



**Department of  
Youth & Community  
Development**

**NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL  
COMMITTEES ON GENERAL WELFARE  
AND YOUTH SERVICES**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING:  
SAFE AND ACCESSIBLE SHELTERS FOR  
HOMELESS YOUTH**

**BILL CHONG  
COMMISSIONER**

**SEPTEMBER 28, 2017**

Good morning Chair Levin, Chair Eugene, and members of the Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services. I am Bill Chong, the Commissioner of the Department of Youth and Community Development. I am joined by Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner, Youth Services; Randy Scott, Unit Head, Vulnerable and Special Needs Youth; and Aaron Goodman, Senior Deputy Counsel for Homeless Litigation and Program Counsel at the Department of Social Services. Thank you for the chance to testify today on this important topic. We appreciate the City Council's long-standing interest in and support of DYCD's Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs.

DYCD is very proud of the significant progress we have made in serving runaway and homeless youth. Under Mayor de Blasio, New York City has made an unprecedented investment to expand the number of beds and enhance services for this population by increasing baselined funding for RHY programs by \$20 million or 250%. DYCD's RHY programs are designed to serve youth holistically, enabling them to obtain the services needed to place them on a path of safe shelter and stability. We are committed to helping these young New Yorkers rebuild their lives.

DYCD funds an integrated portfolio of runaway and homeless youth services that are delivered by community-based providers through contracts. The three types of services include residential services, drop-in centers, and street outreach.

- **Residential services** are comprised of crisis shelter beds and transitional independent living beds, serving youth ages 16 to 20. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) regulates all residential services provided by Youth Bureaus across New York State. DYCD is the designated Youth Bureau for New York City.

Crisis shelters provide emergency shelter and crisis intervention services. Under current State regulations, youth are housed on a short-term basis for up to 30 days, with the chance to extend their stay for an additional 30 days. Youth stay voluntarily while staff make efforts to reunite them with family. In cases where family reunification is not possible, provider staff work with youth to identify appropriate transitional and long-term placements.

Transitional Independent Living (TIL) residences represent a longer-term option that provides support and shelter as youth establish an independent life through educational programs and vocational courses, job placement assistance, counseling, and training in basic life skills. Youth may stay in a TIL shelter for up to 18 months and are typically referred from crisis shelters.

- **Drop-in centers** serve youth up to age 24 and are located in each borough. Youth are provided with basic needs such as food and clothing, and supportive services such as recreational activities, health and educational workshops, counseling, and referrals to additional services, including shelter.
- **Street outreach** focuses on locations in the city where runaway and homeless youth tend to congregate, offering on-the-spot information and counseling. The goal is to develop a rapport with the youth and connect them to services, especially shelter.

Under Mayor de Blasio's leadership, this Administration has taken very specific actions to improve the lives of runaway and homeless youth. Beginning with his first budget in Fiscal Year 2015, the Mayor initiated an expansion of DYCD's shelter beds, adding funding for 100 beds, followed by another 100 beds in Fiscal Year 2016, bringing the total number of funded beds to 453 at that point. In January 2016, Mayor de Blasio announced investments to fund another 300 shelter beds. By Fiscal Year 2019, this administration will have tripled the funding for RHY beds. Currently, 525 RHY shelter beds are open and available to young people, double what was available under the prior administration. In the current fiscal year, 128 beds are in progress: 52 are in contract, 38 are proposed and being evaluated through an open-ended RFP, and funding is available for an additional 38.

Having served under the prior Administration, I remember the annual instability we faced regarding the City's funding of RHY programs and the budget negotiations that would take place every year between the Administration and the Council. For several years, much of the funding was not agreed upon until the adopted City budget, leaving shelter bed providers and the youth they served in a state of uncertainty. In contrast, this Administration has committed each year to make additional investments, and has brought stability and growth to the services that runaway and homeless youth need and deserve. More youth can access shelter beds than ever before, and on an average night, there are dozens of beds available to help a young person in need. The average residential program utilization rate has been about 90%.

We are always planning for the future delivery of RHY programs and services. On September 18, DYCD released a concept paper for its RHY services. Highlights of the concept paper include funding for planned shelter bed expansion and two 24/7 drop in centers, as well as an increase in the price per bed to \$47,000. Comments are due by October 24, 2017. An RFP will be issued later this year for contracts anticipated to begin July 1, 2018.

We have also made investments to ensure that runaway and homeless youth have access to high quality mental health services. All DYCD RHY programs receive ThriveNYC funding to support youth mental health needs through direct services, including mental health assessments and wellness activities. Each month, providers share success stories with DYCD to highlight the impact of these resources on youth. We are pleased to hear that young people are seeking help, more than ever before. In a recent Westat survey of young people in TIL programs, 72% of youth reported accessing mental health services.

Before turning to the legislation on today's hearing agenda, I want to share exciting news. Last week, First Lady Chirlane McCray announced the New York City Unity Project, the City's first-ever multi-agency strategy to deliver services to address the unique challenges and unmet needs of LGBTQ youth. A high proportion of the overall runaway and homeless youth population identifies as LGBTQ. We are thrilled that DYCD is one of 16 City agencies involved with the Unity Project. As part of the announcement, the City invested new funding to enhance services at all seven DYCD drop-in centers, to serve an additional 2,400 youth annually. A second drop-in center will open 24/7 in Queens, modeled after the successful 24/7 drop-in center provided by the Ali Forney Center in Harlem.

I will now offer comments about the proposed legislation on today's agenda. We welcome the opportunity to meet with Council sponsors after today's hearing to discuss these bills in greater detail.

**Intro. 1619** would require an annual report on the number of youth who are "turned away" from DYCD's shelter beds. As I mentioned earlier in my testimony, we are fortunate to have available beds on any given night for youth who need them. If one site does not have availability, providers refer youth to a program that does have availability. No one is "turned away" from shelter.

Regarding the next four bills, I want to first comment on the new State law that was enacted in June and will take effect January 1, 2018. These State law amendments to the Runaway and Homeless Youth Act authorize municipalities' Youth Bureaus to provide expanded services for the 21- to 24-year old population. Unfortunately, the State law did not provide any funding for program expansion and so we have significant concerns about the feasibility of implementing aspects of these revised laws, as they would be extremely financially onerous.

DHS recently estimated that there are 1,900 21- to 24-year-olds in adult shelters, including 700 single adults and 1,200 single females with children. DYCD collaborates closely with HRA and DHS to support youth ages 21 to 24 in several areas. Examples include:

- DYCD and DHS are piloting a new process to streamline shelter access for youth who are aging out or timing out of a DYCD-funded shelter. When a young person nears the point of aging out or timing out, a DYCD shelter bed provider will obtain the youth's consent to provide certain information to DHS in advance of exiting. This will allow DHS to obtain certain needed intake and assessment-related information, in order to identify a program shelter bed. Young adults will be able to bypass intake and assessment in the single adult system and in the families with children and adult family system, so they can be placed directly in shelter with presumptive shelter eligibility.
- DHS is training intake staff at all sites on expanded RHY resources, to inform youth ages 18 to 20 who are seeking shelter about DYCD funded RHY services.
- As part of the City's 15/15 Supportive Housing initiative, the City has designated approximately 1,500 units as youth-specific supportive housing for ages 18 to 25. The City released an RFP on February 24 for Congregate Supportive Housing Units. Runaway and homeless youth will be eligible for these units.
- We are working with HRA to help eligible youth apply for and access LINC housing subsidies. This is part of a broader effort to streamline the City's various rental assistance programs, and we will continue to update the Committee as details are finalized.
- DHS is also improving services for young adults, including opening Marsha's House in Council Member Ritchie Torres' district in the Bronx, the first ever shelter for LGBTQ young adults in the adult system. DYCD has been able to facilitate successful referrals for youth coming from RHY programs.



I want to emphasize that while we support the intent of the following bills, it would be extremely challenging for the Administration to implement these measures without adequate funding. I encourage the legislators and advocates in this room to use their voices to advocate to the State to take the steps necessary to sufficiently fund such an expansion.

We have another fundamental concern about the Council's proposals. Under State law, DYCD and other Youth Bureaus throughout the State have been delegated the authority to create a comprehensive plan for providing services, including residential services, to runaway and homeless youth. This discretion from the State is limited, in that we must obtain State approval for our plan, and shelter providers must comply with OCFS regulations. The State law gives DYCD more flexibility than these bills would allow. These four bills are inconsistent with the State legislative and regulatory framework that entrusts responsibility for these programs with localities' Youth Bureaus.

**Intro. 1699** would increase the maximum length of stay to 120 days in crisis shelters and 24 months in TIL. DYCD supports the increase in length of stay. In fact, I have advocated for this change to the OCFS Commissioner since 2014. The increase in length of stay was included in the new State law. While we agree with the substance, we have concerns that the bill would inhibit DYCD's administrative authority as the Youth Bureau for New York City, and our discretion to determine what to include in the City's annual plan submitted to OCFS. It's essential that we retain flexibility to adjust program design to be responsive to changing and evolving needs.

**Intro. 1700** would require a new annual report on runaway and homeless youth, and would mandate DYCD's providers to offer shelter services to all runaway and homeless youth who request it, using the RHY definition of up to age 24 as authorized in the new State law.

There are significantly more young adults ages 21 to 24 than there are youth under age 21 who are homeless in New York City. An unintended consequence of this bill could be to potentially displace younger, more vulnerable youth and slow down the progress we have made in meeting their needs.

We are also very concerned about the information that Intro. 1700 seeks to include in an annual runaway and homeless youth report, as it would be very difficult—and in some instances inappropriate—to collect some of this information. For example, some youth may not wish to discuss sensitive personal matters such as physical disability or religion. In other instances, it is duplicative of current laws and efforts, such as the demographic data required by Local Laws 126, 127, and 128, or information about sexual exploitation included in the Safe Harbor report. Finally, DYCD would not be able to report on private resources available to serve runaway and homeless youth.

**Intro. 1705** proposes a significant policy and service change for DHS and DYCD. It would require DYCD to conduct the intake and assessment process for all young adults seeking access to DHS shelters, thereby transferring the responsibility from DHS to DYCD. Reflective of the State law, this change would include young adults ages 21 to 23 who are not in DYCD services. DYCD is currently working with DHS to create and test a referral process for youth ages 18 to 20 in DYCD funded programs and we believe that legislating this procedure is premature. Further, we are concerned that the Council legislation would mandate an approach that is beyond DYCD's current capacity.

**Intro. 1706** would require all RHY services to be provided to youth 21 to 24 “in the same manner” as services for ages up to 21. Young adults have different needs than youth ages 16 to 20. The bill would not allow for different program models for young adults that may be more appropriate than what’s been developed for 16- to 20-year-olds. Discussions are ongoing within the Administration as to the best approaches and program models for shelter beds and services for young adults ages 21 to 24, and the roles of DYCD and DHS. Intro. 1706 would negate these discussions and mandate an approach before the Administration has fully evaluated and decided on the right strategy for serving young adults. Moreover, this bill is reflective of the new State law, which although substantively praiseworthy, remains an unfunded mandate.

Moving forward, Mayor de Blasio and DYCD remain committed to meeting the needs of runaway and homeless youth. We’ve made incredible progress, and we are focused on continuing the expansion of residential programs to triple the number of available beds for youth ages 16 to 20 by 2019. We greatly appreciate the City Council’s support and interest in ensuring that runaway and homeless youth have quality services that meet their needs and look forward to continuing to work together to improve the lives of these young people. Thank you again for the chance to testify today. We welcome your questions.



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams  
Before the Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare  
September 28, 2017

Good morning Chairs Eugene and Levin and members of the City Council Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on these five bills that can have a major impact on the lives of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) in our city. While this administration has made important efforts to address homelessness in New York City, there are still far too many young people without a place to call home due to abuse, neglect, and violence and that is an unacceptable situation.

One area where the City can make significant impact is by fulfilling its requirement to raise the age of who qualifies as homeless youth. Intro 1706 raises the age to 24. Earlier this year, the state legislature passed the "Raise the Age" provision, which was the subject of legislation that was introduced at my urging by Assembly Member Helene Weinstein and State Senator Diane Savino, raising the age for youth shelter to 25. I am pleased to see that last week, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) issued a concept paper, anticipating a new request for proposal (RFP) for a youth shelter that contemplates permitting access to youth up to age 25 for youth shelter. However, I remain concerned by the caveats and conditions that are noted in the concept paper. Specifically, I am concerned that the bureaucracy might find an excuse in the soon to be promulgated State regulations rather than a way to get this done. RHY are often homeless due to abuse and sexual assault, which disproportionately affects LBGTQ+ youth. How much longer should these young people have to wait while the City wraps itself in red tape? The State has met this challenge by raising the age so that RHY can get assistance in a safe, age-appropriate facility. Intro 1706 will take away any question of where New York City stands and require DYCD to make the change. These are vulnerable young people in need of refuge. We cannot, with good conscience, continue to use technicalities to deny them the resources and services they need.

The concept paper also indicates that "Raise the Age" is contingent upon the availability of additional resources. Additional resources that target youth homelessness, directing young

people to age- and resource-appropriate facilities are needed even without raising the age. This should not be permitted to stand in the way of implementing "Raise the Age." We must find both the will and the way.

I fully support Intro 1699. RHY are, by definition, in crisis. When the City has an opportunity to positively interact with young people in crisis, we should not be limited in our response by time. Many RHY do not seek services. The ones who do should be given the full slate of resources the City has available for as long as those services are needed. To expect that RHY can fully address the varied causes of their personal crises within a prescribed timeframe is shortsighted. Our response to RHY who do manage to connect with our services should be one of compassion.

Finally, tracking data must be an important part of the City's approach to addressing the RHY crisis. Intro 1700 will require the tracking of RHY as they interact with the City's services. This data can help us increase efficiencies and serve more youth in need. We must understand the outcomes of the services provided if we are to thoroughly address the causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of our assistance. Significantly, this bill also creates a right to shelter for all who need it. Frankly, this is a debate we should be past, but let us remove any ambiguity regarding the City's obligation to provide shelter to all. In the city with the most billionaires in the world, certainly we can ensure that no young person is relegated to live on the street, sleep on a subway grating, couch surf, or compromise their bodies, health, or self-respect in exchange for a place to sleep safely at night.

Testimony to General Welfare and Youth Services Committee of New York City Council  
Hearing on Runaway Homeless Youth

September 28, 2017 by Cole Giannone

Director of Program Evaluation, Training and Advocacy - Ali Forney Center

Thank you Council Members Levin and Eugene for hosting this joint hearing for Runaway Homeless Youth. I also want to thank Council Members Johnson, Gibson, Salamanca and Torres for making Runaway Homeless Youth a priority population in your legislation and for bringing us here in support of a crucial package of bills for young people experiencing homelessness in NYC. My name is Cole Giannone, I am here representing the Ali Forney Center, where I have worked for the past seven years.

At the Ali Forney Center, we have seen the number of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer young people in need of housing grow each year. Each year we also see, that the number of 21-24 year olds represent more of our clients than youth under 21. Nearly 20% of our clients identify as Transgender or Non-binary. 90% of all of our clients are youth of color. When we talk about who would be impacted by legislation introduced by our Council Members, picture these young people. This is an issue of equity, and we in the city of New York, have the opportunity to change the narrative for LGBTQ youth of color. These bills would literally change the lives of those who we say our city protects.

This morning as we were all preparing to come to this hearing, 72 young people woke up in their beds at a site operated by the Ali Forney Center, funded by the Department of Youth and Community Development. That means that this morning, 72 young people under the age of 21, woke up, having been able to shower, eat, sleep and prepare for their days without question of where those activities would take place. These are small programs, sometimes with as few as six beds per site. The programs we can create with this kind of support means that 16-20 year olds can start to rebuild the lives they are destined for. Without the support from DYCD and the Mayor, we would turn away nearly 400, 16-20 year olds, from our housing each year.

I cannot articulate the anxiety one experiences on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday in a Runaway Homeless Youth setting. An energetic and lively person can at once become irritable and depressed. They may retreat from the opportunities ahead as they often see no hope for their future as this significant age approaches. ~~We call on the city to provide the same for 21-24 year olds experiencing homelessness on our streets.~~ For the 72 young people that woke up in safer conditions this morning, there are countless youth over 21 who woke up today, or who stayed awake all night, who do not have access to these small home-like environments that DYCD provides.

We call for the city to extend the length of stay for young people in our programs. We call on the city to allow, and fund, DYCD to serve 21-24 year olds. We have the opportunity to change our system of response to youth homelessness through this package of bills. We must seize this opportunity now, for all of the young people experiencing homelessness today and those who are coming tomorrow. Thank you.



**HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED**

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**Testimony of Homeless Services United before the City Council Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services September 28, 2017**

My name is Catherine Trapani, and I am the Executive Director of Homeless Services United (HSU). HSU is a coalition of approximately 50 non-profit agencies serving homeless and at-risk adults and families in New York City. HSU provides advocacy, information, and training to member agencies to expand their capacity to deliver high-quality services. HSU advocates for expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers.

As the organization that represents the non-profit DHS homeless shelter organizations, HSU has great interest in policy changes that impact homeless services delivery to our clients and to ensuring that our missions, staff, and programs are providing the most compassionate, effective, and efficient services to transform lives from homelessness to being stably housed. It is our belief that every person experiencing a housing crisis deserves access to high quality care and receives the support they need to overcome homelessness. Homeless young people are no exception. In fact, it is imperative that programs with specialized services to meet the unique needs of our youth such as DYCD supported drop-ins, outreach and shelter programs are appropriately resourced so that the young people they serve can achieve stability and not simply “graduate” to an adult homeless system not explicitly designed to meet their needs.

As such, we support this package of legislation, which will have the effect of better tracking the needs of homeless youth so we can better understand what it will take to effectively serve them. This legislation will allow young people up to the age of 24 to stay in specialized DYCD shelters for enough time to address their housing and service needs and, for those who cannot link to housing in even the extended amount of time allotted, find appropriate placement in DHS adult shelters. This will prevent them from going through the trauma and dislocation of entering an assessment shelter first where they must re-establish eligibility for a service we all know they should be entitled to.

We would like to note that in order for these bills to have their intended impact, it is essential that sufficient funding be allocated to DYCD so that the resources they need to accommodate longer lengths of stay are in place, particularly since raising the age of eligibility through 24 will also mean that more young people would qualify for specialized service. If we are successful in resourcing these programs appropriately, with the passing of this legislation every homeless young person in NYC will be entitled to appropriate shelter services designed to meet their needs.

We are pleased that this administration has been largely supportive of the goals of this package of bills and encourage the Council to move them forward such that regardless of which way the political winds may blow in the future, young people will be able to access these vital services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.



**Testimony of**

**Jamie Powlovich  
Executive Director  
Coalition for Homeless Youth**

**Before the**

**The New York City Council  
Committees on General Welfare & Youth Services**

**Oversight Hearing: Safe and Accessible Shelters for Homeless Youth  
Int. 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706**

**September 28, 2017**

Only about 9.5% moved into their own apartment, and about 21% moved in with friends or other relatives, which is often a temporary situation and not always a safe and supportive environment. Less than 20% returned home.<sup>5</sup>

### **Recommendations**

As was previously stated, CHY supports all the legislation currently under discussion, but would also like to highlight some additional recommendations. They are as follows:

#### **1. Funding for Older Youth**

We are very pleased that DYCD has agreed to raise the age and extend the length of stay in both crisis and TIL programs, pending the state law taking effect. We also understand that the state is not adequately funding the change in the law that they passed, and CHY is preparing to advocate for an increase to the NYS RHY budget. However, NYC housing older RHY should not be put on hold because of the state. We ask that when the law changes, DYCD allow providers to access the current RFP to serve RHY 21-24yo, and work to ensure that the needed services are funded thereafter.

#### **2. Funding for Capital Costs**

DYCD currently does not support programs in capital costs. Our members report that the primary barrier to them increasing their bed capacity is lack of capital funding. In FY16, DYCD did in fact contract some crisis beds to a well-established RHY provider. However, the agency had to pull out of the contract prior to opening due to being unable to afford a physical space to house the program with the amount DYCD was offering. DYCD needs to better support programs in obtaining the funding necessary to bring new beds online.

#### **3. Balancing the System**

As outlined above, the current RHY system has more TIL beds than crisis beds. This is a problem. Currently there is no established process for young persons to go from the streets into vacant TIL beds, which tend to be higher-threshold and have tighter eligibility criteria, without going through crisis beds first, or having a provider advocate to DYCD on their behalf. DYCD must assess its current system and take into consideration maintaining a balanced system when awarding contracts.

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<sup>5</sup> DYCD clarified that this discharge data is not unduplicated.



#### **4. Housing Resources**

As mentioned earlier, DYCD data shows that, very often, youth go in circles in the DYCD shelters, often disappear, and rarely end up in their own independent housing. CHY commends DYCD for collaborating with DSS to expand rental subsidy access to DYCD residents, which is long overdue and will reduce the crisis bed-to streets-to crisis bed cycle. In the City's most recent homeless plan, the City, for the first time, committed to giving youth access to rental subsidies this year. Time is ticking.

#### **5. Housing Specialists**

Unlike in DSS shelters, or in the foster care system, DYCD does not fund its programs to have housing specialists. As anyone who has done frontline work with folks experiencing homelessness knows, housing specialists and case managers hold very different positions, and this is even more the case given how discriminatory New York City's rental market is to those with subsidies. To ensure RHY successfully transition to their own apartments with rental subsidies, DYCD needs to award new funding to providers to hire housing specialists. This position would support residents in successfully obtaining safe, long-term housing and exiting homelessness.

#### **6. LGBTQ-competency**

New York City must ensure that all service providers interacting with RHY are trained in LGBTQ competency. This is something that has already been implemented at HRA and DHS. DYCD needs to follow suit.

#### **7. Increased mental health supports**

While the THRIVE funds have started to provide desperately needed resources for therapists and psychiatric support to help youth understand and process their experiences, gain access to needed medication, and provide evaluations for necessary resources like supportive housing, the simple reality is that the limited funds made available are still not enough to provide the kind of comprehensive services that many homeless youth need.

### **Conclusion**

CHY is grateful to the City Council for its ongoing commitment to runaway and homeless youth. We look forward to our continued work together to finalize these important pieces of legislation and to improve the city's runaway and homeless youth services.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Discharge Reasons	FY15 Crisis Beds		FY15 TIL Beds		FY16 Crisis Beds		FY16 TIL Beds		FY17 Crisis Beds		FY17 TIL Beds	
	Number Discharged	Percentage	Number Discharged	Percentage	Number Discharged	Percentage	Number Discharged	Percentage	Number Discharged	Percentage	Number Discharged	Percentage
Discharged to Crisis Shelter	1374	39.44%	25	10.08%	1119	29.70%	52	15.43%	245	26.26%	40	18.18%
Discharged to TIL program	707	20.29%	3	1.21%	670	17.78%	18	5.34%	166	17.79%	17	7.73%
Unknown/Self Discharge	396	11.37%	19	7.66%	884	23.46%	39	11.57%	233	24.97%	24	10.91%
Other Residential Care	347	9.96%	9	3.63%	378	10.03%	9	2.67%	114	12.22%	6	2.73%
Returned Home	212	6.08%	44	17.74%	405	10.75%	63	18.69%	104	11.15%	42	19.09%
Living with Friends/Relatives	157	4.51%	70	28.23%	108	2.87%	73	21.66%	30	3.22%	44	20.00%
Other Adult (Not Friend/Family)	108	3.10%	5	2.02%	63	1.67%	1	0.30%	2	0.21%	2	0.91%
Own Apartment	64	1.84%	40	16.13%	21	0.56%	32	9.50%	6	0.64%	18	8.18%
Adult Homeless Shelter	42	1.21%	21	8.47%	39	1.04%	39	11.57%	6	0.64%	17	7.73%
Non DYCD Crisis/TIL	41	1.18%	9	3.63%	29	0.77%	8	2.37%	11	1.18%	7	3.18%
Hospitalization	30	0.86%	2	0.81%	46	1.22%	2	0.59%	11	1.18%	0	0.00%
Correctional Facility	6	0.17%	1	0.40%	6	0.16%	1	0.30%	5	0.54%	3	1.36%
<b>Total</b>	<b>3484</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>248</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>3,768</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>337</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>933</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>220</b>	<b>100%</b>

Date: 9/28/17

Testimony for Alexander Rey Prez

I am Alexander Rey Perez. I am here to testify because I know what it is like to be out here on the streets, not knowing where to go. To have days that felt like years, and nights feel even longer. I traveled from Florida back to this great big city only to find that it has failed people like me. Young people who face the cold hard truth of "aging out". I speak to you today as a concerned, terrified, and appalled 24 year old young person, a person who now has to understand why things like funding come in between the cities youth having a semblance of what home is. Not only has the internal struggle of knowing that I am homeless consumed my thoughts and riddled my days with worry but I feel like NYC, the place I'd like to call home has made me feel put out and stranded. At this point it's too late for me because I age out May 8th this following year. So not only am I testifying because it's the right thing to do, I am testifying because "the youth" after me was me- and are many of my friends and some of which I consider family. So I ask humbly please pass Intro 1706-207 because like all of you I am a person, a person who just needs to know what home feels like.

Date: 9/28/17

Testimony for Jo Hayne

Thank you council members of New York City Council, for allowing not only myself but all of us to testify in support of these 4 bills today. I am Jo Hayne, 18 years old, genderfluid, and my personal gender pronouns are they/them/theirs. I am here today, homeless since May, testifying to all of you because I have gone halfway across the country despite being from Ohio, only to come here and now see every birthday with dread, knowing that my housing chances will dry up once I turn 21. It may seem silly, I have 3 years ahead of myself, and I have stayed in New York City for almost 3 months. Yet, I cannot predict the future, including how many of you will vote on this matter. What I can say is that every single bill (1700, 1699, 1705, and 1706) must pass, especially 1706, and if these pass, you are giving so many people the one thing we never have enough of while homeless: time. You are giving so many youths I know within the age range more funding, more housing, more living, quite literally. None of us can control this passage of time regarding our age, but by increasing the age, you are not increasing solely our vitality, you increase our hope, our chances of finding our own houses, apartments, condos, all places that we may one day call our home.



**The New York City Council**

**Committees on General Welfare & Youth Services**

**Hearing RE:**

Int No 1619

Int No 1699

Int No 1700

Int No 1705

Int No 1706

**Testimony of Craig Hughes**

**Legal Advocate**

**On behalf of the Peter Cicchino Youth Project, Safety Net Project, and Mental Health  
Project of the Urban Justice Center**

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Thursday, September 28<sup>th</sup> 2017

Thank you, chairs Levin and Eugene, and members of the committees on Youth Services and General Welfare, for the opportunity to testify before you today. My name is Craig Hughes and I am a Legal Advocate with the Mental Health Project at the Urban Justice Center.<sup>1</sup> For more than thirty years, Urban Justice Center (UJC) has advocated for low-income and marginalized New Yorkers using a combination of direct legal service, systemic advocacy, community education and political organizing. Today, UJC is an umbrella organization that includes a dozen projects, most of which serve Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in some capacity. Our Peter Cicchino Youth Project (PCYP) specifically focuses on meeting the legal needs of RHY, with a focus on LGBTQ youth, and provides weekly clinics and workshops on-site at a number of the City's youth drop-ins and shelters. Our Mental Health Project (MHP) serves many of the most vulnerable of these young people, including those suffering from serious and persistent mental illness, through our disability and social work assistance, and through various other services. UJC's Safety Net Project (SNP) helps these young people in our benefit clinics and in consultations with providers.

I am testifying on behalf of each of these projects today in support of all five of the resolutions up for discussion today. I make no exaggeration in stating these five proposed laws, if enacted, would be the most comprehensive set of reforms to New York's RHY programming since modern homelessness began approximately four decades ago. Together, these proposals would fundamentally alter the opportunities available to some of our City's most vulnerable and marginalized youth and begin to correct long-standing holes in our safety net. These bills are necessary steps forward.

### **Background**

Runaway and homeless youth (RHY) have never been given sufficient resources in New York City. Since the current homeless crisis began in the late 1970s homeless youth have typically been the last attended to, and the least served. Their marginalization within the safety net can be seen in the City's doubt of their very existence. Going back to the early 1980s, City officials butted heads with advocates on how many homeless young people walked our streets. Officials tended to argue that the numbers were unknown or small, and advocates tended to argue they were in thousands.<sup>2</sup> During the 1990s, the Giliuani administration commissioned an estimate of the size of the RHY population. When the data returned an estimate of some 20,000 homeless youth in New York City, officials barred the release of the report to the public. Findings were later released in pieces published by the *New York Times* and the *Village Voice*.<sup>3</sup> Of note, the study found that, in 1997, "the... system of 191 beds in emergency settings, and 317 beds in transitional settings, provide only a fraction of the number necessary to house all youth in need of shelter."<sup>4</sup>

The Bloomberg administration was not much more interested in acknowledging the needs of these young people, and certainly not in providing sufficient resources for them. Throughout Mayor Bloomberg's tenure, advocates fought back against the administration's constant use of homeless youth resources as a sort of political

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<sup>1</sup> Please see our website at: <http://www.urbanjustice.org>

<sup>2</sup> See for example: Sheila Rule, "City Failing to Aid Homeless Youths, Study Says," *New York Times* 9/25/1983.

