



Breaking the Cycle of Homelessness
for Women and their Children

**Testimony by Win (Formerly Women in Need, Inc.) for the New York State Budget Hearing on Housing
Joint Legislative Public Hearing on 2024 Executive Budget Proposal: Topic Housing
Scheduled for 2/14/24**

Thank you to Chairs Kavanagh and Rosenthal and the esteemed members of the state legislature Committees on Housing for the chance to submit testimony. My name is Chris Mann, and I am the Assistant Vice President of Policy & Advocacy at Win. Win is the nation's largest provider of shelter and services to families with children experiencing homelessness. We operate 16 shelters and nearly 500 supportive housing units across the five boroughs. Each night, more than 7,000 people call Win "home," including 3,600 children. We are submitting testimony today in staunch support of upholding safe shelter standards, allocating for \$250 million in the upcoming budget for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP), and supporting policies that will promote an increase in housing supply.

For those experiencing homelessness, stable shelter is imperative to uphold the dignity and safety of households. We urge the state legislature to pass S8493, sponsored by Brad Hoylman-Sigal, and A9129, sponsored by Catalina Cruz, to prohibit the imposition of limits on the length of stay at homeless shelters and emergency congregate housing. The current 30- and 60-day time limits imposed by the Adams administration have forced migrants to sleep on the street during the winter months, disrupted children's education, and displaced families far from their established communities. Additionally, shelter limits will result in an increase in street homelessness, which has costly and fatal consequences.

The State must also address the increase in households at risk of homelessness and the growing shelter census—the housing crisis in New York State is worse than it has ever been, with over 150,000 individuals without a home and 175,000 households facing the looming threat of eviction. The lapse of federal aid and pandemic-related eviction protections, combined with the arrival of hundreds of thousands of asylum seekers, has exacerbated an already dire situation. It is imperative that we take decisive action to address this crisis and prevent more of our fellow New Yorkers from experiencing the trauma of homelessness.

The Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) represents a tangible and effective solution to combat homelessness. By allocating \$250 million to HAVP, the State can create a flexible, statewide voucher program akin to the federally administered Housing Choice Voucher (Section-8), but with broader accessibility to support those in need. This program has the potential to provide vouchers for tens of thousands of New Yorkers. The Furman Center estimates that number to be 13,764 households,ⁱ which would equate to over 30,000 individuals.

Investing in HAVP is not only a compassionate response to the homelessness crisis; it is also a sound fiscal decision. By providing stable housing, HAVP will reduce the state's expenditures on emergency shelter services while ensuring a steady stream of rental income for building owners. Additionally, it will offer much-needed financial stability to low-income tenants, preventing the trauma of eviction and homelessness.

As the shelter census continues to rise, it is imperative that we take swift and decisive action to address



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the homelessness crisis in our state. HAVP represents a cost-effective and immediate solution that can provide critical assistance to vulnerable individuals and families while saving the state **hundreds of millions of dollars per year** in both shelter and indirect costs of homelessness. In a Win report set to be released next week, we detail the savings and impact of HAVP on homelessness by region across the state, which are substantial.

It is crucial to recognize, however, that vouchers alone cannot solve homelessness. While HAVP is a critical step in the right direction, the State must do more to address the underlying causes of the housing crisis. One key aspect of this is the need for additional affordable housing units to be built. To achieve this, the legislature should replace the 421-a tax incentive with an as-of-right affordable housing tax incentive that meets the affordability needs of low-income New Yorkers who are forced to find housing in one of the world's tightest housing markets. A recent report from the New York Housing Conference found that the greatest need for increased affordable housing supply is for renters below the median household income of \$50,000.ⁱⁱ Additionally, there should be a tax incentive for office-to-residential affordable housing conversions. Furthermore, lifting the FAR (floor area ratio) cap would enable New York City to increase neighborhood density, thus increasing the availability of affordable housing.

In addition to increasing the supply of affordable housing, strong tenant protections are essential to prevent homelessness and ensure housing stability for all New Yorkers. The legislature should prioritize implementing robust tenant protections to safeguard tenants from eviction, harassment, and discrimination.

In conclusion, I urge state leadership to uphold and protect the legal right to shelter and put an end to shelter evictions for people experiencing homelessness, prioritize the allocation of \$250 million for the Housing Access Voucher Program in the upcoming budget, and take comprehensive action to increase housing supply. The families of New York State deserve real solutions, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure all New Yorkers have access to safe, stable, and affordable housing.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Chris Mann
Assistant Vice President of Policy and Advocacy
Win

ⁱ Raetz, Dong, Murphy, Been (2023) A State-Level Rent Voucher Program. NYU Furman Center
https://furmancenter.org/files/publications/2_A_State-Level_Rent_Voucher_Program_Final.pdf

ⁱⁱ New York Housing Conference (2024) How Does 421a Fit Into Creating Affordable Housing Opportunity in NYC?
<https://thenyh.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/FINAL-NYHC-How-421a-Fits-Into-Affordable-Housing-Tools-Jan-9.pdf>