

Statement in Support of Clinical Mental Health Services in Family Shelter

The undersigned groups express our strong support for providing clinical mental health services on site in family shelters so that parents and children can easily access the tools they need to address their mental health needs. Families in shelter have all experienced trauma and many also struggle with mental health challenges. In our work as shelter providers, mental health providers, and advocates, we see every day that this significant need is going unmet because of the lack of resources. We call on the City Council and the Mayor to remedy this by providing funding for clinical mental health services for adults and children on-site in all shelters serving families with children. This funding must be included in this year's budget and baselined for future years.

Families experiencing homelessness often live with a range of mental health challenges while they do the hard work needed to leave shelter and find permanent housing. Homeless mothers deal with issues that can range from post-traumatic stress disorder and mild situational depression to severe anxiety disorders and psychiatric conditions at twice the rate of the general population. Unaddressed trauma, substance use disorders, and other mental health needs destabilize families and contribute to homelessness.

Despite the pain of living with untreated mental health needs, prioritizing mental health is challenging as families manage their immediate obligations, such as attending meetings to access public benefits and managing transportation for their children to attend school. This is further complicated by the long wait times for mental health clinics, multiple intake visits, and hours that do not accommodate the schedules of low-wage workers. And, given that most families in New York City shelters are Black or Latinx, racial disparities in access to mental health care exacerbate these challenges. Failure to provide clinical mental health services on-site in shelter just makes it that much harder for families to get the help they need.

The time a family spends in shelter – 17 months on average last year – is an opportunity to ensure that parents and children have access to the tools they need for stability and health. Unfortunately, this opportunity is squandered due to a lack of designated clinical resources. New York City introduced social workers into family shelters in 2016, but because of their caseloads and the contractual scope of their mandate, those social workers are unable to provide clinical services on site. Families in shelter need on-site mental health services, including individual counseling and psychotherapy, group therapy, medication management, support with assessments needed to access supportive housing, and specialized services focused on children and families. Providing these resources on-site from trusted members of the shelter team will reduce barriers and provide access to the mental health supports families need for success.

Respectfully,

Win

CAMBA

Catholic Charities Community Services, NY

Citizen's Committee for Children of New York

The Coalition for Behavioral Health

Family Homelessness Coalition

FPWA

HELP USA

Henry Street Settlement

Homes for the Homeless

The Jewish Board of Family & Children Services

Mobilization for Justice, Inc.

National Alliance on Mental Illness of NYC (NAMI-NYC)

National Association of Social Workers – NYC Chapter

Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter, Inc.

Neighbors Together

New York Association of Psychiatric Rehabilitation Services

New York Legal Assistance Group

RiseBoro Community Partnership

Volunteers of America – Greater New York