the administration's efforts must be a top priority.



## **RECAP**

### **Reorganize city government to end family homelessness.**

- Make ending homelessness a top priority.
- Direct the first deputy mayor to lead a cross-agency effort to achieve this goal.
- Meaningfully involve people who have experienced homelessness.



## Reorient housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers.

Lack of affordable housing is one of the primary drivers of family homelessness in New York City. Families facing homelessness or already in shelter need access to subsidies to bring housing security within reach. Housing subsidies have repeatedly proven to be the key to stability for low-income renters. To end family homelessness as we know it, the next mayor must commit to investing in the tools that are proven to keep families stably housed.

In New York City, we have devoted too few resources to the affordability problem, given the substantial human and public costs of housing instability and homelessness. While we are hopeful that the new federal administration will be able to achieve its ambitious housing goals, including universal Section 8 vouchers, New York City cannot sit idly by waiting for others to act. The next mayor must hit the ground running on day one with a housing plan that centers ending homelessness, makes substantial investments in housing that is affordable for the lowest-income New Yorkers, and addresses existing rules that prevent many of the city’s programs from making a more permanent dent in our housing and homelessness crisis for the most vulnerable.



**On day one, the next mayor must have a housing plan that centers ending homelessness.**



To make the city’s housing plan truly a plan to end homelessness, the next mayor’s housing agenda must reform CityFHEPS to make it an effective

homelessness prevention tool, and prioritize people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness for the city’s housing resources.



### Reform CityFHEPS.

To meaningfully address the city’s homelessness crisis, the city must commit to improving its rental voucher program. New York City needs a rental voucher that is widely available to low-income households that need it and that is effective enough to offer meaningful housing opportunities and choice for recipients.

#### Increase CityFHEPS Maximum Rents to Match Section 8 Vouchers

The CityFHEPS rental voucher provides families with a tool to leave shelter for permanent, private-market housing. Yet, the maximum rents the voucher pays are hundreds of dollars below market rents in New York City. There is not a single neighborhood where the median asking rent matches the CityFHEPS maximum rent, of the approximately 100 neighborhoods for which StreetEasy collects data.<sup>12</sup> As a result, families are in shelter for months, and in some cases years, while they search for an affordable unit. And, in many cases, families leave shelter for less stable situations because they are unable to use their voucher.

Of Win families who had access to CityFHEPS vouchers and left shelter in 2019, only 28 percent left using one. Thirty-two percent left for placements that have a much higher return-to-shelter rate, including through the Special One Time Assistance voucher (SOTA) and family reunification.

The solution to this problem is to increase the CityFHEPS maximum rent amounts to the same level as the federal Section 8 voucher, which is based on Fair Market Rent (FMR). HUD determines the FMR each year based on rent levels in the metro area. In 2021, a Section 8 voucher for a 2-bedroom apartment in New York City is \$2,217/month. Compared to the maximum rent allowed under CityFHEPS for a 3- or 4-person household (\$1,580/month), this would increase the maximum rent by \$637/month. This would significantly broaden access to many neighborhoods for voucher holders. In a typical month in 2020, there were 25 neighborhoods where the median asking rent for a 2-bedroom was affordable with the Section 8 rate.

Increasing the CityFHEPS voucher amount would help families leave shelter more quickly, reducing shelter and hotel costs to the city. And by moving out with the highly stabilizing factor of a housing subsidy, families are unlikely to return to shelter. This reform will result in substantial shelter savings, which can offset the cost of the voucher increase (Table 1).

In addition to being fiscally sound, increasing the CityFHEPS voucher is also a moral duty. A higher voucher amount will not only create housing opportunity for homeless families, the majority of whom are Black and Latinx, it will create housing choice. By setting the rent limits far below the cost of housing in New York City, the city is effectively

segregating low-income Black and Latinx families into a handful of neighborhoods. If CityFHEPS rents are not raised, the program will continue to contribute to our city’s serious, long-standing housing segregation problem rather than being part of the solution. Thanks to the leadership of Council Member Stephen Levin, there is a bill pending in the City Council that would effectuate this change—Intro. No. 146-2018.<sup>13</sup> We urge the next administration to support this legislation and this reform, rather than continue to operate a program that is designed to fail.

**Allow Families to Use CityFHEPS to Save their Homes.**

To tackle the homelessness crisis, a key component of the next mayor’s plan must be dramatically expanding in-community access points for housing assistance. To prevent homelessness, we need to more effectively provide assistance to people *before* they become homeless. Thankfully, the city already has a proven mechanism for such outreach points—Homebase. Through the Homebase program, the city partners with community-based organizations to provide homelessness prevention services and resources. But, in order for prevention services to work, there need to be solutions available to help stabilize people in their homes. And, because of current limitations on housed people accessing CityFHEPS, too often families are not eligible for the help they need until it is too late.

**TABLE 1**  
**Estimated Shelter Savings from Decreased Time**  
**in Shelter for 3- or 4-Person Household**

<b>Time Avoided in Shelter</b>	<b>Shelter Cost Saved</b>	<b>Months of Increase Funded for 3 or 4 Person Household</b>
1 month	\$6,114	10 months
2 months	\$12,228	19 months
15 months	\$91,710	144 months (12 years)

Under the CityFHEPS rules, those currently housed are eligible for the voucher if they meet one of five very narrow sets of circumstances. The widest of the categories still imposes significant restrictions: a family must be facing eviction AND have been previously homeless, live in a rent-controlled unit, or be under the care of adult protective services.<sup>14</sup> These criteria leave many families on the brink of homelessness out in the cold. As a result, families lose their housing and end up in shelter, where they become eligible for the voucher after 90 days, only to get a voucher to go back out to the rental market to find housing again.

**Because of current limitations on housed people accessing CityFHEPS, too often families are not eligible for the help they need until it is too late.**

CityFHEPS should be available to help families keep their homes before they are facing eviction and even if they have not been previously homeless. Evictions are a leading cause of shelter entry among families in Win shelter. Families are evicted from their homes, enter shelter, and wait for months to receive a voucher and find affordable housing using it. Each month a family spends in shelter costs the city over \$6,000. If those very same vouchers were available to people to help them keep their apartment or to help them find new housing in their neighborhood, not only would we see a meaningful reduction in the shelter census, we would also move towards a social service system that actually provides assistance where and when people need it, rather than forcing people into homelessness in order to get help.

**Make CityFHEPS easier for tenants and landlords to navigate.**

After the almost universal concern about the low rent levels, the next most common challenge to using CityFHEPS results from the slow and

inconsistent administration of the program. The problems are numerous. Backlogs and long processing times for initial applications, and burdensome requests to resubmit documentation, result in unnecessary time spent lingering in shelter. The delays cause landlords to lose interest, given unclear communications from the city and processing times that often exceed the one month for which landlords are compensated for holding a unit. Lack of clarity and communication from HRA also slow down applications because staff and clients do not have a direct, real time helpline to resolve issues or receive updates on application status. This has been especially problematic with the roll out of the city's new online application system. In addition to working to fix flaws in the system, the city needs to provide support to its users.