<sup>3</sup> On this see: Tina Rosenberg, "Editorial Observer; Helping Them Make It Through the Night," *New York Times* 7/12/1998; David Kihara, "Ask, Don't Tell," *The Village Voice* 8/17/1999, <https://www.villagevoice.com/1999/08/17/ask-dont-tell/>.

<sup>4</sup> Cited in Kihara, "Ask, Don't Tell".

football in budget negotiations.<sup>5</sup> While the City Council helped fund the most reliable, realistic and respected study on the number of homeless youth – in 2008, using City Council funds – the Bloomberg administration never put up resources to match that need.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the Bloomberg administration, New York City had approximately 250 beds in its youth continuum, overseen by the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).<sup>7</sup> It was only upon the end of his tenure that the Bloomberg administration baselined RHY funding in the annual budget.<sup>8</sup> Mayor Bloomberg ended his tenure leaving Mayor De Blasio the largest crisis of housing and homelessness since modern homelessness began.<sup>9</sup> Two days before Mayor Bloomberg left office, Legal Aid sued him for a right to shelter for homeless youth.<sup>10</sup> That case, to the dismay of many, remains unsettled nearly four years into the current administration.

During the primary debates in 2013 candidates were asked a very difficult question: if elected what funding would they, under no circumstances, cut? Mayor De Blasio's answer shocked many of us: he would never cut service for runaway and homeless youth.<sup>11</sup> At no point had RHY matters been a focus of any mayoral candidate – in fact the population remained invisible even in discussions of the contemporary homeless crisis. Hopes were raised among advocates, providers and homeless young people. Unfortunately, the performance of the De Blasio administration in regards to RHY matters has been summarily lackluster. While the Mayor has certainly added some desperately needed beds, which we are of course grateful for, the administration has not met, by any reasonable measure, the needs of this exceedingly vulnerable population. In certain areas, the administration has enacted progressive policies, but in other areas, it has appeared to hold standards that recall previous administrations. The legislation proposed today targets some of the core gaps in RHY policies under the De Blasio administration. Their passage would fundamentally alter the resources available to this population.

Earlier this year Governor Cuomo signed changes into RHY law that allowed for two major shifts in current policy.<sup>12</sup> First, in accord with federal definition, the legislation changed the age that young people could

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<sup>5</sup> On this see Citizens Committee for Children's statement during the last year of the Bloomberg administration: "Council Members, Youth, Providers and Advocates Rally for Runaway and Homeless Youth Services" released 6/19/2013. <https://www.cccnewyork.org/press/releases/council-members-youth-providers-and-advocates-rally-for-runaway-and-homeless-youth-services/>

<sup>6</sup> That study was coordinated by the Empire State Coalition for Youth and Family Services (now the Coalition for Homeless Youth) and estimated 3,800 youth were homeless in New York City on any given night, with 1,600 in some variation of street homelessness.

<sup>7</sup> On RHY services during the Bloomberg administration see the Independent Budget Organization's report: *City Spending for Runaway and Homeless Youth Grows Steadily* released August 2010. <http://www.ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/rhyaugust122010.pdf>. For 2013 data see the Mayor's Management Report for that year, p. 134: [http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/mmr2013/2013\\_mmr.pdf](http://www.nyc.gov/html/ops/downloads/pdf/mmr2013/2013_mmr.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Latonia McKinney & Kenneth Grace, "Hearing on the Fiscal 2015 Preliminary Budget & the Fiscal 2014 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report Department of Youth and Community Development" 03/10/2014. <http://council.nyc.gov/budget/wp-content/uploads/sites/54/2014/07/fy2015-youth.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Andrea Elliott's report in the *New York Times*, entitled *Invisible Child*, is a useful look into the crisis at this transition point. Also see Thomas Main's recent book *Homelessness in New York City Policymaking from Koch to De Blasio* (NYU Press 2016) p. 185-195.

<sup>10</sup> A copy of Legal Aid's complaint can be found online here: <https://www.scribd.com/document/197344657/Legal-Aid-Society-Complaint-Re-Homeless-Youth>

<sup>11</sup> Video of that debate is here: <https://www.c-span.org/video/?314616-1/new-york-city-mayoral-democratic-primary-debate&start=4876>. Mayor De Blasio's comment can be found at 01:30:20.

<sup>12</sup> "Governor Cuomo Announces Passage of the FY2018 Budget," 4/10/2017.

<https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-passage-fy-2018-state-budget>

receive services as homeless youth, from age 20 to until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the legislation increased the amount of time young people could spend in crisis beds to 120 days and in transitional beds to 24 months. Part of the reason this legislation passed without significant pushback at the local level is because it gave municipalities the ability to opt-in on the change of age and length of time in RHY programs. Since the passage of this legislation DYCD and Mayor De Blasio have largely been publicly silent on these matters. However, in a recent concept paper DYCD has in fact noted they plan to move toward making these changes, at their discretion and dependent on available resources. While this is a move in the right direction, it is not sufficient to ensure RHY have access to the sufficient shelter, and without legislation it leaves this decision at the whim of future administrations who very well may not be interested in providing age-tailored homeless services.<sup>14</sup>

### **Current Resources**

According to the Department of Youth and Community Development's (DYCD) most recent estimate, provided to advocates from the Coalition for Homeless Youth late last month, New York City's youth continuum currently includes 505 functioning beds. There are an additional 72 in licensure process, bringing the total to 577 when those beds open. Of the 505 currently open beds, approximately 57% are transitional (TIL) beds, and the remaining are crisis beds. Many of these beds are sub-population specific, including beds specifically for LGBTQQ-identified clients, young mothers and children, and some beds for young women involved in the sex trade. These beds include many of the initial beds that have opened since Mayor De Blasio announced his plans to add an additional 300 beds last year. Upon addition of all 300 beds, DYCD's continuum will total 753 shelter slots for all homeless youth in New York City. Under current rules, DYCD crisis beds allow for a 30-day stay with the possibility of another 30-day stay if DYCD approves a request from a shelter provider. TIL beds currently allow for stays of up to 18 months.

In addition to shelter beds, New York City funds drop-in centers in each borough. In Manhattan there is one 24 hour drop-in, which provides services exclusively to LGBTQ youth. The remainder of currently-running drop-ins are open at varied hours, but no other drop-in centers are open 24 hours.

New York City funds two late-night street outreach programs, which are administered by a single agency. DYCD has reported that in FY16 it served 11,737 RHY via Street Outreach programs.<sup>15</sup> DYCD-funded outreach teams are not formally connected to other municipal outreach teams. Providers often point out that youth-specific outreach has impressive competency with engaging homeless youth while other homeless outreach programs are not particularly adept at engaging this population.

There are some housing resources available to homeless youth relying on DYCD resources. For youth suffering from serious and persistent mental illness who are chronically homeless, a young person *may* be able to

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<sup>13</sup> On how the federal government sees homeless youth needs and services see the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness's paper entitled "Criteria and Benchmarks for Achieving the Goal of Ending Youth Homelessness". [https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset\\_library/Youth\\_Criteria\\_Benchmarks\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.usich.gov/resources/uploads/asset_library/Youth_Criteria_Benchmarks_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>14</sup> NYC Department of Youth & Community Development, *Concept Paper – September 18, 2017*.

<sup>15</sup> See the FY16 Mayor's Management Report, p. 221:

[http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2016/2016\\_mmr.pdf](http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2016/2016_mmr.pdf)



access a supportive housing unit.<sup>16</sup> Youth aging out of foster care or leaving a state institution may also be able to access a supportive housing bed. Earlier this year, the administration announced plans to provide RHY relying on DYCD resources with access to local rental subsidies (e.g. LINC).<sup>17</sup> The administration has not provided this access as of yet. Only a marginal number of youth aging out of foster care are placed into public housing (NYCHA) units, and homeless youth reliant on the DYCD resources do not have priority access to public housing.<sup>18</sup> Homeless youth reliant on the DYCD resources do not have access to Section 8 resources, with the exception of a marginal number who access Section 8 aid through supportive housing. Homeless youth reliant on the DYCD resources do not have access to CityFEPS.

New York City does not fund homeless youth providers to provide staffing specifically for assisting youth in accessing permanent housing. Nor does the City provide funding for assistance with public benefits like Medicaid, cash assistance, disability benefits, or SNAP (food stamps). Youth may access many of these resources but this tends to be because of patchwork connections rather than any streamlined assistance via DYCD.

Under the current administration, and through New York City's Thrive NYC initiative, there has been an increase in funding for mental health services through DYCD programs.<sup>19</sup> New York City has provided both shelters and drop-in centers some funding for mental health assistance, much of which providers have used to fund therapists for ongoing therapeutic services, and psychiatrists for medication management and evaluations for supportive housing applications.

### Gaps in Resources

We applaud the Mayor's attention to providing additional RHY resources. However, our applause is tempered by the vast scope of the youth homeless crisis and, given that, how little the City has really done to embrace the homeless young people on our streets. This begins with simply acknowledging the number of homeless youth sleeping in desperate situations across the five boroughs. Advocates have long argued that the current administration's efforts to tally homeless youth has been overwhelmingly under-resourced and questionable in methodology.<sup>20</sup> Because of this, City agencies have estimated that there are relatively few street-homeless youth on a given night in New York City – for example, 2016 data estimates 149 unsheltered young people between 18-24 years old.<sup>21</sup> A number like that is simply not accurate and few believe it to be valid. But estimates are important for

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<sup>16</sup> Information on supportive housing resources available to homeless youth can be found on the Supportive Housing Network's website: <https://shnny.org/learn-more/what-is-supportive-housing/youth-programs>.

<sup>17</sup> See the outcome of the 90-day review conducted by HRA Commissioner Steven Banks (<http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/reports/2016/90-day-homeless-services-review.pdf>) and the De Blasio administration's report *Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City*. <http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/turning-the-tide-on-homelessness.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> In a FOIL request sent to NYCHA (FOIL #1031317), the authority responded that "A diligent search revealed a total of 900 individuals with NO priority were granted access to NYCHA-administered apartments from 1/1/13 to 11/20/16."

<sup>19</sup> For a useful set of reports and data on mental health services available to youth through ThriveNYC and provider experiences with available resources, please see the testimonies from City Council's 4/6/2017 hearing, available:

<http://legistar.council.nyc.gov/View.ashx?M=F&ID=5115245&GUID=550F2842-7FE1-415B-997F-A820C5842CAC>

<sup>20</sup> For a critical assessment of the Bloomberg administration's efforts please see James Bolas, "City Must Show That Street Homeless Youth Count," *City Limits* 07/25/2013. For a critical assessment under the De Blasio administration please see Craig Hughes, "City's Efforts to Tally Homeless Youth Won't Add Up," *City Limits* 01/23/2017.

<sup>21</sup> This data is available on HUD's website at:

[https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC\\_PopSub\\_CoC\\_NY-600-2015\\_NY\\_2016.pdf](https://www.hudexchange.info/resource/reportmanagement/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_NY-600-2015_NY_2016.pdf). Also

various reasons, including that they impact resource allocation. The 2008 study, funded in part by the City Council, estimated that on any given night 3,800 youth were homeless in New York City. Since 2008's financial crisis, homelessness in New York City has substantially increased. There is ample reason to believe that the number of homeless youth, like the rest of the homeless population, has also increased.

For homeless and runaway youth under 21 years old, youth-specific crisis beds are a lifeline. These beds help our clients get off the streets or out of abusive situations, and into a warm place where they can eat a hot meal, sleep in a warm bed and engage with youth-competent social service providers. However, we have long seen that a 30-day stay is not only anxiety-provoking for vulnerable youth, it is also far too short to help them to exit crisis. Indeed, as DYCD's own data has shown, more than three-quarters through FY17, approximately 50% of the nearly 3000 discharges from crisis beds resulted in youth going straight back into a crisis bed, or consisted of youth disappearing from service provision (see Appendix 1).<sup>22</sup> Many others went into highly-precarious living situations that included living with an unrelated adult, incarceration, or hospitalization. Approximately 12% of discharges went into varied residential care or supportive housing. Only 0.6% moved into their own apartment. It is of note that more crisis-bed discharges were made to hospitals than the adult shelters. Less than 10% of discharges consisted of young people going back to their home. These kinds of figures are alarming, to say the least. A major factor in the revolving-door from crisis bed to crisis bed, or from crisis bed to continued precariousness, is the 30-day limit on stays in RHY crisis beds. How is a young person supposed to gain stability when their access to a bed to sleep in is only available in four-week stints? As importantly, the current age-restriction – which means that young people under age 21 must leave the DYCD system upon their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday – pushes many young people out of helping services before they can truly get the most from them.

While crisis beds tend to be a revolving door, some young people do go from crisis beds into the City's longer-term transitional (TIL) beds. City data shows that, more than three-quarters through FY17, some 18% of crisis discharges consisted of youth going from crisis bed to TIL bed. Unfortunately, given the dearth of long-term housing options, most of these youth didn't fare better when they were discharged from transitional beds. Of 377 TIL discharges, approximately 17% were discharges *back* into DYCD-crisis shelters, another 9% into the adult shelters. More than 20% of discharges were moves into housing with friends or relatives. Approximately, 11% of discharges were youth accessing their own apartment, which is about the same percentage that simply disappeared from services (11.4%). If we add discharges all made into a crisis or transitional shelter, into incarceration or hospitalization, or into another type of shelter, we find that approximately 37% of TIL discharges are into hyper-precarious situations. These numbers show a few things. First, they show that the TIL system has better outcomes than the crisis system – it is less likely to discharge youth into the most precarious of situations. Secondly, youth tend not to access permanent housing through the TIL system. Third, while some youth access the adult shelters upon discharge from TIL's, more youth do not go this route – but this does not mean that these youth are exiting homelessness.

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see, for example, CIDI's report entitled "New York City Youth Count Report 2016".  
[http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/youth\\_count\\_report\\_2016.pdf](http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/youth_count_report_2016.pdf). CIDI's 2015 study is available at  
[http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/youth\\_count\\_report\\_2015.pdf](http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/youth_count_report_2015.pdf). See also DHS's HOPE numbers.

<sup>22</sup> Data obtained through a FOIL request issued by C. Hughes 2017. Source table is included as Appendix 1.

A major issue that homeless youth confront is the lack of permanent housing options available to them when they are trying to exit DYCD's RHY system. As mentioned above, youth relying on DYCD's resources do not have access to the rental subsidies put in place by the current administration for other homeless populations. They do not have priority access into federal resources like NYCHA and Section 8 subsidies. Many RHY who the City deems eligible for supportive housing are not able to access a unit. Without long-term housing options youth remain homeless in one form or another. Often times, we know, that lack of housing options means increased involvement in survival sex or other high-risk engagements in the street-economy. It is often the case that young people who exit the DYCD system find themselves more-involved in survival behaviors in efforts to avoid the adult shelter system.

Another major issue that homeless youth confront is the lack of support with navigating public benefit systems. Anyone who has worked with homeless youth knows that they are often treated badly in mainstream benefits programs including Public Assistance, SNAP, and disability benefits. Public Assistance and SNAP require that youth submit a long list of documentation proving residency, identity, income and other factors, and without assistance from the agency or outside help, their applications are often lost and denied. Negative experiences with public assistance systems lead many youth to avoid them and seek alternative sources of income, which often includes engagement in survival sex and other sectors of the street economy. For youth experiencing disabilities, particularly those related to mental health, accessing long-term disability benefits is exceedingly difficult. The Social Security Administration denies most federal disability (SSI or SSDI) applicants on their initial applications, and accessing a youth-competent attorney to support in an appeal process is often just as hard. DYCD does not provide funding for assistance for navigating public assistance programs, and does not provide assistance for disabled youth to access federal disability aid. Unsurprisingly, many of these youth find themselves going years without the benefits they need. We see many of these young people in our Mental Health Project, but often years into their adult disabilities. Sometimes these young people have found their situations worsening when support through public assistance systems would have made prevented such an outcome.

Finally, LGBTQ youth, particularly transgender young people, are simply not safe in the adult shelters and, often times, in the RHY programs. There is good reason to believe that this is one factor as to why so few discharges from DYCD shelters are made into the adult shelter system but not out of homelessness. On this matter, DYCD deserves significant credit – the agency has sought to make resources available to homeless LGBTQ youth that no other administration has. However, we must, again, temper our applause. While there is certainly a need for LGBTQ-specific services, there is much work to be done to ensure that *all* RHY programs function in full embrace of LGBTQ identities. We must ensure that young people who enter the door at any RHY program are supported in finding who they are and determining their gender and sexual orientations.

#### **Current Legislation**

We are in strong support of each bill currently proposed. Relevant comments for each bill are as follows.

- **Intro 1619:** We support Intro 1619, which requires DYCD to track outcomes of shelter denials. This bill is important because, simply put, DYCD does not track youth turned away from youth shelters.

- **Intro 1699:** We support Intro 1699, which amends the administrative code to extend crisis and transitional stays for runaway and homeless youth. An increase in the crisis stay for runaway youth to 60 and up-to 120 days meets a long-standing need that providers and other advocates have, for years, requested.
- **Intro 1700:** We support Intro 1700, which includes a number of provisions related to reporting and access. Perhaps most decisively, this bill requires that New York City provide shelter to homeless youth upon request. Such a change would shift the services provided to RHY from austerity to access. Such a change would also prevent many RHY from being shuffled from facility to facility in search of a bed and offer them an opportunity to get off the streets without meeting unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. The reporting requirements of this bill are also of significant importance. For years, RHY data has been notoriously difficult to access, left largely to marginal information in municipal reports and FOILs by advocates. By mandating DYCD report on the RHY population some light will be shed on the services provided to this population, and their outcomes from engaging the DYCD system, which will significantly help ensure RHY get the supports they most need.
- **Intro 1705:** We support Intro 1705, which requires that DYCD and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) coordinate entry into the DHS system and that the latter allows homeless youth to bypass assessment shelters (e.g. 30<sup>th</sup> Street, Franklin). Many homeless youth evade the DHS shelter system because the assessment shelters, like 30<sup>th</sup> Street Men's Shelter (more commonly known as "Bellevue"), are dangerous to them. By allowing direct access into long-term transitional shelters, young people are likely to be more open to engage the DHS system when they time-out of the RHY system.
- **Intro 1706:** We support Intro 1706, which increased the age that young people can access RHY services up to the end of 24 years old. This is a desperately needed change. We know that when homeless youth age-out of DYCD-RHY services at the end of age 20 that very often they face intense precariousness upon discharge. They often increase their engagements in survival behaviors. Further, upon discharge, many disabled young people do not get the supports they need navigating the public aid systems. This change would allow many young people to access their youth-competent and age-appropriate resources, and bring New York City law into sync with state and federal regulations.

#### **Additional Needs**

While we are in strong support of the legislation currently under discussion, there are additional needs for resources targeted to the RHY population that are not yet being legislated. Some key needs are as follows:

- **Housing resources:** New York City must provide RHY with resources to exit youth homelessness before it becomes chronic adult homelessness. These resources include access to local rental subsidies and equitable and fair access to supportive housing for those who are eligible. This would also include priority access to NYCHA and Section 8 subsidies. Additionally, New York City must fund housing specialists in all RHY facilities to ensure that youth have housing assistance at every turn.
- **Assistance with benefits:** New York City must provide RHY with resources for navigating and advocating with the public benefits programs. This includes funding services for attaching RHY to

Medicaid, SNAP and cash assistance where needed. As importantly, the City must provide assistance for attaching eligible RHY to local and federal disability programs.

- **LGBTQQ-competency:** New York City must ensure that *all* services providers interacting with RHY are trained in LGBTQQ competency. Thorough competency in serving LGBTQQ youth must be reinforced for every program and all City personnel engaging RHY.
- **Additional mental health supports:** While the ThriveNYC Program has assisted with some resources for RHY, there is a significant need for an increase in mental health services provided to RHY. This includes an increased number of therapists and psychiatrists funded by the City to engage this population.

Thank you for listening to our testimony. We look forward to any questions you may have.

Appendix 1.

Discharge Outcomes (Duplicated Discharges)

FY17 # Days/Month	Jul	Aug	Sept	Q1	Oct	Nov	Dec	Q2	Q2 YTD	Jan	Feb	Mar	Q3	Q3 YTD	April	May	June	Q4	TOTAL FY17
	31	31	30		31	30	31			31	28	31			30	31	30		
<b>CRISIS SHELTER</b>																			
Number Discharged	320	306	307	933	312	266	300	880	1,613	277	236	283	796	2,006	290			260	2,669
Total Number returned home	35	36	34	104	28	25	28	79	183	36	18	21	74	257	27			27	284
Living with Friends/Relatives	10	8	12	30	8	5	8	22	52	16	8	7	31	63	5			5	86
Own Apartment	1	1	4	6	3	3	1	7	19	3	0	1	4	17	1			1	19
Discharged to TIL Program	52	64	60	186	72	36	39	146	312	46	53	62	160	472	50			50	522
Discharged to Crisis Shelter	104	87	84	248	102	77	98	278	523	87	66	66	200	723	69			69	782
Adult Homeless Shelter	0	6	0	6	5	3	3	11	17	0	7	6	13	30	7			7	37
Correctional Facility	0	5	0	5	0	2	0	2	7	1	0	0	1	8	0			0	8
Hospitalization	3	3	5	11	4	6	7	17	28	7	3	8	18	44	2			2	48
Non DYCD Crisis/TIL	0	8	3	11	5	0	0	3	14	12	2	2	16	30	0			0	30
Unknown/Self Discharge	93	72	66	233	36	56	71	167	400	36	61	66	155	556	66			66	620
Other adult(not friend/family)	0	2	0	2	0	45	0	45	47	0	0	0	0	47	26			26	75
Other Residential Care/Supportive Housing	22	26	67	114	50	9	44	105	217	53	26	46	126	343	6			6	349
<b>TRANSITIONAL INDEPENDENT LIVING</b>																			
Number Discharged	44	46	37	129	49	34	31	114	249	21	33	47	101	244	33			33	377
Total Number returned home	5	14	3	22	10	3	7	20	42	2	4	4	11	53	5			5	58
Living with Friends/Relatives	9	3	8	20	9	15	7	31	51	6	2	15	23	74	11			11	85
Own Apartment	5	4	4	13	2	3	2	7	20	5	6	7	18	36	4			4	42
Discharged To TIL Program	4	6	4	14	2	1	1	4	19	0	1	3	4	22	0			0	22
Adult Homeless Shelter	0	2	2	4	8	5	7	20	34	2	7	1	10	34	1			1	36
Correctional Facility	1	1	1	3	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	1	1	4	8			8	14
Hospitalization	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2	0	0	1	1	3	0			0	3
Runaway Crisis Shelter	12	8	5	25	10	5	3	18	43	4	6	5	15	58	8			8	64
Non DYCD Crisis/TIL	2	2		4	3	0	0	3	7	0	1	1	2	9	2			2	11
Unknown/Self Discharge	3	8	9	20	3	1	2	6	28	1	5	7	13	38	4			4	43
Other adult(not friend/family)	0	0	1	1	0	1	0	1	2	1	0	1	2	4	0			0	4
Other residential care	3	0	0	3	2	1	0	3	6	0	0	1	1	7	0			0	7

**New York City Council  
Committee on Youth Services  
and  
Committee on General Welfare  
Hearing  
Thursday, September 28, 2017  
10:00 AM  
Testimony of The Bronx Defenders,  
by Orayne Williams**

Chairperson Eugene, Chairperson Levin, and members of the Committee on Youth Services and Committee on General Welfare, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Orayne Williams, and I am a social work intern at The Bronx Defenders. The Bronx Defenders represents tens of thousands of clients each year, including many youth and young adults and many who are marginally housed or homeless. We support all of the important reforms contained in the several bills before you today. I emphasize in particular the needs, experienced by countless Bronx Defender clients, for extended stays in shelter beyond the current limit and for shelter for young adults through age 24. I would like to share some of my own story, which I hope will help you to understand the importance of the issues being considered today.

I never had the luxury of living a stable life. I moved from Jamaica to the United States, from shelter to shelter, and from school to school. Adapting to these different environments was difficult and caused me emotional distress. I remember washing my one underwear repeatedly at nighttime only to put it on the radiator so it would dry by morning when I left for school. How can I forget the many sleepless nights dense with fear and choked with feelings of the unwanted and the unloved? I believe that the true effect that homelessness has on the population it plagues is often overlooked or misunderstood. Homelessness is not just the obvious idea of being without

a physical home. It also encompasses certain aspects, such as the breaking up of families, which silently dehumanize a person's psyche. I know this is true because I once was homeless.

In 2009, my mother and I were forced to move into a family shelter in Bed Stuy after the police raided the house we lived in due to residents selling drugs. I remember riding the 6 train to the PATH at 2:00 am. I sat across from my mother, who was holding my baby sister in her hands. I watched as they both slept. Tears carved my face as I, too, wanted to sleep but wondered who would protect us if I did. After living in a family shelter with my mother for eight months and enduring much verbal and emotional abuse, she asked me to leave. I was now homeless and without family support. It was two weeks before my 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, and it was cold and snowing outside. I walked out the shelter's door and down the slushy New York City street to the subway station, trying not to drag my bags on the ground. I did not once look back.

After calling my mentor, Wayne Harris, I learned that I had one hour to get to the Covenant House drop-in center. I began to run, not stopping to pick up the pieces of clothes that fell out of the bags. I made it in time. I spent two months at Covenant House. Even though it was not family, my things were not safe from being stolen, and the food was not the best, I felt safe. Though I believe the rooms were overcrowded, I had a bed to sleep on. I remember finding it difficult to prepare my college applications because I had to be signed in before curfew and there was no computer access. However, the staff worked diligently to help me. I felt supported and "believed in."

After I completed Covenant House, I was placed at SCO Independence Inn 1, which is a transitional living program. I was assigned a caseworker who assisted me with establishing my goals and encouraged to remain focused. I stayed at the Inn for about eight months before leaving to attend college. Independence Inn 1 provided me with groceries, a mini fridge, towels,



pots and other items for college. The staff assured me that if I needed anything while in college I should not hesitate to contact them. For two years, I was able to lean on those staff members when things got rough financially. They prepared care packages for me to pick up. There were not my blood family but they supported me as though they were. That was enough to motivate me to keep pushing forward.

As I mentioned earlier, homelessness includes certain aspects, such as the breaking up of families, which silently dehumanize a person's psyche. Throughout my hardship I learned that your family is whoever you make your family. Providing shelters with empathetic staffs to homeless youth is like giving them another chance to feel loved and wanted. I support any idea to provide more shelters and transitional living programs for New York City youth and young adults, more oversight, and more information about this particularly vulnerable population.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.

TESTIMONY

New York City Council, Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services  
Oversight Hearing, Thursday, September 28, 2017  
Submitted by Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services

Good morning, Chairperson Eugene, Chairperson Levin, and good morning to the members of the New York City Council General Welfare and Youth Services Committee. My name is Amy Wilkerson, and I am the Director of Youth Services at Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services. We're one of the City's leading providers of education, youth development, and mental health and wellbeing programs.

Sheltering Arms currently operates two transitional independent living support programs for runaway and homeless (RHY) youth in Queens and is opening a new program in Harlem this fall. The majority of youth that come to our RHY programs face overwhelming challenges to achieving their full potential and becoming active participants in society. The majority of them do not have a high school diploma. Many of them come from broken families or families with history of domestic violence or substance use. Some of them have learning disabilities or mental health issues that are overdue for treatment and care. As providers, we are charged with helping these youths to become self-motivated and self-sufficient in their personal, educational, and work life by the time they turn 21. These are large goals for everyone, and are almost insurmountable to the youths in our programs. Requiring DYCD to provide RHY services, including transitional independent living support services, to homeless youth ages 21-24, and extending the periods of time youth may remain in runaway and homeless youth shelters would allow us more time to work with youth and create the impact we, as well as the youth, would like to see. Therefore, **Sheltering Arms strongly supports bill intro 1706-2017 and bill intro 1699-2017 and recommends that they become the law.**

Sheltering Arms also operates two community based youth centers: one in Jamaica and one in Far Rockaway. Both Jamaica and Far Rockaway are plagued by decades of generational poverty, gang violence, under-performing schools, and a dearth of resources, opportunities, and positive activities. Each year, our youth centers serve more than 3,400 youth including more than 250 through case management. An estimated 40% of those who come seeking housing are 21-24. This speaks volumes to the need for affordable, permanent housing for this age group. We believe it would be beneficial for youth who are receiving DYCD services to have access to LINC vouchers just like their adult counterparts in the Department of Homeless Services system.

