

MARCH 2026

# DIVERSION & SHELTER ELIGIBILITY DENIALS AT PATH

By Maya Jasinska, Christopher Mann,  
and Henry Love



**win**

---

# Background

---

When families have nowhere else to turn, they seek shelter placements at the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) intake center located in the South Bronx. Despite NYC’s right to shelter, becoming eligible for shelter is not an easy process. In fact, far too many families are found ineligible for shelter the first time they apply, subjecting them to the traumatic experience multiple times. Being found eligible for shelter is essential to being eligible for rental assistance subsidies, like CityFHEPS, which help families move out of shelter and stabilize. In other words, repeated denials needlessly prolong the length of time a family spends in shelter. In Fiscal Year (FY) 2025, Win clients had to apply for shelter an average of approximately two times before being found eligible for a shelter placement. Of the 2,239 families who entered a Win family shelter in FY25, 43% had two or more entries within the fiscal year, with one client reapplying at PATH 20 times. A 2023 report by the City Comptroller’s Office found that 80% of families were denied shelter upon first application.<sup>i</sup>

To prove their eligibility for shelter, families must demonstrate their last two years of housing history, to allow PATH staff to divert them from the shelter system by uncovering alternative housing options to shelter that families either concealed or were not aware of.<sup>ii</sup> Difficulty with proving eligibility—described in more detail in this brief—under the two-year housing history requirement means that many clients remain in the shelter system under “conditional” status for months at a time, reapplying and returning to PATH every 10 days. On average, it took 41 days after a family’s first entry at Win to be found eligible for shelter: four times the length of time it should take. One client in FY25 even waited 314 days after their first entry to be found eligible for shelter.

In FY25, 8.6% of families applying at PATH were diverted from entering shelter altogether.<sup>iii</sup> Our interviews with Win clients reveal that diversion and mediation services at PATH often keep families in overcrowded and, in some cases, dangerous situations that ultimately delay the process of getting into permanent housing. Until eviction prevention policies—such as HomeBase emergency rental assistance and the right to counsel—are better implemented, and shelter eligibility is no longer a prerequisite for CityFHEPS, Win suggests that the City Council and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) prioritize eliminating barriers to shelter entry.

This includes shortening the housing history requirement to one year and allowing for self-attestation to one’s housing history.

---

# Doubled-up Homelessness

---

Though not included in the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s definition of homelessness, but rather the U.S. Department of Education’s definition, in 2019, 3.7 million Americans experienced “doubled-up” homelessness—or living with other adults due to economic hardship, housing loss, or domestic violence.<sup>iv, v</sup> While shelter can be a challenging space for some families, doubled-up and overcrowded conditions are also associated with many detrimental effects, especially for families who have previously lived in shelter.<sup>vi, vii</sup> Negative effects of overcrowding in inadequate quality homes include poor health, increased interpersonal tension, and worse educational outcomes for children.<sup>viii, ix</sup>

When families arrive at PATH, they have often already been doubled-up for some time. Doubled-up conditions often increase stress and strain relationships, and many families come to shelter as a last resort. Initially welcoming offers to help a friend, neighbor, or family member can sour. The conflicts that arise during doubling-up can worsen the social isolation of people experiencing homelessness. One in three Americans who are homeless cite their reason for homelessness as a loss of social support, and more than one in five families with children in the DHS system identified domestic violence as the reason for their homelessness.<sup>x</sup> <sup>xi</sup> Most Win clients felt pessimistic about doubling-up as a successful, sustainable diversion from shelter because of the conflicts that arise in overcrowded housing:



*It’s gonna ruin that friendship because you’re like burdensome. They’re like you need to get out or you need to leave. Someone telling you you need to get out or you need to leave is very hurtful because, like, you have to get out, you have to leave and go back to PATH.*

In other words, doubling-up is not a permanent housing solution; clients may end up returning to PATH. However, PATH employees do not recognize doubled-up or overcrowded situations as a type of homelessness:



*They try to tell you if you're really homeless or not, that's the funny thing. They will tell you if you're homeless, like, you can't tell someone they have to make me stay there. They said I can't stay there, I can't stay there. How are you gonna sit there and say I'm not homeless, I can go there because they have room? That's their house, if they said no, they said no. And they do that, they will deny you.*

Beyond not recognizing doubled-up situations as poor alternatives to shelter, this lack of understanding about the tensions and discord in doubled-up housing situations exacerbates the high rate of eligibility denials at PATH. Fractured relationships mean that previous landlords or hosts often refuse to confirm a family's need for shelter, contributing to repeated denials. As one Win client explained:



