



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness  
for Women and their Children

## Testimony of Women In Need (Win) for the Committee on Housing and Buildings February 23, 2023

Thank you to Chair Sanchez and to the esteemed members of the Housing and Buildings Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony today. Currently, Win is the nation's largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness. We operate 14 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Currently, more than 6,500 people call Win “home” every night, including 3,600 children — in total, we house over 14% of homeless families with children in New York City.

Today, there are 70,810 people, including 22,913 children, sleeping each night in a New York City shelter.<sup>1</sup> This already unfathomable number is only rising—during the first four months of FY23, the average number of individuals in shelter per day increased by 21% compared to the same period in FY22 due to the influx of asylum seekers from the southern border of the United States.<sup>2</sup> The shortage of shelter beds has forced the city to push for emergency spending worth over \$2 billion dollars, while warehousing families experiencing homelessness in hotels without the critical resources they need.<sup>3 4</sup> Currently, across our shelters, Win has a less than 1% vacancy rate. Across the whole city, shelters for families with children have a vacancy rate of less than .5%.

Right now, the most immediate actions the city can take to ameliorate its homelessness crisis is to increase affordable housing and improve the voucher system. **Therefore, we are delighted to support Resolution 344 in relation to establishing a housing access voucher program (HAVP)** and thank Public Advocate Williams and Council Members Sanchez, Stevens, Mealy, Restler, Joseph, Hudson, Farías, Abreu and Nurse for calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, A.3701B/S.2804B. As it stands, when vouchers are accessed and utilized, they have the potential to stabilize low-income households struggling to pay rent and to provide those in shelter with a path to permanent housing. In the last year, our trained program staff worked to move just over 840 families out of shelter and into permanent homes. Rental assistance programs have been key to this success. In FY22, of the 5,207 families with children that exited shelter to permanent housing, 79% of placements were subsidized.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, without subsidies like HAVP, families often struggle to make a sustainable exit from shelter. In FY22, 15% of families with children who exited shelter without a subsidy returned within one year, compared to less than 1% of families who exited with a subsidy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> NYC: Department of Homeless Services. *The Daily Report*. February 2, 2023.

<https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dailyreport.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> The City of New York: Mayor Eric L. Adams. (2023). *Preliminary Mayor's Management Report*.

[https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2023/2023\\_pmmr.pdf](https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2023/2023_pmmr.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> New York City Comptroller: Brad Lander. (2022). *The State of the City's Economy and Finances*.

<https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/annual-state-of-the-citys-economy-and-finances/>

<sup>4</sup> Anuta, Joe. Politico (Jan 13, 2023). *New York Mayor: Cost of asylum seekers could hit \$2B as shelters reach capacity* <https://www.politico.com/news/2023/01/13/nyc-cost-asylum-seekers-2b-00077885>



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However, many New Yorkers are still ineligible for housing vouchers.<sup>5</sup> New York State needs an ongoing, government-funded housing access voucher program. The Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) (Kavanagh [S568](#)/ Rosenthal [A4021](#)) HAVP would operate much like the federal Section 8 program, which many New Yorkers remain unable to access because of its requirements and inadequate supply.<sup>6</sup> HAVP would actually be more inclusive than Section 8 or CityFHEPs program because it would be available to people regardless of income, documentation, and criminal record.

HAVP has the potential to help more than 50,000 people statewide avoid the trauma of homelessness and is an essential tool to combat the homelessness crisis.<sup>7</sup> Half of HAVP vouchers would go towards rehousing people experiencing homelessness and the remaining half would be issued to low-income New Yorkers at risk of becoming homeless. These vouchers would prevent families at risk of homelessness from entering shelter and keep those who have left shelter from reentering. HUD's Family Options Study revealed that long-term rent subsidies, like those offered by HAVP, rather than entering shelter, reduced homelessness and increased housing stability while also promoting benefits in other domains of family well-being, including halving intimate partner violence, reducing adult psychological distress, parent-child separation, absenteeism and behavior problems for children, and increasing food security.<sup>8</sup>

Based on recently released projections from the NYU Furman Center, HAVP is also the cost-effective option.<sup>9</sup> Per a rough cost-saving analysis, HAVP will cost a family \$50 a night versus the \$188 a night it costs to live in shelter. The savings are even more drastic for a family that would otherwise live in an emergency hotel room paid for by the city, which can cost up to over \$300 a night.<sup>10</sup> Therefore, we support the sponsors of Resolution 344 in calling on the New York State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign HAVP into law.

