

Family Homelessness in NYC:

How Can We Solve It?

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“I am not leaving any New Yorkers behind. We're moving together and that is the goal of what we must accomplish,” said the freshly inaugurated Eric Adams, mayor of New York City, at a March 2022 press conference. He was referring to the undeniable rampant homelessness that in this era, seems almost synonymous with the Big Apple. “I'm not abandoning anyone. I am not believing that dignity is living in a cardboard without a shower, without a toilet...in terrible living conditions...This city is now engaged in a multi-agency mission with compassion and caring, taking our time, not rushing through this, but being compassionate to people who are experiencing terrible circumstances.”¹ Keen observers must wonder though, will Adams’ attempts to curb and alleviate homeless work, when the issue has only worsened?

SUMMARY

Despite New York City’s investments in homelessness prevention, the number of New Yorkers sleeping in shelters and on the street each night has remained near record levels. The production of new supportive housing — affordable housing with onsite services that help formerly homeless, disabled tenants live — has been far too slow, and the availability of placements far too scarce. This thesis examines the issue of family homelessness, the conditions that have contributed to the present crisis, and recommends various solutions that can help reduce the number of homeless families

THE LARGER PROBLEM

A homelessness crisis is plaguing New York City. According to The Bowery Mission, an organization that serves the city’s underprivileged, “nearly one in every 106 New Yorkers is

¹ Vazquez, J. (2022, April 3). 'mission with compassion': NYC details homeless plan amid efforts to shake encampments. NBC New York. <https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/new-details-expected-on-nyc-homeless-plan-amid-sweeping-effort-to-shake-encampments/3622546/>

homeless.”² As of November 2020, around 4,000 people sleep on the street, in the subways or in other public spaces every night. That number is just a small fraction of the more than 78,000 men, women and children who lack permanent housing and live in temporary shelter. Moreover, the number of chronically homeless has escalated by 15% from 10 years ago, and by 7% since January 2014.³ The growth has occurred despite the increase in spending on homeless services, which has more than doubled since November 2013, reaching \$3.2 billion in the 2019 fiscal year.⁴

New York City’s homelessness problem may never be totally solved, but policymakers are interested in finding ways to diminish its severity. Such a difficult challenge will require innovative and complex solutions. A multipronged approach is needed since people land on the street for a variety of reasons. Many are victims of poverty, sudden unemployment with no emergency savings, or rising rents. Some suffer from mental illness or drug addiction. A large number have criminal records, making it nearly impossible to obtain employment or housing. Others believe living on the street is safer than living in a shelter. There are also young runaways who have nowhere to turn for assistance.

² “Homelessness & Poverty in New York City.” The Bowery Mission. Rebuilding Lives Since 1879., November 2020. www.bowery.org/homelessness/#:~:text=people%20are%20homeless%3F-In%20a%20city%20of%20more%20than%208.3%20million%20people%2C%20nearly,or%20in%20other%20public%20spaces.

³ “Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City.” Coalition For The Homeless, May 2021. www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/.

⁴ West, Melanie Grayce. “New York City’s Spending on Homeless Hits \$3.2 Billion This Year.” The Wall Street Journal, Dow Jones & Company, 22 May 2019, www.wsj.com/articles/new-york-citys-spending-on-homeless-hits-3-2-billion-this-year-11558562997#:~:text=Spending%20on%20homelessness%20in%20New,Wednesday%20by%20Comptroller%20Scott%20Stringer.

This specific policy brief, however, will focus on family homelessness in New York City – cases where a unit of at least one parent and child under the age of 18 lack long-term accommodation, which has its own unique set of causes and possible solutions.

THE CHALLENGE OF FAMILY HOMELESSNESS

Family homelessness in New York City continues to reach new records. According to a report from the Coalition for the Homeless⁵, in November 2016, there were 15,899 families sleeping in shelters each night. Individual family members comprised more than three quarters of the 62,840 people in homeless shelters. Nearly 40 percent (24,000) were children. In March 2021, 11,563 families with 33,877 children and adults were sleeping nightly in New York City shelters. So, the numbers have decreased slightly over the last four and a half years, but are still very high.