In addition, Sheltering Arms would also like the City Council and DYCD to consider providing additional funding for RHY services to hire Housing Specialists. Unlike their adult counterparts, youth receiving RHY services do not have a clear bridge to permanent housing and that there are very little housing subsidies for youth. They ended up competing with adults for the same affordable apartments with less income, credit history and independent living skills.

Thank you again for providing me with this opportunity to testify, and for your partnership on all the issues impacting our community.

**Contact Information:** Mohan Sivaloganathan, Chief Development Officer, Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services. Email: [MohanS@shelteringarmsny.org](mailto:MohanS@shelteringarmsny.org). Phone: 212-886-5604.



September 28, 2017

**Testimony before the New York City Council**

**Runaway and Homeless Youth Oversight Hearing**

Sarah Meckler, LCSW  
Assistant Director of Special Populations, The Door

Good morning, and thank you for this opportunity to testify on this package of Runaway and Homeless Youth legislation. I am Sarah Meckler, Assistant Director of Special Populations at The Door, and I oversee the largest drop-in program for RHY in the 5 boroughs. The Door is a large multi-service youth development agency providing a full range of integrated services at a single site to approximately 10,000 New York City youth between the ages of 12-24 each year. Last year we served over 1,900 homeless youth through our drop-in program.

I want to thank the Council Members who brought forth this legislation to expand RHY services and express my support for the legislation. Access to shelter has expanded considerably for homeless youth over the last two years, but there is much more that can be done. Starting in June of this year, the drop-in team at The Door started collecting data on how many young people in our program were able to obtain emergency shelter on the day they were requesting it. We started tracking it ourselves, as we believed there was no efficient and accurate system of tracking in place through DYCD. For the period of June 2017-August 2017, 45% of the youth (ages 18-21) requesting it were not able to get placed in emergency shelter that night. This was mostly because all the youth shelters were full or, at times, because they had restricted access at some or all youth shelters due to behavior and mental health issues. To add, typically in summer we get the least amount of requests for shelter, so I anticipate that the numbers of young people seeking shelter will increase over the winter months.

When discussing this data with DYCD, they stated that they were showing vacancies in their system on the days these youth were not able to be placed. This is because, while there may be vacancies in their system, the vacancies don't always match up with young person's needs. For example, they might be heterosexual and there is only a vacancy in a LGBTQ program or there might be an opening for a shelter for parents, but that youth might not be a parent. In addition, the majority of new beds that have been opened have been Transitional Independent Living beds (or TIL beds). TILS are programs designed for longer stays and typically have more expectations for the residents to follow than a crisis shelter program. In addition, almost all the TILS are not able to take a youth right away and most require some sort of documentation and an interview before they are admitted. So while it may be helpful for a youth to enter a TIL program, it does not solve their need for immediate shelter. The bill that would require DYCD to document a thorough breakdown of who is requesting shelter is an excellent one. I would add that they should also track who is requesting immediate shelter vs any type of housing placement. In addition, DYCD should work with providers to develop an efficient and accurate tracking system. The tracking system that is currently in place through DYCD does not capture all youth that are being turned away from shelters and the reporting system is also not being enforced. With some simple reports on youth who are currently being turned away from DYCD shelters, we could have the accurate data we need in order to accomplish our goal of all homeless youth receiving immediate shelter when they need it.

I don't want to take up too much of your time, but I will say that I support extending the length of stay available to youth in shelters and TILS and I also support extending the age to 24, but only if there is sufficient financial resources to meet this need. It is wonderful that, in DYCD's most recent concept paper, they included extended

length of stay and extended age groups as an option for their new RFPS, however, without the sufficient resources to fund this large expansion, we will most certainly have much larger numbers of youth of all age groups not able to enter shelter when they need it. Based on who we served through our drop-in last year, we would potentially have an additional 450 youth ages 21-24 trying to seek shelter, just from The Door alone. As stated above, we are not sufficiently meeting the needs of the 16-21 year-old population, so in order to meet their needs and also extend the age, we would need a large increase in financial resources, as well as capital funding so agencies who specialize in services to this population have the means to find buildings and renovate them to the standards of OCFS. As for the bill that would allow DYCD providers to directly refer to DHS program, I also strongly support this. As I am sure you are aware, many young people get very intimidated by the DHS intake centers and many refuse to go to them and would rather be on the streets than have to reside in one. If youth providers were able to directly refer to youth or LGBTQ specific programs in the DHS system, without subjecting them to the assessment shelters, we could prevent many young people from ending up on the streets. I would also encourage the city to make good on their promise of giving rental subsidy access to youth in DYCD shelters. We were told this had been approved two years ago, but have yet been able to access these subsidies for our clients. And finally, I encourage the council to support the Coalition for Homeless Youth's suggestion that all RHY programs, including drop-in programs, be given additional funding to hire housing specialists to help youth search for permanent housing options. Our drop-in program for example, only receives enough funding to support 2 Case Managers, but we serve 1,900 youth. Additional funding is needed in the drop-in programs and for support services in the shelters. Solely utilizing funding to add more beds would leave the youth without the adequate support they need to find long-term housing options and permanently exit homelessness.

In conclusion, I want to leave you with a story of a young woman I just met with yesterday. Sadly, she is just one of many many young people who face similar situations. She is 18 and heterosexual and originally from the former Soviet Union. She came to the United States seeking asylum because her step-father was severely abusive and attempted to kill her mother and herself. She was previously residing with her mother in first, a domestic violence and then a family shelter, but came to The Door seeking independent shelter because her mother was increasingly abusive and controlling herself, blaming her for the abuse and for the family having to relocate to the United States. She wanted to finish her final year of High School and get her working papers so she could work and support herself. We called all three crisis shelters that accept heterosexual females and all three were full. We explained the process to get into a TIL and she planned to return the following day to complete the paperwork. The only immediate option for the night was the DHS assessment shelter. She left to go there, but we later got an email that she did not stay because she felt the staff at the shelter were very rude and unwelcoming and it seemed unsafe. Instead, she chose to stay on the street for the evening in the Times Square area in hopes that Covenant House would have a bed for her the next day. She was eventually able to get into Covenant House, but had this legislation been in place, she would not have had to go through what she did. Unfortunately, she is just one of thousands of this city's most vulnerable youth who often fall through the cracks and get pushed aside because there is not adequate shelter, housing, and support for them.

I commend this visionary legislation and hope that City Council supports it and is able to allocate enough resources to make it a reality.

Sarah Meckler, LCSW  
Assistant Director of Special Populations  
The Door





FOR THE RECORD

**Committee on Youth Services Hearing  
New York City Council  
Thursday 28, September 2017**

**Re: Amida Care Support for 2017 Introductions 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706**

Thank you for this opportunity to testify. As a non-profit Medicaid Special Needs Plan (SNP) serving homeless youth, Amida Care supports Introductions 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706, and encourages New York City Council to pass this powerful suite of legislation to increase the availability of youth shelter in New York City.

Amida Care operates in all five New York City boroughs. We specialize in providing comprehensive health coverage and coordinated care to Medicaid recipients with chronic conditions, including HIV/AIDS and behavioral health disorders. We currently provide services to people living with HIV, people who are homeless regardless of HIV status, and, starting in November 2017, people of transgender experience regardless of HIV status.

In New York City thousands of youth are homeless or unstably housed. They are undercounted and therefore the city does not allocate sufficient resources to social services that can help. This translates into insufficient shelter beds and support services to get and keep youth off the street. Additionally, as soon as they turn 21 many youth are no longer eligible for youth specific housing and have to seek shelter with older adults.

Stable and secure housing is critical to good health and well-being. A lack of housing correlates with poor health outcomes, including increased incidence of chronic illnesses like HIV. Research affirms that housing is a critical social determinant of health. Having a safe place to live helps with keeping appointments, taking medications on time and staying employed.

Many homeless and runaway youth in New York City are Latino, Black or LGBT, groups that are at the highest risk for HIV. In 2015 77% of new HIV diagnoses were among Black and Latino New Yorkers, 61% were among MSM and 40% were in youth 20-29 years old. Furthermore, despite an overall decrease in new HIV infections in New York City between 2001 and 2015, infections increase among transgender individuals.

Amida Care supports these four important bills to increase access to youth shelters and urges urgent passage by New York City Council. Introductions 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706 bring NYC laws and regulations in line with New York State law that allows jurisdictions to extend youth shelter services to youth up the age of 25. They also make sure homeless youth are counted and have better access to safe shelter and services.

Thank you for accepting out testimony.

*Please contact Lyndel Urbano, Director of Public Policy for more information: [lurbano@amidacareny.org](mailto:lurbano@amidacareny.org)*

## Memorandum in Support of 2017 Introductions 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706

As a non-profit Medicaid Special Needs Plan (SNP) serving homeless youth, Amida Care supports Introductions 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706, and encourages New York City Council to pass this powerful suite of legislation to increase the availability of youth shelter in New York City.

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Stable and secure housing is critical to good health and well-being. A lack of housing correlates with poor health outcomes, including increased incidence of chronic illnesses like HIV. Research affirms that housing is a critical social determinant of health.<sup>i</sup> Having a safe place to live helps with keeping appointments, taking medications on time and staying employed.

Many homeless and runaway youth in New York City are Latino, Black or LGBT, groups that are at the highest risk for HIV. In 2015 77% of new HIV diagnoses were among Black and Latino New Yorkers, 61% were among MSM and 40% were in youth 20-29 years old. Furthermore, despite an overall decrease in new HIV infections in New York City between 2001 and 2015, infections increase among transgender individuals.<sup>ii</sup>

Introductions 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706 bring NYC laws and regulations in line with New York State law that allows jurisdictions to extend youth shelter services to youth up the age of 25. They also make sure homeless youth are counted and have better access to safe shelter and services.

- **Intro. 1699-2017** by Council Member Vanessa Gibson would extend the periods of time that youth may remain in runaway and homeless youth shelters.
- **Intro. 1700-2017** would require the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) to report annually on runaway and homeless youth and to provide shelter services to all runaway and homeless youth who request shelter services.
- **Intro. 1705-2017** by Council Member Rafael Salamanca Jr. would require the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and DYCD to create and maintain a process for streamlining DHS' intake and assessment process for any runaway or homeless youth seeking to enter a DHS shelter.
- **Intro. 1706-2017** by Council Member Ritchie Torres would require DYCD to extend access to any transitional independent living (TIL) and crisis services programs that are operated by DYCD or by a provider pursuant to a contract with DYCD to homeless young adults up to their 25th birthday.

Amida Care supports these four important bills to increase access to youth shelters and urges urgent passage by New York City Council.

Please contact Lyndel Urbano, Director of Public Policy for more information: [lurbano@amidacareny.org](mailto:lurbano@amidacareny.org),



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<sup>i</sup> American Journal of Public Health 101, no. 8: 1508–14; Jason P. Block, Asaf Bitton, Ula Hwang, Maya Vijayaraghavan, Melanie Jay, and William Hung. 2011. “Housing Insecurity Associated with Food Insecurity and Poor Health in Children,”

<sup>ii</sup> NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Dec. 2016. “HIV Surveillance Report, 2015”  
<https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/dires/hiv-surveillance-annualreport-2015.pdf>

**Testimony of Housing Works**  
before  
**The New York City Council**  
**Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare**  
regarding  
**Oversight of NYC Runaway and Homeless Youth Services**

September 28, 2017

Thank you, Chairman Eugene and Chairman Levin and members of the Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare, for hearing our testimony today. My name is Reed Vreeland, and I am here representing Housing Works—a healing community of people living with and affected by HIV/AIDS. Founded in 1990, we are the largest community-based HIV service organization in the United States, and provide a range of integrated services for low-income New Yorkers living with and at risk for HIV/AIDS – from housing, to medical and behavioral health care, to job training. Our mission is to end the dual crises of homelessness and AIDS through relentless advocacy, the provision of life saving services, and entrepreneurial businesses that sustain our efforts.

On behalf of Housing Works and the young people we serve, I thank Mayor De Blasio and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) for taking significant initial steps to expand housing and services for homeless youth in NYC. Yet I urge the City Council to enact legislation that would more aggressively and systematically combat youth homelessness. The Council must help close the large gap between the youth housing and services that NYC provides, and what is needed.

The most recent NYC Homeless Youth Count, a point-in-time (PIT) count of sheltered and unsheltered homeless youth, identified 1,805 unaccompanied homeless youth age 24 and younger, and found that 1,653 were sheltered and 152 were unsheltered on the night of February 8<sup>th</sup>, 2016.<sup>i</sup> When responding to the Youth Count survey, 20.5% of the unsheltered youth indicated that they had stayed in 10 or more places over the past month. Yet according to DYCD 2016 Annual Report only 753 Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) beds will be in place by FY2019.<sup>ii</sup> RHY providers warn that a large number of unaccompanied youth are still unsheltered or unstably housed and aren't being served by the City's current youth services system.

At Housing Works, we have long demonstrated that “housing *is* health care.” This is especially true for young people. Homeless youth often face multiple risk factors for HIV infection. Research studies show that a longer duration of time spent homeless is associated with more frequent engagement in HIV risk behaviors.<sup>iii</sup> <sup>iv</sup> The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports that young people ages 13 to 24 accounted for 22% of all new HIV diagnoses nationally<sup>v</sup> and that youth with HIV are the least likely out of any age group to be linked to care and have a suppressed viral load (which helps the person stay healthy and makes them unable to transmit HIV to other sexually). In New York State, HIV-positive young people ages 19-24 have significantly lower rates of viral load suppression as compared with older HIV-positive persons.<sup>vi</sup>

Providing stable housing and wraparound services for homeless youth does more than combat the homelessness crisis, it can also greatly improve public health and even help end New York's HIV/AIDS epidemic. In fact, the New York City and State Blueprint for Ending the AIDS Epidemic specifically recommends reducing new HIV incidence among homeless youth through stable housing and supportive services <sup>vii</sup> and Housing Works supports the full implementation of this recommendation.

- 1. NYC should extend the length of stay in RHY shelter and increase the maximum age of eligibility to 24.** Housing Works is encouraged to see that DYCD has released an RFP that would allow transitional independent living (TIL) programs to serve older youth ages 21-24; however, now that it is allowed by state law, we urge the City Council to pass two bills, Int. No. 1706 and Int. No. 1699, which would amend the administrative code of the City of New York to extend the stay of



both crisis and TIL programs and require DYCD to provide RHY services, including shelter services, to homeless young adults ages 21 to 24 in the same manner as such services are provided to homeless youth under the age of 21.

2. **NYC should affirm that RHY have the right to “youth appropriate” shelter.** Housing Works urges the City Council to pass Int. No. 1700, which would require DYCD to provide shelter to all RHY who request shelter and would require more detailed reporting on RHY, including reporting requirements that would improve the City’s understanding of the size, service needs, and resources available for homeless youth. In 2013, the Legal Aid Society filed a lawsuit against the City of New York on behalf of RHY.<sup>viii</sup> One of the desired outcomes of the case is to grant RHY the right to “youth appropriate” shelter.
3. **NYC should improve tracking and reporting of people who are turned away from RHY housing and services.** Housing Works supports Int. No. 1619, which would require DYCD to track and report the number of youth that are turned away from services on a quarterly basis. Currently, the City has no effective way of tracking turnaways.
4. **NYS should make the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) more accessible to RHY.** Housing Works supports Int. 1705, which amend the administrative code to require DYCD and DHS to create and maintain an intake and assessment process for RHY seeking to transition from RHY services to a DHS services shelter, bypassing the DHS intake shelter. Many young people choose not to enter the shelter system based on first and second hand experiences at the intake shelter.
5. **NYS should expand permanent housing options for people aging out of RHY services.** Two years ago, Mayor de Blasio pledged to give RHY in DYCD-funded programs access to Living in Communities (LINC) vouchers, like their adult counterparts in the DHS system. The City Council should take action to make sure that this promise is honored and that people aging out of RHY services have access to permanent housing options.

Time and time again, the City Council has demonstrated leadership by passing legislation that will help vulnerable New Yorkers. The Council now has an opportunity to improve and expand RHY services and put NYC on a pathway to end youth homelessness. Your leadership is needed.

Thank you for your time.

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<sup>i</sup> DYCD and Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence. NYC Youth Count Report. (2016)

[http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/youth\\_count\\_report\\_2016.pdf](http://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/youth_count_report_2016.pdf)

<sup>ii</sup> DYCD. Annual Report. (2016) [https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/2016\\_Annual\\_Report\\_DYCD\\_Final.pdf](https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/2016_Annual_Report_DYCD_Final.pdf)

<sup>iii</sup> Collins, J. and N. Slesnick, Factors Associated with Motivation to Change HIV Risk and Substance Use Behaviors among Homeless Youth. *J Soc Work Pract Addict*, 2011. 11(2): p. 163-180.

<sup>iv</sup> Rice, E., et al., Position-specific HIV risk in a large network of homeless youths. *Am J Public Health*, 2012. 102(1): p. 141-7.

<sup>v</sup> CDC, National Center for HIV/AIDS, Viral Hepatitis, STD, and TB Prevention. Fact Sheet: HIV Among Youth. (April 2017)

<sup>vi</sup> Feller, D. J., & Agins, B. D. (2016). Understanding Determinants of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Viral Load Suppression: A Data Mining Approach. *Journal of the International Association of Providers of AIDS Care (JIAPAC)*, Vol 16, Issue 1, pp. 23 - 29.

<sup>vii</sup> NYS DOH. Ending the Epidemic Blueprint. Page 25. (2015)

[https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/ending\\_the\\_epidemic/docs/blueprint.pdf](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/ending_the_epidemic/docs/blueprint.pdf); ETE Blueprint, Committee Recommendation

32: [https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/ending\\_the\\_epidemic/docs/crs/cr32.pdf](https://www.health.ny.gov/diseases/aids/ending_the_epidemic/docs/crs/cr32.pdf)

<sup>viii</sup> The City of New York v. CW, DS, et al. (2013) <https://www.scribd.com/document/197344657/Legal-Aid-Society-Complaint-Re-Homeless-Youth>



Testimony of

Carolyn Strudwick, Associate Vice President, Safe Horizon Streetwork Project

Safe Horizon, Inc

City Council RHY Oversight Hearing

General Welfare

Hon. CM Levin

New York City Council

Youth Services

Hon. CM Eugene

September 28, 2017

## **Introduction**

Thank you Chairman Levin and Chairman Eugene and members of the committees for the opportunity to testify before you today regarding proposed City Council legislation to more effectively address the youth homeless crisis in New York City. My testimony will specifically address Intro. 1700, Intro. 1705 and Intro. 1699. My name is Carolyn Strudwick and I am the Associate Vice President of the Streetwork Project of Safe Horizon, the nation's leading victim assistance organization and New York City's largest provider of services to victims of crime and abuse, their families and communities. Safe Horizon creates hope and opportunities for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers each year whose lives are touched by violence.

Since 1984, Safe Horizon has operated the **Streetwork Project** that serves homeless and at-risk young people up until the age of 24, the great majority of whom have been exploited and abused and are at significant risk for injury and disease. The Streetwork Project is comprised of an overnight street outreach program, through which we made 13,437 contacts with homeless youth on the streets last year; a 24-bed overnight shelter program through which we housed 171 youth last year; and two drop-in centers which we provided case management, practical assistance, healthy food and bridges to housing and mental health care to 1,060 unduplicated youth last year.

Safe Horizon is grateful to the City Council for taking meaningful steps to address the homeless youth crisis in New York City. While the de Blasio Administration should be commended for releasing proposals to increase the number of beds in the Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) shelter network, there are still far too few crisis shelter beds available most nights for the number of homeless young people in need.

While we support the Council's intent to increase the length of stay and the age of eligibility for RHY shelter, these proposals will be much more impactful if homeless young people face fewer obstacles when trying to access these shelters. We invite the Council to join our efforts to impress upon the City the need to include start-up capital costs in the RHY shelter RFP in order to allow more providers to participate in this proposal.

A case example: MB is a 20-year-old young straight identified black male who has been homeless for approximately 4 years. He has had history of foster care and group home placement. At the end of July, his mother became sick and was admitted to the hospital, at which point he became homeless. MB found himself in a crisis with no support and ended up in our

program. The only shelter he would go to were those in the youth continuum of care where he states those are the only places he feels safe and unjudged. He likes the interaction he has with the staff and the structure it provides him. MB has a variety of behavioral issues, which influences his functionality such that he does not like change and new things often feel overwhelming for him. This in turn makes it hard for him to adjust especially in larger systems such as DHS adult shelters, which would be his only option outside the RHY. MB needs consistency and a safe stable environment in which he can make connections and have long-term support in addressing his challenges.

The current 30-day length of stay is not enough and does not allow for the provision of structure and ongoing support needed for clients like MB. MB has been in our shelter at least three times over the past year he has been in our program. With his behavioral challenges, MB does not meet the criteria for TILS placement. Therefore, upon each discharge, he becomes very anxious and scared as he realizes the streets are where he will be until he is able to return. MB is also working on a few goals within the program where a longer-term shelter stay would benefit him. MB will also turn 21 years old in a few months, which will make him ineligible to stay in our crisis shelter. We strongly feel that given extra time to work with MB, we would be able to provide more consistent and ongoing care that addresses his special needs while working towards more stability for MB.

### **State of the Problem**

Homelessness among young people in the United States is a serious and pervasive social issue. Reputable estimates indicate that up to 1.7 million minors across the country experience homelessness over the course of a year.<sup>1</sup> Federal data, which includes street-level counts and shelter head-counts, estimates that on a single night in January 2016 there were 35,686 unaccompanied homeless youth, with the vast majority of this number comprised of young people 18-24 years old. Individuals in New York City (NYC), which hosts the largest sheltered homeless population in the United States, made up nearly 5.6% of the national total of unaccompanied youths 18-24, and more than 22.8% of parenting youth in the same age range

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<sup>1</sup> Martha R. Burt. 2007. "Understanding homeless youth: Numbers, characteristics, multisystem involvement, and intervention options." Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Ways and Means, Subcommittee on Income Security and Family Support. <http://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/47046/901087-Understanding-Homeless-Youth-Numbers-Characteristics-Multisystem-Involvement-and-Intervention-Options.PDF>

Homeless youth are exceedingly vulnerable to trauma, sexual exploitation, disease, and violence. Studies have estimated that at least half of homeless youth have experienced abuse<sup>2</sup> and that homeless youth have had traumatic experiences; many meet criteria for a posttraumatic stress disorder diagnosis.<sup>3</sup> Abusive households, poverty, and familial rejection due to sexuality or gender identity are known factors contributing to youth homelessness. High percentages of homeless young people are involved in survival sex, the drug economy, or gangs.<sup>4</sup> Studies have shown that large proportions of homeless lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ) youth, in particular, have had recent involvement in survival sex. Without access to safe shelter and ongoing supportive services, remaining on the streets is their only option. These young people will face increased risk for poor behavioral and health outcomes.

Streetwork's programs are structurally designed to address the needs of homeless youth who are trauma survivors. Streetwork uses a combination of evidence-based approaches including client-centered practice, trauma-informed care, and a holistic harm reduction approach that assesses for risk, harm, and safety continuously with the knowledge that these young people need consistency, a stable environment, and caring adults to support their stability and healing.

### **Barriers to Service**

Homeless youth encounter various barriers that make it difficult for them to access services. Because they are not consistently part of youth oriented social support systems, ( e.g. schools, church groups, families) street involved youth have little or no opportunity to develop the practical, emotional and interpersonal skills they need to succeed in schools, job, housing and other programs. Services for this population are also disjointed as NYC's services for homeless youth cross multiple government agencies, each having different criteria for eligibility. As a result, many young people are often not knowledgeable about resources that are available to them. For instance, while the general population can access a healthcare provider with insurance, homeless youth are often detached from insurance and disproportionately without access to a

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen W. Baron. 2003. "Street youth violence and victimization." *Trauma, Violence and Abuse* 4(1), p. 22-44.

<sup>3</sup> Kimberly Bender et. al. 2010. "Factors associated with trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder among homeless youth in three U.S. cities: The importance of transience." *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 23(1), p. 161-168. Carolyn F. Wong, Leslie F. Clark & Lauren Marlotte. 2016. "The impact of specific and complex trauma on the mental health of homeless youth." *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 31(5), p. 831-854

<sup>4</sup> Robin Petering. 2016. "Sexual risk, substance use, mental health, and trauma experiences of gang-involved homeless youth." *Journal of Adolescence* 48, p. 73-81.

stable healthcare source.<sup>5</sup> In addition, many homeless youth have had profoundly negative experiences with service agencies, which are mostly geared towards an older adult population. As a result, many tend to avoid these systems. Finally, because homeless youth disproportionately experience behavioral health problems, and because many traditional social service programs are geared towards an older adult population, programs are not structured to take into consideration the unique developmental needs of young adults and therefore often have rules that homeless youth struggle to manage. In turn, many young people find themselves discharged or banned from programs without alternative options available to them.

In summary, homeless youth contend with many conditions that make them vulnerable to a broad range of exploitation. Because of the trauma they endured in the child welfare system, and/or abusive families as well as their involvement in high-risk activities, they are very unlikely to seek help from government agencies or traditional social services. Unfortunately, without the support of family or service providers, it will be difficult for many to stabilize and improve their lives. Therefore, it's imperative that all young people within the RHY population have access to effective youth centered programming such as separate facilities which include shelter and drop-in centers that sensitively engage these young people throughout their process while providing a safe and non-threatening environment as they work their way towards stability.

### **(Int 1700-2017) Right to Shelter**

As noted, youth need stability in order to progress through their next stages. Research has recognized a housing first approach as a best practice in helping to stabilize individuals coping with a wide range of life struggles. However, there continues to be a gap in service regarding meeting the needs of youth needing shelter. We commend the Mayor on recognizing the need for more beds and prioritizing shelter beds for youth by increasing the number of beds over the next several years. Unfortunately, there are a significant number of beds still not on line and not available to young people, leaving a gap in services in terms of provision of shelter. Prior to Mayor de Blasio's increase of 300 shelter beds, there were 453 beds available for youth shelter. Of the 300 promised, only 52 are actually up and running, all within the transitional independent living (TIL) shelters. We are aware that there might be multiple factors contributing

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<sup>5</sup> J. Mackelprang et al. 2015. "Predictors of emergency department visits and inpatient admissions among homeless and unstably housed adolescents and young adults." *Medical Care* 53(12), p. 1010-1017.

to the delay of getting new beds online and including the financial cost of start-up. For those of us who operate shelters, we already know that the financial cost can be high. Currently, the city does not provide capital cost to assist with start-up of shelter beds. Given the already costly real estate prices in the city and surrounding boroughs, and OCFS's strict regulations towards certification which in many cases often requires major reconstruction to meet licensing regulations, this poses significant financial barrier as organization are not always able to absorb the cost based upon the current contract awards amount.

Young people deserve the right to shelter and should not be denied this right based upon contractual financial limitations. That is why we are supporting the passing of this bill, which we hope will require the city to invest more resources and ensure that there is adequate shelter to meet the needs.

**(Int 1706-2017) Amend services to RHY up to 25 years old and extend length of stay in crisis shelter**

Our recent shelter data shows that over 46% youth who came into our crisis shelter were thrown out of their homes and abandoned by family and 69% were away from home for more than a period of 30 days. The average length of stay was 31 nights. More staggering data indicates that majority of our youth (42%) arrive from homeless system and upon discharge 40% return to the homeless system

As noted previously, NYC made up 5.6% of the national total of unaccompanied youths ages 18-24, and more than 22.8% of parenting youth. The majority of young people who access Streetwork Programs are between the ages of 21 to 24 years old; 56% at our Lower East Side Drop In and 67% at our Harlem site. This means that a significant number of youth experiencing homelessness and in need of critical services are not eligible for support from Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) services as youth become ineligible for services upon their 21st birthday.

Currently, the length of stay in crisis is 30 days and youth have up until their 21st birthday to have achieved stable living situations and employment. Based upon the conditions referenced above identifying contributing factors to youth chronic homeless, youth require more time to address the multiple issues they are facing. Data from DYCD shows that young people who use these 30-day youth shelters often remain in a cycle of instability. In fiscal year 2016,

less than one percent of those discharged from youth crisis shelter beds moved into their own apartments. About 18% of those discharged, moved along the local continuum from crisis shelter to a transitional independent living (TIL) bed. More than half of those discharged either went right back into a crisis bed (29.7%) or were unaccounted for (23.5%).

The above statistics serves to illustrate the current problem, the instability that young people experience when they are not afforded much more stable and long-term support. Youth need more time as navigating multiple systems and addressing barriers can be a lengthy process for both youth and the advocates that work with them. For example, we know that supportive housing is a key resource for some homeless youth—and Streetwork has documented expertise in successfully placing disabled homeless youth in these units. However, this value resource has become hard to access due to a mixture of declining unit availability, provider-based eligibility criteria, and tenant preferences. In all, the process for accessing supportive housing takes at least a year, on average. There is also a subset of homeless youth who have challenges managing higher threshold services such as TILS, who need longer term crisis shelter that can continue to address their unique needs. When youth have limited time in shelter with a goal toward stabilization, they are at a disadvantage. Stabilization does not happen in 30 days. The result is a high percentage of chronically homeless youth cycling between the streets and crisis shelters without ever accessing long-term shelter. Many end up in the streets where they face the likelihood of resorting to high-risk behaviors for survival thus decreasing their chances for success and healing. We know from our experience working with this population that young people need more consistency and time as they work towards self-sufficiency. For the reasons that we mentioned earlier, we urge the Council to pass the bill increasing age of eligibility for crisis shelter to 25 years old and increase the length of stay to 90 days, at minimum.





