



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness  
for Women and their Children

## **Testimony of Women In Need (Win) for the Committee on Women and Gender Equity February 27, 2023**

Thank you to Chair Cabán and to the esteemed members of the Committee on Women and Gender Equity. We appreciate the opportunity to offer testimony and express our support for Intro 534, which would require the Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence (ENDGBV) to establish a trauma-informed program that connects eligible survivors of domestic or gender-based violence to support services.

Win is New York City's largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness. In total, more than 10 percent of homeless families with children in New York City live in Win shelters. For our families and others across the country, domestic violence is a major cofactor of housing insecurity and homelessness. Nationwide, more than 80 percent of women with children who have been homeless have also experienced domestic violence, and in New York, domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness.<sup>1</sup> Of the 2,200 families Win housed last year, 90 percent were led by women, many of whom have entered a homeless shelter after fleeing domestic violence. Intimate partner violence also has a generational impact, and over 230,000 children living in shelters are believed to suffer from trauma associated with exposure to domestic violence.<sup>2</sup>

However, for housing insecure and homeless families, the social services and protections that New York City provides to survivors can offer life-saving support. Extending these benefits under Intro 534 to equip victims of domestic violence with advocates and funds to aid in their recovery through lock changes has the potential to have an immediate and direct impact on families and children impacted by intimate partner abuse and, overtime, to abate the rate of homelessness among survivors.

**There is an unfortunate and historic correlation between homelessness and domestic violence.** For our families, homelessness is often an ill-fated outcome of abuse. Victims of gender-based violence often leave their homes to decrease the risk of repeated abuse, and families may rely on homeless shelters as a safe alternative to the home they shared with their abuser. Luckily, in response to these realities, New York City has built the largest network of domestic violence programs in the country. Intro 534 will build on this legacy to launch a 2-year trauma-informed pilot program to change the entrance door locks of the dwelling units of survivors of domestic violence and provide related support services.

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<sup>1</sup> "Homelessness in America: Focus on Families with Children," US Interagency Council on Homelessness, Washington, D.C.: September 2018. Online, [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Homeslessness\\_in\\_America\\_Families\\_with\\_Children.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Homeslessness_in_America_Families_with_Children.pdf) (Accessed November 30, 2022)

<sup>2</sup> "The Intimate Relationship between Domestic Violence and Homelessness," The Institute for Children, Poverty, & Homelessness, October 27, 2018. <https://www.icphusa.org/commentary/the-intimate-relationship-between-domestic-violence-and-homelessness-2/> (Accessed November 30, 2022)



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**Sometimes, the simplest solution is also the most effective. Intro 534 is commonsense reform that will prevent repeat domestic violence and its ramifications, such as homelessness.** Stipends for lock changes will keep families safely housed in their rightful homes, rather than uprooting parents and children to avoid abuse. For the eligible families this bill targets, whose households have an annual gross income between 51 and 80 percent of the area median income, the costs associated with changing a lock can be a hardship for a family already enduring immense financial and psychological burdens. Instead, Intro 534 will establish this simple safety step as a right for survivors and their families and alleviate the financial and logistical difficulty that changing locks could cause.

**While the substance of Intro 534 is straightforward, its implementation is careful and adequately trauma informed.** We thank the sponsors for prioritizing historically oppressed communities and targeting survivors of domestic violence who are English language learners, homeless, immigrants, disabled, queer, have a criminal history, or are a member of a community of color. Marginalized and low-income communities are disproportionately impacted by domestic violence in New York City, and systemic inequalities have impeded these communities' access to supportive services.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, these families also experience the highest rates of homelessness.<sup>4</sup> Therefore, the services and stipends offered by Intro 534 through survivor advocates and a pilot program will work to right these deep disparities in care. Additionally, we appreciate that the pilot program outlined in Intro 534 includes the voices of survivors through regular participant surveys. Only those impacted can truly assess the efficacy of support programs, and it is essential that survivors themselves measure the success of Intro 534.

Ultimately, homelessness is a complex, intersectional issue, but the steps to solve its causes can be simple. We applaud the City Council for introducing this legislation that could have an immense impact for housing insecure survivors of domestic violence and their families. Thank you also to Council Member Farías for **Resolution 475 to call on the New York state legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign legislation, to create a "purple alert system" for missing victims of domestic violence.** Tackling domestic violence is an upstream approach to homelessness, and we urge the City Council to pass the proposed legislation and combat this cofactor of homelessness.

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<sup>3</sup> Julie Wertheimer-Meier and Edward Hill, "2020-2021: Domestic Violence, Race/Ethnicity and Sex Report," NYC Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-Based Violence, New York, NY: September 2022. Online, <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/ocdv/downloads/pdf/2021-Domestic-Violence-Race-Ethnicity-and-Sex-Report.pdf> (Access February 27, 2023).

<sup>4</sup> "DHS Data Dashboard – Fiscal Year 2022," New York City Department of Homeless Services, 2022. <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/dashboard/FY22-DHS-Data-Dashboard-Charts.pdf> (Access February 27, 2023)/