As a disclaimer, it is important to note that the issue of family homelessness across the five boroughs has no doubt been affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the recency of this unprecedented historical event, the exact numbers and detailed research on the intersection of the pandemic and homelessness are not yet available and as such will not be detailed in this report. However, because of short-term relief programs from the city and state such as eviction moratoriums, an April 2021 report shows that the number of homeless families decreased in the outbreak of the coronavirus, while unfortunately, the rate of homelessness for single adults in New York City reached record levels.⁶

⁵ “Family Homelessness in NYC: City and State Must Meet Unprecedented Scale of Crisis with Proven Solutions” Coalition for the Homeless. January 2017. https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Family-Homelessness-1-2017_FINAL.pdf

⁶ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/homeless-new-york-city-adults-families-covid-pandemic/>

In order for the shelter system to function as only a temporary refuge without perpetually growing, more families must leave the system each year than the number of families that enter. Programs initiated by the de Blasio administration to increase eviction prevention (reducing the inflow) and to move sheltered families into permanent housing (increasing the exits) mitigated the growth in the shelter census, and so far appear to be reducing the vexing phenomenon of formerly homeless families returning to shelters. However, even with a laudable increase in stable housing placements in Fiscal Year (FY) 2016 (to 5,437 in total, up from 227 in FY 2013), 950 more families came into shelters than moved out. In December 2018, more than 12,500 families slept in New York City's homeless shelters according to the Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness.⁷ That is a 55 percent increase over the last decade.

CAUSES OF THE PROBLEM

The primary forces underlying the growing shelter population continue to be the severe lack of affordable housing in New York City, rising unemployment, and an increase in the number of families fleeing domestic violence.⁸

Lack of Affordable Housing

The significant shortage of affordable housing in New York City continues to be the main reason for family homelessness. New York City's housing market is tight, with a citywide rental vacancy rate of 3.63% in 2017. Rent stabilized apartment vacancy rates on the whole were

⁷ "The Dynamics of Family Homelessness in New York City," Institute for Children, Poverty & Homelessness. May 2021. <https://www.icphusa.org/dynamics/>

⁸ NYC Independent Budget Office, "The Rising Number of Homeless Families in NYC, 2002-2012," New York, NY, 2014.

2.06%.⁹ An extreme dearth of available housing, particularly at the lowest end of the income scale, has increased housing instability and overcrowding. Seventy-three percent of low-income households in New York City were severely rent-burdened in 2014 (paying more than half of their income for rent), compared with 71 percent in 2006. Among households with moderate incomes, the proportion of households with severe rent burdens increased from 37 percent in 2006 to 45 percent in 2014.¹⁰ Meanwhile, severe crowding among renters rose by 44.8 percent between 2005 and 2013.¹¹

These recent trends are reflected in the reasons for homelessness reported by families during the shelter intake process. Eviction and overcrowding remain among the top five reasons families with children, as well as adult families (without minor children) enter shelters. In the first 11 months of FY 2016, there were 5,621 families who became homeless for these two reasons, accounting for 42 percent of 13,361 shelter entries.¹²

While the number of families entering shelters due to overcrowding (2,195 families in total) in 2016 was almost exactly what it was a decade prior, the number did dip to less than half the 2016 level (898) in FY 2012 before rising again by 125 percent. Overcrowding is the only reason cited by families that has fluctuated so dramatically in the past decade.¹³ In 2015-16

⁹ "2019 Housing Supply Report," Rent Guidelines Board. <https://rentguidelinesboard.cityofnewyork.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/2019-HSR.pdf>

¹⁰ Gould Ellen, I., Karfunkel, B. (2016). Renting in America's Largest Metropolitan Areas. Online: <http://furmancenter.org/nationalrentallandscape>

¹¹ Stringer, S. (2015). Hidden Households. Online: https://comptroller.nyc.gov/wpcontent/uploads/documents/Hidden_Households.pdf

¹² New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students. (2016). Data and Statistics on Homelessness. Online: <http://www.nysteachs.org/info-topic/statistics.html>