**BROOKLYN  
DEFENDER  
SERVICES**

**TESTIMONY OF:**

**Elia Johnson – Brooklyn Adolescent Representation Team**

***BROOKLYN DEFENDER SERVICES***

**Presented before**

**The New York City Council Committee on General Welfare  
and the Committee on Youth Services**

**Oversight Hearing on**

**Safe and Accessible Shelters for Homeless Youth**

**and**

**Intros 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705 & 1706**

**September 28, 2017**

My name is Elia Johnson and I am an adolescent social worker with Brooklyn Defender Services (BDS). Our organization provides innovative, multi-disciplinary, and client-centered criminal defense, family defense, immigration, civil legal services, social work support and advocacy in nearly 40,000 cases involving indigent Brooklyn residents every year. I thank the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare and the Committee on Youth Services, and in particular Chairpersons Corey Johnson and Stephen Levin, for the opportunity to testify on issues related to shelter services for Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in New York City.

As a member of the Brooklyn Adolescent Representation Team, I currently work with 50 BDS adolescent clients, ages 14-24. The Brooklyn Adolescent Representation team is made up of dedicated attorneys and social workers and represents over two thousand adolescents ages 13-24 annually. We are grateful for the opportunity to speak today about the ways in which that the Department of Youth and Community Development can better serve Runaway and Homeless Youth.

## Homeless Youth and the Criminal Legal System

Public defenders in Brooklyn serve around 500 homeless 16- and 17-year-olds every year, a vast majority of whom are not being served by RHY providers because of the lack of services in Brooklyn. About half of the youth are made homeless by the criminal justice system when the court issues an order of protection against the youth for 90 days after a criminal allegation involving a domestic disturbance, making it illegal for the young person to return home.<sup>1</sup> The other half disclose to their defense team that they are living with friends or significant others because of a breakdown of the relationship with their parents.

Furthermore, RHY providers report that they already serve over 1000 youth per year (at facilities almost exclusively located in Manhattan) from Brooklyn. **We estimate that Kings County would need at least 300 crisis shelter beds to ensure that no Brooklyn youth was forced to sleep on the street, sleep on the train, couch surf, or trade sex for shelter.**

Instead of providing shelter and services for homeless youth, the City too often relies on the criminal legal system to handle this population's complex needs, at a heavy cost to taxpayers. A majority of youth surveyed by The Door in 2013 reported that they had been arrested. The cost of a single misdemeanor arrest in NYC is \$1750. This covers all police time including overtime pay for arresting officers and supervisors, all pre-arraignment jail costs, and all court expenses.<sup>2</sup> Detaining a person at Rikers Island for a year costs the City \$208,500 per year.<sup>3</sup> This figure does not take into account the significant extra costs related to supervision and programming for adolescents incarcerated on Rikers. In contrast, RHY providers received \$35,886/youth crisis shelter bed in 2015. The actual cost to RHY providers is far higher than this 2015 reimbursement figure.

Furthermore, New York City's youth homeless crisis places an enormous burden on ACS to house youth in the foster care system. Even if a young person is taken into ACS custody, because of overcrowding at the Children's Center, some adolescents are currently being housed on Long Island away from their friends, families and schools until appropriate group or foster homes can be found. As this Committee is well aware, those group and foster homes are in short supply. Older teens may end up staying weeks or months at the Children's Center because it is so hard to find foster homes for them.

## Youth Homelessness in New York City – Case Example

<sup>1</sup> As a matter of practice in Brooklyn, prosecutors regularly ask for and judges regularly issue a full order of protection in cases involving "domestic violence", even though these are normal disputes between teenagers and their parents. Full Orders of Protection, in effect, usually render our young clients homeless. In contrast, in New Jersey, when EMT's respond to a domestic disturbance involving a youth, they take the youth to the Emergency Room rather than arresting them. If NYC were to adopt this approach 250 youth in Brooklyn every year would avoid court-mandated homelessness.

<sup>2</sup> Police Reform Organizing Project, *Over \$410 Million Per Year: The Human and Economic Cost of Broken Windows Policing in NYC* (2014), [http://www.policereformorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Over410MillionaYear\\_docx.pdf](http://www.policereformorganizingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/Over410MillionaYear_docx.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> New York City Independent Budget Office, 2013.



Eric<sup>4</sup> was arrested after an incident in his home with his half-sister. Eric, a young man who had been in foster care since the age of 3, had only recently reunited with his father. Unfortunately, as is common with children who have experienced significant trauma, Eric had a hard time adjusting to his new home, and the conflict in the home led to his arrest. Eric was arrested and arraigned in Kings County Criminal Court at night. The Judge issued a Full Order of Protection on behalf of his half-sister. He was released from arraignments at midnight with a metro card and nowhere to go.

Eric was legally barred from returning to the only home he knew in New York City. He had no other family. Eric left Kings County Criminal Court and wandered around downtown Brooklyn before he got on the subway. A policeman found Eric sleeping on the subway and took him to the ACS Children's Center. Eric spent a few days at the Children's Center before he was placed in ACS custody at Children's Village, which is in Dobbs Ferry, New York about 30 minutes outside of New York City. Due to the order of protection Eric cannot return home for the foreseeable future and will remain in ACS custody until he ages out or signs himself out.

### Current RHY Capacity

There is a severe need for shelter options for adolescents in New York City. The New York City Department of Youth and Community Development runs a range of services for Runaway and Homeless Youth. Unfortunately, DYCD only has two crisis shelters that serve all youth under 21, Covenant House and Safe Horizon Streetworks Overnight, both in Manhattan. Covenant House, near Times Square, is the largest and has about 200 shelter beds and another 140 spots for longer-term residential stays. The shelter serves youth age 16-21 and turns away about 75 people a month.<sup>5</sup> Safe Horizon, located in Harlem, offers only 24 beds. There are other limited crisis shelter options for LGBTQ youth, victims of sex trafficking, and pregnant and parenting young mothers.<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, the majority of our clients are teenage boys of color who do not meet these criteria. Drop-in centers exist in all of the five boroughs but do not provide short-term emergency housing to accommodate youth like Eric.

Right now, too many of our clients live in the streets, "couch surf" or sleep on the floors or couches of friends, neighbors or even strangers. Indeed, homeless youth are more likely to be arrested, engage in criminal activity to meet their survival needs, or engage in unsafe sexual relationships or the commercial sex trade because they need a place to sleep. A 2013 study by Covenant House and Fordham University found that 1 in 4 of the surveyed homeless youth became a victim of sex trafficking or was forced to provide sex for survival needs, such as

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<sup>4</sup> Name changed to protect his identity.

<sup>5</sup> Mireya Navarro, "Housing homeless youth poses challenge for Mayor Bill de Blasio," NY TIMES, March 27, 2015, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2015/03/28/nyregion/housing-homeless-youth-poses-challenge-for-mayor-de-blasio.html>.

<sup>6</sup> Ali Forney has 32 beds for youth who identify as LGBTQ in Brooklyn, Covenant House has 22 mother and child beds at West 52<sup>nd</sup> St in Manhattan, and Inwood House in the Bronx has 8 beds for young women.

food or a place to sleep. Of these victims, about half reported that the number one reason they had been drawn into commercial sexual activity was because they did not have a safe place to sleep.

The City must do better to provide safe shelter space for youth in the communities that they live in so that they do not end up in these situations. Manhattan, which houses the only two youth crisis shelters in New York City is not safely accessible for youth in Brooklyn, Queens, Staten Island or the Bronx. We applaud members of the Committee on General Welfare and the Committee on Youth Services for the steps they have taken with each of the bills before the Council today, which will go a long way in improving access to housing for homeless youth. We also issue further recommendations for actions that the Council can take on this issue.

We support each of the following bills:

***Intro. 1700-2017 - Expand Appropriate Shelter Access for all Runaway and Homeless Youth:*** We believe that by appropriately tracking the number of RHY in New York City DHS and DYCD will have a better understanding of the true need for shelter services and will therefore take action to allocate funding for youth shelters in each of the five boroughs that are easily accessible by public transportation. The bill also adds a new section to the NYC codes requiring DYCD to provide shelter services to all runaway and homeless youth who request such shelter from the department. This reform is long overdue. It is devastating for service providers like us who literally have nowhere to send our clients in need of a safe place to sleep. Mandating that DYCD find a way to house these youth is a critical first step in ensuring that DYCD providers have sufficient capacity to serve runaway and homeless youth.

***Intro. 1699-2017 - Expand the Length of Stay for Runaway and Homeless Youth*** We support extending the amount of time that young people can stay in shelters to 60 or 120 days, as it often takes at least that long to obtain more permanent housing. We believe that this will allow adolescents to remain in a safe place until a more long-term option can be reached instead of being forced to leave after 30 days, which is the current policy at Covenant House. Often this forces young people to return to unsafe situations or the streets.

***Intro. 1705-2017 - Streamline DHS Intake/Assessment for Runaway and Homeless Youth:*** We believe that streamlining the process for intake and assessment from short-term shelters into DHS facilities is critical to ensuring that young people are able to access long-term and permanent housing. This will decrease the revolving door of young people entering short-term crisis centers and then leaving after the allocated time period with no long-term or permanent solution.

***Intro. 1706-2017 - Raise the Age for Runaway and Homeless Youth:*** As a social worker who works with adolescents, I hear every day from my adolescent clients that they do not want to go into shelters with adults because they do not feel safe in those spaces. Young people under the age of 25 are fundamentally different from adults, as proven by numerous studies on brain development. By raising the age to 24, adolescents in their early twenties will now have a safe place to sleep with people their own age.

Additional Recommendations



*1. Support the opening of RHY crisis shelters in all five boroughs.*

Kings County alone needs at least 300 crisis shelter beds to ensure that no Brooklyn youth is forced to sleep on the street, sleep on the train, couch surf, or trade sex for shelter. Right now there are only a handful of crisis shelter beds in Brooklyn and they are only for youth who identify as LGBTQ. The vast majority of runaway and homeless youth must seek crisis shelter beds in Manhattan where they are too often turned away for lack of beds. Runaway and homeless youth have been made homeless by failures of the education system, juvenile and adult justice systems, the foster care system, and adults who have failed to properly care for them. The City can and must address the youth homelessness crisis by opening youth crisis shelters in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Staten Island and Queens.

*2. The City must provide reimbursement for capital investments to RHY service providers to allow them to open crisis shelters in the outer boroughs*

We have been told that RHY providers are unable to open new crisis shelters in boroughs like Brooklyn because the City currently does not fund capital investments. The City should assist RHY providers to locate and secure bed space in Brooklyn as landlords are often reluctant to lease to shelter providers. Even better, the City could renovate existing City buildings such as old hospitals or schools for this purpose and then issue RFP contracts for use of these spaces. Additionally, DYCD's RFPs should include funding for capital expenditures, a current barrier to instituting new beds under the existing DYCD funding scheme. Finally, the RFP should reflect the actual cost of running a crisis shelter bed, as opposed to the current inadequate reimbursement rate. This number must include the provision of wraparound support services for youth housed at the crisis shelter. The availability of high-quality services is critical to the ability of New York's homeless youth to break the cycle of homelessness and court involvement.

Conclusion

We applaud the City Council for taking these important steps to provide housing for adolescents in New York City. We encourage the City Council to further ensure that everything is being done for RHY in New York City by establishing and funding crisis shelter housing for youth in every borough of the City by incorporating capital investments costs into the RFP process.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to Andrea Nieves, BDS Policy Team, 718-254-0700 ext. 387 or [anieves@bds.org](mailto:anieves@bds.org).

**Testimony to the New York City Council**  
*Committee on General Welfare*  
*Committee on Youth Services*

Int. No. 1619  
Int. No. 1699  
Int. No. 1700  
Int. No. 1705  
Int. No. 1706

September 28, 2017

Good morning. My name is Jenn Strashnick and I am a Senior Staff Attorney in the Advocacy and Legal Services Department at Covenant House New York, where we serve runaway and homeless youth, ages 16 to 24. I would like to thank the Committee on General Welfare and the Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify today on Int. Nos. 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706, which, if passed, will greatly improve services to some of New York City's most vulnerable young people: runaway and homeless youth (RHY).

Covenant House New York (CHNY) is the nation's largest, non-profit adolescent care agency serving homeless, runaway and trafficked youth. During this past year, CHNY served over 1,600 young people in our residential programs, and through our drop-in center and street outreach efforts. On a nightly basis, we provide shelter to approximately 250 young people, including pregnant women and mothers with their children, LGBTQ youth, and commercially sexually exploited youth and trafficking survivors. Our youth are primarily people of color and over a third of our youth have spent time in the foster care system. Many of our youth have experienced abuse or neglect at the hands of parents or other caregivers, and a disproportionately

high percentage of our youth struggle with the pervasive impacts of trauma, mental health issues, and substance abuse. We provide young people with food, shelter, clothing, medical care, mental health and substance abuse services, legal services, high school equivalency classes and other educational programs, and job-training programs. All of these services help young people overcome the trauma of abuse, homelessness, and exploitation and move toward stability.

We strongly support Int. Nos. 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706 in order to better serve the needs of runaway and homeless youth. These important bills address long-standing barriers that prevent youth from fully accessing the help they desperately need and we are grateful to the City Council for the introduction of these bills.

### **1. Extending the Length of Stay for Runaway and Homeless Youth**

Under current law, runaway and homeless youth may stay in RHY crisis shelters for a period of 30 days with the possibility of a 30-day extension. This simply is not enough time to fully address the needs of a young person in crisis and transition them to more stable housing. Most of our youth have experienced trauma at the hands of parents, pimps, and other adults or from living on the streets. The current length of stay limits hinder a young person from being able to heal from this trauma because they immediately must begin the process of searching for more stable housing in order to survive. It is difficult to focus on healing from trauma, finding a job, or addressing mental health and substance abuse issues when a young person's primary focus becomes where he or she is going to live after 30 days. There are also other barriers well outside of a young person's control that conflict with the current length of stay limits. For example, it often takes a full 30 days just to help a young person replace their birth certificate, Social Security card, state identification card or other documents that were lost or stolen due to being homeless—documents that are necessary for a young person to find employment and

housing. For young people with more severe mental health issues who qualify for supportive housing, the current time limits are even more problematic due to long waiting lists at supportive housing sites. The result of the current length of stay limits is that RHY shelters, such as CHNY, are forced to discharge youth before they are ready to leave, which interrupts the progress a young person has made at a particular program. These youth often go to another youth shelter but when there are no beds available, youth are plunged back into homelessness because they fear the adult shelter system and would rather couch surf, live on the streets, or engage in survival sex—exchanging sex for shelter—and some become victims of human trafficking. This bouncing back and forth between various environments completely disrupts a young person's progress and perpetuates the cycle of homelessness.

Therefore, extending the length of stay to a possible 120 days would greatly help stabilize young people and improve their chances of escaping homelessness. This increase would allow young people the time needed to heal from trauma and then begin the process of finding employment, continuing their education, and finding stable housing, without having to turn to multiple shelters or return to the streets.

## **2. Extending the Age of RHY Programs to Include Youth Up to Age 25**

Currently, city and state-funded RHY shelters may only serve youth under age 21. It is heartbreaking when we are forced to discharge a young person from our crisis shelter on their 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. We frequently receive calls from young people over age 21 seeking shelter and it is painful when we are forced to tell them there is nowhere for them to go except the adult shelter system. Science has taught us that a young person's brain continues to develop until they are 25 years old, and that 21 to 25-year-olds have different needs from older adults. Federal funding for homeless youth already allows programs to serve youth up to age 25 because they recognize that



homeless young adults need age-appropriate services. While the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) does provide shelter to youth over age 18, young people must first go through the intake and assessment process at shelters with older, chronically homeless adults, who often have more severe mental health and substance abuse issues. As with 18 to 21-year-olds, 21 to 25-year-olds still often fear entering the DHS system due to this intake and assessment process and also because sometimes there are not available beds in the youth-specific shelters. The result is that when these youth are too old for RHY shelters they couch surf when they can, but otherwise may turn to the streets or survival sex to survive.

Therefore, we support New York City taking a stand for these homeless young adults by allowing them to remain in RHY shelters until their 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in order to access age-appropriate services. While we are very much in support of this change, we want to emphasize the need for additional funding in order to adequately serve this new population.

### **3. Streamlining Intake and Assessment for Youth Transitioning from DYCD to DHS Shelter**

When a young person reaches their length of stay limit in an RHY shelter or turns 21 years old, they sometimes must turn to the adult shelter system through DHS. Even if the length of stay for RHY crisis shelters is extended and if the age is raised to 25, there will still be some youth who will need to enter the DHS system due to a lack of youth beds. While DHS does provide shelter to youth over age 18 and can provide access to other permanent housing resources not available to youth in DYCD shelters, such as apartment vouchers, youth first must complete the intake and assessment process at places like the 30<sup>th</sup> St. Intake Center for men and Franklin Shelter for women. Many youth fear entering the DHS system due to this intake and assessment process—for example, it can be very intimidating for an 18-year-old who is

experiencing homelessness for the first time to be placed with a chronically homeless 50-year-old with severe mental health and substance abuse issues. For homeless, pregnant young women and young mothers, they must go to Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH), in order to apply for shelter and be placed in a temporary placement while their shelter eligibility is assessed. Youth often spend the entire day at PATH and sometimes struggle to even receive shelter placement. Since there is currently no information sharing between DYCD RHY shelters and DHS, a young person essentially must start over when they enter the DHS system and often must share their story again, which can be retraumatizing for young people who must once again describe stories of abuse, exploitation, and other forms of trauma.

We support a process where youth transitioning from RHY shelters to DHS shelters can bypass the DHS intake and assessment process and be placed directly in a program shelter, where they can continue the progress they started in an RHY shelter. By allowing RHY shelters, with a young person's written consent, to share part of the RHY case file with DHS, the young person would not need to retell their story, therefore avoiding retraumatization.

In conclusion, the passage of these bills would provide incredible support to runaway and homeless youth, and homeless youth adults. We appreciate that advocates, City Council, and DYCD are all in agreement that every runaway and homeless young person deserves a bed in a youth shelter. However, while we are in full support of these bills, it is imperative that sufficient funding is available to ensure every youth seeking help can be served in a DYCD shelter. Finally, we would like to thank Council Member Eugene and Council Member Levin for holding today's hearing, and a special thank you to Council Member Johnson for the introduction of these bills and for being a champion for our youth. We thank the entire New York City Council

for their support in the fight against youth homelessness as the passage of these bills would make New York City a leader in supporting runaway and homeless youth.

Testimony of

**The Legal Aid Society**

**and**

**Coalition for the Homeless**

on

Oversight: Safe and Accessible Shelters for Homeless Youth  
Int. Nos. 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705 & 1706

prepared for submission to

The New York City Council  
Committee on Youth Services  
Committee on General Welfare

by

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September 28, 2017  
New York, New York

## ***Introduction***

We would like to thank the Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services and Committee Chairs Steve Levin and Mathieu Eugene for providing us with an opportunity to be heard concerning the proposed bills, Introduction Numbers 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705 and 1706, regarding services for runaway and homeless youth (RHY). We applaud the committees' dedication to this important issue. In particular, we would like to thank Council Member Corey Johnson and his staff, whose hard work and commitment to this vulnerable population are steadfast.

## **Basic RHY Demographics**

Runaway and homeless youth are generally defined as unaccompanied young people who have run away or been forced to leave home and now reside in temporary situations, places not otherwise intended for habitation, or emergency shelters. The federal Runaway and Homeless Youth Act defines the population as being between 12-24 years of age. As of April 2017, New York State redefined RHY to be anyone under the age of 25 years, thereby laying the groundwork for the package of legislation before the Council today.

It is notoriously difficult to accurately count the number of runaway and homeless youth in New York City, and this difficulty is a substantial barrier to the provision of adequate shelter and services. The only government-sponsored youth count is organized around the City's Point in Time (PIT) count, which takes place on a mid-winter night. Providers and advocates have long argued that the PIT and youth counts miss substantial portions of RHY. Reasons for this vary from arguments that the definition of RHY does not include significant parts of the population, such as those couch-surfing or engaging in survival sex, to arguments that youth experiencing homelessness have an ability to blend into the fabric of the City. Thus, both the PIT and related youth count serve as an inadequate snapshot of homeless youth on a particular day rather than a census of youth with unstable housing situations who are in need of City services.

However, by our most reliable estimates, roughly 3,800 youth in New York City are homeless, and the city does not have nearly enough shelter beds—crisis or transitional independent living (TIL)—to serve this population.<sup>1</sup> During a meeting in April 2017, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) reported they had funded 458 beds, with an additional 295 to be opened by 2019, bringing the total to 753 beds. This is certainly an improvement over four years ago, when there were just 253 beds. However, it is still woefully insufficient to serve the number of RHY in New York City.

As is the case with so many other marginalized and system-involved populations we work with, youth of color and LGBTQ/TGNC youth are vastly overrepresented in the RHY population. In 2015, 44% of respondents to NYC's Youth Count survey were Black, 24% were Latino, and 17% identified as two or more races. Similarly, LGBTQ youth become homeless at a significantly higher rate than the adolescent population as a whole and are vastly overrepresented in the RHY population. According to a 2012 report by the NYC Association of Homeless and Street Involved Youth Organizations, research shows that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and questioning

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<sup>1</sup> Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, *The New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations' State of the City's Homeless Youth Report*, 2009.

youth make up 25-40% of the homeless youth population in NYC and other large cities,<sup>2</sup> compared with 3-6% of the general population.<sup>3</sup> In addition, the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services presented census data showing that 5% of homeless youth identified as transgender and another 18% were unsure or chose not to answer the question about gender identity.<sup>4</sup> According to the City's own 2015 Youth Count, almost 60% of youth living in shelters or transitional living facilities, 50% of youth in unstable housing, and 30% of unsheltered youth identified as a sexual orientation other than straight.<sup>5</sup> Many homeless youth are also immigrants, and like their older counterparts face additional challenges in accessing services and permanent housing, especially in the current political climate. Immigrant RHY cannot apply for financial aid and often cannot work legally, making it all the more difficult to stabilize.

### **Causes of Youth Homelessness**

In 2013, a comprehensive survey by the New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care shed important light on the causes of homelessness. The top reasons for homelessness at that time were reported "fighting frequently with [] parents" (34%), being "kicked out" of the home (31%), "physical, mental or sexual abuse" (34%), "neglect or [a] parent not meeting basic needs" (26%), unwillingness to "live by parents' rules" (20%), and parental use of drugs or alcohol (20%).<sup>6</sup> Anecdotally, these statistics are reflected in the stories we hear from clients with whom we work daily and are distinct from the reasons adults become homeless. Often the choice to leave home is a survival strategy in and of itself. Remarkably, youth experiencing homelessness demonstrate incredible fortitude and resilience in the face of trauma histories, routine discrimination, and incredible systemic barriers.

### **Youth Experiencing Homelessness**

By definition, RHY are disconnected from the very support systems that are intended to support adolescent development into adulthood, such as their families and schools. As discussed briefly above, even before a young person is considered runaway or homeless they have likely experienced trauma. This trauma is only exacerbated each day they are experiencing homelessness.

While it is difficult to explain all of the ways in which youth experience homelessness in New York City, there are common threads. Not surprisingly, homeless youth in New York face myriad dangers, obstacles, and simply frightening circumstances as they navigate the city trying to survive. Survival often involves entry into the street economy. Many homeless youth are pressured to trade sex for a place to sleep or shower and about one-third to half of these youth exchange sex for money, food, or a place to stay.<sup>7</sup> Many are victims of sex trafficking.<sup>8</sup> These

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<sup>2</sup> Id.

<sup>3</sup> [http://news.gallup.com/poll/182051/san-francisco-metro-area-ranks-highest-lgbt-percentage.aspx?utm\\_source=Social%20Issues&utm\\_medium=newsfeed&utm\\_campaign=tiles](http://news.gallup.com/poll/182051/san-francisco-metro-area-ranks-highest-lgbt-percentage.aspx?utm_source=Social%20Issues&utm_medium=newsfeed&utm_campaign=tiles).

<sup>4</sup> Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, *supra*.

<sup>5</sup> It is our understanding that the complete 2016 Youth Count report will be released soon.

<sup>6</sup> Lance Freeman and Darrick Hamilton for the New York City Coalition on the Continuum of Care, *A Count of Unaccompanied Homeless Youths* in New York City, November 19, 2013.

<sup>7</sup> Meredith Dank et al. The Urban Institute, *Surviving the Streets of New York: Experiences of LGBTQ Youth, YMSM, and YWSW Engaged in Survival Sex*, February 2015; Marya Viorst Gwadz et al., *The initiation of homeless youth into the street economy*, 32 *Journal of Adolescence* 357, 358 (2009).

dangers expose them to a significantly heightened risk of sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV.<sup>9</sup> For runaway or homeless youth with serious substance abuse issues, which often stem from the very chaotic and traumatic family histories that drive them to homelessness, options are limited. Programs are often abstinence based, and many of these youth need treatment, support, and time before they are able or ready to quit.<sup>10</sup> RHY are at high risk of involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system due to their homelessness.<sup>11</sup> The lack of stability can also impact their ability to continue with school, or find and maintain employment.<sup>12</sup> For these reasons, access to meaningful healthcare, including access to quality mental healthcare, and related services is particularly crucial for RHY. Despite the many challenges they face, RHY exhibit a common desire to be self-sufficient and yearn for the tools and ability to be successful in that pursuit. Because they do not share many of the characteristics of chronically homeless adults, it is critical to provide youth-specific shelter and services that increase their ability to achieve self-sufficiency.

### **Crisis and TIL Bed Availability**

The City has put forth more resources over the last few years to increase the number of beds that are available to RHY aged 16-20, but it still has a long way to go. Notably, almost all the beds that have been added to the DYCD-funded RHY shelter system are TILs, which don't address the need for short-term crisis placements as a pivotal initial placement. As providers and youth confirm time and again, there are still not enough crisis beds for RHY, and each night homeless youth are turned away. There is not a reliable or standardized system in place to count youth who are turned away in their attempt to access emergency shelter; hence the Council's introduction of 1619, which we discuss below. Currently, if a youth obtains a crisis shelter bed, the City ejects the youth from shelter after 60 days. When a homeless youth is discharged from one crisis shelter, they may seek shelter services from another provider, but if no beds are available they may be turned away with no place to go. Many are understandably reluctant to enter the DHS adult shelter system because of their experiences with trauma and other vulnerability factors as mentioned above.

While in crisis shelter, homeless youth are eligible to apply for TILs. TILs are DYCD-funded residential facilities intended to assist homeless youth transition to independent living. Although DYCD will place some youth directly into a TIL upon entry into shelter, usually the TIL application process requires applicants to submit a mental health evaluation, and requires youth to demonstrate that they are either enrolled in school or employed. These longer-term housing options are intended to help youth who have stabilized in crisis shelter settle into a smaller, more home-like environment where, with support, they can develop the ability to be self-sufficient before aging-out or timing out back into the community.

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<sup>8</sup> Ric Curtis et al., *The Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children in New York City* (September 2008), available at [http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/CSEC\\_NYC\\_Executive\\_Summary.pdf](http://www.courtinnovation.org/sites/default/files/CSEC_NYC_Executive_Summary.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, *The New York City Association of Homeless and Street-Involved Youth Organizations' State of the City's Homeless Youth Report*, 2009.

<sup>10</sup> Id.

<sup>11</sup> See generally Id.; Dank, et al., supra; Youth Justice Board, Center for Court Innovation, *Homeless Not Hopeless: A Report on Homeless Youth and the Justice System in New York City*, June, 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, supra.

It is also important to note that while we often describe the need for RHY beds, the reality is that the services surrounding the youth in the beds are what truly make these programs valuable. Many service providers in New York City go above and beyond what is required of them by state law, and task themselves not only with providing a place for young people to sleep, but also providing crucial resources, referrals, and support to these young people in need.

### **The Positive Impact of Specialized Services for Runaway and Homeless Youth**

Within the past few weeks, a groundbreaking white paper was released by the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing in collaboration with the Coalition for Homeless Youth. The purpose of the underlying study was to build upon a foundation of other research and over a three year period to examine a diverse group of RHY service providers to assess the effectiveness of these programs.<sup>13</sup> One of the most significant findings of the study is that high quality RHY programs not only meet basic requirements, but “address higher order relational, psychological, and motivational needs... fostering a sense of resilience among RHY” and providing long-term benefits to a youth’s functioning.<sup>14</sup> In short, well-funded, high quality RHY programs make a positive impact on a youth’s ability to stabilize and successfully transition from crisis to independence. While more research is needed to evaluate the long-term benefits of RHY services, understanding that these programs make a proven difference to the youth they serve gives further support to why we are here pushing for the passage of this package of legislation.