**CityFHEPS is hard for families and landlords to use because of:**

- Long application processing times
- Confusing documentation requirements
- Lack of communication and support from HRA
- Delays issuing rent payments

Delays can also result in clients losing units, as landlords get frustrated with delays in receiving final approval, even with the landlord incentives. And, once families are in units, our staff continue to get calls from landlords about late payments from the city and difficulty communicating with the Human Resources Administration. In short, the program has numerous administrative problems that make participation onerous for families and the staff helping them, and for landlords. For a homeless family searching for housing with a city rental voucher that pays hundreds of dollars below market rents, the additional burden of poor program administration is really the last thing they need.

CityFHEPS will only work if landlords are willing to take the voucher. Even with legal protections against source of income discrimination, if landlords are unwilling to take the voucher because working with the city is too costly, this program is destined to fail. While this administrative issue may not be as attention grabbing as voucher amounts or the next plan for NYCHA, it is no less important. If CityFHEPS is to succeed, it must be designed to be user-friendly for recipients and for the landlords that the program relies upon to meet its goals.

### **Root out source of income discrimination for all voucher holders.**

Families searching for housing with vouchers face a host of challenges—a voucher that pays far below market rents; a program that is inhospitable to landlords and challenging for families to navigate; and many landlords who illegally discriminate against renters. Families experiencing homelessness may face discrimination for a number of reasons: because they are applying for housing while living in a homeless shelter; because homeless families are disproportionately likely to be Black or Latinx and, therefore, face racial discrimination in the housing market; because homeless families are often headed by single mothers, who face sexist and moralistic attitudes, and because landlords don't want to rent to households with children. The families in Win shelters encounter landlord aversion to housing vouchers all the time; and recent

reporting by NY1 (reporting on discrimination against CityFHEPS voucher holders) and *The New York Times* (reporting on discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders) confirmed that they are not alone.<sup>15</sup> “We don't take programs” is a near constant refrain. And, this is the case despite both local and state laws prohibiting this form of discrimination.

Despite a city law, a new state law, and investment in enforcement resources, source of income discrimination persists. More resources and a more proactive and expansive approach to enforcement and education are needed to stem this pernicious behavior—particularly to do the involved testing work critical to rooting out housing discrimination. Distressingly, after creating and staffing an income discrimination unit at the New York City Commission on Human Rights, the de Blasio administration's hiring freeze has prevented back-fill hires, leaving the unit with only three employees.<sup>16</sup> It is laughable to think that a mere three people can tackle a problem of this scale. The next administration must put meaningful resources into the Commission to address this problem. At full capacity, the unit was staffed at five – the next mayor must at least double this staffing level. There is little question that this is money well spent because the alternative is for the city to pay the (very costly) price of longer shelter stays, as families struggle to find landlords willing to accept their vouchers.



In the next administration, the Commission on Human Rights must create mechanisms that make violation of the law more costly for real estate professionals, and adopt a strategy most likely to grab the attention of the industry. In a city with two million rental units, the Commission will never be able to prosecute each individual perpetrator. Therefore, its goal must be an enforcement mechanism that will serve as much as a deterrent to others as a punishment for confirmed perpetrators. This can be accomplished with harsh and well-publicized penalties. A promising and creative example of this is the city's recent effort to have violators set aside units in their building for households with vouchers.<sup>17</sup> In addition, with more staff (as noted above), the Commission must engage in more testing for discrimination, which is a process it should widely publicize. Public education and awareness need to be a top priority for the Commission. Because the goal of the Commission should be to deter landlords from this behavior, an aggressive communications strategy must be integral to its work.

Finally, part of a proactive, expanded approach to ending source of income discrimination must also involve addressing legitimate concerns landlords have about accepting vouchers, by lessening administrative burdens, improving administration of programs, and providing assistance to small landlords in navigating voucher administration. The Human Rights Commission and the agencies that administer vouchers (i.e., NYCHA, HPD, and HRA) should work together to consider both strategic enforcement, public awareness, and incentive approaches—all of which will be needed to address this serious problem.



## RECAP

### Reform CityFHEPS.

- Increase maximum rents to match Section 8 vouchers.
- Allow families to use CityFHEPS to save their homes.
- Make CityFHEPS easier for tenants and landlords to navigate.
- Root out source of income discrimination.



## Target affordable housing resources to end homelessness.

While every recent New York City mayor has had a housing plan that involved making hard decisions about where to focus resources, ending homelessness has never been an explicit goal. For the first time, the next mayor's housing plan must make ending homelessness as we know it a top goal. This most fundamental measure must be the primary measure we use to judge the success or failure of that plan, and housing policies must be designed to achieve this goal. A housing plan cannot be a success while tens of thousands of families cycle in and out of homelessness.

For decades, New York City has led the nation in the scope and the scale of its municipal housing plan, committing more of its tax-levy dollars to subsidized housing than any other city in the nation. Yet, it is also home to one of the worst homelessness crises in the nation. Given the nature of the city's housing market, it is possible to see how these two facts coexist. At the same time, it is unacceptable that in the city with the highest number of people with annual income over \$5 million,<sup>18</sup> with the largest commitment to affordable housing, over 11,700 families slept in a municipal shelter each night last year.<sup>19</sup>

### Prioritize Deeply Affordable Units and Supportive Housing for Housing Resource Investment.

To end homelessness as we know it, the next mayor must prioritize units for the lowest income New Yorkers for investment of resources. The de Blasio administration's second housing plan upped its commitment to housing investments.<sup>20</sup> Yet, those commitments are still far below what the city needs. Indeed, it wasn't until the City Council forced its hand that the administration instituted a mandatory 15 percent set aside for homeless households in subsidized new development projects over 40 units—implemented in 2020, six years into the Mayor's administration.<sup>21</sup> The failure of the administration to prioritize the neediest New

Yorkers from the start resulted in a lost opportunity to make a substantial dent in the homelessness crisis. Coalition for the Homeless estimates that an additional 8,500 units could have gone to homeless New Yorkers if the policy had been implemented at the start of the administration.<sup>22</sup>

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**Failure to prioritize the neediest New Yorkers has been a lost opportunity to make a dent in homelessness.**

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There is no question that a housing plan requires tough tradeoffs. The state of the housing market in New York City is such that households across a wide range of incomes need help paying the rent. However, not all need is the same. And, the choices of the de Blasio administration have not adequately prioritized the poorest New Yorkers. Between 2014 and 2020, the administration had created about the same number of subsidized units for households earning between 80 percent and 165 percent of Area Median Income (between \$80,000 and \$169,000 for a family of three) as it did for households earning below 30 percent of AMI (below \$31,000 for a family of three).<sup>23</sup> The next mayor must make different choices.

The next administration must commit to creating at least 8,000 units a year for extremely low income (ELI) renters.<sup>24</sup> This would more than double the number of ELI units projected under the current plan.<sup>25</sup> And, in addition to maintaining the 15 percent set aside requirement, at least 3,000 units of the 8,000 ELI units per year should be for homeless households. The city must invest in both new construction and preservation programs, including programs that facilitate the preservation of naturally occurring affordable housing.