¹³ New York City Independent Budget Office (2004). The Rising Number of Homeless Families in NYC, 2002–2012. Online: <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/2014dhs.pdf>

63,375 school-aged children lived in doubled-up households, an increase of 25 percent over the previous year.¹⁴

Families Fleeing Domestic Violence

Victims of domestic violence who become homeless are primarily women leaving their abusive partners. Whether single or with children, when they leave, they often do not have a source of income beyond the abusive partner and welfare. They are often not the owners of the home or the listed tenant on the rented apartment. Accordingly, affordability of housing is an issue for these women and their children. Domestic violence and housing instability are interrelated.¹⁵

In recent years, domestic violence has eclipsed eviction as the leading cause of homelessness among families in New York City.¹⁶ Domestic violence was the top reason families with children moved into shelters in 2016, rising to 30 percent of all families with children entering temporary housing.¹⁷ In Fiscal Year 2018, domestic violence accounted for 41 percent of the family population entering the city's Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters. According to New York City Comptroller, Scott Stringer, domestic violence drove about 12,500 people in more than 4,400 families to shelters run by the DHS in the 2018 fiscal

¹⁴ Same as footnote 4

¹⁵ Pavao, J. (2007;32(2):143–146) American Journal of Preventive Medicine, Intimate Partner Violence and Housing Instability. Online: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/6569159_Intimate_Partner_Violence_and_Housing_Instability#pf4

¹⁶ "Domestic Violence is Fueling NYC's Homelessness Crisis," Coalition for the Homeless, October 2019. <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/todays-read-domestic-violence-fueling-nyc-homelessness-crisis/>

¹⁷ Same as footnote 4.

year, up 37 percent and 44 percent from 2014, respectively. That figure included some 7,000 children, more than half of whom were younger than six, Stringer’s office said.¹⁸

There is an alternate shelter system run by the Human Resources Administration specifically for domestic violence survivors, which provides additional social services. But there is a 180-day time limit for residency at these shelters, which means that many survivors are left to find permanent housing or enter the general shelter system. New York City currently only has the capacity to house 23% of survivors in these specialized shelters.¹⁹

Rising Unemployment

Recent unemployment data signals another source of economic stress among low-income families. According to one study²⁰, “becoming unemployed nearly triples the probability of moving in with others.” Between November 2015 and November 2016, the unemployment rate in New York City rose from 5.2 percent to 5.7 percent (in the rest of New York State unemployment fell and as of January 2017 was just 4.6 percent). There was a sudden reduction in the number of employed New Yorkers of 129,000 between March 2016 and August of 2016, and accordingly, there were 35,198 more people receiving unemployment benefits in October 2016 than in June 2016 – a striking increase that likely impacted the demand for shelter. The

¹⁸ “Domestic Violence Fueling NYC Homelessness Crisis, Study Shows,” Patch, October 21, 2019. <https://patch.com/new-york/new-york-city/domestic-violence-fueling-nyc-homelessness-crisis-study-shows>

¹⁹ Devershi, Kay. “Half of homeless domestic violence survivors feel unsafe in NYC shelter system,” NYN Meida. February 3, 2020. <https://nynmedia.com/content/half-homeless-domestic-violence-survivors-feel-unsafe-nyc-shelter-system>

²⁰ 6 Wiemers, E. (2014) The Effect of Unemployment on Household Composition and Doubling Up Online: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4325982/>

August 2016 unemployment rate in the Bronx, where family homelessness was concentrated more than in any other borough, hit an alarming 7.8 percent.

The unemployment rate as of March 2022 is at 6.50%. In March 2021 it was at 11.70%, compared to 12.90% the previous month and 3.70% in March 2020. This is higher than the long-term average of 7.81%.²¹ In 2015, families entering shelters predominantly came from a few clustered zip codes in the poorest neighborhoods in New York City.²² However, homeless families come from every zip code in NYC prior to entering shelters.

