

AUGUST 2024

Win's Fiscal Year 2025 Policy and Advocacy Agenda

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The logo for 'win' features the word 'win' in a bold, lowercase, sans-serif font. A small white arrow points upwards from the top of the letter 'i'.

Background

Win *works to end the cycle of generational homelessness by providing a holistic solution of safe housing and social services to help families regain independence and thrive in permanent housing.* As the Policy and Advocacy team, we support this goal by catalyzing systems-wide change on local, state, and federal levels and realizing equitable solutions to end homelessness for families with children.

Our FY25 Policy Agenda lays out our policy priorities for ending family homelessness, which fall into two main categories: **Promoting Housing as a Human Right** and **Strengthening Supports for Families Experiencing Homelessness**. This agenda also reflects our commitment to research, best practices, the voices of our clients and direct care staff, who help guide our priorities and contribute their own during insight sessions. Finally, the Win mission to end homelessness inherently intersects with broader equity goals, and we are focused on solutions that will advance racial justice, gender equality, and civil liberties.

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2025 Priority Initiatives

At Win, we recognize that ending family homelessness requires a multifaceted approach. Our policy priorities are designed to be adaptable yearly, identifying the key areas that must be addressed while considering political realities and urgent policy needs. Although Win is committed to advancing all our policy priorities outlined below, in FY25 we will take an active leadership role in the **ten priority initiatives** at the City, State, and Federal levels presented here:

New York City Priority Initiatives

- Defend New York City's right to shelter from ongoing attacks by the Mayor, Governor, and anyone else.
- Improve the shelter intake process for families with children experiencing homelessness.
- Resolve administrative issues that prevent the timely distribution of rental assistance to households in need.
- Ensure families in shelter have access to clinical mental health services required under Local Law 35.

New York State Priority Initiatives

- Pass the Housing Access Voucher Program, a statewide rental subsidy, akin to the federal Section 8 voucher program.
- Pass legislation to prohibit the City's 30- and 60-day's shelter limits for new migrants.
- Expand access to shelter-based child care centers.
- Secure more legal aid funding for low-income tenants and immigrants experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

Federal Priority Initiatives

- Expand access to work authorization for migrants and asylum seekers through new designation and redesignation of Temporary Protected Status and changes to the asylum application process.
- Pass the Family Stability and Opportunity Vouchers Act, which would provide \$250 million in housing vouchers to families with young children to move to high opportunity neighborhoods over five years.

As an epicenter of the United States' housing affordability crisis, New York City can lead the nation by adopting and investing in more holistic solutions to end homelessness. Win will work with our housing partners in the nonprofit, private, and public sectors to advocate for legislative and administrative changes from all levels of government that advance housing as a human right and ensure a more stable future for families with children in New York City and across the country. Our comprehensive policy agenda is laid out below.

Housing as a Human Right



➤ Win believes that quality housing is a human right and is requisite for ending homelessness. We are therefore **committed to advancing policies** that both prevent families from ever experiencing homelessness and improve housing opportunities for those living in shelter.

I. Voucher Access and Reform



Even if you have a voucher a lot of landlords won't even accept that voucher. Affordable housing needs to match up with what the voucher is covering.

—WIN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING RESIDENT

Housing subsidies are the number one pathway to permanent housing for families experiencing homelessness. Housing families with vouchers is cost-efficient, as these subsidies are a fraction of shelter costs, and effective, as just 0.3% of families with children that leave shelter with a voucher re-enter shelter within two years, compared to 15% of families who leave shelter without a voucher.ⁱ

- **Improve CityFHEPS administration** by working with the Adams Administration to further progress on processing packages, pre-clearing apartments, and sending payments on-time so that tens of thousands of New Yorkers can exit or avoid entering shelter with the voucher.
- **Expand rental assistance to all New Yorkers regardless of documentation status.** By diverting spending on emergency shelter New York City can save over \$3 billion annually and

help tens of thousands of New Yorkers move into their own homes.