The city also must also increase investment in the NYC 15/15 Supportive Housing Initiative. Permanent supportive housing is a critical piece of the suite of interventions needed to end homelessness. Supportive housing provides permanent subsidized housing with social services to families with complex histories of trauma, disability, and special needs. For families who need it, it is the linchpin to achieving long-term housing stability. The next administration's expanded investment in deeply affordable housing must include funding at least 2,000 units a year of permanent supportive housing for individuals and families. We also echo the Supportive Housing Network of New York's (SHNNY) call for a shift in the city's NYC 15/15 commitment away from scattered site towards congregate supportive housing facilities.<sup>26</sup> Currently, half of the city's present commitment (15,000 units over 15 years) is scheduled to be scattered site; we urge the next administration to adopt a 75 percent/25 percent split, favoring congregate. As SHNNY has documented, and Win has experienced in its own supportive housing program, the operational challenges of scattered site supportive housing are significant. Congregate housing is a much more streamlined, effective, and efficient model for ensuring high quality unit management and service provision.

Finally, the city should also commit to supporting the development of ELI and supportive housing units in other ways. The scarcity and expense of land and the very involved and lengthy maze of bureaucracy needed to build subsidized housing are major impediments to development, especially for units that serve the lowest-income New Yorkers. The city's commitment to using its housing plan to ending homelessness must also tackle these barriers by granting ELI and supportive housing projects priority for access to city-owned land and fast-tracking for permit approvals and administrative reviews.

### Plan and Invest to Save NYCHA.

Investment in housing to prevent homelessness will also require implementing a comprehensive plan to preserve NYCHA. NYCHA is home to 365,000 New Yorkers (though the unofficial count is likely much higher) living in 175,000 subsidized housing units.<sup>27</sup> It is the most valuable single housing resource in the city for the most vulnerable New Yorkers because it provides permanently affordable, subsidized housing where rents adjust as household income does. At Win, over a quarter of our clients exited to NYCHA last year. Tragically, not only is NYCHA a critically important source of affordable housing, it is also a looming disaster. The state of disrepair at NYCHA, if not addressed, threatens the on-going habitability of these critically important units. If any of these units are lost to disinvestment, not only are they lost to the families currently in them, they are also not available for families in the future, thus reducing supply and adding to already overwhelming demand for very low-rent housing in the city. Saving NYCHA must be a requirement for any plan to end homelessness.

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**The city has an obligation to ensure that NYCHA remains a source of deeply affordable housing.**

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NYCHA's woes, a result of decades of disinvestment, are well documented. The capital needs of the building stock are estimated to total \$40 billion.<sup>28</sup> While the city must continue to be a strong advocate for state and federal funds for public housing, it also has an obligation and a substantial interest in ensuring that NYCHA units remain a source of deeply affordable housing for current and future New Yorkers.

New York City must commit to investing at least \$1.5 billion annually in NYCHA.<sup>29</sup> If matched by the state, it is estimated that this amount of investment would allow NYCHA to address its capital backlog.<sup>30</sup> While this number might be reduced as a result of federal action, the city (and the state) must be prepared to act even if federal support continues to be insufficient. There are also a host of operational, management, and tenant-relations issues that must be addressed head-on, in partnership with residents, by the next mayoral administration.

### / RECAP /

#### Target affordable housing resources to end homelessness.

- Prioritize deeply affordable and supportive units for investment.
- Invest to save NYCHA.
- Create at least 8,000 units a year for extremely low income (ELI) renters.
- Set aside 3,000 of the ELI units annually for homeless households.
- Invest in 2,000 units a year of permanent supportive housing.
- Shift the NYC 15/15 unit split to prioritize investment in congregate units.
- Invest \$1.5 billion to restore and preserve NYCHA



## Recalibrate benefits and expand services to prevent homelessness.

The most crucial strategy for ending family homelessness as we know it is to prevent it from happening in the first place. Homelessness is a symptom of poverty, which results from reinforcing, interrelated factors. These factors are driven by private practices, and government policies (both shaped by racism and sexism) that result in limited access to stable and good paying employment with growth trajectories; limited access to affordable child care, health care, and other services needed to support employment and economic well-being; limited access to educational opportunities; and an inadequate social safety net. Preventing homelessness means putting in place timely interventions that mitigate these factors that trap families.

Public benefits and social service programs can be a mechanism for mitigating the underlying factors that result in homelessness, but as currently structured, they do not provide sufficient, timely, or accessible support for addressing the unmet financial and socio-emotional needs that render families vulnerable to homelessness. Ending homelessness will require recalibrating public benefits, ensuring social services are in place to prevent and respond to homelessness, and investing in the social services workforce.



### Recalibrate public benefit programs to create opportunity.

Many of the reforms that need to be made to public benefits are not within the purview of the city. Yet New York City's budget, and New York City's vulnerable families, need them to be made. Therefore, the next mayor will need to recruit allies and get fixing public benefits on to the priority list for New York State leaders. And then, the mayor must continue to work with the state's legislative and executive leaders to recalibrate benefits in

three fundamental ways to meaningfully reduce the risk of homelessness in the city. First, access to public benefits must be expanded to address the tenuous hold many low-income families have on their housing. Second, public benefits should also be reformed so that they offer families opportunities to strengthen their financial outlook and resilience, thereby reducing the risk of homelessness. And finally, public benefits must be expanded to reach some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers: immigrants of all documentation statuses.

### Expand access to public assistance programs to reach all low-income families vulnerable to homelessness.

Taken as whole, public assistance programs are set up to prevent destitution and provide a temporary lifeline. However, they usually cannot be accessed until a family has experienced the deepest poverty and financial hardship, or a destabilizing event like losing their home. The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program is the primary federal funding source to states to provide direct financial assistance to families, and is also used to fund certain social services such as child care and workforce development programs. States augment federal funding with their own dollars, and have discretion in setting eligibility requirements and the amount of assistance provided to a family, within constraints set by the federal government including work requirements, time limits, and inadequate federal funding.<sup>31</sup> And, because federal TANF dollars are used to partially fund programs like child care, workforce development, and rental assistance vouchers, federal and state TANF guidelines are effectively the guidelines governing many of the local programs that play a role in preventing homelessness.

In New York State, a family of three must have income below approximately \$43,500/year, subject to additional asset and means tests, to qualify and remain eligible for TANF assistance. This means that “low-income” and many “very low-income” families do not qualify, despite facing financial hardship and high rent burdens that put them at risk for homelessness. Limiting financial support, and in some case, access to other programs, to families with incomes below \$3,600/month (approximately 200 percent of the federal poverty line for family of three people in 2021<sup>32</sup>) in a city where the median monthly rent was nearly \$1,500 in 2018,<sup>33</sup> leaves many families who are vulnerable to homelessness unable to access financial and other supports. Housing is considered affordable if it absorbs no more than 30 percent of a household’s income; higher rent burdens are linked to housing instability and homelessness. The lowest income New Yorkers must be prioritized for resources, but other low-income households who are also at risk of homelessness and struggle to improve their financial outlook under the weight of unsustainable rent burdens, must also be supported in order to end family homelessness.

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**Ending family homelessness  
requires expanding benefits to  
all low-income households who  
struggle under the weight of  
unsustainable rent burdens.**

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Expanding access to benefits not only prevents homelessness, it is also necessary for currently homeless families and can provide the support a family needs for upward mobility. If a family loses their housing, finding an available apartment in New York City costs even more – approximately \$2,000/month for the typical unit in 2018.<sup>34</sup> With existing eligibility parameters for public programs, the path out of shelter is unclear.