Conditions in both the housing and job markets place tens of thousands of low-income families at risk of becoming homeless. There is a widening disparity between rising rents and falling income. Sixty percent of New Yorkers do not have enough savings to cover three months of living expenses²³, and so if they fall on hard times, within a short span, they do not have money to pay their rent and are likely to be evicted.

HOW TO BEST ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

The City and the State have begun to take important steps to address the homelessness crisis, and need to continue to strengthen and expand these initiatives. In 2017, The Citizens' Committee for Children (CCC), Enterprise Community Partners (Enterprise), and New Destiny Housing (New Destiny) came together to convene the Family Homelessness Task Force (FHTF).

²¹ New York Unemployment Rate, March 2021. https://ycharts.com/indicators/new_york_ny_unemployment_rate

²² G. Routhier, "Family Shelter Entrants Come Predominantly From a Few Clustered Neighborhoods," 2016. [Online]. Available: <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/familyshester-entrants-come-predominantly-clustered-neighborhoods/>.

²³ 9 Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development. (2016). How is Economic Opportunity Threatened in Your Neighborhood? Online: <http://anhd.org/policy-reports/how-is-economic-opportunity-threatened-in-yourneighborhood-2016/>

The FHTF included stakeholders from over 40 organizations with expertise in housing, homelessness, and child well-being. They developed and advanced recommendations to prevent and end family homelessness, while at the same time ensuring the well-being of families living in shelter.²⁴ At the same time, The Coalition for the Homeless also released suggested measures.²⁵ Together, they form the basis for the following proposals.

I. Keeping Families in Their Homes

Keeping families in their existing homes is perhaps the ideal method of homelessness prevention. The State should strengthen its rent stabilization policies and, in collaboration with the City, prevent the further loss of rent-stabilized units. Rent regulations benefit low-income families - the median income of a rent-regulated tenant is only \$38,000. According to a June 2011 report from the Community Service Society, “well over a million people with incomes below twice the poverty line live in rent-regulated housing. Regulated apartments constitute their largest source of housing, far more than live in public and subsidized housing combined. Sixty percent of residents in rent-regulated apartments are people of color.”²⁶

In his *NYU Review of Law & Social Change* article entitled ‘The Theft of Affordable Housing: How Rent-Stabilized Apartments are Disappearing from Fraudulent Individual Apartment Improvements and What Can be Done to Save Them,’ Justin R. La Mort delves into what he calls “illegal theft of affordable housing” through “fraudulent individual apartment improvements” by landlords. “Rent stabilization is currently the main form of rent regulation

²⁴ “Prioritizing Homeless Children and Their Families,” New Destiny Housing, June 2017. <https://newdestinyhousing.org/wp-content/uploads/FHTF-Full-Report-6-2017.pdf>

²⁵ Same as footnote 4

²⁶ Jones, D. R. (n.d.). Rent Regulations Benefit Low-income families. Community Service Society of New York. <https://www.cssny.org/news/entry/rent-regulations-benefit-low-income-families>

allowing the middle- and working-class the ability to afford to live in New York City by prohibiting unjustified evictions and ensuring limits on rent hikes,” writes La Mort. As of 2013, forty-six percent of New York City renters, or 961,000 households, lived in rent-stabilized housing. While this number may seem large, it is a significant decrease from the nearly sixty-three percent of rental units that were subject to rent regulation in 1981. This loss in affordable housing only further increases homelessness.²⁷

In addition to holding what La Mort calls “a sizeable minority of unprincipled property owners exploiting the unwatched corners of rent stabilization law” accountable, the State should remove the \$2,700 decontrol rent threshold (which allows a rent-controlled apartment that has reached a legal rent of \$2,700 to become decontrolled upon a vacancy) and put into place much narrower parameters, if any, for deregulation. In addition, the City should educate consumers about tenant rights in rent-stabilized housing to help keep families in their homes.