*You cannot be held responsible for somebody not answering their phone...That's why I got found ineligible over 25 times. Because I couldn't verify two-year housing. Every week I was going there. Twenty-five times. I had stacks of ineligible papers...So I just had to hope that one of these people would answer their phones and not hold that grudge for the reason why they kicked me out and answer their phone and PATH would be like "Oh, you're eligible."*

Being denied placement over 25 times would have unnecessarily extended this client's stay in shelter by at least eight months. Although the two-year housing history requirement is supposedly in place to allow PATH workers to thoroughly research any possible shelter alternatives for a family, the 2022 Comptroller's Audit of PATH found that PATH personnel denied 42% of family applications without adequately investigating their housing history.<sup>xii</sup> These denials often occurred when PATH "Fraud Investigators" could not reach a family's previous landlord or host. Furthermore, paper documentation requirements can be insurmountable for families in housing crisis, who may be fleeing from domestic violence situations that included the intentional theft of their critical documents, or who have lost or not received documents because of lockouts and other types of displacement.

---

# Diversion to Low Quality or Dangerous Housing

---

Concerningly, many of the situations that families are diverted to from PATH are not quality, stable housing, but in fact are overcrowded situations. One Win client described being denied shelter at PATH:



*Someone [PATH employee] said ‘We felt there was space there because you could have slept on the floor.’ Like, how am I gonna sleep on the floor when I have three kids – well at the time I had two kids, but now I have three kids? I can’t sleep on somebody’s floor. And why would you even think that’s a place for me to sleep on somebody’s floor?’*

Overcrowding—let alone sleeping on the floor—is especially damaging for children, giving them less quiet space to concentrate on schoolwork or get quality sleep before the school day.<sup>xiii</sup>

Even more concerningly, Win clients have described PATH staff not recognizing signs of domestic violence or dangerous situations and conducting cursory inspections of current living situations. Before stepping foot into PATH, most families have already experienced trauma—often because of long-term housing instability, domestic violence, or poverty. Yet PATH, the very center designed to help vulnerable families, can be retraumatizing, with Win families describing their treatment at PATH as punitive and dehumanizing. As one Win focus group participant explained:



*They make you feel unwelcome. Because sometimes you go there and they talk to you like—they make you feel how you are: homeless. That’s how they really make you feel; like they’re better than you. Like, even a worker told me there one time, ‘Well this isn’t my issue. I have somewhere to sleep at night.’*

By not taking into account the trauma and lived experiences of homeless families, the treatment and environment families face at PATH can trigger trauma responses, such as anxiety, challenges regulating moods and responses, and difficulty completing forms and navigating the application requirements. Expecting parents—sometimes with their children present—to go through the trauma of retelling their whole story to be deemed eligible for shelter is unrealistic and harmful. Unsurprisingly, Win clients have described not feeling confident to disclose the truth about their living situation, and then being denied shelter as a result of PATH’s focus on diversion:



*Honestly I no say everything because I don't want make my stay in trouble because this involve a lot of stuff. When that happened I don't want to say nothing because I was scared for my kids' life and my life. So I no say everything, I say only the part I think they want to know. So for sometimes that's not enough. They want me to say a lot of stuff, you see, like - I feel like my kids life is in danger. So when that -sorry- when I say that I said "Oh my god, I have to be careful what I say." Because if I tell the complete story, they gonna know it's me who opened my mouth.*

---

# Benefits Inaccessibility

---

Unfortunately, in NYC, being deemed eligible for shelter is a prerequisite for many critical benefits that do guarantee housing stability and permanence for families—like CityFHEPS. Families stuck in conditional placements—despite living in shelter—are not eligible for CityFHEPS. Furthermore, there is very little support for families that are living doubled-up, and 50% of family members taking in a relative are themselves on benefits.<sup>xiv</sup> Doubling-up can even increase housing precarity. When a family agrees to take in another family that is homeless, they can potentially jeopardize their own benefits: Rental assistance subsidies are set for a specific number of people living in an apartment—if that number increases, a family could lose their subsidy.<sup>xv</sup>



*That night, she no open the door for us. She no open the door because she don't want me no more in her house because I put some restriction... So when all that stuff happened, the second time, they tried to find out more because she sent me a letter to say she no want me in her house because she don't want to lose the program she had...*