- **Include funding in the New York State budget for the Housing Access Voucher Program** to create a flexible and inclusive statewide voucher for people at risk of or experiencing homelessness, regardless of their immigration status or criminal record.
- **Combat unlawful discrimination based on source of income** so that voucher holders can utilize vouchers without risk of refusal. Win will advocate for additional staff and resources to support the New York City Commission on Human Rights source of income unit within the Law Enforcement Bureau to enforce legal protections against source of income discrimination and hold abusers accountable.
- **Increase Access and Funding for Housing Choice Vouchers** so that more families across the nation can remain permanently housed with a federal voucher.

II. Improved Access to Public, Affordable, and Supportive Housing



All these buildings they are building in the city, and you meet someone working and with a voucher, [but] they still can't get in.

—WIN TRANSITIONAL HOUSING RESIDENT

Homelessness is a housing problem, and Win works to increase and preserve the number of affordable and quality units available to New Yorkers who are

at risk of or experiencing homelessness. We're focused on reforms that will maximize utilization of available units and repair offline affordable housing.

- **Reform the supportive housing application process** by broadening eligibility requirements so that vacant units can be filled quickly by those in need. We also aim to mainstream the application process by reviewing the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System and utilizing the Access HRA system.
- **Reimagine public and affordable housing** by advocating for additional investments in NYCHA and for the reinstatement of a state tax credit for affordable housing development. These solutions will maximize the leasing of available units and incentivize additional production of affordable and supportive housing.

III. Homelessness Prevention



If you are stably housed, you can work on your mental health, employment, and other things important to you.

—WIN PROGRAM DIRECTOR OF SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

With the City's shelter census reaching record highs, we know that we must work to advance upstream solutions to this crisis. Win supports investment in preventative measures, so that families can stay in their homes and shelter can be rightly relegated as a last resort.

- **Support rental assistance programs** in New York City and State so that households at-risk of eviction can receive significant economic relief and remain stably housed.

We are also working to leverage the Emergency Rental Assistance and One-Shot Deal programs to address wide-spread rental arrears for supportive housing tenants.

- **Implement and enforce strong tenant protections** to ensure that tenants utilizing vouchers can access apartments and once housed, can remain there.
- **Defend and fund the right to counsel** in New York City for low-income tenants facing eviction proceedings as an invaluable tool in decreasing rates of eviction and combatting the homelessness crisis.

Win supports investment in preventative measures, so that families can stay in their homes and shelter can be rightly relegated as a last resort.

Strengthening Supports for Families Experiencing Homelessness



➤ Win is improving the shelter experience for families with children currently experiencing homelessness, from their initial assessment at DHS' Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center to their ultimate move to permanent housing. We are focused on an agenda that maximizes healing and sets up families for sustainable success and permanent exits from the shelter system.

I. Shelter Intake and Experience

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Path is the beginning, you can get discouraged if they deny you, if you have a bad experience.

—SUPPORTIVE HOUSING TENANT

Recognizing that prolonged periods of homelessness—the average shelter stay for families is over 500 days—can worsen mental health issues, educational outcomes, employment opportunities, and physical health, Win looks to prevent traumatization and provide quality care and case management for families experiencing homelessness.

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- **Defend the right to shelter in New York City**, so that every New Yorker and child experiencing homelessness is guaranteed a safe place to sleep every night. We are focused on maintaining humane standards for shelter as outlined in the consent decree in Callahan v. Carey.
- **Require mental healthcare professionals** in family shelters as per Local Law 35. This law,

which Win was instrumental in passing, will require low-barrier and lifesaving mental healthcare in-person and virtually by mandating one mental health professional for up to every 50 families with children. We are committed to making sure it is properly funded and implemented.