### **Support for the Package of Proposed Legislation**

Each and every one of the bills under consideration today would, if passed, have a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of New York City’s runaway and homeless youth. For this reason, we strongly urge the Council to pass them all. It is worth noting that some of these laws would not be possible without the recent amendments to the State’s Runaway and Homeless Youth Act (RHYA), which provide that municipalities may elect to expand their RHY systems to serve youth up to age 24, and which make clear that there is no time limit on homeless youths’ length of stay in crisis shelter, and that runaway youth may stay in crisis shelter for up to 120 days. While we understand the current Mayoral Administration may support these expansions, we believe it is still imperative for the Council to pass the entire package to ensure that RHY will have access to these life-saving services in the long term.

### **Int. No. 1619: In relation to runaway and homeless youth who have been turned away from any shelter under the jurisdiction of the department of youth and community development**

Int. No. 1619 would make it possible to assess how many youth who request DYCD-funded shelter are being turned away. The current system, which requires a referring agency or person to fill out a form to indicate whether a youth was able to access shelter, is rarely, if ever, used. This means that there is no formal system for youth who are turned away from shelter to be tracked. We do support reducing the amount of information required to be included by this bill in order for it to be as effective as possible while not placing undue burden on the providers or the youth,

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<sup>13</sup> Gwadz, M., Freeman, R., Cleland, C.M., Ritchie, A.S., Leonard, N.R., Hughes, C., Powlovich, J., & Schoenberg, J. (2017). *Moving from crisis to independence: The characteristic, quality, and impact of specialized settings for runaway and homeless youth*. New York: Center for Drug Use and HIV Research, NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing.

<sup>14</sup> Id. at 16.



and we have passed along these edits to the Council. However, in order for the City to truly ascertain how well they are serving RHY, there needs to be a method for understanding who cannot access services at the front door. We believe Int. No. 1619 will allow for meaningful data collection, and allow the City to have a better grasp on who they are currently unable to serve.

Int. No. 1699: In relation to time frames for runaway and homeless youth shelter services

Int. No. 1699 would serve to align local law with the recently amended New York State RHYA by extending the lengths of time for which runaway youth can remain in crisis shelters and homeless youth can remain in TIL shelters.<sup>15</sup> As described above, the current shelter time limits create an untenable cycle in which RHY are often unable to work quickly enough to make suitable living arrangements and are regularly discharged from shelters back to the streets. These proposed extended time limits are an important step toward allowing the shelter system to genuinely support our young people as they work to emerge from the system no longer homeless, rather than to perpetuate that cycle. The State has recognized this reality, and the City should do the same.

Int. No. 1700: In relation to shelter for runaway and homeless youth

Int. No. 1700, which requires DYCD to report annually on the demographics and characteristics of the RHY population, is a simple yet critical change. Reporting requirements such as these not only foster transparency and accountability, they are the means by which NYC will understand who these young people are and what they need. Without an accurate and regularly updated picture of this population, the City cannot serve them well. This bill will begin to provide a sense of who is using the system and will broaden reporting requirements as has been done previously for other shelter systems in NYC. Also, this bill will ensure that youth who are trying to access shelter services will be able to do so.

Int. No. 1705: In relation to runaway and homeless youth entering department of homeless services shelters

Int. No. 1705 streamlines the intake and assessment process for RHY who are transitioning from DYCD shelter to the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) system, and makes this process less burdensome for RHY. Ideally, changes to the time and age limits in RHY shelter will allow youth to stabilize by gaining skills and confidence to reenter their communities directly from the youth shelter system. However, in recognition of the fact that even with these changes some youth will need to enter the DHS shelter system, this bill will allow RHY shelter services providers to share information with DHS. This allows youth to leave an RHY bed and enter a DHS bed directly without having to go through the lengthy and duplicative DHS intake and assessment, thereby saving time for the youth and minimizing the waste of resources between the shelter systems.

Int. No. 1706: In relation to runaway and homeless youth services for homeless young adults

Int. No. 1706 again aligns our city with the recent amendments to the New York State RHYA, requires DYCD to serve “homeless young adults” ages 21-24, and to do so as they do the rest of the runaway and homeless youth population. Not only have youth and advocates pushed for this

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<sup>15</sup> It is worth noting that increasing the crisis shelter deadline extension for runaway youth will also help homeless youth because although the statute does not set a time limit for homeless youth, DYCD and its providers use the same deadline for all youth using a crisis bed, whether runaway or homeless.

change for years, but an expert consensus has recently emerged regarding adolescent brain development, establishing that the prefrontal cortex of the brain—which largely governs impulse-control, judgment, and planning—generally does not mature until well after the teenage years. In fact, the research demonstrates that the brain undergoes a “rewiring” process that is not complete until approximately 25 years of age. The Supreme Court itself has recognized this reality.<sup>16</sup> In keeping with what we know about brain development, the amended RHYA provides that municipalities seeking State funding may include “homeless young adults”—defined as homeless persons age 21 to 24—within their plans for runaway and homeless youth. New York City should opt to serve 21-24 year olds as homeless young adults, separate and apart from the DHS system. These young people, much like their younger homeless counterparts, are not like older homeless people: they are homeless for different reasons, they cope with and experience homelessness differently, and they need different services and supports in order to emerge from homelessness as healthy, self-sufficient people. While 21-24 year olds are not children or even teens, in many important respects they are also not yet adults, and the system should treat them accordingly.

### **Lack of Permanent Housing for RHY**

While it is not the direct focus of this hearing, we would be remiss not to mention how crucial it is for RHY to have access to meaningful permanent housing options. Other than some limited supportive housing units, youth leaving the RHY shelter system do not have access to any of the long-term housing resources afforded to individuals leaving other NYC shelters. RHY in youth shelter do not have access to a NYCHA priority or housing vouchers such as LINC. While the administration has explained that they are working on including RHY in the housing plan and voucher eligibility in the future, that has not yet materialized. Until this population has access to permanent, affordable housing, they will truly be unable to fully realize their potential as self-sufficient members of our City.

### ***Conclusion***

Thank you again to the committee for looking so closely at a number of issues facing our runaway and homeless youth. We strongly encourage you to pass all of the bills before you, and are happy to answer any questions you might have.

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### **About The Legal Aid Society and Coalition for the Homeless**

The Legal Aid Society: The Legal Aid Society, the nation’s oldest and largest not-for-profit legal services organization, is more than a law firm for clients who cannot afford to pay for counsel. It is an indispensable component of the legal, social, and economic fabric of New York City –

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<sup>16</sup> See *Graham v. Florida*, 560 U.S. 48, 68 (2010); *Miller v. Alabama*, 132 S. Ct. 2455, 2464 n.5 (2012) (“The evidence presented to us in these cases indicates that the science and social science supporting Roper’s and Graham’s conclusions have become even stronger. See, e.g., Brief for American Psychological Association et al. as Amici Curiae 3 ([A]n ever growing body of research in developmental psychology and neuroscience continues to confirm and strengthen the Court’s conclusions’); *id.*, at 4 (‘It is increasingly clear that adolescent brains are not yet fully mature in regions and systems related to higher order executive functions such as impulse control, planning ahead, and risk avoidance’); Brief for J. Lawrence Aber et al. as Amici Curiae 12–28 (discussing post *Graham* studies).

passionately advocating for low-income individuals and families across a variety of civil, criminal and juvenile rights matters, while also fighting for legal reform.

The Legal Aid Society has performed this role in City, State and federal courts since 1876. It does so by capitalizing on the diverse expertise, experience, and capabilities of more than 1,100 lawyers, working with some 800 social workers, investigators, paralegals and support and administrative staff. Through a network of borough, neighborhood, and courthouse offices in 26 locations in New York City, the Society provides comprehensive legal services in all five boroughs of New York City for clients who cannot afford to pay for private counsel.

The Society's legal program operates three major practices — Civil, Criminal and Juvenile Rights — and receives volunteer help from law firms, corporate law departments and expert consultants that is coordinated by the Society's Pro Bono program. With its annual caseload of more than 300,000 legal matters, The Legal Aid Society takes on more cases for more clients than any other legal services organization in the United States. And it brings a depth and breadth of perspective that is unmatched in the legal profession.

The Legal Aid Society's unique value is an ability to go beyond any one case to create more equitable outcomes for individuals and broader, more powerful systemic change for society as a whole. In addition to the annual caseload of 300,000 individual cases and legal matters, the Society's law reform representation for clients benefits more than 1.7 million low-income families and individuals in New York City and the landmark rulings in many of these cases have a State-wide and national impact.

The Legal Aid Society is uniquely positioned to speak on issues of law and policy as they relate to New York City's runaway and homeless youth. Each of our three practice areas routinely interacts with the RHY population. The Legal Aid Society is counsel to the Coalition for the Homeless and for homeless women and men in the *Callahan* and *Eldredge* cases. The Legal Aid Society is also counsel in the *McCain/Boston* litigation in which a final judgment requires the provision of lawful shelter to homeless families. Legal Aid's Juvenile Rights Practice provides comprehensive representation as attorneys for children who appear before the New York City Family Court in abuse, neglect, juvenile delinquency, and other proceedings affecting children's rights and welfare. Last year, our staff represented approximately 34,000 children. Last year, the Society's Civil Practice provided free direct legal assistance in more than 48,500 cases and legal matters through neighborhood offices in all five boroughs, and 23 specialized units, of which the Homeless Rights Project is one. Our Criminal Practice handles over 220,000 trial and post-conviction cases a year, some of which arise out of arrests predicated on our clients' homeless status. Our perspective comes from daily contact with children and their families, and also from our frequent interactions with the courts, social service providers, and State and City agencies.

In addition to representing many thousands of children, youth, and adults each year in trial and appellate courts, we also pursue impact litigation and other law reform initiatives on behalf of our clients. On December 30, 2013, the Legal Aid Society, in collaboration with Patterson Belknap Webb & Tyler, LLC, filed *C.W. v. The City of New York*, a federal class action lawsuit on behalf of RHY in New York City. The lawsuit seeks to establish that young people in New

York have a right to youth-specific shelter, and to remedy (1) the City's consistent failure to provide an adequate number of shelter beds for RHY, (2) its routine discharge of youth from crisis shelters before permanent housing has been secured, and (3) its longstanding failure to provide reasonable accommodations or mental health services to RHY with disabilities. Our goal in litigation is to ensure that the City creates and maintains enough youth-specific beds to meet the needs of *all* youth seeking shelter. No youth should languish on the street while relegated to a shelter waiting list or be discharged from shelter due to arbitrary time limits. In addition, we seek to ensure that youth discharged from shelter are provided with due process prior to any ejection from shelter. All five of the bills at issue today would bring us closer to these goals, by giving youth more time in crisis shelter to secure other housing, by fostering transparency and accountability in service provision, by streamlining the intake and assessment process between DYCD and DHS, and by providing young adults aged 21-14 with age-appropriate services.

Coalition for the Homeless: Coalition for the Homeless, founded in 1981, is a not-for-profit advocacy and direct services organization that assists more than 3,500 homeless New Yorkers each day. The Coalition advocates for proven, cost-effective solutions to the crisis of modern homelessness, which is now in its fourth decade. The Coalition also protects the rights of homeless people through litigation involving the right to emergency shelter, the right to vote, and life-saving housing and services for homeless people living with mental illness and HIV/AIDS.

The Coalition operates 11 direct-services programs that offer vital services to homeless, at-risk, and low-income New Yorkers. These programs also demonstrate effective, long-term solutions and include: Supportive housing for families and individuals living with AIDS; job-training for homeless and formerly-homeless women; and permanent housing for formerly-homeless families and individuals. Our summer sleep-away camp and after-school program help hundreds of homeless children each year. The Coalition's mobile soup kitchen distributes over 900 nutritious hot meals each night to homeless and hungry New Yorkers on the streets of Manhattan and the Bronx. Finally, our Crisis Intervention Department assists more than 1,000 homeless and at-risk households each month with eviction prevention, individual advocacy, referrals for shelter and emergency food programs, and assistance with public benefits as well as basic necessities such as diapers, formula, work uniforms, and money for medications and groceries.

The Coalition was founded in concert with landmark right to shelter litigation filed on behalf of homeless men and women (*Callahan v. Carey* and *Eldredge v. Koch*) and remains a plaintiff in these now consolidated cases. In 1981 the City and State entered into a consent decree in *Callahan* through which they agreed: "The City defendants shall provide shelter and board to each homeless man who applies for it provided that (a) the man meets the need standard to qualify for the home relief program established in New York State; or (b) the man by reason of physical, mental or social dysfunction is in need of temporary shelter." The *Eldredge* case extended this legal requirement to homeless single women. The *Callahan* consent decree and the *Eldredge* case also guarantee basic standards for shelters for homeless men and women. Pursuant to the decree, the Coalition serves as court-appointed monitor of municipal shelters for homeless adults, and the City has also authorized the Coalition to monitor other facilities serving homeless families.



**The New York City Council**  
**Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare**

**Oversight: Safe and Accessible Shelters for Homeless Youth**

September 28, 2017

**Testimony of**  
**Jeremy Christopher Kohomban, PhD.**  
**President and CEO, The Children's Village, President Harlem Dowling**

I am Dr. Jeremy Kohomban, the President and CEO of The Children's Village and the President of Harlem Dowling. Founded in 1851, we work with some of New York City's most vulnerable children and families. We support children and teens in foster care, in the juvenile justice system, and teens who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. We do so through a wide range of programs, including community prevention, residential interventions, health services, evidence based interventions, affordable housing, and one of the nation's only long-term, privately funded mentoring programs, the WAY Home which supports youth up to the age of 25. We are also a DYCD partner operating 27 in-school programs and two youth shelters.

I want to respond to the amendments being discussed today. Our recommendations are grounded in front-line experience, and also supported by relevant research.

Let me begin by stating the obvious, but it must be stated. Disproportionality by race and by place is the greatest impediment to success that we see in this population. A 2012 report<sup>1</sup> by the Social Science Research Council found that "the New York Metro area has the widest gap by neighborhood in terms of youth disconnection of America's largest cities." Basically, this means

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<sup>1</sup> "Youth Disconnection in New York City," Measure of America / Social Science Research Council (2012), retrieved from <http://www.measureofamerica.org/one-in-seven>.

that the children we serve come from poor, racially segregated community districts. They are overwhelmingly of color, and black children enter our systems faster, remain longer and far too many exit with the worst outcomes.

Int 1699-2017 By Council Members Gibson, Johnson, Dromm, Menchaca, Mendez, Torres, Vacca and Van Bramer

**Extend the periods of time youth may remain in runaway and homeless youth shelters.**

We agree that homeless youth should be permitted to remain in shelters for a longer period of time. We have seen an increase in the number of youth having sexual identity issues, struggling with substance abuse, who are pregnant or parenting, or who are exhibiting mental health issues. These youth need more time so that we can address their issues. However, to experience success, this group of children need treatment and services that are responsive to their presenting issues. In the absence of targeted services, we will squander the opportunity to truly help.

Int 1705-2017 By Council Members Salamanca Jr., Johnson, Dromm, Menchaca, Mendez, Torres, Vacca and Van Bramer

**Create and maintain a process for conducting intake and assessments for any runaway or homeless youth who is seeking to enter a DHS shelter.**

We agree. In Westchester County, this is standard practice. All paperwork is done on site. Even in instances when we determine that the admission to the Youth Shelter is inappropriate (for example, if already in DSS custody) we let the child stay the night and coordinate movement in the morning.



Int 1706-2017 By Council Members Torres, Johnson, Dromm, Menchaca, Mendez, Vacca and Van Bramer

**Permit shelters for runaway and homeless youth to serve youth ages 21-24.**

We agree. The 21-24 year old youth we serve, many of whom have no support system, are often functioning socially and emotionally at lower levels than other youth. Many exit government systems at age 21 and are soon homeless and disconnected despite their best efforts. In 2013, MDRC<sup>2</sup> noted that youth disconnection is a dynamic phenomenon – most do not simply give up, but rather make numerous attempts to re-engage with school or work, with varying degrees of success. A youth shelter can work with these youth before they give up. ACS recently predicted that 750 children will age out this year. Nationally we project 25,000 children ageing out of foster care this year. Youth from both these systems will find their way into NYC's homeless population.

However, two cautions. First, while the intent here is applaudable, there is significant risk that without adequate services, this becomes yet another stop-gap measure that institutionalizes youth and creates a sense of entitlement that charity or government will have a solution for their lives. We know that this is not true. Our shelters cannot be a place where youth languish. Our shelters cannot be a place that simply prepares youth for adult shelters and prison, the other two government solutions readily available for the poor, black and brown children we serve. If we increase the age of youth able to use a shelter, we must add proven programs like Family Finding, to help them reconnect to family or someone that cares. Youth are only successful when they have at least one willing stable adult relationship. At least one person who commits to unconditional belonging<sup>3</sup>. In our experience, only when belonging is

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<sup>2</sup> "Building Better Programs for Disconnected Youth," MDRC (February 2013), retrieved from <http://www.mdrc.org/publication/building-better-programs-disconnected-youth>

<sup>3</sup> "Survival is not enough; help children thrive, not just survive" Huffington Post (May, 2016) [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeremy-christopher-kohomban-phd/survival-is-not-enough-he\\_b\\_6496650.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeremy-christopher-kohomban-phd/survival-is-not-enough-he_b_6496650.html)

established do youth transition from dependence on government and charity to a life of independence and tax payer status.

Second, we should not mix 21 – 24 year olds with younger children. The children in our shelters are not siblings, they are often strangers. At 21, young people are adults, despite the disadvantages they have faced and despite the maturity that is still to come<sup>4</sup>.

Int 1700-2017 By Council Members Johnson, Torres, Dromm, Menchaca, Mendez, Vacca and Van Bramer

**Report annually on runaway and homeless youth.**

We support the data gathering and tracking. Data allows us to measure success, identify failure and improve intervention. But, please do not burden our staff with these good ideas. Our front line is very thin, our budgets strained! Every minute that we spend away from children is a minute that takes away from safety, relationships and helping them move out, into families. These are good ideas. But, like most good ideas, they often become unfunded mandates where we are asked to do more with less. In this case, that means, taking more staff away from children.

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<sup>4</sup> “You are an adult, but your brain might not be, experts say” CNN (December, 2016)  
<http://www.cnn.com/2016/12/21/health/adult-brain-development/index.html>



## Can Teens Be Safe From HRA's Negligence & Fraud & that of its Partners it Condone?

1. A concussion caused by more than 15 punches to the left temple was the primary, but not only cost of a) HRA's Negligence & b) disregard of fraud by its business partner Urban Pathways, Inc.  
Shouldn't HRA's Banks be fired to prevent further harm & see how it feels? Hell Yes!!!

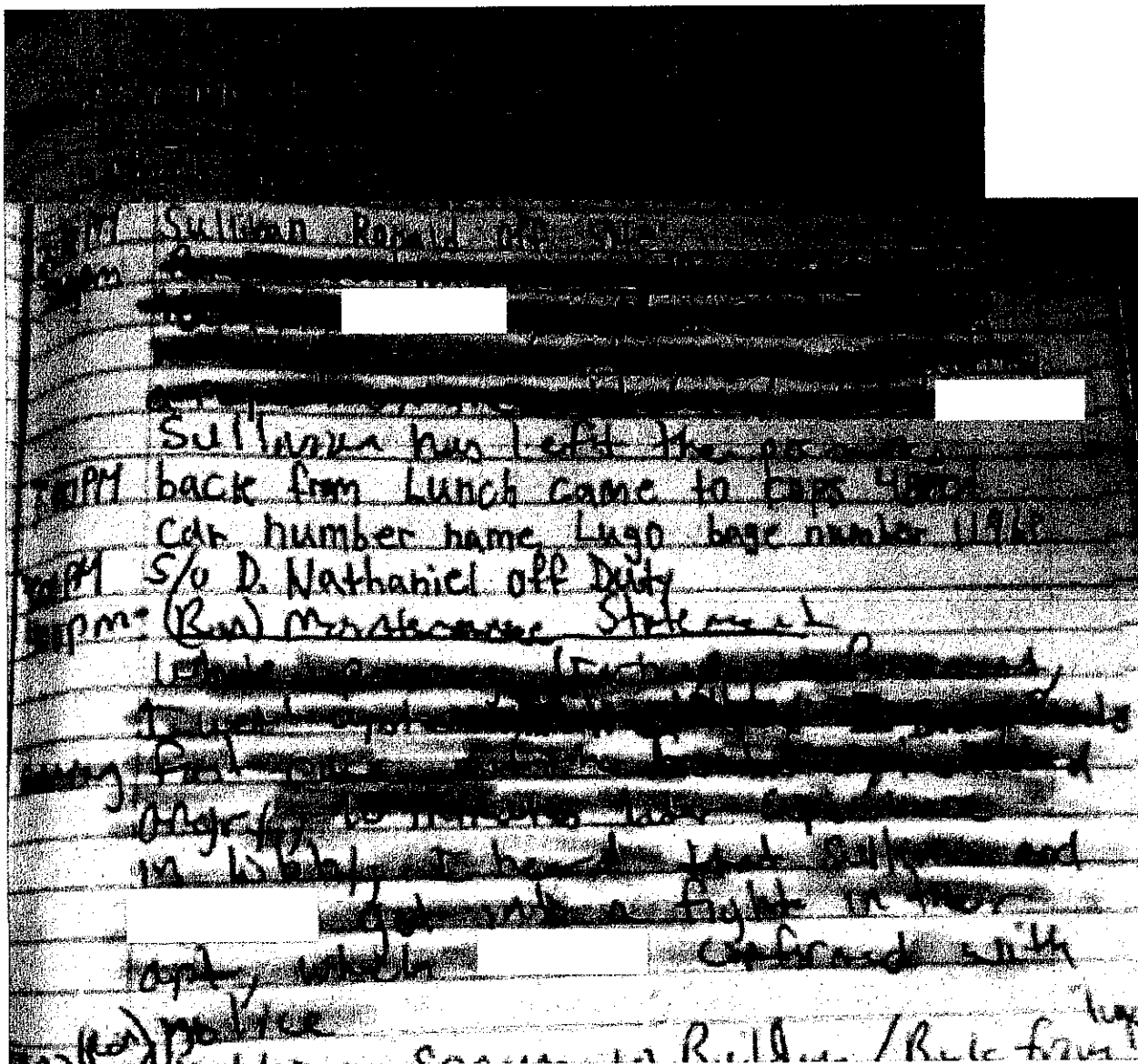
Concussion was diagnosed less than 1 month after the 7/2/16 assault by Ronald Sullivan (victim's former roommate) that followed his attempted 5/12/16 assault. Both the attempted & actual assault happened in the same apartment. HRA was notified on 3/16/16 & 4/1/16 about a bait-and-switch fraud by Urban Pathways, Inc. If HRA had taken appropriate and timely corrective action, Mr. Sullivan's attempted and actual assault would not have happened. HRA instead ignored this problem.

<b>Mount Sinai Beth Israel</b> Department of Emergency Medicine First Avenue at 16th Street New York, NY 10003 <u>212-844-1644</u> <i>Medical Records</i>	
Take-Home Instructions for the Patient	
Patient's Name:	DOS: 07/02/2016 19:51
Medical Record Number: 300001782686	
E.D. Attending Physician: MD Nicole Nembhard	
E.D. Resident or Physician Assistant: PA-C Dafna Gershoony	
E.D. Primary Nurse : Adora Chatman, RN	
Primary Care Provider: Physician - Non-BI	
Primary Diagnosis: Abrasion of left forearm	
Additional Diagnoses: Head injury	

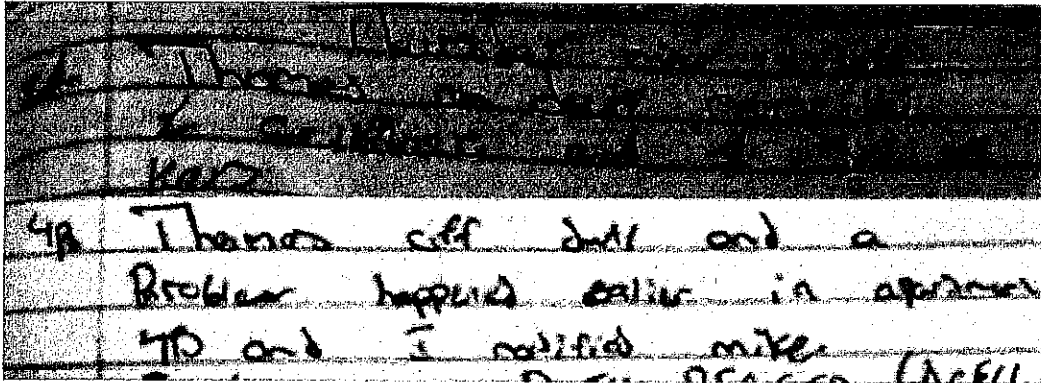
<b>Mount Sinai Beth Israel</b> Department of Emergency Medicine First Avenue at 16th Street New York, NY 10003 212-844-1644	
Take-Home Instructions for the Patient	
Patient's Name:	DOS: 07/30/2016 13:27
Medical Record Number: 300001782686	
E.D. Attending Physician: MD Kimberly Henderson	
E.D. Resident or Physician Assistant: RPA-C Ursula Jemiolo	
E.D. Primary Nurse : Marjorie Rubin, RN	
Primary Care Provider: Physician - Non-BI	
Primary Diagnosis: Concussion w/o LOC	

- 2. Security log information for the apartment building where the 7/2/16 assault occurred & 5/12/16 assault was prevented by a security worker for Urban Pathways, Inc. named Thomas Fair:

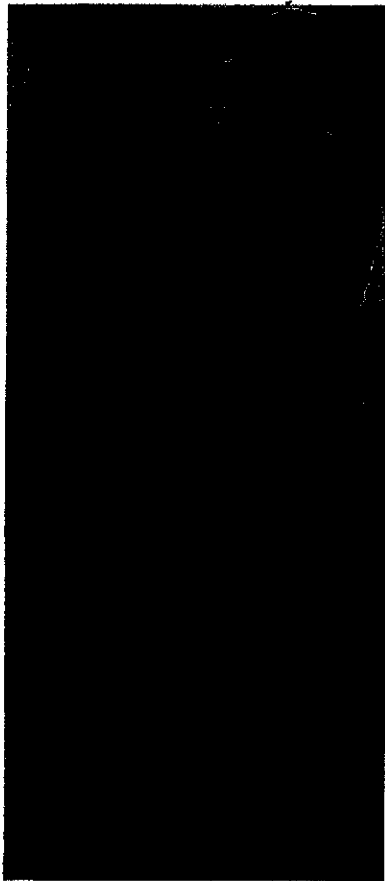
7/2/16 Security Log:



7/2/16 Security Log:



3. Photo from 10:58 am on 5/12/16 of Mr. Fair standing in front of Mr. Sullivan in the living room where Mr. Sullivan tried to commit an assault on that date and later did so on 7/2/16.



4. a) Demand made to HRA's partner Services for the UnderServed (SUS) on 5/12/16 to have Mr. Sullivan evicted immediately for security reasons after he tried committing an assault. SUS and Urban Pathways were required by law to notify HRA immediately about the attempted assault by Mr. Sullivan:

b) Response received from Molly McCracken of SUS in which she indicated that Mr. Sullivan wouldn't be evicted.

+1 (646) 866-9302

Thu, May 12, 12:44 PM



I want my roommate forced out immediately for the following reasons: a) He made a verbal threat today against me in the presence of the security officer in my apartment's living room, b) he charged at me in the living room and had to be held back by that security officer. c)

+1 (646) 866-9302

The management company has offered to meet with you to air out these greavances and offer some solutions to the problem. We eill pass on your requurst to them for a written response as well. Please also consider reaching out to Keisha or Arianna in thr greavances department. Again, I'd recommend reaching out to the management company to have a meeting, face to face always works better. Lastly, please understand that you are both lea see holders in that bulding and no one is going y be relocated against their will.

5. Phone records for 5/19/16 calls between a) 7/2/16 assault victim and b) Lisa Lombardi and Ron Abad of Urban Pathways, Inc. that were about having Mr. Sullivan evicted immediately and their refusal to do so:

Date / Time	Contact ▲	Location	Call Type	Minutes
05/19/2016 11:33AM	☎ 212.736.7385	Incoming, CL	SDDV	24
05/19/2016 11:13AM	☎ 212.736.7385	New York, NY	SDDV	10

6. Information about Mr. Sullivan's Bronx Criminal trial for the 7/2/16 assault. In that trial, Judge Cori Weston that Mayor de Blasio picked wrongfully excluded the security logs as evidence and the Bronx District Attorney's office failed to use testimony from a key witness Mr. Sullivan admitted having just committed an assault as he was fleeing from the apartment building on 7/2/16 in which he committed it.