In order for TANF to help end family homelessness, New York State must expand eligibility requirements so that all low-income families can access public programs. And, New York State must prioritize allocation of TANF funding to programs that help prevent homelessness and create opportunities for economic inclusion. The next mayor can help accomplish this by urging the state to dedicate a larger portion to providing direct basic assistance. In 2019, New York State dedicated 28 percent of the TANF funding it received from the federal government to meeting the basic needs of families.<sup>35</sup> This percent must increase, as must allocations to child care and workforce development programs.

In addition to advocating at the state for these changes, New York City also has a responsibility to invest in expanding benefits, given the higher cost of housing in the city compared to the rest of the state.

**Extend public benefit programs to create a bridge out of housing vulnerability.**

In addition to preventing homelessness by closing the gap between income and the cost of housing, the next mayor can help state leaders see the potential of TANF as a bridge for families to leave poverty altogether by helping to set the stage for a future where rents are within reach without direct financial assistance. The state has the power to do this by defining the activities that satisfy TANF work requirements to include forward thinking workforce development programs that, instead of pigeonholing low-income workers, lead to economic inclusion. Examples are programs that support entrepreneurship and accelerated Associate Degree and higher education.

The state must also provide additional funding for these programs, both to innovate and diversify the existing offerings, and to expand availability. Federal TANF funding can be used to fund “work

programs,” but New York State invested less than 10 percent of its TANF dollars in 2019 to provide the work programs in which public assistance recipients are required to participate.<sup>36</sup> This results in unnecessarily limited options, forcing TANF recipients to make difficult choices between maintaining financial assistance and participating in other, unapproved opportunities to build a financial future.

## The Next Mayor’s State Agenda

NYC’s next mayor will need to work the state executive, legislative, and agency stakeholders to tackle many of the shortcomings in public programs:

- Expand eligibility for TANF
- Prioritize investment in direct assistance to families
- Innovate and invest in workforce development programs
- Redefine the work requirement for TANF
- Expand eligibility for the NY Safety Net Assistance Program
- Create cash assistance for all senior and disabled immigrants
- Supplement existing programs to extend benefits to family members who are undocumented

Workforce programs are not enough. As discussed above, access to TANF must be expanded so that families have the financial support to meet their basic needs. And TANF must be used to fund high quality child care so that parents can participate in development opportunities. Without financial support and child care, workforce solutions are not genuinely accessible to very low-income families.

By providing the financial support that very low-income families need in order to develop the tools for increasing their income and financial

stability, coupled with increasing the income limit for qualifying for assistance so that families are supported until financial stable, New York State and City can work together to ensure that families do not become homeless today, or in the future.

### **Address the lack of access to government supports that leaves stable housing out of reach of undocumented immigrants.**

Immigrants of all documentation statuses make important contributions to New York City’s economy, tax base, and communities. They also contribute to public programs. Yet immigrants face racial discrimination and damaging stereotyping, as perpetuated by policies that, for example, attempted to label them a “public charge” and deny them permanence for seeking assistance. Further, the lack of protection afforded them under U.S. laws, and the lack of access to public benefits, often leaves undocumented immigrants no choice but to accept exploitative working conditions that often involve being paid less than other workers, denied benefits, stolen wages, and other abuses.

Appropriately, New York City provides shelter to any person who is homeless, regardless of immigration status. At Win, we know that undocumented families have one of the longest and hardest roads out of shelter. The low-wage and sometimes unpredictable employment available to them simply does not pay the rent in New York City. And without government programs to bridge the gap, housing remains out of reach. The next mayor can address this.



**Undocumented families have one of the longest and hardest roads out of shelter.**



New York State replaces the federal TANF program with its own NY Safety Net Assistance program in order to bring cash assistance to immigrants

in certain categories,<sup>37</sup> but this is not enough. The next mayor must partner with the state administration and lawmakers to expand the NY Safety Net Assistance program to reach not only “qualified” immigrants who cannot access federal benefits temporarily,<sup>38</sup> but also immigrants who are “unqualified” for federal benefits altogether.

Additional programs need to be created using state and city funds to fill the gaps left by federal programs. The city and state should come together to create a program akin to federal Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) to provide assistance to senior and disabled persons, following the example of California, which provides these benefits to anyone who would be eligible for the federal program but for their documentation status.<sup>39</sup> And, New York needs to provide food assistance to all of those who need it, regardless of documentation status.

New York must also fill the holes left by federal programs that treat undocumented family members of mixed status families as invisible. State and city funds must be used to make up the difference between federal benefits that are provided at a level and amount that is based on only the number of citizen or qualified members of the family, and not on the real family size. This includes supplementing public assistance, and making up the difference in housing assistance provided through programs such as CityFHEPS by counting undocumented family members when determining the apartment size a family is eligible for.

Finally, New York City must create and fund rental assistance for wholly undocumented families who are not otherwise eligible for assistance. The next administration should explore the existing CityFHEPS program as a potential mechanism for reaching undocumented households. This can be accomplished by the next city administration, and must not be delayed any further.

## / **RECAP** /

### **Recalibrate public benefits.**

- Expand access to public assistance programs.
- Create a bridge out of housing vulnerability.
- Provide support to undocumented immigrants.



### **Ensure access to meaningful social services to prevent and overcome homelessness.**

Preventing and overcoming homelessness requires social services to address barriers that low-income families face to accessing quality employment that pays a fair wage, provides benefits, offers the flexibility and stability that single working parents need, and that offer opportunities for growth. Many families are also contending with the unmet socio-emotional and mental health needs that often accompany trauma and poverty, and which have been brought out of the shadows by the pandemic.<sup>40</sup> The structure and level of support in the homelessness and social services systems fall far short of addressing these fundamental challenges, which is a primary reason why so many families leaving shelter fail to achieve the stability they need to maintain housing. The next mayor must change the city’s approach and dramatically increase its investments in these systems to ensure that they are working to end and prevent homelessness, not just cycle families through.

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**The structure and level of support in the homelessness and social services systems fall far short of addressing these fundamental challenges.**  
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The first step to making shelter a launching pad to housing stability is to rectify the city’s reliance on for-profit landlords and developers to secure shelter facilities. This model results in shelters that sacrifice social service and other spaces in order to command

the highest possible rent, and puts a city facing a homelessness crisis at a disadvantage when negotiating with landlords in a competitive real estate market. Non-profit owned shelters can correct this issue, offering more appropriate facilities at a lower price so that the city can invest dollars in families instead of in rent.

The time a family spends in shelter is a critical touchpoint for engaging in services and accessing benefits that address the barriers that very low-income families of color face. So that this time and opportunity is not wasted, holistic services must be available in every family shelter, and no family can be sheltered in commercial hotels that do not provide social services. The next mayor must fully fund shelter-based: (1) workforce development programs, (2) child care and youth recreation programs, (3) mental health supports, and (4) housing assistance. These services are an investment in the long-term well-being and future stability of families, and are part of the holistic, long view that the next mayor must take of family homelessness in order to go beyond managing the crisis to ending it.

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**The time a family spends in shelter is a critical touchpoint for engaging in services and accessing benefits that address the barriers that very low-income families of color face.**

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Finally, in order to end family homelessness, supports cannot end when a shelter stays end. As families leave shelters, they need to be connected to the resources they need to thrive in their communities. And, funding high-quality, widely available job training, child care, and mental health services in every community is a key step to preventing future homelessness—both for

people coming out of shelter and for all families that cannot afford to access these services on the private market.