- **Improve the intake process at the PATH assessment centers**, so that displaced families with children encounter a trauma-informed, respectful, and streamlined intake process. Additionally, we aim to relieve children from the burden of visiting PATH and to add more PATH locations for convenience.
- **Strengthen the human services workforce** by investing in staff and providing significant cost-of-living adjustments to make their salaries a more accurate reflection of the critical and demanding work they do every day.

II. Workforce & Economic Mobility

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Clients [are] in a situation where they have to choose between pursuing better paying jobs and keeping childcare, keeping them in a perpetual state of poverty.

—WIN YOUTH & RECREATION STAFF MEMBER

To address the financial inequities of families living in shelter, Win is determined to break down employment barriers and to set up structures and resources so that families experiencing homelessness can achieve financial autonomy and remain permanently housed.

- **Improve access to quality early childhood education and care** for families living in shelter to make it easier for parents to pursue employment and higher education while their children receive social and educational benefits from reliable child care providers.
- **Require employment specialists and workforce development programs in all family shelters** so that New Yorkers experiencing homelessness can learn tools to gain and maintain their financial independence and housing.
- **Expedite work authorization and expand legal support** so that asylum-seeking and non-citizen families can work legally and can qualify for housing subsidies.
- **Implement and advance direct cash transfer programs** as proven stimulants of economic mobility and poverty reduction.

III. Children and Youth in Shelter

- **Enforce and expand on McKinney Vento Protections** such that each child's right to education, regardless of housing or immigration status, is realized. Some improvements include increased resources for transportation, helping families stay with their preferred school during shelter transfers and moveouts, facilitating mid-school year enrollment changes, and funding for technical assistance for school district liaisons to better identify eligible families and pair them with the appropriate services.
- **Guarantee shelter-based educational resources** to break down barriers to children and youth in shelter accessing and thriving in school. These include but are not limited to: coordinators or social workers for early intervention/special education assessments and services, enrollment

support specialists, liaisons supporting the transition from early childhood education to K-12, provision of school supplies, and promoting school-to-shelter connectedness (especially for non-English-speaking parents and transferring school records).

- **Provide and/or connect families to extracurricular, enrichment programming, and vocational programming for young adults (especially afterschool and during summers).** These can range from more academic programs such as tutoring, language classes, or college preparation to athletic or arts programs. For youth and young adults, this includes investments in internship and vocational opportunities, such as the Summer Youth Employment Program.
- **Provide robust social-emotional learning supports to children in shelter.** This includes mental health services tailored to children and youth, from individual and group therapy to therapeutic programming and curricula in enrichment programs (art classes, gardening programs).

Appendix

- i. Eric Adams, Joseph Varlack, and Daniel Steinberg. “Mayor’s Preliminary Budget Report,” Mayor’s Management Report: Preliminary Fiscal 2023, February 2023. 2023. https://www.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/pmmr2023/2023_pmmr.pdf
- ii. “Mental Health,” *Ruff Institute of Global Homelessness*. 2017. <https://ighhub.org/understanding-homelessness/causes-intersections/mental-health#:~:text=Homelessness%2C%20in%20turn%2C%20amplifies%20poor,depression%2C%20sleeplessness%20and%20substance%20use>
- iii. “Still Disconnected: Persistently Low Attendance Rates for Students in Shelter,” *Advocates for Children of New York*, May 18, 2022. https://www.advocatesforchildren.org/sites/default/files/library/still_disconnected.pdf?pt=1
- iv. “No Longer Hidden: The Health And Well Being of Homeless High School Students,” *Institute for Children, Policy & Homelessness* October 31, 2019. <https://www.icphusa.org/reports/>

About Win

Since its founding to provide emergency shelter to four homeless women and their children, Win has grown into the largest provider of family shelter and supportive housing in New York City and the country. Win offers transitional housing and permanent supportive housing that's coupled with programs and services developed to support long-term housing stability. All of Win's services are guided by its mission—to transform the lives of New York City homeless families with children by providing the safe housing, critical services, and the ground-breaking programs they need to succeed on their own—so families can regain their independence and children can look forward to a brighter future.





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