The City, State, service providers and the philanthropic community should invest in prevention strategies that target families at different levels of housing stability to help families head off a housing crisis. The few that exist are proven to work, but are not enough. New York City’s HomeBase program provides evidence for the role of community-based services in preventing homelessness. Via local offices throughout the city, HomeBase provides referrals to an array of homelessness prevention services. HomeBase also provides direct assistance to help clients keep existing rental subsidies and maintain their current housing—including financial assistance to cover rent or rental arrears, help completing income recertifications, and mediation

²⁷ La Mort, J. R. (2017, December 5). The theft of affordable housing: How rent-stabilized apartments are disappearing from fraudulent individual apartment improvements and what can be done to save them. N.Y.U. Review of Law & Social Change. <https://socialchangenyu.com/review/the-theft-of-affordable-housing-how-rent-stabilized-apartments-are-disappearing-from-fraudulent-individual-apartment-improvements-and-what-can-be-done-to-save-them/#V>

with landlords and others—as well as relocation assistance. Studies show that assistance from HomeBase prevented families from entering shelters and reduced the rate of homelessness in the communities it served.²⁸ The city should broaden homelessness prevention services, beyond HomeBase, legal assistance and rental subsidies, and explore the development of a tool that will help households assess their level of housing stability and connect them to needed services depending on where they fall on the housing stability spectrum. The City should increase the capacity of organizations that provide services and resources that are inextricably linked to housing stability.

The City, with the support of philanthropy and nonprofit domestic violence experts, should develop safe alternatives to shelter for families headed by domestic violence survivors who can remain in their existing housing or move directly to permanent housing. The city is too focused on street homeless, who are largely single men. This is due to their blatant visibility, if Mayor Eric Adams’ “aggressive plan to deploy police officers and mental-health workers into New York City’s subway, pledging to remove more than 1,000 homeless people who shelter there regularly” is any indication.²⁹ De Blasio’s 128-page “Turning the Tide on Homelessness” report released in 2017 dedicated just one page to survivors³⁰ and the only recommendation was to add shelter beds when what many victims need is more stable housing.

²⁸ “Homelessness Prevention: A Review of the Literature,” Center for Evidence-based Solutions to Homelessness http://www.evidenceonhomelessness.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Homelessness_Prevention_Literature_Synthesis.pdf

²⁹ Newman, A., Rubinstein, D., & Gold, M. (2022, February 18). New York City plans to stop homeless people from sheltering in subway. The New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/02/18/nyregion/homeless-people-subway-trains-mta.html>

³⁰ Marsh, Julia. Half of NYC’s homeless domestic-violence victims feel unsafe in shelters,” NY Post. February 2, 2020. <https://nypost.com/2020/02/02/half-of-nycs-homeless-domestic-violence-victims-feel-unsafe-in-shelters/>

Eviction had traditionally been the leading cause of homelessness among families, but due to an increase in the Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement rental subsidy (a rent supplement for families with children who receive Cash Assistance and have been evicted or are facing eviction, who lost their housing due to a domestic violence situation, or who have lost their housing because of health or safety issues), the percentage of families without minor children listing eviction as the reason they were homeless decreased by six percentage points from 2015 to 2016.³¹ However, thousands of families still are evicted, often because too few can access eviction prevention legal services. The city needs to guarantee access to lawyers in housing court for all low-income New Yorkers. As shown below, this is a policy that works. By investing in legal services, evictions have already dropped by more than 40% from 2014 through 2019.³²

II. Help Homeless Families with Children Obtain and Retain Quality Affordable Housing with Access to Services

Next, we should help homeless families with children obtain affordable housing and access to applicable initiatives. Rental assistance programs begun by the city, such as CityFHEPS (which has replaced the Living In Communities Rental Assistance Program, Special Exit and Prevention Supplement, and City Family Eviction Prevention Supplement rental assistance programs) help families obtain and retain permanent housing. There is now one

³¹ Same as 4

³² "Press Release: More Permanent Housing for Homeless Families," NY Gov. January 22, 2021. <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/press-releases/more-permanent-housing-for-homeless-families-2021-01-22.page>

program to make it easier for people to get help, easier for landlords to get payments, and easier for the Department of Social Services to manage cases.³³