### **Create financial tools nonprofits need in order to participate in shelter development.**

One of the prerequisites for accessible services is appropriate space in which to provide them. Unfortunately, our family shelter system is made up of a patchwork of converted and repurposed buildings, very few of them designed with the needs of families and social service provision in mind. Because the experts in shelter services—the nonprofits that provide them—are usually left out of the design and development process, shelters often lack appropriate, adequate space for services like child care or offices for social workers, and usually lack elements that create an environment conducive to healing and growth. Sadly, many shelters are made to feel institutional, and have been built or converted with the goal of maximizing the number of units, and thereby families, for which the landlord can charge rent.

This approach to shelter has not only resulted in ill-designed facilities, but it has also resulted in too few shelters, leading the city to place families with children in costly commercial hotels when shelters are full. Hotels lack the basic living amenities and the square footage that families with children need for a multi-month stay, and effectively do not provide any social services. Placing homeless families with children in hotels because shelters are full is the ultimate failure and disservice.

#### **Non-profit shelter development helps:**

- End the use of commercial hotels to shelter families and children
- Save public dollars by charging lower rents for buildings than private landlords
- Ensure families have shelter designed to meet their needs

Creating a right-sized system of appropriately designed shelters where families, children, and social service workers can do the hard work of breaking the cycle of homelessness requires facilitating the involvement of non-profits in the development of shelters. The next mayor can make this possible by establishing financing tools, access to city-owned land, or the upfront capital needed to acquire property and initiate development. Including non-profits in shelter development will not only create a better system, it will create one that is more fiscally responsible. Most of the current shelter system is rented from private landlords and developers that are for-profit businesses that charge as much as the market will bear and sometimes more (because of the city's lack of options). The city's budget for shelters has not increased only as a result of increasing need for shelters, it is also a function of the cost of rent. Shelter contracts include the cost of providing services for families, as well as the cost of rent. Rent usually makes up a least a third of the contract cost, and can be as much as almost half of the cost. By facilitating the development of shelters by non-profits, the next mayor will reduce the cost of rent, and these savings will be realized over the ten or more year life of the shelter contract. Savings can be better invested in services and in permanent housing solutions than in paying rent to private landlords. And by renting from non-profits, the city is investing in institutions with a mission to serve the city, instead of contributing to profits.

**Address barriers to quality employment with meaningful workforce development opportunities.**

The majority of families in Win shelter are headed by women with a high school education or less, severely limiting their employment options. Preventing homelessness requires helping families access opportunities to grow and develop their earning potential, so they can secure well-paying, stable, flexible employment that supports housing stability.

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**Preventing homelessness  
requires helping families access  
opportunities to grow and  
develop their earning potential.**

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The next mayor must acknowledge that low-income families need access and supports to pursue higher education, apprenticeships, and/or programs that prepare people for vocational, skilled, or entrepreneurial opportunities. Diverse and innovative workforce development opportunities that include options such as accelerated Associate Degree programs, preparation to build and manage a business, and apprenticeships and credentialing for skilled employment with higher pay and opportunities for growth, can help families build the financial resilience to break the cycle of homelessness.

The City University of New York (CUNY) system is a tremendous public asset that can put educational attainment within reach for low-income New Yorkers. Collaborative development and implementation of programs and mechanisms that connect homeless parents to higher education and allow them to build their earning potential is an integral part of a workforce development strategy for the future.

The next mayor must fully fund these types of programs in family shelters. Funding must provide for sufficient, appropriate, and well qualified staff to provide both one-one-one support, as well as to host events and develop and maintain partnerships. Every family shelter must have enough income building or workforce specialists to support every family, as well as additional experienced staff to organize events such as job fairs, and to build partnerships with employers, trainers, and other workforce programs that offer opportunities and pathways for families in shelter.

**Connect every homeless family with support and resources for finding permanent housing.**

Shelter should be an opportunity to begin building the foundation for breaking the cycle of homelessness, which requires securing and maintaining stable housing. One of the roles shelter can play in the housing stability of families is helping them secure affordable, appropriate housing from shelter. This is no simple task. The menagerie of housing programs in place, and the complex eligibility requirements and processes of each—from housing lotteries, to NYCHA waiting lists, to rental assistance vouchers—require knowledge and know-how in order to navigate effectively. And finding an apartment in New York City, with its dearth of affordable apartments and landlords who discriminate against people with “programs” or applying from shelter, requires experience and relationships in the real estate market.

The next mayor must increase the number of Housing Specialists in family shelters. Housing Specialists provide families one-on-one support with every aspect of the apartment search process, including searching, viewing, applying, and interviewing for apartments and signing a lease. Working with a Housing Specialist can mean a quicker exit from shelter to permanent housing. Unfortunately, current funding levels allow shelters to hire too few Housing Specialists, which results in high caseloads and unfortunate triaging. This approach prolongs the time families spend in shelter. Instead, shelters should have enough Housing Specialists to help all families with the process of preparing for and finding permanent housing both through one-on-one supports, and through group workshops and events.

**Meet the needs of parents and children with specialized, shelter-based services for children and youth.**

The experience of homelessness during the critical developmental years can impair the

healthy cognitive, emotional, and social growth of children and youth, and inhibit their learning and academic progress. Depression, anxiety, and social withdrawal have been found to be more prevalent among children who experience homelessness.<sup>41</sup> Homeless teens report elevated rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts.<sup>42</sup> And homeless students graduate from high school at lower rates than their peers.<sup>43</sup> The long-term implications of this are great, potentially limiting the life chances and earning potential of the tens of thousands of Black and Latinx children and youth experiencing homelessness today.

**Child care and youth recreation:**

- allow parents to pursue housing and employment opportunities
- promote healthy early development of young children
- support academic engagement and skills and interest development of youth

Yet DHS shelter services and performance metrics target the head of household and largely disregard their children. This existing approach to homelessness is short-sighted, and misses the opportunity and need to support the resilience of children and youth. The next mayor must invest in shelter-based services to mitigate the potentially long-term implications of homelessness (including future homelessness) for children and youth. These supports are also necessary to give parents the time and peace of mind needed to apply for housing, apply for jobs, and to do the other things necessary to leave shelter for stable housing.

Drop-in child care that is healthy, safe, and developmentally appropriate must be available at every family shelter. Youth programming must include academically enriched programs that include STEAM curricula, and that bring resources such as the Department of Youth and Community Services (DYCD) SONYC / COMPASS programs into shelters. Children and youth must also have

access to therapeutic out-of-school recreational activities, and one-on-one services and other group programming that help them heal from trauma, on-site at their shelter. For this to be possible, the next mayor must fully fund the necessary child care, recreation, teaching, and supervisory staff, as well as training for staff in healthy early development, youth development, and emotionally responsive practices. Appropriate spaces for providing child care and activities for children must also be part of every shelter budget, along with needed personal care and educational supplies.

In addition, shelter services for children and youth must be funded to include specialized clinical social workers to screen for special learning needs, developmental challenges, behavioral challenges, and mental health conditions as part of each family's assessment and tailored service plan. Shelters must also be funded to provide developmentally appropriate child care for younger children to support their socio-emotional well-being, and to allow caregivers to pursue employment and housing. And youth programming must include academically enriched and therapeutic out-of-school time recreational activities, on-site, academic tutoring, and one-on-one services and group programming that help children and youth heal from trauma.