---

# Conclusion & Recommendations

---

While the intent of the housing history requirement and diversion policy is supposedly to keep people permanently housed in their communities, the reality is that they either prolong families' time in shelter or that the housing options that PATH workers identify as alternatives to shelter are often in poor quality or even dangerous situations. Doubling-up and overcrowding increase housing insecurity in the community, have deleterious effects on children, and do not offer families pathways to finding their own permanent housing. To ease the burden on families, City Council should pass Intro 1072, sponsored by Council Member Hudson, to reduce the two-year housing history requirement to one year. Furthermore, City Council should pass legislation such that families can self-attest to their housing history and not rely on hard-to-reach third parties for verification. Additionally, legislation should set clear parameters on what constitutes a sufficient investigation of housing history to prevent families from getting stuck in a doom loop of denials. If a family has been denied eligibility repeatedly and returned to PATH many times, their need for shelter is evident. City Council should also pass oversight legislation requiring DHS to track and report on how many families are referred to mediation services at PATH, as well as what the outcome of that mediation is, and whether that family returns to PATH.

City Council can also pass further measures to reduce the disruptive impact of homelessness and the application process for shelter on families' lives. These include instituting appointment times at PATH, so that families can adjust their work schedules and arrange childcare; guaranteeing shelter placements in the nearest possible shelter to the youngest child's school; and opening more intake sites in more boroughs—as proposed in Intro 453 sponsored by Council Member Ung.

Lastly, we recommend that Mayor Zohran Mamdani implement the CityFHEPS bill package, which includes a bill that would allow people facing eviction to become eligible for CityFHEPS. This would constitute true diversion from shelter and keep New Yorkers permanently and safely housed, in their own homes.

---

# Appendix

---

- i. New York City Office of the Comptroller. "Review of the New York City Department of Homeless Services' Programs and Services." August 2023. [MD22-105S.pdf](#)
- ii. PATH brochure, DHS: [path-brochure.pdf](#)
- iii. Wasow Park, Molly. "Mayor's Management Report: Human Resources Administration" Mayor's Office of Operations, Fiscal Year 2025. [hra.pdf](#)
- iv. Richard et al. "Quantifying Doubled-Up Homelessness: Presenting a New Measure Using U.S. Census Microdata" Housing Policy Debate 34 (1): 3-24, March 2021. [Quantifying Doubled-Up Homelessness: Presenting a New Measure Using U.S. Census Microdata: Housing Policy Debate: Vol 34 , No 1 - Get Access](#)
- v. Gartland, Erik. "Hidden Housing Instability: 3.7 Million People Live in Doubled-Up Households" Center for Budget and Policy Priorities, September 2022. [Hidden Housing Instability: 3.7 Million People Live in Doubled-Up Households | Center on Budget and Policy Priorities](#)
- vi. Villarosa, Linda. "A Couch Is Not a Home." *New York Times Opinion*. [Opinion | Voices from Inside America's Homelessness Crisis—The New York Times](#)
- vii. Bush and Shinn, "Family Experiences of Doubling Up After Homelessness." *City Scape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, Vol 19 Number 3, 2017. [Cityscape Double Issue - Planning Livable Communities | The Family Options Study](#)
- viii. Bush and Shinn, 2017.
- ix. Harvey, Hope. "Cumulative Effects of Doubling-Up." Harvard Joint Center for Housing Studies, May 2018. [Harvard JCHS Harvey Cumulative Effects of Doubling-up.pdf](#)
- x. Martin, Courtney. "What's the Real Reason People Become Homeless?" UC Berkeley Greater Good Magazine, August 2024. [What's the Real Reason People Become Homeless?](#)
- xi. New Destiny Housing. "A Crisis Compounded: The Dual Crises of Domestic Violence and Homelessness." July 2024. [DV Report](#)
- xii. New York City Office of the Comptroller. "Audit report on the department of homeless services' determination of temporary housing benefits for families with children." February 2022. Available at: [https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/DHS\\_MG20\\_070A.pdf](https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wp-content/uploads/documents/DHS_MG20_070A.pdf)
- xiii. Bush and Shinn, "Family Experiences of Doubling Up After Homelessness." *City Scape: A Journal of Policy Development and Research*, Vol 19 Number 3, 2017. [Cityscape Double Issue - Planning Livable Communities | The Family Options Study](#)
- xiv. Polgar, Michael F.; North, Carol S.; Pollio, David E. "Stress and support among people caring for homeless adult relatives." In: *Contemporary Perspectives in Family Research*. 2014; Vol. 8B. pp. 223-245.
- xv. Gardiner, Aidan. "The Shelters Keeping People Out of Shelters." *New York Times*. March 2024. [Connecticut Shelters Keeping People Out of Shelters—The New York Times](#)

# 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.




Donate  
to Win




Follow Win's  
Advocacy Work

## Follow Win

 /winnyc.org

 @winnyc\_org

 @winnyc\_org