The evidence is there. Since 2012, the number of formerly homeless families that have returned to live in a shelter has decreased by 15 percent. This is a direct result of Mayor de Blasio's administration's focus on longer-term housing programs, like public housing and federal Section 8 vouchers (which assist people earning low wages in paying for "decent housing and a suitable living environment" outside of public housing units³⁴), as well as the city-supported rent subsidies mentioned above. Indications are that rent subsidy programs have been effective in keeping thousands of families in their homes, and allowing families to move out of shelters more quickly.⁴ Long-term subsidies and permanently affordable housing placements are the most successful ways to keep families in stable housing, according to the US Department of Housing and Urban Development.³⁵

Additionally, the City needs to aggressively enforce the source-of-income anti-discrimination law with landlords who illegally reject families who attempt to utilize housing vouchers. Vouchers are one of the most powerful tools in combating homelessness. According to the Center on Policy and Budget Priority, vouchers cut homelessness by three quarters.³⁶

³³ NYC Gov, Rental Assistance <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps.page>

³⁴ "What You Need to Know About How Section 8 Really Works," ProPublica. <https://www.propublica.org/article/what-you-need-to-know-about-how-section-8-really-works>

³⁵ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. (2016). Family Options Study 3-Year Impacts of Housing and Services Interventions for Homeless Families. Online: https://www.huduser.gov/portal/family_options_study.html

³⁶ Fischer, W. (n.d.). More housing vouchers: Most important step to help more people afford stable homes. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. <https://www.cbpp.org/research/housing/more-housing-vouchers-most-important-step-to-help-more-people-afford-stable-homes#:~:text=Vouchers%20are%20highly%20effective%20at%20helping%20low%2Dincome%20people%20afford,lives%20of%20low%2Dincome%20people.>

Additionally, vouchers help with housing stability, “reducing how many times a family moves in a five-year period by over one-third, and reducing overcrowding by half. They can be the difference between someone having a home or being homeless.”³⁷

On April 12, 2019, New York State amended the New York State Human Rights Law to protect all New Yorkers from discrimination based on lawful source of income. This law applies to nearly all types of housing in New York State. The law states that it is illegal for anyone to deny housing based on the type of lawful income received. Source of income discrimination is often directed at those whose lawful income comes from sources other than a paycheck, including social security payments, any form of government assistance, or child support.³⁸ Despite the new rule, a lawsuit was recently filed in federal court in Manhattan that accuses 88 brokerage firms and landlords in New York City of discriminating against people with housing vouchers.³⁹

On top of that, the City and State should increase the supply of permanent affordable housing resources available to homeless families by including or increasing set-asides for homeless families in existing zoning, tax incentive, and publicly funded housing programs. The number of public housing placements for homeless families needs to be increased from 1,500 per year to at least 3,000 and the number of Section 8 and HPD apartments to at least 2,500 placements, for a minimum of 5,500 annual placements. Developers should be required to provide at least 10% homeless units in a project. The New York City Housing Authority, with

³⁷ Peters, N. (2022, May 11). To truly address homelessness, New York City must take on housing voucher discrimination. Gotham Gazette. <https://www.gothamgazette.com/130-opinion/11284-homelessness-new-york-city-housing-voucher-discrimination>

³⁸ “Source of Income Discrimination,” NY Attorney General. <https://ag.ny.gov/source-income-discrimination>

³⁹ “88 Landlords Accused of Housing Bias,” NY Times. March 15, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/15/nyregion/real-estate-lawsuit-section-8-discrimination.html>

City and/or State funding, should use vacant public housing units requiring rehabilitation to provide permanent housing to homeless families.