**Ensure mental health and psychosocial well-being so families can maintain stable housing after leaving shelter.**

Mental health and well-being services are central to preventing homelessness. Serious psychological distress has been found to be most prevalent among people who experience racism and material hardship,<sup>44</sup> yet mental health services are not readily available in many low-income communities, especially for children. Unaddressed mental health needs can make it difficult to fulfill day to day responsibilities, make effective decisions, engage with employment, among other impairments.

Addressing mental health needs early among children and adults, and providing on-going supports, must be part of any plan to end family homelessness.

Despite the important expansion of services made in recent years with the introduction of social workers in shelter through to the Thrive initiative, it is not enough. Social workers in shelter assess family history and needs, prepare families to engage in therapy and clinical services, and provide referrals and on-going monitoring of clinical service plans. Despite what is known about the disproportionate incidence of unmet mental health needs among low-income families, and of the prevalence of experience with domestic violence, family shelters are not funded to hire enough social workers to ensure that every family has the on-going, one-on-one support of one, or to ensure that social workers are available to lead group programming on site. The next mayor must increase funding so family shelters can hire more social workers.

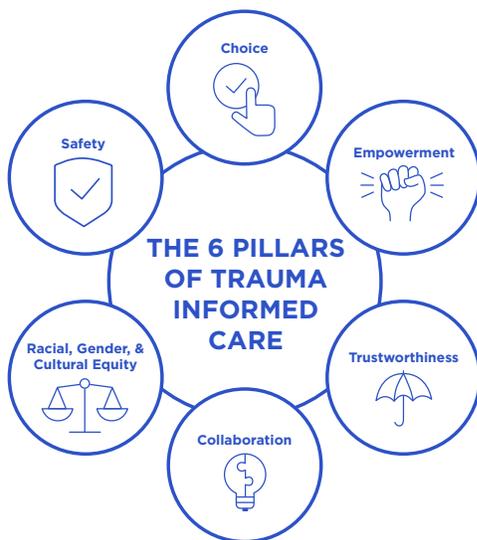
Additionally, based on what is known about homelessness, trauma, and well-being, shelter should also be funded to provide group and recreational activities that promote psychosocial well-being. These can include activities such as cooking workshops, or more therapeutically focused activities such as support groups for parents of teens. Skill building and community building recreational activities are part of meeting the mental health needs of homeless adults.

As discussed in the previous section, shelter funding must also provide for clinical social workers specialized in assessing and supporting the socio-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral health of children and youth.

**Provide every homeless family and child receives trauma informed care.**

Trauma can be experienced through one or multiple events, through on-going, overwhelming stressors, and can be an individual or community experience. Traumatic events can take the form of individual acts of racism or sexism, both overt and covert, being displaced from one’s home, the loss of friends and loved ones to the COVID-19 virus, and many others. It is also experienced through continuous stressors, such as exposure to community or family violence, institutional racism, sexism, and other systematized forms of oppression, and long-term economic hardship and deprivation.

Trauma can have long-term consequences for physical health, mental health, and functioning. Unresolved or on-going trauma can result in PTSD and factor into depression, anxiety, and other conditions,<sup>45</sup> and can inhibit a person’s ability to maintain employment, participate in healthy relationships, and even meet one’s day-to-day needs.<sup>46</sup> Trauma in children can impair their cognitive, emotional, and social development,



leading to behavioral problems and poor academic outcomes, which can diminish their life chances and earning potential.<sup>47</sup>

All homeless families have experienced trauma by virtue of being homeless. Most have experienced multiple traumas, including racism, sexism, severe economic hardship, and community and family violence. Shelter must be trauma-informed, not only to prevent further trauma and re-traumatization, but also to bolster resilience and to help families and children heal from trauma. To ensure every homeless family receives trauma-informed care, the next mayor must:

- Fund, require, and track that all city agency staff and social service provider staff receive training and on-going professional development in trauma-informed care;
- Provide for independent experts to audit HRA and DHS rules and policies for accessing benefits and shelter in order to identify and correct procedures and requirements that are not trauma informed;
- Fund and require a review of shelter facilities, rules, and procedures to identify and correct deficiencies in provision of trauma-informed care; and,
- Provide mental health and well-being supports for the shelter workforce to address vicarious trauma and burnout.

By integrating trauma-informed care and principles into all services and policies, shelters can support healing from experiences that can make families vulnerable to returning to homelessness.

**Link families leaving shelter to stabilizing supports in their home community.**

Experiencing homelessness is a risk factor for re-experiencing homelessness. Shelter must provide services and supports that bolster resilience and start families on the path of healing, financial growth, and long-term stability and well-being. But, the need for that support doesn’t end when a family’s shelter stay is over; and leaving

shelter for a new home can, itself, be a destabilizing transition. Once connected to permanent housing, formerly homeless families must also be connected to the community-based resources that will support their housing stability, as well as their long-term goals. And, those services must be funded at levels that can meet the needs of people leaving shelter and also the needs of others at risk of homelessness in the community. If we fail to provide adequate access to stabilizing services in the community, the goal of ending family homelessness will never be reached.

The next mayor must ensure homeless families are supported while establishing themselves in a new community after leaving shelter. To do this, the next mayor must fund aftercare for every family who leaves shelter for a permanent home to ensure a continuation of care so that families can continue on the path to long-term housing stability. Aftercare should provide six to twelve months of case management that connects families to community-based services including child care, afterschool activities, and health and mental health services. Case management should also include monthly well-being check-ins, support maintaining and adjusting benefits, and service planning toward long-term goals, including support accessing educational and workforce development opportunities. Formerly homeless families may also look for support navigating the tenant-landlord relationship.

Shelter staff must be linked to community-based case management providers. This integration of services between DHS and HRA staff, and their non-profit service providers, on the ground is one example of the breaking down of silos that the next mayor must undertake at the highest level of city government. This will ensure a smooth transition to a new home and community-based services that does not threaten a potentially destabilizing loss of support or services. The next mayor can ensure this continuity of support for vulnerable families by providing funding for more case managers in order to reduce caseloads, which will allow for adequate exit planning and a warm hand off to the community.

Finally, to end family homelessness, we need to ensure that low-income families in communities (whether coming from shelter or not) have access to the range of supports all families need to maintain stable housing.

The next mayor must ensure that low-income families are not pigeon-holed into low-pay, low-quality employment by providing **innovative workforce development programs** in every community. On-going support and opportunities will not only be needed by families after they leave shelter, they are also needed to help prevent homelessness for other low-income families. Quality programs can advance economic inclusion for low-income communities historically

**SHELTER  
&  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICES**

- **Case management**
- **Child care & youth development**
- **Workforce development**
- **Mental health services**

disenfranchised from opportunity, reducing the risk of homelessness for all vulnerable communities. The next mayor must ensure that every community has enough **affordable, high-quality child care seats** for every child to benefit from early education and socialization experiences, and so that parents can engage in employment and in development opportunities. As discussed earlier, greater investment of TANF dollars by the state can help expand availability of child care, but will not alone meet the need. The next mayor must also invest in child care and early education.