<b>Case Details - Summary</b>	
<b>CASE INFORMATION</b>	
Court:	Bronx Criminal Court
Case #:	2016BX042188
Defendant:	Sullivan, Ronald G
<b>Defendant</b>	
Name:	Sullivan, Ronald G
Birth Year:	1959
NYSID:	9937368J
<b>Incident and Arrest</b>	
<b>Incident</b>	
Date:	July 2, 2016
CJTN:	67733435J
<b>Arrest</b>	
Date & Time:	July 11, 2016 11:16
Arrest #:	B16639255

Date/Time	Judge/Part	Calendar Section	Arraignment/Hearing Type	Court Reporter	Outcome/Release Status
02/24/2017	TP5	BENCH TRIAL	No Type		
02/23/2017	Weston, C TP5	PENDING	Bench Trial	Slavik,	Case Continued (adjourned) - Temporary Order Of Protection Issued RoR Continued

Charge	Detail
PL 120.15 00	<b>B Misdemeanor, 1 count, Not an arrest charge, Arraignment charge</b> Description: <i>Menacing 3rd</i>
PL 240.26 01	<b>Violation, 1 count, Not an arrest charge, Arraignment charge</b> Description: <i>Harassment 2nd- Phy Contact</i>
PL 120.00 01 **TOP CHARGE**	<b>A Misdemeanor, 1 count, Arrest charge, Arraignment charge</b> Description: <i>Aslt W/int Causes Phys Injury</i>

7. Information about a rewarding job opportunity the 7/2/16 assault victim badly interviewed for on 8/18/16 because of severe problems he was experiencing from the concussion he was diagnosed with on 7/30/16:

From: @huxley.com>  
Subject: FW: Interview Confirmation-BNP Paribas-Thursday, August 18th, 4:40PM  
Date: August 17, 2016 at 5:15:39 PM EDT  
To: @yahoo.com>

Hi,

Just want to correct one typo. The interview is at 787 7<sup>th</sup> Avenue in the Equitable Center.

I said HSBC by accident, so please ignore that.

From: @huxley.com>  
Subject: RE: \*Urgent-Job Opportunity-Support Specialist-Investment Bank-NYC\*  
Date: August 16, 2016 at 10:56:16 AM EDT  
To: @yahoo.com>

BNP is looking to pay \$450 a day W2.

8. Information about minimum-wage jobs HRA has exclusively made available to the assault victim following the 7/2/16 assault HRA is liable for because it failed to take appropriate and timely corrective action against Urban Pathways that would have prevented that assault:

HUMAN RESOURCES ADMINISTRATION  
FAMILY INDEPENDENCE ADMINISTRATION  
EMPLOYMENT SERVICES  
BUSINESS LINK  
123 WILLIAM STREET, 6TH FLOOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10038  
(212) 643-2881 select 0



Human Resources Administration  
Family Independence Administration  
Department of Social Services  
FIA-1180a (E) 12/09/2016 (page 1 of 2) LLF

24290 01036



802 FAIRMOUNT PL APT  
BRONX, NY 10460-4172

Date: 09/18/2017  
Center:  
Case Number:  
Case Type:  
Caseload:

**Don't Lose Out!**  
**Attend This Interview To See if You Can Earn More Money**

Congratulations! You have been selected by the Human Resources Administration for a chance to **earn \$12.14 per hour** as a Job Training Participant. We have paid positions available throughout the city.

**1) Pre-Screening Appointment Information**

Appointment Date: Thursday, September 28, 2017

Time: 10:00 am

9. BS claim made by a lawyer for HRA named Ann Marie Scalia at the end of a letter dated 8/1/17 she sent to assault victim:

**“We will continue to try to address your concerns and assist you in any way possible.”**

10. 4/1/16 e-mail sent to HRA's Barbara Beirne about forgery and a bait-and-switch fraud concerning an apartment lease agreement the 7/2/16 assault victim signed on 2/16/16 in HRA's offices located at 33 Beaver Street in Manhattan while in the presence of witnesses and with Lisa Lombardi of Urban Pathways, Inc.:

**From:** @yahoo.com>  
**Subject:** Fraud by HRA's business partner, Urban Pathways, Inc.  
**Date:** April 1, 2016 at 4:53:02 PM EDT  
**To:** beirneb@hra.nyc.gov  
**Cc:** bankss@hra.nyc.gov

Dear Ms. Beirne,

Good afternoon and thank you for the time you shared with me during our phone call today.

As discussed, the following is a copy of the lease agreement that I signed with Lisa Lombardi of Urban Pathways on February 16, 2016 at the offices of DHS located at 33 Beaver Street in Manhattan in a small conference room where there were roughly 5 people who witnessed that signing by Ms. Lombardi and I:

**PDF**



Urban Pathways -  
Original Lease.pdf  
1.3 MB

The following file attachment is a copy of the illegally modified lease agreement I received from Urban Pathways on or about March 7, 2016:

**PDF**



Urban Pathways -  
Illegally Re...Lease.pdf  
2.2 MB

The following is a list of how those 2 lease are different:

- a) I signed the lease that was presented to me by Ms. Lombardi on February 16, 2016. I never signed the subsequently modified lease that illegally contains a photocopy of my signature from where I signed the original lease agreement. By having included that photocopy of my signature in the illegally modified lease, Urban Pathways committed the crime of forgery in the second degree pursuant to New York law.
- b) The terms of the lease I signed clearly indicated that I would be residing in apartment 4C and that information was handwritten. The terms of the subsequent lease indicates that I would reside in Room 1 of Apartment 4B in that same building, which is a very small room. The information in the subsequent lease was typed.
- d) The pricing shown in the 2 leases differs.



11. Information about the more than \$1.85 Million HRA seems to have given Urban Pathways, Inc. to acquire the apartment building where the 7/2/16 assault happened. The information at the end lists Ms. Beirne's contact details.

**FAIRMOUNT FACILITY FOR VETERANS - Negotiated Acquisition**  
 - Other - PIN# 16NHEOC02001 - Due 1-28-16 at 2:00 P.M.

**\*For Informational Purposes Only\***

HRA intends to enter into a Negotiated Acquisition with the following vendor;  
 Urban Pathways, Inc. Located at 802 Fairmount Place, Bronx NY  
 E-Pin#: 09616N0004 Contract Amount: \$1,851,220.00 Contract Term: 10 Years

The need for safe shelter for veterans is immediate, as there is a homelessness crisis with veterans as a particularly vulnerable group. Urban Pathways, Inc. can provide case management and building management services, and has identified 802 Fairmount Place as a building that is appropriate and available to permanently house 24 formerly homeless veterans in 1 and 2 bedroom units using subsidies such as LINC and VASH. Urban Pathways, Inc. would enter into a master lease with the property owner, and manage all aspects of this permanent housing facility.

*Use the following address unless otherwise specified in notice, to secure, examine or submit bid/proposal documents, vendor pre-qualification and other forms; specifications/blueprints; other information; and for opening and reading of bids at date and time specified above.*

*Human Resources Administration, 150 Greenwich Street, 37th Floor, New York, NY 10007. Barbara Beirne (929) 221-6348; beirneb@hra.nyc.gov*

12. Excerpt from HRA's own records confirming the 7/2/16 assault victim notified it on 3/16/16 about a bait-and-switch by Urban Pathways, Inc. involving his apartment lease agreement:

3/16/2016	CA Application Interview	Mensah,R	He also provided a lease stating in apartment by himself but when he moved he found out there was someone else sharing the apartment with him. and the first lease he signed was change by landlord.
3/16/2016	Make Case Comment	Harris,V	Case Comment:  He also provided a lease stating this is where he moved to but stated he was suppose to be moving in apartment by himself but when he moved he found out there was someone else sharing the apartment with him. and the first lease he signed was change by landlord.

13. Urban Pathways, Inc. isn't validly registered with HPD as of 9/27/17 for the apartment building discussed in this report and has not resolved violations issued against it by HPD a long time ago, due to HRA & HPD's ongoing negligence:

9/27/2017  
081417

HPD Building, Registration & Violation Services --- Select --- [Home](#)

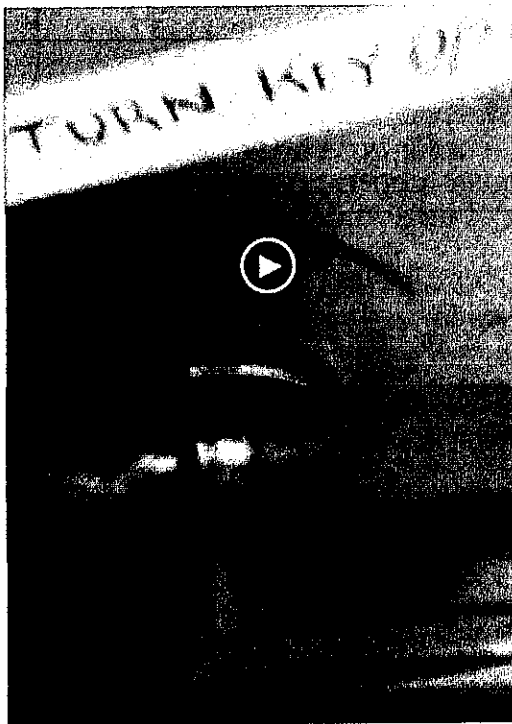
**The selected address: 802 FAIRMOUNT PLACE, Bronx 10460**

HPD#	Range	Block	Lot	CD	CensusTract	Stories	A Units	B Units	Ownership	Registration#	Class	
931302	Active	798-802	02954	0026	6	36502	4	16	-	PVT	227429	E

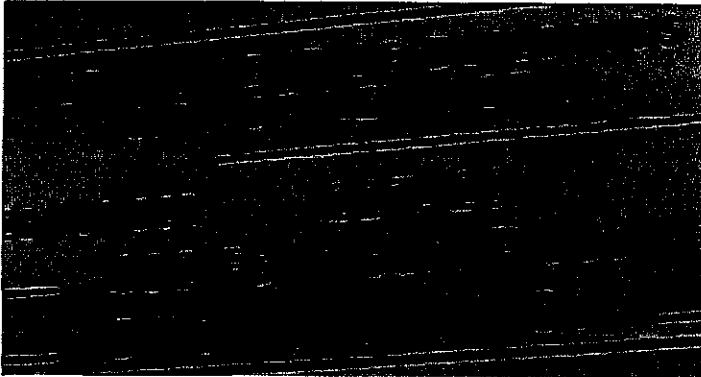


THIS PROPERTY IS NOT CURRENTLY VALIDLY REGISTERED WITH HPD.

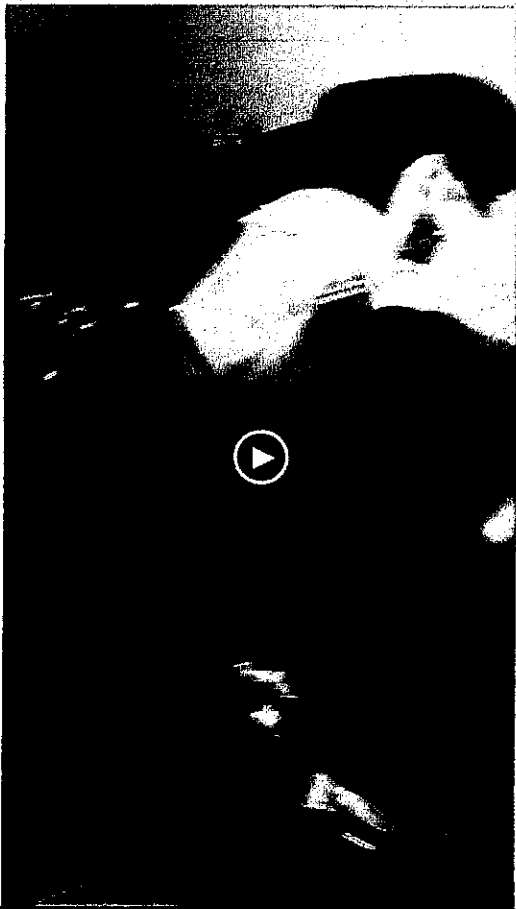
14. Screenshot from video recorded at 10:49 pm on 9/25/17 showing the lock broken for the entrance door to the apartment building where the 7/2/16 assault happened due to Urban Pathways, Inc. & HRA's ongoing negligence:



15. Screenshot from video recorded at 10:53 pm on 9/25/17 showing the registration sign with New York City's Department of Buildings for the apartment building discussed in this report.



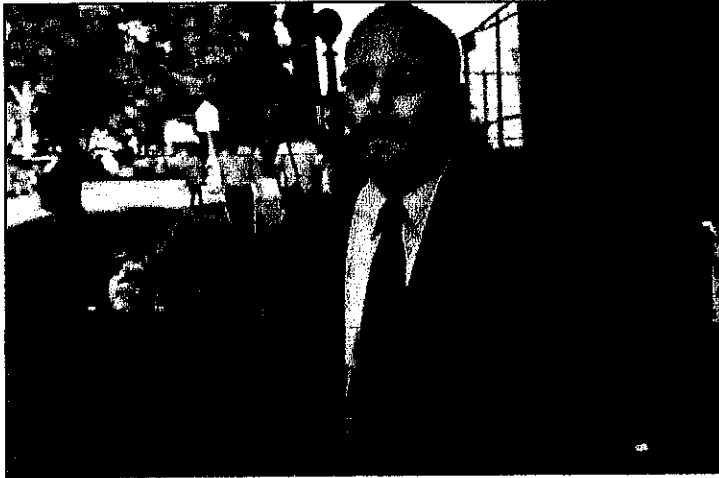
16. Screenshot from video recorded at 10:53 pm on 9/25/17 showing a large amount of trash to be respected and trusted far more than HRA in the 1<sup>st</sup> floor stairwell of the apartment building discussed in this report. Although HPD issued a violation about this a long time ago, there has been no enforcement of it.



17. Where trash resides, but lies elsewhere & often:

**Salary and contact information for HRA's Commissioner Steven**

**Banks:**



Human Resources Administration head, Steve Banks leaves his home located at 48 Sherman Street in Brooklyn, New York.

Source: <http://a856-gbol.nyc.gov/GBOLWebsite/GreenBook/Details?orgId=2880>

• **Work Contact Information:**

150 Greenwich St., 40th Fl. New York, NY 10007

**Steven Banks**, Commissioner. Salary: \$226,366

Appointed Apr 1, 2014

☎ (929) 221-7315

**Work e-mail:** banksst@hra.nyc.gov

**Work Fax:** 212-437-2126

**Home:** 48 Sherman Street  
Brooklyn, New York

**Note:** This is also home to Jean Schneider, who is the Supervising Judge  
Citywide for New York City's Housing Courts

**FOR THE RECORD**

**Testimony of the Youth Justice Board**  
**A program of the Center for Court Innovation**  
before  
**The New York City Council**  
**Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services**  
regarding  
**Proposed Int. Nos. 1700, 1699, 1705, and 1706**  
**Providing services and shelter for runaway and homeless youth**  
September 28, 2017

Thank you to Chairman Levin; Chairman Eugene; Councilmembers Gibson, Salamanca, and Torres; and members of the Committees for the opportunity to submit this testimony on the importance of providing shelter and services to runaway and homeless youth. We are submitting this testimony on behalf of the Youth Justice Board, a youth leadership and public policy program for teens in New York City.

The Youth Justice Board is a project of the Center for Court Innovation. It was established in 2004 to give young people a voice in policies that affect their lives. Each program cycle, a team of teenagers from across New York City investigates a current justice system or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations, and works to promote and implement key ideas.

For the past year, our group has been researching the relationship between homelessness and justice system involvement for New York City youth ages 16 – 24. In June 2017, we released a report entitled *Homeless Not Hopeless: A Report on Homeless Youth and the Justice System in New York City*. This report outlined what we learned about youth homelessness and the justice system, and proposed ten policy changes that we believe will help reduce both homelessness and incarceration in New York City. Our goal is to improve the lives of homeless youth by proposing effective policy recommendations to help youth access resources and avoid criminal records.

We believe the issue of homelessness is urgent and it affects many of us and our peers. Some members of our group have experienced homelessness, justice system involvement, or have been part of the foster care system, while others stand in solidarity. Every member of the Board believes that a safer New York City for youth means reducing homelessness and incarceration, and we are excited to see the City Council take up these issues. We also believe that it is important to listen to the voices of youth when making public policy; otherwise, our experiences will not be understood.

During our research process, we looked at the relationship between youth homelessness and the justice system in New York City to identify opportunities to better support homeless youth, minimize justice system involvement, and prevent homelessness in the future.

To do this, we conducted interviews with 34 topic experts and led three focus groups with young people who have had personal experience with homelessness. We then developed ten recommendations to support homeless young people in New York City and limit their interactions with the justice system.

The bills we are discussing today are in line with several of our recommendations, so we wanted to share some of our relevant research with the Committees today. (If you would like to read our full report, a copy is included here or can be downloaded at [www.courtinnovation.org/research/homeless-not-hopeless](http://www.courtinnovation.org/research/homeless-not-hopeless).)

In our research, we learned that the intake process is difficult for homeless youth to enter and navigate. We learned that DHS shelters offer only one intake point for men, two for women, and one for families with children. The limited number of intake points means youth often have to travel far and sit through long wait times, among other challenges. In our focus groups, youth described waiting for days at DHS intake centers and sleeping on chairs overnight. Even as the city works to build 90 neighborhood-based shelters, DHS intake currently remains concentrated at select locations. Improving the intake process and overall shelter system experience is important, because if young people are turned away or feel overwhelmed with the process, they may give up altogether and end up in a place—or engage in behaviors—that are unsafe. Easing burdensome requirements associated with the shelter intake process could help to keep young people off the streets.

We believe a collaboration between DHS and DYCD to improve the intake process would decrease the likelihood of homeless youth partaking in unsafe behaviors and help keep youth off the streets. Youth we spoke to have expressed frustration with being repeatedly asked to revisit their traumatic and painful memories during multiple intake processes. As DHS and DYCD are collaborating, we recommend they include other service providers, advocates, and youth themselves in the conversation.

Additional areas that could use improvement include eliminating the requirement that parents bring their children to intake; making the physical space in intake centers and shelters feel more welcoming; training shelter staff to help applicants feel welcome; training staff in LGBTQ sensitivity; addressing undocumented immigrants' fears about what information might be shared with immigration officials; and supporting homeless youth who don't have identification and other documentation, especially transgender youth whose documents may not correspond with their gender identity.

We would also like to express our support for DYCD reporting annually on runaway and homeless youth, and providing shelter and services to all youth who request it. Although there is already a count in place with the Youth Count, it is vital to emphasize the importance of keeping up with it. This current census does not effectively capture the many youth who are couch surfing or staying with friends. Considering all the details related to these cases will provide us with accurate information that will allow us to decide next steps. This way, we can have a positive impact on the experiences and stability of homeless youth.

Requiring that DYCD provide shelter to all runaway and homeless youth who request it means that there will be less youth sleeping on the streets and can keep them away from dangerous circumstances such as survival sex or incarceration. Our focus group participants described waiting for weeks before finally getting a bed at a youth shelter. "It's really hard, because you have to wait a while on the list... You got to wait about like almost a month," said one young person. Another told us, "There are never enough beds, there's never enough money. There's never enough anything, there's never enough resources. So it's like, what are your other options?"

In one of our interviews, Haddijatou Waggeh, youth justice coordinator at the Midtown Community Court, told us that when young people cannot access emergency shelter or get kicked out because of time limits, they are likely to sleep on the street, where they are exposed to violence and risk being arrested for trespassing. Many engage in survival sex in exchange for shelter. She told us that adults will wait outside of shelters for youth to be turned away, and as they leave, attempt to solicit young people into prostitution or otherwise exploit them. Youth who leave a shelter without a clear plan are also at significant risk, both of exploitation and of becoming involved in the justice system as a result of these actions.

We also want homeless youth to have the opportunity to stay in transitional independent living facilities (“TILs”) for up to 24 months instead of 18 months, and for up to 120 days in crisis shelters. Giving homeless youth these opportunities will help give them more time to plan ahead for their departure. Oftentimes when youth are kicked out of facilities too early, they are more likely to resort to crime in order to survive, and end up at greater risk for incarceration.

The homeless youth we spoke to said the current time limits hurt them. They want more time in shelter programs in order to look for jobs, continue their education, and seek long-term housing. “Being in different youth shelters, they're really helpful... but the only problem is that it's so short term, so everything that you want to do you have to do at a fast pace, because after 60 days you'll have to get out,” said one young person during our focus group. Another told us, “Going from crisis shelter to this one to this one ... in my experience, it's not set up in a way where you're built to succeed.”

More time spent in shelters and TILs allows more preparation and stability, and gives youth more time and energy to try and find a job or another shelter if necessary. This would greatly benefit the city as it would decrease the amount of youth without shelter. This decreases the amount of city crime and allows for a more productive community in general. As one of our focus group participants said, “If you're homeless, you should always have somewhere to go. No matter what, somebody should help you. Don't matter where, because nobody deserves to sleep outside.”

And lastly, we believe that it would be beneficial to extend the age limit for DYCD shelters and services through 24 years old. Many youth over 18 we spoke to (who have the option to go to DHS once they are discharged from DYCD shelters) expressed anxieties about being discharged from DYCD programs and forced to choose between living on the street or in a DHS shelter. They felt safer and more comfortable in youth shelters than in adult ones. They want to be able to stay in the youth shelters up to the age of 24 instead of being discharged into the adult system. One young person in our focus group talked about their frustration at being discharged from shelters at age 18, saying, “I think that age is one of the most biggest things, because it's like some people don't even get into this predicament until they're 18 or after that.”

We believe that if you extend the age limit, more young people will get help. Also fewer kids will be on the street, and can find a way to take care of themselves and get on their feet. Extending the age limit will give youth more access to food, showers, referrals, a safe place to sleep, and all the necessities to keep them safe. They do not have that now.

Youth homelessness and its relationship to the criminal justice system is a serious and growing issue in New York City. As determined and diverse teens, we hope that our research inspires you to act on these issues. We want our report and our testimony today to call stakeholders and people in power to action. Any emotions evoked by the experiences of homeless youth as well as the information provided by our recommendations will spread awareness and begin further discussions about the issue.

Thank you for reading our testimony today, for caring about homeless youth, and for taking our perspective seriously. Please let us know if there is any way we can support your efforts to protect youth from homelessness and the justice system. We hope you continue to focus on this work and solve the issues we have talked about today – New York City youth are depending on you.

*With questions or comments regarding this testimony or the Youth Justice Board, please contact:*

Zoe Ridolfi-Starr  
Program Coordinator, Youth Justice Board  
Center for Court Innovation  
[zstarr@nycourts.gov](mailto:zstarr@nycourts.gov)  
o: (646) 386-4189





A Report on Homeless Youth  
and the Justice System in New York City

 Youth  
Justice  
Board





Youth Justice Board members discuss youth-adult partnerships with Center for Court Innovation staff.

## This publication was written by Youth Justice Board members and staff.

The Youth Justice Board is a project of the Center for Court Innovation. It was established in 2004 to give young people a voice in policies that affect their lives.

Each year, a team of teenagers from across New York City investigates a current justice system or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations, and works to promote and implement key ideas. This report represents the research and original ideas of the Youth Justice Board members as written by program staff. Board members contributed all artwork and reflection pieces.

Support for the Youth Justice Board has come from the Lily Auchincloss Foundation, the New York City Council, the New York State Unified Court System, and the W. Clement & Jessie V. Stone Foundation.

Points of view and opinions expressed in this document are the opinions of the Youth Justice Board members and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Center for Court Innovation or the above-named entities.

To download this report and other Youth Justice Board publications, visit [www.courtinnovation.org/yjb](http://www.courtinnovation.org/yjb).

Cover image: Samiha Amin Meah, Center for Court Innovation.  
Report photos: Youth Justice Board.

June 2017

# Dear Reader

We are a group of teenagers hailing from all five boroughs of New York City. Over the 2016–2017 school year, we focused on the issue of youth homelessness and its intersection with the criminal justice system. Our goal is to improve the lives of homeless youth from ages 16 to 24 across the city by proposing effective policy recommendations to help youth access resources and avoid criminal records.

We hope to bring attention to an issue that is often ignored by society. Seeing the disproportionate percentage of people of color and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people that are affected by homelessness affects us because these groups are a part of our community. Within our group, we have been affected by the criminal justice system through incarceration and police encounters. Some of us have been affected by discrimination against our race or our sexual orientation, and some of us have experienced homelessness ourselves.

Throughout the year, we conducted interviews, analyzed data and research, participated in trainings, and had discussions with homeless youth. During a focus group, we talked to 25 homeless youth who shared valuable insights about their personal experiences. They talked about their struggles involving a variety of issues, such as finding stable housing, accessing resources, and navigating the justice system. Many youth talked about facing abuse in shelters, being kicked out of their homes because of their gender identity or sexual orientation, and the impact of the instability of foster care.

This year we acquired many skills, such as teamwork, public speaking, leadership, and research. As many of us entered the program, we were oblivious to the extent of injustices happening to homeless youth in the justice system. Throughout the year, we were able to learn more not only about the daily struggles that many youth face, but how to come up with policies that will hopefully improve their everyday lives.

As determined and diverse teens, we hope that this report inspires you to act on these recommendations and that they will be implemented to better the lives of homeless youth and decrease their involvement in the justice system.

Sincerely,

**THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD**

# Acknowledgements

THIS REPORT IS DEDICATED TO ALFRED SIEGEL, A DEVOTED SUPPORTER OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD PROGRAM AND A MENTOR TO ITS MANY STAFF, MEMBERS, AND ALUMNI.

Many people helped to make this report possible. The Youth Justice Board would like to thank the following individuals for their knowledge, time, and support this year:

## INTERVIEWEES:

Judge Jody Adams, Leslie Britt, Imogen Carr, Louis Cholden-Brown, Detective Tanya Duhaney, Victor Furtick, Audace Garnett, Nancy Ginsburg, Matt Green, Shaquana Green, Dan Hafetz, Beth Hofmeister, Katy Kam, Tina Kelly, Arija Linauts, Katherine Marshall-Polite, Dr. Barbara McKeon, Benita Miller, Denise Niewinski, Kendal Nystedt, Lisa Parrish, Betty Pierre, Chansi Powell, Jamie Powlovich, Kyle Rapiñan, Michael Santos, Randy Scott, Sideya Sherman, and Bill Torres.

## FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

We are grateful to the 25 young people who shared their opinions and experiences during our focus groups.



Members of the Youth Justice Board visit the Queens Youth Justice Center.

## CENTER FOR COURT INNOVATION:

Afua Addo, Mohammed Alam, Andre Anteliz, Linda Baird, Shubha Bala, Raye Barbieri, Amanda Berman, Greg Berman, Debbie Boar, Aaron Charlop-Powers, Serin Choi, Sharese Crouther, Alejandra Garcia, Viviana Gordon, Dory Hack, Margaret Harris, Elise Jensen, Keisha Jones, Ross Joy, Ignacio Juareguilorda, Anna Krist, Tracey Little, Michele Maestri, Adam Mansky, Samiha Amin Meah, Saadiq Newton-Boyd, Shernette Pink, Chante Ramsey, Zoe Ridolfi-Starr, Sally Sanchez, Dipal Shah, Kristina Singleton, Brett Taylor, Brett Vetterlein, Haddijatou Waggeh, Matthew Watkins, and Robert V. Wolf.

We would also like to thank Mary Walle, former Youth Justice Board program associate, for her work and support.

## ADDITIONAL THANKS:

Francis Aponte-Veras, Shivani Dave, New York City Council Member Corey Johnson, Lee Strock, and Alexis Sypek.

## YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD ALUMNI:

Nazir Shaw and Ivoryona Williams.



# The Youth Justice Board Model

Over the course of a two-year program cycle, a team of teenagers from across New York City investigates a current justice system or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations, and works to implement its proposals. The Youth Justice Board brings young people's perspectives to public policy discussions while supporting members' personal and professional growth. The program aims to foster ongoing dialogue between policy-makers and informed youth leaders. In the first year of the program's two-year cycle, Board members research a selected issue, develop and publish informed policy recommendations, and present them to policy-makers and key stakeholders. During the second year, members work to implement the recommendations. Each year, new teens representing a diverse cross-section of neighborhoods and backgrounds are selected to join the Board. Participants include youth with firsthand experience of the issues addressed by the program. After completion of the project, many alumni stay engaged with the program and pursue other civic engagement activities in their neighborhoods and schools. The program's curriculum builds Board members' leadership, research, and public speaking skills and helps them develop and advance substantive and actionable policy recommendations.

## **TRAINING:**

Members receive training on research strategies, active listening, interviewing, public speaking, and more. Members also learn how local government works.

## **FIELDWORK:**

The Board designs and implements a research plan that includes interviews, focus groups, and site visits with a wide range of sources. Members meet with experts in the field, community members, and public officials. Members design and lead focus groups of young people affected by the issue under investigation to learn how it affects their peers.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENT:**

The Board's research culminates in the development of targeted policy proposals. The Board issues a final report and presents its recommendations to government officials and policy-makers.