The City and State should standardize and streamline the allocation of existing homeless housing resources. They should use cross-systems information about homeless families in the shelter databases to target available subsidies and/or homeless resources more appropriately. New York City Housing Prevention and Development (HPD, the department responsible for developing and maintaining the stock of affordable housing) and Human Resources Administration (HRA, which provides rental assistance) should standardize inspection standards across rental subsidy programs. HPD and HRA should work together to prioritize and fast track the application review process and the inspection of units intended for homeless families. “Cross-agency cooperation and data-sharing between HRA and HPD, or the centralization of homeless housing resources... would help to ensure that homeless families are being assigned the most appropriate subsidy or housing option given the situation of that household,” says the CCC.⁴⁰

The city should strengthen post-shelter services and explore new service models to improve the chances that homeless families with children will retain permanent housing. The City, with the support of philanthropy, should encourage the piloting of an evidence-informed service-enriched housing model for vulnerable homeless families that do not qualify for NYC 15/15 housing (which only supports chronically homeless families or families at serious risk of becoming chronically homeless, where the head of the household suffers from a serious mental illness or a substance use disorder). HPD should facilitate the provision of volunteer services in

⁴⁰ Services and housing: Two critical components to ensure the well being of homeless children and families. CCC New York. (2021, January 1). <https://ccnewyork.org/services-and-housing-two-critical-components-to-ensure-the-well-being-of-homeless-children-and-families/>

HPD-funded projects housing 10% or more homeless families with children. The City should enhance and publicize the existing 311 Helpline.

Beginning in 2017, with Mayor’s DeBlasio’s plan, “Turning the Tide on Homeless in New York City”,⁴¹ the city aimed to end the practice of placing homeless families in cluster sites (privately owned apartments that were paid for by the city) and hotel rooms, and shelters could then enable more appropriate placements for children and their families. The Department of Homeless Services has been working to convert more cluster buildings into permanent affordable housing. At the beginning of this year, the City announced that it was assisting not-for-profit housing developers acquire and rehabilitate another 14 residential “cluster site” buildings, currently used to house families experiencing homelessness, and convert them into more than 750 permanent affordable housing units. City-wide cluster use has been reduced by nearly 95 percent citywide.⁴² This practice should be continued.

III. Systemic Recommendations

Systemically, improvements must be made as well. The city should create an integrated housing and homelessness plan focused on homeless families with children and create an interagency coordinating council that includes advocates, service providers and formerly homeless family members to monitor that plan and ensure that the needs of homeless children and their families are addressed. The City should track and make public data about homeless

⁴¹ “Turning the Tide on Homelessness,” NYC Gov. <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/turning-the-tide-on-homelessness.pdf>

⁴² Same as footnote 27.

families with children as well as information about the allocation of housing and homeless housing resources to homeless families with children.

CONCLUSION

While some policies and programs have produced promising results in housing stability, the larger housing and economic condition in New York City, and some insufficient policy responses, continue to contribute to growing homelessness. While the high number of families still in homeless shelters would seem to contradict the success of the programs recommended, thousands of families have achieved stability via the assistance provided and the work has kept the number from growing even higher.

Providing more permanent housing resources is the only proven way to reduce the number of families in shelters, whether new or returning families. Growing economic insecurity and job loss in a city with insufficient affordable housing is causing an increase in shelter demand for the lowest-income New Yorkers, who have no financial cushion.

The City cannot solve this crisis alone. New York State must also play a role. The State legislature has sought funds for Home Stability Support (HSS) since 2016, but has been stymied by former Governor Andrew Cuomo. In the 2019-2020 Legislative Session, the HSS bill had the support of 35 Senators and 125 Assembly Members – more than half of each legislative body. However, Governor Cuomo refused to budge on HSS for years, even as the number of homeless

New Yorkers swelled to record highs.⁴³ Governor Kathy Hochul has shown a renewed interest in collaborating with the City on homelessness prevention, the extent of which remains to be seen,⁴⁴

More funding needs to be available at all levels, city, state and federal to truly solve this vexing issue. Record homelessness demands bold solutions. Tens of thousands of homeless men, women, and children continue to bed down in shelters each night, wondering whether the City and State will assist them in accessing the housing they so desperately need. It is our elected officials' duty to help them.

⁴³ "FAQs," Home Stability Support. <http://www.homestabilitysupport.com/faqs>

⁴⁴ (2021, December 13). Governor Hochul signs legislation to combat homelessness and expand housing affordability in New York City. NY State Senate. <https://www.nysenate.gov/newsroom/press-releases/brian-kavanagh/governor-hochul-signs-legislation-combat-homelessness-and>