The next mayor must ensure that every low-income New Yorker has access to **quality mental health services** in their community. To be accessible and quality, services must be located near one's home, and appointment times must be available to accommodate all schedule needs, without long waiting lists, and in a space that is clean and welcoming for adults and children. And mental health services must be provided by trained, credentialed, and experienced clinicians. Although imperfect, the Thrive initiative has advanced understanding of what is required for a city-wide approach to supporting mental health. The next mayor must build on lessons from Thrive, and on the community networks and infrastructure that it put in place, as well as expand its successful components, including social workers in shelter.



### **Invest in the human services workforce.**

The human services workforce is dedicated to supporting those in need. Their work requires the skills to meet client needs and navigate bureaucracy, while providing support that is trauma-informed. To ensure that all families receive trauma-informed care, the needs of the workforce in shelter and supportive housing cannot be overlooked. And as a workforce comprised primarily of women of color working to help others, providing resources and support is a matter of fairness and equity. Additionally, supporting the

essential workers who make up the human services workforce is necessary to retain talented, devoted, and experienced professionals.

The first step to supporting the workforce is funding decent and fair pay, and, when appropriate, hazard pay. The human services workforce is underpaid. The average annual income for the social assistance sector in 2019 was just over \$34,000.<sup>48</sup> In New York, workers in the social assistance sector are consistently paid less than those in the same occupation in other sectors.<sup>49</sup> In 2015, the average pay of human services workers generally covered about 30 to 45 percent of the bare-bones survival budget of a four-person household in New York. The sector's low pay meant that 60 percent of those working in the social assistance sector were utilizing or had a family member utilizing at least one public benefit.<sup>50</sup>

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**The low pay of the sector overall is part of a larger system that devalues the work of women of color.**

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Fair pay for the human services workforce is also an issue of racial and gender equity. Analysis from the Comptroller's office shows that the essential worker group of child care, homeless, food, and family services is 81% women. This essential worker group had 13 percent of workers at or below the poverty line and 34 percent at or below twice the poverty line.<sup>51</sup> The human services workforce is disproportionately comprised of women of color. While women of color made up 21 percent of all New York State private sector workers in 2015, they made up 41 percent of human services workers.<sup>52</sup> The low pay of the sector overall is part of a larger system that devalues the work of women of color.

The human services workforce also needs funding for professional development and subsidies for training and continuing education. Staff should be empowered to attend evidence-based trainings that support their work, expand and deepen their skills and knowledge, and allow them to grow professionally and financially. Subsidizing continuing education can help ensure that human service workers are able pursue career growth in the sector.

Finally, frontline staff who support families experiencing homelessness are themselves exposed to potentially traumatic incidents, and well as to secondary experiences of trauma in their work. Experiences where staff are not directly involved with the traumatic event, but are engaging in the incident through a client's retelling are known as vicarious trauma.<sup>53</sup> There is general recognition that the intensity of working with individuals experiencing trauma negatively impacts the well-being of staff providing necessary services.<sup>54</sup> Predictive factors of vicarious trauma include high caseloads, limited training about trauma, and limited time for self-care.<sup>55</sup> The next mayor must provide well-being supports to address vicarious trauma. It is important that vicarious trauma is addressed at the systems level. Too often, the onus is placed on the individual through an emphasis on self-care that fails to recognize the need for external and organizational support. To systemically address vicarious trauma, the next mayor should reduce caseload sizes of shelter staff; provide staff training resources in trauma informed care, with an emphasis on caring for vicarious trauma; and provide resources for employee self-care.

## /RECAP/

### **Ensure access to meaningful social services.**

- Create financial tools nonprofits need to develop shelters.
- Improve and expand workforce development programs.
- Increase supports for homeless families searching for housing.
- Fund specialized, shelter-based services for children and youth.
- Provide mental health and psychosocial services.
- Ensure every homeless family receives trauma informed care.
- Link families leaving shelter to stabilizing supports in the community.
- Invest in the human services workforce.



## Redesign homeless services to be trauma informed and human centered.

Ending family homelessness requires city-wide coordination of and accountability for relevant agencies at the highest levels, as described in the first section of this report. The experience of those using the system on the ground level will be the ultimate test of the coordination, accountability, and commitment to ending family homelessness that exists in the top levels of government. Shifting services and programs to be human centered will require reducing bureaucracy to bring transparency and efficiency to program rules and processes, and providing clear, complete, consistent information to families and social service workers.

Homeless families have described their experiences with DHS, HRA, and other city agency programs and services as disjointed, confusing, unhelpful, and illogical. They have also described them as demoralizing, dehumanizing, and punitive. Becoming human centered will require a deep commitment to principles of trauma informed care, and to their implementation.



### Reform shelter eligibility and intake for families with children.

The city must end the cruel practice of requiring families to prove that they are homeless to be eligible for shelter placement. All families seeking shelter must apply in-person at PATH, the city's only intake center for families with children. When applying, families must prove that they have nowhere else to stay by documenting every place they have stayed in the last two years. DHS then investigates whether the family can return to any of them. For families, this entails a dehumanizing and traumatic experience of recounting places from their past that are unsafe, unwelcoming, or inappropriate for their family, and

the embarrassment of a city worker calling family and friends to verify that they will not accept the family in their home. DHS must trust that families understand the implications of shelter and apply because it is truly what their family needs. DHS should model its application on low-barrier best practices that have emerged from COVID-19 relief programs, including accepting self-attestation of need as proof.

In addition to addressing administrative barriers that families face to accessing assistance, the next mayor must also address the socio-emotional harm the process can inflict. Families arrive at PATH in the midst of one of the most distressing crises imaginable. Instead of being met with compassion and care, families in Win shelter have described the treatment they receive as punitive, dehumanizing, and traumatic. The next mayor must ensure that every worker who interfaces with a family at PATH is trained in trauma-informed care, and that on-going professional development and staff supervision supports implementation of trauma-informed care.

Additionally, DHS should make permanent the current exemption of children at PATH. In order to reduce the number of people at the PATH center during the pandemic, DHS suspended the requirement that all members of the family—including children—be present at PATH when applying for shelter. PATH is an office building of crowded, tense waiting rooms where families often have to spend the entire day, and adults often have to recount details of abuse and other information that are not appropriate for children. Children should not be required to go to PATH.

 **RECAP /****Reform shelter eligibility and intake.**

- Accept self-attestation and cease investigations
- Require trauma informed care at PATH
- Stop requiring children go to PATH to apply for shelter

**Make navigating NYC's social service agencies easier for families.**

For a family in need to seek assistance they must navigate complex eligibility requirements, unclear applications and documentation requirements, and long waiting periods. Often they must interact with many different agencies with different processes and requirements. The next mayor must cut bureaucracy, providing clear, consistent, and accessible information on how to apply for financial supports, services, and affordable housing, and must put in place knowledgeable city workers to support New Yorkers and non-profits when filling out and following-up on applications. The next mayor must simplify and streamline all HRA, HPD, NYCHA, and DHS applications for public benefits, shelter, affordable housing lotteries, CityFHEPS, and other benefits. Program rules and benefits must also work in concert, and not in isolation, in order to provide families with comprehensive support that addresses homelessness. And families should not have to run from agency to agency to get answers and supports that they need. There should be centrally located, easy-to-access hubs for benefits access; and individual agencies should have the resources they need to provide families with comprehensive information about the range of issues they face and services and benefits for which they are eligible.