## **IMPLEMENTATION:**

The Board works to influence practice in the field through action and advocacy. Board members design, develop, and pilot new initiatives based on their policy proposals. Members also work to convince decision-makers and service providers to implement their recommendations.

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings and recommendations of the 2016-2017 Youth Justice Board, an after-school program that engages New York City teenagers in studying public policy issues that affect young people. The Youth Justice Board has looked at the relationship between youth homelessness and the justice system in New York City to identify opportunities to better support homeless youth, minimize justice system involvement, and prevent homelessness in the future. During the 2017-2018 program year, the Board will work to implement many of the ideas contained in this report.

The Youth Justice Board conducted interviews with 34 topic experts and led three focus groups with 25 young people who have experienced homelessness. The Youth Justice Board developed ten recommendations to support homeless young people in New York City and limit their interactions with the justice system:

- A. IMPROVE SHELTERS AND SHORT-TERM SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH**
  1. Simplify and clarify the shelter intake process.
  2. Ensure homeless youth can access emergency temporary shelter when in crisis.
  3. Improve onsite services offered by shelters.
  4. Provide homeless youth with adequate information about available resources.
  
- B. IMPROVE THE JUSTICE AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS TO BETTER SERVE HOMELESS YOUTH AND TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS**
  5. Expand diversion opportunities.
  6. Support incarcerated youth in planning for their release and securing safe, stable housing.
  7. Develop cross-system trainings with input from young people.
  8. Increase support for LGBTQ youth in foster care.
  
- C. PROVIDE SERVICES AND SUPPORT WITH LASTING IMPACT**
  9. Increase affordable long-term housing options for youth.
  10. Provide the Department of Education with more resources to support homeless students.



# Introduction

Rates of homelessness have surged across New York City in recent years.<sup>1</sup> Young people face unique challenges once they lose access to stable housing. Their experiences are profoundly affected by the practices and policies of multiple systems, including the child welfare, juvenile justice, and criminal justice systems. These systems are complex, interrelated, and notoriously hard to navigate.

The Youth Justice Board looked at the relationship between youth homelessness and the justice system in New York City to identify opportunities to better support homeless youth, minimize justice system involvement, and pre-

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Homeless youth [are] so hidden because a lot of homeless youth try so hard to blend in and not look homeless, try to seem like they live a regular life... Anybody can be going through anything—you'll never know, because they're trying to hide it.

— Focus group participant

vent homelessness in the future. Though youth homelessness is an urgent issue in New York and other cities, there is little opportunity for positive collaboration between young people and other stakeholders. To develop informed solutions, policy-makers must have a deep understanding of young people's experiences.

Counting homeless youth is tricky. Unlike adults who often rely on shelters or public spaces for housing, young people are more mobile and are more likely to “couch-surf” and benefit from the help of friends and extended family. When homeless youth are out in public spaces, they more easily blend in and try to avoid notice. As one young person in our focus group told us, “Homeless youth [are] so hidden because a lot of homeless youth try so hard to blend in and not look homeless, try to seem like they live a regular life... Anybody can be going through anything—you'll never know, because they're trying to hide it.”

As mandated by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) annually conducts a “Homeless Outreach Population Estimate,” referred to as the “HOPE Count.” The HOPE Count is essential to understand the scope of homelessness in New York City, but is limited in its ability to capture the numbers of homeless youth. According to Beth Hofmeister, staff attorney at The Legal Aid Society's Homeless Rights Project, the HOPE Count is “horribly ineffective” in part because it uses HUD's definition of

<sup>1</sup> | (Coalition for the Homeless n.d.)

homeless, which is too narrow to fully capture the circumstances of many homeless youth.<sup>2</sup>

In recognition of the HOPE Count's limitations, beginning in 2015 New York City's Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has coordinated efforts to more accurately capture the number of homeless youth through a supplemental "Youth Count." The Youth Count surveys youth through programs that serve homeless youth, such as drop-in centers, outreach teams, and emergency shelters. The Youth Count uses a broader definition for homelessness than HUD, including unstable living conditions, such as couch-surfing, staying with a significant other, or providing sex in exchange for shelter.<sup>4</sup> The February 2016 Youth Count found that, on the night identified for the count, there were 1,805 homeless youth in New York City. Randy Scott, unit head at the Vulnerable and Special Needs Youth Division, Runaway and Homeless Youth Services at DYCD, noted that DYCD has been working to improve the accuracy of the Youth Count by collaborating with service providers, city agencies, and youth. However, advocates and service providers we spoke to remain critical of the Youth Count's accuracy. Hofmeister asserted that advocates and providers know "the problem is way bigger than what is captured in the Youth Count."

There are also issues with information collected through service providers and city agencies. Good data requires reliable self-disclosure by homeless youth, which can be difficult to obtain. Young people don't always understand themselves as "homeless;" they may have a place to sleep at night, even though it is unsafe or unreliable. Youth who do understand themselves to be homeless may choose not to self-disclose for several reasons. First, identifying oneself as homeless and getting services can require navigating complex bureaucracy and invite unwanted system involvement.

Second, youth—like adults—are aware of social stigma around homelessness. Third, youth often feel there is nothing to gain, and a lot to lose, by disclosing their housing insecurity.

#### HOW DO TEENS AND YOUNG ADULTS BECOME HOMELESS?

Some of the root causes of youth homelessness are the same as those for the larger population of homeless New Yorkers, such as economic hardship or loss of housing due to eviction, unexpected illness, or medical costs. Youth may also become homeless as a result of leaving an abusive or unsafe living situation. According to a 2014 study of youth served by organizations in 11 major U.S. cities, over half of homeless youth first became homeless because a parent or caregiver asked them to leave home.<sup>5</sup> Other self-reported reasons for initially becoming homeless included being unable to find employment, being physically abused, a caregiver's use of drugs or alcohol, their own drug or alcohol use, or exiting jail or prison.<sup>6</sup> Board members learned in interviews that youth with undocumented parents or caregivers may also become homeless due to a provider's detention or deportation.

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I think the foster care system is a driver of homelessness, and also a recipient. But the underlying cause is LGBTQ rejection.

— Lisa Parrish, New York City Administration for Children's Services

<sup>2</sup> (Health Services and Resources Administration 2011)

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> (New York City Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence and New York City Department of Youth and Community Development 2016)

<sup>5</sup> The majority of the Street Outreach Program Data Collection Study sample (69.7%) is between 19 and 21 years of age.

<sup>6</sup> (Administration on Children, Youth and Families 2016)

Youth who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) are often subject to discrimination at home and in foster care settings. According to a national survey of service providers who serve youth who are homeless or are at risk of becoming so, approximately 40% of their clients identify as LGBTQ.<sup>7</sup> Service providers also reported that, of the LGBTQ youth they serve, 68% cite family rejection as a major factor contributing to their homelessness. LGBTQ youth who enter the foster care system may find themselves again experiencing abuse and discrimination due to their sexual orientation or gender identity. As Lisa Parrish, senior advisor at the Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice at the New York City Administration for Children’s Services (ACS), said, “I think the foster care system is a driver of homelessness, and also a recipient, but the underlying cause is LGBTQ rejection.”

New York City service providers see a high number of transgender youth who are homeless. As Kyle Rapiñan, director of survival and self determination at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, explained, “The rate of homelessness for trans people, especially trans women of color, is through the roof.” Multiple interviewees and focus group participants explained that transgender youth who are homeless face additional challenges. For example, they may not have identification that matches their gender identity, which can cause tension when interacting with law enforcement, city agencies, and service providers, and can result in discrimination, detention, or denial of services.

#### **WHAT IS THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN HOMELESSNESS AND JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT FOR OLDER TEENS?**

As the Board learned in interviews and focus groups, homeless youth are more vulnerable than non-homeless youth to arrest and system involvement. Actions taken by homeless youth in order to survive are often arrestable offenses, such as shoplifting, trespassing, sleeping on trains, and turnstile jumping.

Simply spending more time on the street and in public places means more contact with police officers. One focus group participant told us, “Homeless people are more likely to be outside and... we have more interaction [with the cops] than if you had a job working nine to five.” Homeless youth engage in arguments in public spaces because they do not have private spaces in which to deal with interpersonal conflict; this can lead to arrest. Young people who are homeless often lack government-issued identification, which can make interaction with law enforcement more complicated.

The New York Police Department (NYPD) can be an ally in helping homeless youth access support and services. For example, staff from the Midtown Community Court explained that officers in the Times Square area will sometimes refer homeless youth to the Covenant House shelter on 41st Street. At the same time, the Board learned through its focus groups that homeless youth frequently feel harassed and treated violently by police officers. As Hofmeister shared, “I have seen police officers do amazing things with my clients, and I have seen them do terrible things to my clients.”

Through interviews and focus groups, the Board learned that many homeless youth engage in sex work to secure a place to sleep or to earn income. For their own safety, young people often prefer to work with each other, or help their friends by suggesting safe clients or setting up dates or locations. However, trafficking laws mean that these youth—especially if the one helping is over 18 and the other is under 18—can be charged with trafficking, a serious charge that carries heavy criminal consequences. Transgender youth are particularly vulnerable to sex work or trafficking arrests; LGBTQ youth in New York are seven times more likely to engage in sex work than their cisgender peers,<sup>8</sup> young trans women engaged in sex work are significantly more likely

<sup>7</sup> (Durso and Gates 2012)

<sup>8</sup> (Dank, et al. 2015)

than cisgender women to be arrested,<sup>9</sup> and LGBTQ youth, particularly trans youth of color, are especially vulnerable to being profiled as sex workers and arrested on “loitering for the purposes of prostitution” charges, regardless of whether they are working.<sup>10</sup>

Frequently, experts interviewed by the Board brought up the complicated needs and concerns of homeless or justice system-involved youth who are also undocumented (or who have undocumented parents). Once homeless, undocumented youth are extremely vulnerable to interactions with law enforcement. According to Kendal Nystedt, immigration attorney at Make The Road, “Every interaction with the criminal legal system is more dangerous if you’re an undocumented person... As soon as you have an arrest you become a target for deportation.”

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## The rate of homelessness for trans people, especially trans women of color, is through the roof.

— Kyle Rapiñan,  
Sylvia Rivera Law Project

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Justice system involvement can be a catalyst for housing insecurity, and can make many essential resources—like housing, employment, and government benefits—more difficult to obtain. As the Board learned from Nancy Ginsburg, director of the Adolescent Intervention and Diversion Team at The Legal Aid Society, “The collateral consequences of convictions are serious. They can prevent you not just from getting housing, but also from getting a job to help you pay for housing.”

### WHAT IS THE POTENTIAL IMPACT OF RAISE THE AGE LEGISLATION AND OTHER POLICY DEVELOPMENTS?

A consistent theme throughout the Board’s research was the challenge presented by the age of criminal responsibility in New York State, which is currently 16-years-old. Many services and programs for justice system-involved young people were created in recognition that the age of criminal responsibility did not reflect best practices for helping young people and ran counter to other state systems’—such as foster care and New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)—definitions of “adulthood.”

On April 10, 2017, New York State passed legislation to raise the age of criminal responsibility from 16 to 18 as of October 1, 2019. The passage of the “Raise the Age” legislation will fundamentally change how young people move through the justice system, and will make it possible for thousands of young people to avoid criminal records and their collateral consequences. Two impacts of the legislation relevant to the Board’s work are the plan to reroute cases involving 16- and 17-year-olds to family court instead of criminal court, and to stop detaining youth under the age of 18 with adults.

Also during the Board’s work, in April 2017 the Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform released a final report detailing recommendations for a new vision of criminal justice in New York City.<sup>11</sup> Based on a year of study, the final report calls for reducing the New York City jail population by half and for a robust investment in alternatives to incarceration, particularly for adolescents and young adults. The Commission’s recommendations for a justice system that both avoids the unnecessary use of jail and connects young people to tools that are particularly meaningful for homeless youth.

<sup>9</sup> “Trans females (37%) were significantly more likely than cis males (12%) or cis females (17%) to report a prior prostitution arrest and at least three times more likely to report a prostitution arrest in the past year (30% v. 9% v. 10%).” (Swaner, et al. 2016)

<sup>10</sup> (Hanssens, et al. 2014)

<sup>11</sup> (Independent Commission on New York City Criminal Justice and Incarceration Reform 2017)

New York City and New York State are also taking steps to actively address the needs of homeless New Yorkers through policy change. In February 2017, New York City released a report entitled *Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City* outlining strategies to increase the number of neighborhood-based shelters, reduce the number of people living in shelters, and expand supports and services available to homeless New Yorkers.<sup>12</sup> Finally, the state's 2018 budget, released in April 2017, provides municipalities with the ability to double the length of time youth can spend in crisis and transitional programs and to increase the maximum age of participation in programs for homeless youth from 21 to 24.<sup>13</sup> Individual municipalities will decide whether to implement these extensions.

#### WHAT DO YOUTH SAY THEY WANT?

There are many agencies and services that serve homeless young adults. Youth in our focus groups identified key elements these providers have in common. First, young people of all identities trust them and feel safe and welcome. Second, they recognize that young people have multiple needs and take a comprehensive approach. Finally, the programs and agencies most valued are those that specifically serve youth, and don't also serve adults in the same spaces or programs. Youth interviewed by the Board also felt that programs and services that were welcoming to and inclusive of LGBTQ youth were better and more likely to meet the needs of homeless youth overall.

<sup>12</sup> (New York City Department of Homeless Services 2017)

<sup>13</sup> (Office of Governor Andrew M. Cuomo 2017)

# Recommendations

The Youth Justice Board hopes our recommendations will spark conversation between city agencies, legislators, service providers, and homeless youth. Over the next year, the Youth Justice Board will work with these stakeholders in an effort to encourage the implementation of the ideas contained in this report.

The Board's recommendations fall under three themes:

## **A.** IMPROVE SHELTERS AND SHORT-TERM SERVICES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH

1. Simplify and clarify the shelter intake process.
2. Ensure homeless youth can access emergency temporary shelter when in crisis.
3. Improve onsite services offered by shelters.
4. Provide homeless youth with adequate information about available resources.

## **B.** IMPROVE THE JUSTICE AND CHILD WELFARE SYSTEMS TO BETTER SERVE HOMELESS YOUTH AND TO PREVENT HOMELESSNESS

5. Expand diversion opportunities.
6. Support incarcerated youth in planning for their release and securing safe, stable housing.
7. Develop cross-system trainings with input from young people.
8. Increase support for LGBTQ youth in foster care.

## **C.** PROVIDE SERVICES AND SUPPORT WITH LASTING IMPACT

9. Increase affordable long-term housing options for youth.
10. Provide the Department of Education with more resources to support homeless students.

# 1.

## Simplify and clarify the shelter intake process

Overwhelmingly, we heard in our interviews and focus groups that the city shelter system is difficult to enter and the intake process is challenging to navigate. Improving the intake process and overall shelter system experience is important, because if young people are turned away or feel overwhelmed with the process, they may give up altogether and end up in a place—or engage in behaviors—that are unsafe. Easing burdensome requirements associated with the shelter intake process could help to keep young people off the streets.

### **CONVENE A WORKING GROUP OF AGENCIES AND SERVICE PROVIDERS TO MAP, REVIEW, AND RECOMMEND IMPROVEMENTS TO THE SHELTER SYSTEM INTAKE PROCESS.**

Intake is the first step in entering the shelter system, and it is a very complex process for young people to navigate. Each DYCD shelter has its own intake process. There are advantages to this—for example, youth can show up to a shelter and be admitted, instead of having to first travel to an intake center and then travel to a shelter. Providers fought for this approach. Jamie Powlovich, executive director at the Coalition for Homeless Youth, told us that providers prefer not to have a unified database of names in order to protect the privacy of clients. At the same time, when each shelter has its own intake process it can be confusing and time-consuming for youth. The lack of available beds means that youth often have to travel to multiple shelters before being admitted. (For more information on this issue, please see recommendation #2 on

pages 11-13). Youth in our focus groups said they expect each DYCD intake to take an hour and a half to two hours. Youth also expressed frustration that they are repeatedly asked the same information, often including painful personal memories and trauma history, at each new site or shelter.

DHS shelters have a different centralized intake system that requires all prospective residents to show up at one of four processing locations, provide documentation, and undergo interviews before being placed. Then, they are required to travel with all their belongings to their placement shelter. The process can be difficult and stressful; Judge Jody Adams, former senior advisor for children and families in shelter to the commissioner of DHS, described the family intake center as “a scene in which families are often desperate and unhappy.” We learned from Imogen Carr, supervisor of alternatives to incarceration programming at the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, that DHS shelters offer only one intake point for men, two for women, and one for families with children. The limited number of intake points means youth often have to travel far and sit through long wait times, among other complications. In our focus groups, youth described waiting for days at DHS intake centers and sleeping on chairs overnight. Even as the city works to build 90 neighborhood-based shelters, DHS intake currently remains concentrated at select locations.



Additional areas that could use improvement include eliminating the requirement that parents bring their children to intake; making the physical space feel more comfortable; training shelter staff to help applicants feel welcome; training staff in LGBTQ sensitivity; addressing undocumented immigrants' fears about what information might be shared with immigration officials; and supporting homeless youth who don't have identification and other documentation, especially transgender youth whose documents may not correspond with their gender identity.

We recommend that a working group examine the intake processes at both DYCD and DHS shelters and recommend improvements. The group should include:

- Staff responsible for conducting and supervising intake;
- Shelter managers;
- Social workers;
- Legal service providers and advocacy groups specializing in homeless issues;
- Representatives from the district attorney's offices who focus on diversion;
- Representatives from the Department of Corrections and Department of Youth and Family Justice who oversee reentry planning;
- Staff from organizations that specialize in serving homeless youth, such as The Door;
- The Department of Education's (DOE) Students in Temporary Housing unit; and
- Youth who have experienced homelessness.

#### **CREATE A VISUAL GUIDE TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THE DHS INTAKE PROCESS.**

The intake process at DHS can be confusing for young people. To clarify the process and what to expect, we recommend creating a visual guide that explains the intake process and outlines what youth need in order to get placed in a shelter. This guide should be available in multiple languages and include:

- A list of every step in the intake process;
- A list of documents youth need to bring and who they should contact for help if they do not have the necessary documents;
- An estimate of how long the process will take;
- A notice that youth need to bring their children along if they are applying for family placement;
- Whether any of their personal information can be shared with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE);
- Information on how DHS places transgender and gender-nonconforming people; and
- Information about who youth should contact if they feel they are treated in an unfair or inappropriate manner.



# 2.

## Ensure homeless youth can access emergency temporary shelter when in crisis

The existing continuum of shelters and short-term housing programs cannot serve the growing number of homeless youth in New York City. Practitioners widely agree that there is insufficient funding to provide enough beds on a nightly basis and that existing options must be expanded in order to better serve youth in crisis. We recommend expanding access to emergency, temporary shelter.

### **GUARANTEE YOUTH A RIGHT TO EMERGENCY SHELTER.**

While anyone over the age of 18 has a legal right to shelter in New York City and DHS has a legal responsibility to provide it, youth under 18 have no such protection. Homeless youth in New York City should never be left to fend for themselves on the street, and should have a right, as adults do, to emergency shelter.<sup>14</sup> Jamie Powlovich, executive director at the Coalition for Homeless Youth, explained that without a legal right to shelter, “there is no pressure on the city or state to provide enough beds for the many youth who need them.” Many young people end up resorting to survival crimes in order to find shelter, or get arrested for trespassing or sleeping on the subway. Beth Hofmeister, staff attorney, Homeless Rights Project at The Legal Aid Society said, “There aren’t enough beds for the number of people who want them... There is never enough money for beds.”

Our focus group participants described waiting for weeks before finally getting a bed at a youth shelter. “It’s really hard, because you have to wait a while on the list... You got to wait about like almost a month,” said one young person. Another told us, “There are never enough beds, there’s never enough money. There’s never enough anything, there’s never enough resources. So it’s like, what are your other options?”

Haddijatou Waggeh, youth justice coordinator at the Midtown Community Court, has observed that when young people cannot access emergency shelter they are likely to sleep on the street, where they are exposed to violence and risk being arrested for trespassing. Many engage in survival sex in exchange for shelter. She told us that adults will wait outside of shelters for youth to be turned away, and as they leave, attempt to solicit young people into prostitution or otherwise exploit them. Youth who leave a shelter without a clear plan are also at significant risk, both of exploitation and of becoming involved in the justice system as a result of these actions. Louis Cholden-Brown, deputy chief of staff for legislation, planning, and budget at the office of Council Member Corey Johnson, believes the legal right to shelter, and a consequential increase in beds, should be an urgent issue for city

<sup>14</sup> | The Legal Aid Society’s Homeless Rights Project currently has an open suit against the City of New York arguing for this right.

lawmakers. “This is a population that has been crying out for a long time,” he said. “This is not a new issue and there is a long way to go. We have to push the envelope... This is what it means to be a progressive city.” As one of our focus group participants said, “If you’re homeless, you should always have somewhere to go. No matter what, somebody should help you. Don’t matter where, because nobody deserves to sleep outside. Nobody deserves that.”

#### **INCREASE THE NUMBER OF BEDS DESIGNATED FOR LGBTQ YOUTH.**

There are not enough crisis beds for homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ. These youth are frequently housed in shelters where staff and other residents may discriminate and even use violence against them, and there are not enough shelters designed to house and support them. Hofmeister said that many of her LGBTQ clients face intense discrimination in the shelter and welfare systems. “Most of my clients... identify as LGBTQ, and a number of them are trans. They’re often really discriminated against,” she said. “I can’t tell you how many times, when you really get down to the root of the issue, it has to do with someone’s bias against the youth’s sexuality or gender identity.” A focus group participant agreed, saying, “It’s just harder to find queer housing that’s like comfortable and safe and... actually good for resources.”

#### **CREATE A 24-HOUR DROP-IN CENTER IN EACH BOROUGH.**

Drop-in centers are the most temporary option in New York’s shelter continuum, and are often the first point of contact between homeless youth and city services. They serve youth 14- to 24-years-old and provide food, showers, Internet access, charging stations, clothing, entertainment, and referrals to shelters and other social services. They are operated by private nonprofits through contracts with DYCD. Youth in our focus groups told us they often rely on drop-in centers when they are looking for referrals and other support.

Randy Scott, unit head at the Vulnerable and Special Needs Youth Division, Runaway and Homeless Youth Services at DYCD, explained that drop-in centers offer youth an opportunity to meet other young people who may be struggling with similar issues, access resources, and build friendships and community. “Our drop-in centers are great places where youth can watch TV, shower, use a computer, connect with other young people, and link to services,” he said. “The centers get [youth] off the street until they are ready to move to the next step.”

There are seven drop-in centers across New York’s five boroughs open at different times. Six of the drop-in centers are closed at night, and they do not provide beds or a place to sleep. There is currently only one drop-in center open 24 hours a day, the Ali Forney Center in Harlem. DYCD, with support from its state oversight agency, the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), should seek to create a 24-hour drop-in center in each borough. This will help youth in immediate crisis get access to the resources they need.

#### **EXTEND THE AGE OF ELIGIBILITY FOR DYCD PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO 24, AND INCREASE THE LENGTH OF TIME YOUTH ARE PERMITTED TO STAY IN CRISIS SHELTERS AND TRANSITIONAL INDEPENDENT LIVING FACILITIES.**

Under DYCD’s range of services, there are two levels of shelter for homeless youth:

1. Crisis shelters provide short-term emergency food and shelter for youth between 16- and 21-years-old. Youth can remain in the shelters for between 30-60 days, and during that time may receive short-term case management services to help them find housing, employment, mental health care, and other resources. Youth are entitled to receive 30 days of aftercare after being discharged.
2. Transitional independent living facilities (often called “TILs”) provide extended temporary shelter, food, programming, and case management services. TILs are

open to youth between 16- and 21-years-old, and youth are allowed to stay up to 18 months. (Youth who enter at age 16 or 17 can apply for an extension of up to six months, though it is not guaranteed.) TILs are required to provide onsite programs like job training and educational support to help residents work towards economic independence. Youth are entitled to receive 90 days of aftercare when they are discharged or age out.

Scott explained that DYCD's goal is to help youth get a job, find housing, and stabilize their lives before turning 21 so they no longer need to live in shelter. "In cases where there is no success with that, they can go into DHS," he said.

The homeless youth we spoke to said these options are insufficient. They want more time in shelter programs to look for jobs, continue their education, and seek long-term housing. "Being in different youth shelters, they're really helpful... but the only problem is that it's so short-term, so everything that you want to do you have to do at a fast pace, because after 60 days you'll have to get out," said one young person during our focus group. Another told us, "Going from crisis shelter to this one to this one... In my experience, it's not set up in a way where you're built to succeed." Many youth over 18 we spoke to (who have the option to go to DHS once they are discharged from DYCD shelters) also expressed anxieties about being discharged from DYCD programs and forced to choose between living on the street or in a DHS shelter. They felt safer and more comfortable in youth shelters than in adult ones. They want to be able to stay in the youth shelters up to the age of 24 instead of being discharged into the adult system. One young person in our focus group talked about their frustration at being discharged from shelters at age 18, saying, "I think that age is one of the most biggest things, because it's like some people don't even get into this predicament until they're 18 or after that."

Several of the policy experts we interviewed agreed that increasing access to short-term shelter and other services offered by DYCD could make a difference. Hofmeister said, "For many youth, they feel it's not worth the risk going to a DHS shelter. They'd rather take their chances on the street and hope a bed becomes available at a DYCD shelter." She also said that violence and conflict, especially targeting young or LGBTQ people, is significantly more common at DHS shelters than at DYCD ones.

Existing regulations present a challenge. According to Scott, "That age range is not driven by DYCD, but by the state... State regulations say we can only house youth until their 21st birthday." He also said that state regulations limit the time youth can stay in a DYCD shelter. However, as mentioned in the introduction, the 2018 New York State budget will give municipalities expanded options. DYCD will have the option to extend the age of youth they serve up to 24, and double the amount of time youth are able to stay in shelter and TIL programs.<sup>15</sup> According to Scott, state and city agencies are currently discussing whether and how New York City might implement these extensions. We encourage DYCD to make these changes and seek the funding they need to do so.

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**If you're homeless, you should always have somewhere to go. No matter what, somebody should help you. Don't matter where, because nobody deserves to sleep outside. Nobody deserves that.**

— Focus group participant

# 3.

## Improve onsite services offered by shelters

In our focus groups, youth told us they struggle to find services and to travel all over the city to access them. One focus group participant described the process this way: “You’ve just got to create a Frankenstein to be able to do anything. It’s like, oh, I can go here to get these resources, here to get these resources, and here to get these resources. This I can stay for 30 days, this I can stay for three months, this I can do that... You shouldn’t have to work that hard.” Young people pointed to The Door as an example of a service provider they often rely on, because it offers onsite programs and assistance navigating a wide range of issues, from healthcare to legal representation. We were encouraged to learn that the city’s plan for addressing homelessness includes a commitment to offering services onsite at shelters and adding more purpose-built shelters.<sup>16</sup> The

city’s current plan for expanding services onsite at shelters includes:<sup>17</sup>

- Expanded mental health services for families;
- Employment training for shelter residents; and
- Job training, recreation, and support programs.

This is a strong starting point. There are additional services and supports that would benefit young people in particular.

### EXPAND THE BREADTH OF WRAPAROUND SERVICES AVAILABLE ONSITE AT SHELTERS.

One young person in our focus group said there were many things she would change about shelters, but the most important is offering more services onsite. “I guess one thing would be just actual help,” she said, “Besides just the whole physically being able to stay there, there should be more places that actually help you... Like you get a caseworker from a shelter. Somebody that actually tries to help you get a job and actually works with you.”

According to youth in our focus groups, services that would be useful onsite include:

- Legal help and referrals, including immigration services;
- Employment services;
- Health, mental health, and reproductive health services (the city’s current plan prioritizes mental health services for families with children);



Board members talk about the services offered onsite at youth shelters with Randy Scott of DYCD.

<sup>16</sup> (New York City Department of Homeless Services 2017)

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

- Education, including GED/TASC and tutoring services;
- Enrollment for NYC ID;
- Support with addiction and referrals to treatment services;
- Childcare;
- Support in accessing and updating personal records and documents including medical records, social security cards, and birth certificates (many homeless youth are estranged from their families and do not have a safe way to collect these);
- Enrollment for Medicaid and other benefits; and
- Support with finding long-term housing.

We also recommend that shelters provide pamphlets and other resources related to these issues that young people can take with them, even if they do not stay in the shelter. In addition to the areas listed above, resources on how to interact with police and “know your rights” documents would be useful for teens.

#### **IMPROVE SHELTERS FOR LGBTQ YOUTH.**

While all of the above suggestions will benefit LGBTQ youth, shelters can take additional steps to become safer and more welcoming for young people who identify as LGBTQ. Many young people and interview subjects described shelters as unwelcoming for LGBTQ youth. One focus group participant told us, “Now I’m in a DHS shelter... and I’m LGBTQ. I’m a lesbian, and it’s just a lot of difficulties when you’re in those type of environments that don’t really accept you.”