**An increase in housing vouchers must also go hand in hand with an increase in housing options for homeless families,** and we support the City Council in introducing innovative legislation that would promote the availability of additional units to be used for supportive and

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<sup>5</sup> <https://cccnewyork.org/press-and-media/new-york-desperately-needs-a-housing-voucher-program/>

<sup>6</sup> New York State: Homes and Community Renewal. (May 6, 2021). *HCR Announces Lottery For Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Waitlist In New York City*. <https://hcr.ny.gov/news/hcr-announces-lottery-section-8-housing-choice-voucher-waitlist-new-york-city>

<sup>7</sup> Lum, Chau. Gothamist. (March 31, 2022). *As budget deadline looms, fate of a widely supported housing voucher program is in Hochul's hands*. <https://gothamist.com/news/as-budget-deadline-looms-fate-of-a-widely-supported-housing-voucher-program-is-in-hochuls-hands>

<sup>8</sup> U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research. (2016). *Family Options Study: 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families*. <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/sites/default/files/pdf/Family-Options-Study-Full-Report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> NYU Furman Center. (Feb 2023). *A State-Level Rent Voucher Program*. [https://furmancenter.org/files/publications/2\\_A\\_State-Level\\_Rent\\_Voucher\\_Program\\_Final.pdf](https://furmancenter.org/files/publications/2_A_State-Level_Rent_Voucher_Program_Final.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Campanile, Carl and Bernadette Hogan. (Jan 13, 2023). *Eric Adams inks \$275M hotel room deal to house at least 5,000 migrants* <https://nypost.com/2023/01/13/ka-ching-adams-ink-275-million-with-hotels-to-house-migrants/>



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alternative housing. Supportive housing is an extremely effective solution to chronic homelessness, with more than 86% of residents in supportive housing remaining housed for several years.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we thank Council Member Carlina Rivera and Council Member Lincoln Restler for sponsoring **Int. 196 and Int. 637 that would prioritize non-profits and 501c3 in purchases of residential and city buildings.** Next, we hope to see legislation and reform from the city and administration that would also eliminate some of the administrative burdens and extensive document requirements that currently keep supportive housing units offline.<sup>12</sup>

**Affordable housing must remain affordable, and Int. 74 sponsored by Council Member Gale Brewer will establish a land bank for New York City to develop, rehabilitate and preserve affordable housing.** According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there was an 8% drop from 2019 to 2021 in the number of apartments registered as rent stabilized in New York City.<sup>13</sup> Additionally, rents across New York City have risen 20% in the past three years.<sup>14</sup> In short, low-income and even middle-class New Yorkers are being priced out of their family neighborhoods, a phenomenon that is depleting the city of its culture and straining our social services system and shelters.

**Res. 38** from the Public Advocate will require that any owner intending to sell a multi-unit residential dwelling, must first make a fairly appraised offer of sale to the tenants within the residence before making any sale offers to third parties. This mandate has the potential to counteract the unreasonable ballooning of rent prices and to preserve the priceless culture of New York's unique neighborhoods. **Int. 932** will also support social housing, a form of sustainable housing that promotes fair and communal governance of buildings by their current residents or qualified nonprofits.

Ultimately, Win stands in support of the introduced legislation and resolutions, and we look forward to the City addressing additional concerns. Homelessness is an extremely intersectional issue, and any efforts that can be made to increase affordable housing and alternative options to shelter will have a direct impact on the families and children that Win houses. While Win provides wraparound and trauma-informed services to promote recovery and prevent recidivism to shelter, homelessness is an inherently traumatic event that can exacerbate the severity of

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<sup>11</sup> Kurtzman, Laura. The University of California, San Francisco (UCSF) *Study Finds Permanent Supportive Housing is Effective for Highest Risk Chronically Homeless People* (Sep 17, 2020). <https://www.ucsf.edu/news/2020/09/418546/study-finds-permanent-supportive-housing-effective-highest-risk-chronically>

<sup>12</sup> Newman, Andy. The New York Times (Nov 4, 2022). *Nearly 2,600 Apartments for Mentally Ill and Homeless People Sit Vacant* <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/nyregion/nearly-2600-apartments-for-mentally-ill-and-homeless-people-sit-vacant.html>

<sup>13</sup> NY Department of Housing Preservation and Development (May 16, 2022). *2021 NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey Selected Initial Findings*. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/hpd/downloads/pdfs/services/2021-nychvs-selected-initial-findings.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Brand, David. CityLimits. (Sep 13, 2022). *It's Not Just Manhattan: Rents Are Still Rising Across NYC* <https://citylimits.org/2022/09/13/its-not-just-manhattan-rents-are-still-rising-across-nyc/>



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preexisting mental illness or trigger additional disorders.<sup>15</sup> The toll that homelessness has on children is particularly severe, leading to developmental delays, cognitive impairment, and increased mental health problems.<sup>16</sup> For the health of all New Yorkers and especially the city's children, we urge City Council to vote in favor of the proposed legislation and resolutions.

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<sup>15</sup> Castellow, J., Kloos, B., & Townley, G. (2015). Previous Homelessness as a Risk Factor for Recovery from Serious Mental Illnesses. *Community mental health journal*, 51(6), 674–684. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10597-014-9805-9>

<sup>16</sup> Goodman, S., Messeri, P., & O'Flaherty, B. (2016). Homelessness prevention in New York City: On average, it works. *Journal of housing economics*, 31, 14–34. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jhe.2015.12.001>