Services and programs must also be made accessible by providing in person access points via community-based organization or HRA centers,

once it is safe to do so. And these access points should provide one stop for all public benefits and programs, regardless of the administering city agency. HRA must also staff a hotline to provide real-time, live support to landlords, the public, and social service staff to answer questions and resolve issues with applications, sanctions, and issuing of benefits. Similarly, HPD must create a helpdesk to provide customer service to New Yorkers applying for affordable housing, including lotteries.

 **RECAP /****Make navigating social service agencies easier for families.**

- Offer a centralized, accessible hubs for accessing benefits.
- Provide live helplines to support applications.
- Coordinate requirements and services to streamline processes.

**Redefine the metrics DHS uses to measure success.**

Finally, to be truly human centered, the next mayor must move away from short-term measures of performance and toward measures of successful outcomes that more accurately measure stability.



**The next mayor must move away from short-term measures of performance and toward measures of successful outcomes that more accurately measure stability.**



Currently, DHS focuses its management of shelter providers on move-outs. The narrow focus is part of the city's failed approach to homelessness, which seeks to manage the shelter census, instead of facilitating long-term housing stability for families.

DHS must track metrics of success that measure progress towards long-term housing stability by measuring financial resilience gained while in shelter, not just public assistance enrollment, and assessing workforce stability. And instead of tracking how many families are placed near the child’s school, DHS should measure student attendance, as part of shared accountability and partnership with the DOE. And the city should report all returns to shelter, regardless of shelter exit type or when the return occurs.



## RECAP /

### **Redefine the metrics DHS uses to measure success.**

- Measure exits to permanent subsidized housing.
- Measure shelter returns one year and two years after.
- Measure gained or maintained employment while in shelter.
- Measure school attendance.

# A Conversation with the Next Mayor

If the next mayor truly cares about tackling inequity, they must make ending family homelessness a top priority beginning on day one of their administration. Ending family homelessness will be a tremendous challenge in a city with a dire lack of housing that is affordable to hundreds of thousands of its residents, and where there are many barriers to accessing financial and social service supports. But our city's future as a place where all can thrive, and where racism and sexism are rooted out and inequities corrected, depends on it.

These pages lay out a bold and holistic plan for ending family homelessness as we know it. The next mayor must reorganize how city government is structured to end family homelessness; reorient housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers; recalibrate benefits and social services to prevent homelessness and create opportunity; and redesign homeless services to be human centered. Half measures or weak steps will continue the mishandling of past administrations, widening and deepening racial and socioeconomic strife and inequity.

As the next Mayor of New York City, will you pledge to end family homelessness? And will you do so humanely and equitably, adopting the principal and proposals we put forth?

If you commit to Win's bold and holistic plan, New Yorkers will be able to measure your success when you leave office by:

- reducing by half the number of families with children who apply for shelter;
- reducing by half the number of DOE students who qualify as homeless;
- increasing the number of families who leave shelter for permanent, subsidized housing;
- ending the use of commercial hotels to shelter families with children;
- a substantial reduction in the number of severely rent burdened households in the city.

The ushering in of a new administration offers an opportunity to correct the city's fundamentally flawed approach to family homelessness. We look forward to this opportunity with the hope that all families with children who are experiencing, re-experiencing, and at risk for homelessness will be met with an administration committed to addressing the systemic barriers that trap so many Black and Latinx families in a cycle of homelessness and housing instability. Win looks forward to reimagining the city's approach to the pernicious problem of homelessness, and will be ready to partner and support your administration, and to hold it accountable to New York City's families.

# EVERY FAMILY HOUSED



**Reorganize** how city government is structured to end family homelessness



**Reorient** housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers



**Recalibrate** benefits and expand services to prevent homelessness



**Redesign** homeless services to be trauma-informed and human centered

## ACCOUNTABILITIES

Reduce the number of families with children who apply for shelter by half.

Reduce the number of DOE students who qualify as homeless by half.

Increase the number of families who leave shelter for permanent, subsidized housing.

End the use of commercial hotels to shelter families with children.

Substantially reduce the number of severely rent burdened households in the city.

## GOAL

Every Family Housed



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# Appendix: Projected New Costs

Ending family homelessness requires investment in housing resources and socio-economic programs so that vulnerable families can achieve long-term housing stability, as outlined in *Every Family Housed: A Blueprint for the Next Mayor to End Family Homelessness*. The numbers below represent the estimated new annual spending the city must make to implement the ambitious proposals outlined in the Blueprint.

Fostering housing stability and greater economic security for vulnerable families, as well as achieving efficiencies in government services, will reduce New York's reliance on shelters and create substantial cost savings that are not captured below.

<b>KEY</b>	<b>N</b> Areas where we believe cost impacts would be nominal or neutral.
	<b>\$</b> Areas where new investment is needed.

## **N Reorganize how city government is structured to end family homelessness.**

- Make ending homelessness a top priority.
- Direct the first deputy mayor to lead a cross-agency effort.
- Involve people who have experienced homelessness.

## **\$ Reorient housing resources to work for the lowest income New Yorkers. \$2,593,600,000**

- **Reform CityFHEPS. \$241,600,000**
  - Increase maximum rents to match Section 8 vouchers.
  - Allow families to use CityFHEPS to save their homes.
  - Make CityFHEPS easier for tenants and landlords to navigate.
  - Root out source of income discrimination.
- **Target affordable housing resources to end homelessness. \$2,352,000,000<sup>1</sup>**
  - Prioritize deeply affordable and supportive units for investment.
  - Invest to save NYCHA.

## **\$ Recalibrate benefits and expand services to prevent homelessness. \$958,400,000**

- Recalibrate public benefit programs to create opportunity.<sup>2</sup>
  - Expand access to public assistance programs.
  - Create a bridge out of housing vulnerability.
- **Provide support to undocumented immigrants. \$185,600,000**
- **Ensure access to social services to overcome homelessness. \$432,376,800**
  - Create financial tools nonprofits need to develop shelters.
  - Improve and expand workforce development programs.
  - Increase supports for homeless families searching for housing.
  - Fund specialized, shelter-based services for children and youth.
  - Provide mental health and psychosocial services.
  - Ensure every homeless family receives trauma informed care.
- **Link families leaving shelter to supports in the community. \$30,400,000**
- **Invest in the human services workforce. \$310,000,000<sup>3</sup>**

## **N Redesign homeless services to be trauma-informed and human centered.**

- Reform shelter eligibility and intake for families with children.
- Make navigating NYC's social service agencies easier for families.
- Redefine the metrics DHS uses to measure success.

**Estimated Total Annual New Costs to Implement the Blueprint to End Family Homelessness:  
\$3.5 Billion**

1. This number and our affordable housing recommendations in the report align with the United for Housing Recommendations for the Next Mayor, which we helped develop along with many other housing and homelessness organizations in New York City, <https://u4housing.thenyhc.org/>.  
2. We do not include a cost for expansion of benefits because this cost is shared between the city and state.  
3. Analysis by Homeless Services United, Inc.



## ABOUT WIN

Win is New York City's largest provider of shelter and services for homeless families with children. Across its shelters and supportive housing, Win transforms the lives of New York City's homeless women and their children by providing a holistic solution of safe housing, critical services and innovative programs they need to succeed on their own—so the women can regain their independence and their children can look forward to a brighter future.

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