You’ve just got to create a Frankenstein to be able to do anything. It’s like, oh, I can go here to get these resources, here to get these resources... This I can stay for 30 days, this I can stay for three months... You shouldn’t have to work that hard.

— Focus group participant

Specifically, shelters should:

- Offer gender-neutral bathrooms;
- Train shelter staff in LGBTQ sensitivity;
- Ensure transgender youth have access to prescribed medications they need, such as hormone therapy; and
- Provide support for transgender youth to request changes to their birth certificate and personal identification.

# 4.

## Provide homeless youth with adequate information about available resources

Many homeless young people do not know where to find information about the resources available to them. They often rely on word-of-mouth and tips from fellow homeless youth they encounter on the street. While this kind of peer-to-peer information sharing can be valuable, the information is not always complete or current. There is a need for a more systematic, targeted approach to ensuring youth are aware of resources. Many homeless youth do not have regular access to the Internet so displaying resources in public will help homeless youth find them. All information should be available in multiple languages to ensure all New York youth can understand and access this information.

### **ADVERTISE RESOURCES FOR HOMELESS YOUTH IN LOCATIONS THAT THEY FREQUENT.**

Focus group participants suggested that the city develop an advertising campaign to raise awareness of resources available for homeless youth, including multi-service agencies like The Door. This campaign could include posting ads in public places that homeless youth often frequent, including the subway, the Hudson River piers in the West Village, or the public charging stations and LinkNYC towers throughout the city. “There’s so many advertisements all over New York City, and all over anywhere. There should be more about homelessness... It should be broadcasted all over,” said one young person in our focus group. Another agreed

and added, “The subway is a good place too, because everybody uses the subway when they’re homeless. Half of us f----- sleep on the subway, and it’s like I see all these advertisements for f----- food delivery services and breast implants, but not one about adolescent homeless services.” Further, Betty Pierre, deputy director of preventive services, children and family specialist at OCFS, recommends that schools and other youth-serving organizations clearly post information about resources for homeless youth so they can access them anonymously.

### **CREATE A RESOURCE THAT EXPLAINS THE VARIOUS SHORT- AND LONG-TERM HOUSING OPTIONS AVAILABLE FOR HOMELESS YOUTH.**

The housing continuum in New York City can be difficult for attorneys and city officials to understand, let alone a young person trying to navigate the system on their own. We learned that many young people have trouble understanding their options, are unaware of the housing resources available to them, or simply don’t know how to access the various programs. One focus group participant told us, “I wish I had known about vouchers. I didn’t know about vouchers,” and another said, “I wish I would have known about youth crisis shelters. If I would have known about that then maybe then I wouldn’t have slept on the street.” Another homeless young person told us, “I just wish that I would have known like



where to go... I wish there was something that would have let me know that it was possible to go to an overnight shelter. I wish I would have known people or known about the systems and stuff.” We recommend the creation of a visual guide (or multiple guides) that outlines the short- and long-term housing options available for homeless youth aged 16 to 24 in New York City. This guide should be available in multiple languages, and include:

**1. Information on short-term housing options:**

- A list and explanation of drop-in centers, crisis shelters, and TILs at DYCD and adult shelters at DHS;
- A notice that DOE schools are required to provide students with free transportation from shelters and provide support to continue their education;
- For each DYCD and DHS shelter:
  - Location and closest public transportation;
  - Time limits for stays;
  - Eligibility restrictions (e.g., age limits and criminal records);
  - Available onsite resources (e.g., medical help, Internet access, Metrocards, food, clothing, and laundry services);
  - Whether the program serves any specific demographic (e.g., LGBTQ youth, young parents);

- Documents and information required for intake;
- Whether personal information may be shared with ICE;
- Whether a report will be filed with ACS if applicants are under age 18; and
- Whether applicants will be placed according to their gender identities.

**2. Information on long-term housing options:**

- A list and explanation of available vouchers and rental subsidies, qualification requirements, and how to apply;
- An explanation of the city’s supportive housing program, qualification requirements, and how to apply;
- Information on NYCHA housing and eligibility criteria for priority placement;
- For each long-term housing option:
  - Eligibility restrictions (e.g., age limits and criminal records); and
  - Documents and information required for intake and how to get missing documents.

# 5.

## Expand diversion opportunities

Entering the justice system can be difficult and damaging for any young person: their education may be disrupted in confinement; they may experience violence and trauma; and convictions may limit their future job opportunities and housing options. These challenges are even greater for homeless youth, who are less likely than their peers to have a supportive network in place. Transgender and gender-nonconforming youth in particular are at greater risk of mistreatment and abuse following arrest, and therefore stand to gain even more by staying out of the justice system. As Kyle Rapiñan, director of survival and self determination at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, told us, “Jail is not good for anyone, and it is especially difficult for trans people.” We recommend increasing opportunities for diversion that provide homeless youth with alternatives to criminal conviction.

### **INCREASE HOMELESS YOUTH'S ACCESS TO DIVERSION PROGRAMS.**

Over the past few years, New York City has greatly expanded diversion programs that offer young people the opportunity to participate in community-based programs instead of going through the traditional justice system. Youth who successfully complete diversion programming may avoid jail time and a permanent criminal record. Diversion programs target different stages of the justice system process (e.g., post-arrest, alternative to prosecution, or post-adjudication) and have specific eligibility criteria (e.g., type of charge and prior criminal history).

However, some diversion programs designed for low-level nonviolent offenses are inaccessible to homeless youth because the underlying case criteria requires them to have identification or a permanent address.

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One time I hopped the train and the cops came... They were like, ‘Give me an address,’ and I was like, ‘I don’t have an address.’ They want an ID. I don’t have none of my documents, so they took me to booking.

— Focus group participant

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For example, in 2015 city stakeholders launched Project Reset which operates in Manhattan and several neighborhoods in Brooklyn and is run by the Center for Court Innovation. Project Reset serves 16- and 17-year-olds who have been arrested for low-level, nonviolent crimes. They must be first-time offenders with no involvement in any other ongoing investigations or cases. The program handles cases involving charges of drug possession, trespassing, and shoplifting, among other low-level



offenses. Project Reset provides an alternative response to Desk Appearance Tickets (referred to as a “DAT”). Police screen for eligibility at the point of arrest, issue a DAT, and alert the young person about the opportunity to participate in Project Reset. Prosecutors review each case and a defense advocate discusses the merits of the program with the client. If the young person elects to participate, they must engage in a short community-based program. Upon successful completion, the prosecutor declines to prosecute the case, the participant does not have to go to court, and no record of their engagement with the justice system is retained.

However, to receive a DAT at the point of arrest, young people must have identification and provide an address. This criteria excludes many homeless youth from receiving a DAT, and therefore from the opportunity of a community-based program in lieu of being held in custody and appearing in court. First, homeless youth may be less likely to have identification; second, they may not have an address (while they have the option to provide the address of a shelter or place they are staying, the youth may move to another location before receiving case information, therefore missing their court date and risking a bench warrant).

If a youth gets arrested, police officers and prosecutors need to have a way of reaching that youth. However, youth should not be penalized for being homeless. One young person in our focus group told us, “One time I hopped the train and the cops came... They

were like, ‘Give me an address,’ and I was like, ‘I don’t have an address.’ They want an ID. I don’t have none of my documents, so they took me to booking.”

Homeless youth face escalating consequences from even the briefest justice system involvement. As one participant in our focus group told us, “If you get caught up and you can’t get a DAT, they can’t issue a ticket and send you away, they arrest you... Usually I get caught up at night because I’m on my way home from work, so I have gotten multiple write-ups from my [shelter], because I’ve gotten arrested and not been able to make the curfew... That was just like, a scary experience, because not only did I just sit here and spend an entire night in jail after going through the trauma of being arrested, again... now I’m worried about having to fight this housing situation while also trying to get the rest of my life together.”

The implementation of Raise the Age legislation will direct 16- and 17-year-olds away from criminal court processes such as DAT issuances, but this will continue to be an issue for homeless youth between 18 and 24. Justice system stakeholders, including law enforcement and the district attorneys’ offices, should collaborate with community-based diversion programs to develop ways for homeless youth to qualify for DATs and other diversion-eligible case statuses (and subsequent diversion programs) without jeopardizing case processing. Stakeholders should include homeless youth in this conversation to help inform practices.

Encouragingly, we learned from Adam Mansky, director of operations at the Center for Court Innovation, that Project Reset may expand in Manhattan and parts of the Bronx to be available for all ages. We recommend all diversion programs extend the age of eligibility to 24. Diversion programs should also expand their list of eligible offenses to include common survival offenses, such as solicitation, loitering for the purposes of prostitution, and sleeping on the subway. This would increase opportunities for more homeless young people to have their cases resolved without getting a criminal record.

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Even though they're just doing their job it's just like, damn, I'm homeless. I've got bigger s--- to worry about. I've got to worry about where I'm going to sleep tonight and you're giving me a whole ticket for like, \$125 for walking through cars?

— Focus group participant

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#### **CREATE MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH TO AVOID BENCH WARRANTS.**

Homeless youth who are fined for minor offenses often struggle to pay these fines. Youth in our focus groups said they often couldn't afford to pay the ticket, or they never got a copy of the ticket because they didn't have an address where it could be mailed. One focus group participant told us, "I don't really pay for tickets...I can't. I literally tell the cop, like, I'm homeless. How am I going to pay this? And then he still gives it to me... even though

they're just doing their job it's just like, damn, I'm homeless. I've got bigger s--- to worry about. I've got to worry about where I'm going to sleep tonight and you're giving me a whole ticket for like, \$125 for walking through cars?"

When youth are unable to pay their fines, they may be issued a bench warrant. This escalates a minor offense to one with more serious consequences, which can in turn lead to incarceration and make it more difficult to get a job, housing, and other resources. There are some existing opportunities to have these bench warrants vacated; however, many young people do not know about them. Warrant forgiveness programs such as the Begin Again program offered by the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office and the Clean Slate program offered by the Manhattan District Attorney's Office should be offered more frequently, directly promoted through channels that reach homeless youth, such as in subways, schools, and mass transit centers, and hosted onsite at youth centers like The Door or the Ali Forney Center.

In 2016, the City Council passed the Criminal Justice Reform Act, a piece of legislation that gives police officers the discretion to treat several offenses (open container, littering, public urination, excessive noise, being in the park after closing, and others) as civil violations and not criminal offenses. As a result, nonpayment or failure to appear will not result in a warrant. The Center for Court Innovation was contracted by the city to provide community service options as nonmonetary alternatives for respondents who cannot afford or choose not to pay their fines. We recommend that the City Council and mayor expand the number of charges that move out of the criminal and into the civil domain, including nonviolent quality of life offenses such as theft of service, walking through subway cars, and obstruction of seating.

# 6.

## Support incarcerated youth in planning for their release and securing safe, stable housing

Young people exiting the justice system are at extremely high risk of homelessness. Currently, discharge practices vary greatly between agencies, detention centers, courts, and other sites, and youth are often released with little or no transition planning. Jamie Powlovich, executive director at the Coalition for Homeless Youth, said, “The justice system doesn’t do enough to help youth in the system transition back into society. They are literally just dumped back into the community.” A young person in our focus group said, “When they discharge you from jail or prison, they give you a couple bucks basically to get home, not caring if you have a home or not.”

Benita Miller, executive director at the New York City Children’s Cabinet, and Chansi Powell, policy advisor at the Children’s Cabinet, told us that the current level of transition planning “could be improved” and that Mayor Bill de Blasio’s administration is focused on closing gaps by developing aftercare services and supportive housing options. “You can’t just drop them off at the train station and say ‘good luck,’” said Miller, “They need more support than that.” Powell agreed, saying, “Youth need more transition planning, and it should begin long before they leave our care.” Michael Santos, an attorney at the National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty, agrees that youth often receive inadequate transition planning, if any at all, during and after incarceration. Youth

in our focus groups told us this was a problem too. One said, of being incarcerated, “You go away and you come out... you have to figure out, like, what am I going to do? Or where do I go?” Another young person described the night he was released from detention, saying, “They just leave you there... That night I had no way of transportation, no way of getting on the train. So, I had just got out and I was like, ‘Oh, my God, I have to hop the train. This is so bad...’ They’ll kick you to the curb until it’s your turn to come back in here.”

### **JAILS AND DETENTION CENTERS SHOULD ASSIGN STAFF TO SUPPORT YOUTH DISCHARGE PLANNING.**

Any jail or detention center responsible for youth aged 16 to 24 should designate at least one staff member to support discharge and transition planning for youth. This effort should include detention centers, Rikers Island, and

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When they discharge you from jail or prison, they give you a couple bucks basically to get home, not caring if you have a home or not.

— Focus group participant

other sites, and should be coordinated with the courts. Staff members should work with youth to develop clear discharge plans which include housing and resources for addressing common challenges associated with living on one's own (e.g., paying rent, managing bills, and reporting problems to landlords). As recommended by both Santos and Louis Cholden-Brown, deputy chief of staff for legislation, planning and budget at the Office of Council Member Corey Johnson, staff should actively coordinate with the various service providers and city agencies that the young person may rely on, including the DOE, DHS, DYCD, NYCHA, ACS, and Department of Probation.

#### **CREATE A HOUSING ACADEMY FOR INCARCERATED YOUTH.**

The Foster Care Housing Academy, developed by Miller during her time at ACS, helps prepare youth to exit the foster care system by providing free training in independent living skills to any youth who is preparing to age out of foster care. Miller says the Academy is valuable because “it helps educate the kids about how to be a tenant, how to navigate in an adult world... It allows them be messy and ask dumb questions.” We recommend that a similar program be created for justice system-involved youth. The Academy should help youth learn how to address common challenges associated with living on one's own (e.g., paying rent, managing bills, and reporting problems to landlords). This will help equip young people who have a high risk of becoming homeless with the knowledge and skills they need to secure and maintain stable housing.

# 7.

## Develop cross-system trainings with input from young people

Homeless youth commonly interact with adults from many systems, including the education, foster care, justice, and shelter systems. Beth Hofmeister, staff attorney at The Legal Aid Society's Homeless Rights Project, told us, "It's very common that homeless youth identify as LGBTQ, have been in foster care, have had involvement in the criminal or juvenile justice system, have interacted with the public health system, or have trauma histories." Training staff across systems in trauma-informed practices and LGBTQ support and inclusion will help gain the trust of homeless youth, increasing the likelihood youth will make use of services.

### **OFFER TRAININGS IN TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES AND DE-ESCALATION TECHNIQUES TO ADULTS WHO ARE LIKELY TO INTERACT WITH HOMELESS YOUNG PEOPLE.**

We heard from Katy Kam, crisis coordinator at The Door, that using a client-centered, trauma-informed approach benefits homeless youth by meeting them where they are. Yet many adults who are likely to interact with homeless youth as part of their jobs do not have training in trauma-informed approaches. We recommend that all adults who are likely to interact with homeless young people receive training in trauma-informed practices, including de-escalation techniques that do not trigger further trauma for young people who have already experienced so much of it. Nancy Ginsburg, director of the Adolescent Intervention and Diversion Team at The Legal Aid Society, told us that all police aren't trained

to deal with trauma and mental health issues, which can lead to more arrests because officers don't have the tools to defuse situations in which these issues are contributing factors. Learning how to recognize, respond to, and de-escalate behaviors associated with trauma could help lower youth arrest rates. These trainings will be even stronger if young people who have experienced homelessness firsthand are actively involved. Adults who participate in these trainings will have a better understanding of the experiences of homeless youth and the effect of trauma on their lives.



Board members learn about the legal needs of transgender homeless youth from Kyle Rapiñan of the Sylvia Rivera Law Project.

#### DEVELOP TRAININGS FOR SYSTEM PROFESSIONALS ON LGBTQ ACCEPTANCE AND INCLUSION.

We heard in our interviews and focus groups that there is a need for better understanding the experiences and needs of LGBTQ youth. In particular, we recommend training shelter staff, school staff, and police officers on understanding diverse gender identities, using youths' preferred pronouns, recognizing trauma, and supporting transgender youth.

Kyle Rapiñan, director of survival and self determination at the Sylvia Rivera Law Project, said that the relationship between transgender youth and law enforcement is "...very bad. Trans people and trans youth especially are called the wrong pronouns, their IDs are questioned or taken, they are often wrongfully detained and harassed by the police. They are also unreasonably profiled and arrested for sex work and other survival economies."

Meanwhile, most shelters don't have gender-neutral bathrooms or other protections for transgender youth, and youth in our focus groups reported seeing and experiencing LGBTQ discrimination by both residents and staff. One young person said, "I'm like, yo, you say that you're LGBT-friendly, but you're targeting the community... If you have a problem with that community, you don't need to be working there... I feel like they should train their people right to be around the LGBT community."

Another participant shared this story: "I saw a young boy sleeping outside and I said, 'Do you need any help going somewhere?' I told him about Ali Forney [which provides emergency shelter and other services for LGBTQ youth], and he said, 'I don't want to do a shelter system. I'd rather sleep outside than getting disrespected by people again and again.' That made me cry because like yo, that's where we go for shelter and then we get abused and disrespected and laughed at." Focused training would benefit both young people receiving services and help staff establish more trusting relationships with LGBTQ homeless youth, thereby improving the effectiveness of their work.

#### EXPAND THE USE OF YOUTH ADVISORY BOARDS TO ADDRESS YOUTH HOMELESSNESS.

The Mayor's Office is planning to involve 30,000 young people in youth leadership councils by the year 2020.<sup>18</sup> These programs place young people between the ages of 14 and 21 as advisors on policy, practice, and advocacy to city agencies, schools, and community-based organizations. Youth build their professional and leadership skills while making connections with adults and providing meaningful input. Following a similar model, DYCD convenes homeless youth through its Runaway and Homeless Youth Advisory Committee. As momentum builds around this type of programming at the city level, we recommend that DYCD ensure there is representation on its committee from justice system-involved youth and that their needs and concerns are included in the committee's work. We also recommend that DHS convene a youth advisory board of homeless and justice system-involved youth. In addition, other city agencies that already have youth leadership councils through the Mayor's Office, including NYCHA, should consider a focus on preventing homelessness, a topic that several NYPD precinct youth councils have already taken on.

<sup>18</sup> (NYC Service 2017)

# 8.

## Increase support for LGBTQ youth in foster care

Family rejection and discrimination against LGBTQ youth remain pressing issues in the foster care system. Many of the young people in our focus groups described experiencing abuse, harassment, and discrimination in the foster care system because of their sexuality or gender identity. When youth are pushed out of foster care, they are more likely to end up homeless and are at greater risk of justice system involvement. According to Tracey Little, women’s wellness navigator at the Center for Court Innovation, when youth flee from unsafe or unwelcoming foster care placements, they typically live on the street and are more likely to engage in survival crimes like sex work. We recommend expanding the support available to protect youth in foster care placement from discrimination and decrease their chances of living on the streets and engaging in survival crimes.

### **SUPPORT AND EXPAND THE WORK BEING DONE BY THE ACS OFFICE OF LGBTQ POLICY AND PRACTICE.**

More resources should be allocated to support the work of the ACS Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice, which has no budget of its own. Lisa Parrish, senior advisor at the Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice at ACS, explained, “Our office exists because LGBTQ youth are over-represented in the foster care system. We believe that this is largely due to family and community rejection, and structural discrimination.” Denise Niewinski, deputy director of the Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice at ACS, agreed, and added, “We try to ensure that all our homes are affirming. It’s a real challenge.”

The ACS Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice implemented a system-wide policy in November 2012, giving youth the right to a safe and respectful home, but according to both the people we interviewed and the youth in our focus group, there is still much work to be done to ensure this policy is respected. Many participants in our focus groups who had been in foster care described experiencing abuse, discrimination, and neglect in their placements. “We have a policy that requires our LGBTQ youth to be treated with care and respect. But do we think that’s always the case right now? No.” said Parrish.

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**We have a policy that requires our LGBTQ youth to be treated with care and respect. But do we think that’s always the case right now? No.**

— Lisa Parrish, New York City Administration for Children’s Services



Three specific initiatives this office is working on are particularly worthy of investment:

- 1. Increase the training that agencies and placement families receive on LGBTQ acceptance.** ACS is working to increase training for families. Staff from the Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice told us that training for foster families is required once when they are first approved to foster children and every two years thereafter, but they believe it needs to be more frequent and sustained in order to address the deep roots of LGBTQ discrimination. We recommend that youth with lived experience in the foster care system participate in shaping and delivering training to foster parents, and receive compensation for their efforts. Parrish and Niewinski said that their team would like to create a paid youth leadership program for LGBTQ foster youth in which they deliver training to future foster families, but that the office currently lacks the resources to do so. In accordance with ACS's LGBTQ acceptance policy, this training should include information on the use of gender pronouns and on gender-nonconforming identities. Although we understand that resources are scarce, ACS should prioritize the value of youth voice in these trainings and find a way to include them.
- 2. Increase efforts to recruit foster parents who identify as LGBTQ.** "Our goal is to help [youth] be their authentic selves, become independent, and be happy and healthy like everybody else," explained Niewinski. Having foster parents they can relate to could help youth feel more comfortable, create safer homes, improve placement stability, and help prevent youth from running away or becoming homeless.

- 3. Ensure youth know how to file a grievance complaint if they are uncomfortable in their placement and that complaints are acted upon promptly and in the best interests of the child.** "We wish that more young people would contact us," said Parrish. Though many youth struggle with acceptance issues in their placements, "We get very few incident reports from youth themselves," said Niewinski. Youth should have easy access to file a complaint and should receive regular reminders about how to ask for help if they need it. ACS should consult with youth currently in foster care to learn what would be most convenient for them, and consider an online app or other digital platform, based on youth input.



Board members learn about LGBTQ youth in the foster care system from Lisa Parrish and Denise Niewinski of ACS.



# 9.

## Increase affordable long-term housing options for youth

Every person we interviewed—from law enforcement to attorneys, from city officials to homeless youth themselves—identified the shortage of affordable and accessible long-term housing options as a critical barrier facing homeless youth. According to Jamie Powlovich, executive director at the Coalition for Homeless Youth, “There’s really no good way out of shelter. Runaway and homeless youth are the only population that has been left out of any existing housing access program.” Additionally, “The number one way to fix homelessness is to help people find long-term housing,” said Beth Hofmeister, staff attorney at The Legal Aid Society’s Homeless Rights Project, “otherwise, they will just move from shelter to shelter for years.” Katherine Marshall-Polite, director of the Students in Temporary Housing Unit at the DOE, echoed these concerns, saying, “There just isn’t enough housing for youth who are unaccompanied.”

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**The number one way to fix homelessness is to help people find long-term housing. Otherwise, they will just move from shelter to shelter for years.**

— Beth Hofmeister, The Legal Aid Society

Some groups of young people are particularly harmed by the lack of affordable housing. For example, Imogen Carr, supervisor of alternatives to incarceration programming at the Manhattan District Attorney’s Office, told us that she sees young people who are forced to remain incarcerated because they cannot show the judge they have a stable housing situation. In Carr’s experience, “The court can be concerned about releasing someone to an unstable environment.” Carr told us that, from what she has seen, DHS shelters usually don’t qualify as “stable environments” in the court’s eyes, so defendants who might otherwise be released can be left waiting on Rikers Island, often for months, until they can secure an alternative housing option. “From both a cost and mental health perspective, it’s not what we want to be doing,” she said.

Carr said, “If you give someone a safe, stable place to stay, their justice system involvement will drop dramatically.” Powlovich echoed this, saying, “When people want to exit the survival economy, having access to safe and secure housing is the make or break factor in whether they might be able to leave.” We want all young people to have access to housing and increase their personal safety and economic stability.

### **OFFER MORE SUPPORTIVE HOUSING SLOTS FOR HOMELESS YOUTH AND YOUNG MOTHERS.**

Supportive housing is one way New York City has endeavored to respond to the housing shortage. In supportive housing programs, which are operated by nonprofit organiza-

tions, residents typically pay one third of their rent and receive a government subsidy for the remainder. Supportive housing units include a comprehensive array of services onsite, such as medical and mental-health care, child care, and help finding employment. Hofmeister said that the unique combination of housing subsidies and onsite support can be beneficial for many residents, particularly youth with complex and connected needs. Many people we interviewed named supportive housing as an excellent potential option for homeless youth, but agreed that there are too few units available and not enough specifically for homeless youth. Carr told us that, though supportive housing might be a life-changing program for homeless youth, the lack of slots and long waiting lists make it challenging for many of them to access.

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**If you give someone a safe, stable place to stay, their justice system involvement will drop dramatically.**

— Imogen Carr, Manhattan District Attorney's Office

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Young parents who are also homeless face particularly acute needs. According to Judge Jody Adams, former senior advisor for children and families in shelter to the commissioner of DHS, a large number of young parents live in shelters. “Within homeless shelters,” she explained, “the percentage of head of households under the age of 25 is significant. It’s a constant issue.” Benita Miller, executive director of the New York City Children’s Cabinet, explained that many young parents in New York struggle to provide safe, stable long-term housing for their children. “Young

mothers are at greater risk [of homelessness] given the economic realities of parenting at a younger age. For young homeless mothers, there are few resources. There are fewer than 30 supportive housing slots. This number is woefully low,” she told us. She also noted that Mayor de Blasio’s administration has been advocating to increase the number of slots available to young mothers who are custodial parents since 2014. Judge Adams agreed with Miller’s concerns. She suggested that, in order to help young families support their children and avoid becoming entangled in the justice system, “Young mothers should be eligible for a particular focus in supportive housing.”

To address these challenges, we recommend the creation of more designated supportive housing slots for homeless youth and young mothers.

**CHANGE THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR SUPPORTIVE HOUSING SLOTS TO REFLECT THE REALITIES OF HOMELESS AND JUSTICE SYSTEM-INVOLVED YOUTH.**

Currently, youth must show one year of documented homelessness to qualify for supportive housing slots. Only a stay in a recognized shelter counts as homelessness under the current program requirements. This effectively excludes a huge portion of homeless youth because many homeless youth couch-surf or sleep on trains. Additionally, there is unclear information about whether time spent incarcerated or in substance abuse treatment programs counts towards the requirement. Participants in our focus groups described applying for supportive housing after being released from prison or from substance abuse treatment, only to be told they were not yet eligible and would have to spend more time in homeless shelters before they would be eligible. One of the young people in our focus group said of supportive housing, “There’s so many different qualifications, and one of them is to have a year of documented homelessness. But I asked if I could bring a letter from my mom saying that she kicked me out and stuff, and they was like ‘No. That’s not good enough.’” Carr says

that, when she works with people on Rikers Island or with open court cases who are trying to apply for supportive housing, “It is really difficult for them to show the documentation necessary to meet the HUD homelessness criteria.” Time spent incarcerated, in treatment programs, or in informal and temporary housing (e.g., couch-surfing) should count towards qualifying for supportive housing.

#### **EXPAND VOUCHER ELIGIBILITY FOR HOMELESS YOUTH.**

The city has different voucher programs. The Living in Communities (LINC) voucher program helps people living in shelters afford private apartments. The city pays 70% of the rent and the individual pays the remaining portion. Currently, youth staying in DHS shelters are eligible to apply for LINC vouchers to help them cover the cost of private apartments, but youth staying in DYCD shelters are not. Powlovich told us, “Mayor [de Blasio] keeps saying he’ll extend the vouchers to DYCD too, but he hasn’t yet.” She worries that many young people are left in unsafe and unstable conditions when they hit the maximum time they can stay in DYCD shelters and are bounced back out into the street. Youth staying at any city-recognized shelter, including DYCD shelters, should be eligible for the LINC voucher.

The city has additional vouchers that homeless youth might apply for, but current voucher requirements often make them inaccessible for homeless youth. For example, some vouchers require youth to live without any roommates or with only one roommate, and pay their entire portion of the rent independently. Hofmeister described these expectations as “unrealistic” for youth and said that adjusting the voucher requirements could help more homeless youth access safe apartments. Young people who are not homeless often live in shared apartments with roommates to defray the cost of living; youth who are homeless but seeking to use vouchers to supplement their rent payments should be allowed to as well.



Board members visit the Manhattan District Attorney’s office to learn more about the role of housing in criminal court cases.

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#### **NYCHA SHOULD CONTINUE TO IMPROVE PUBLIC HOUSING ACCESS FOR PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS.**

NYCHA is a primary provider of affordable housing for low-income New Yorkers, and could play a unique role in helping prevent homelessness. According to Powlovich, “Certain convictions prevent young people from returning to NYCHA.”

We learned about two NYCHA programs in particular that impact justice-involved youth at risk of becoming homeless.

##### **Permanent Exclusion**

NYCHA’s permanent exclusion policies bar people convicted of certain crimes<sup>19</sup> from returning to NYCHA grounds to live or even to visit friends or family. Nancy Ginsburg, director, Adolescent Intervention and Diversion Team at The Legal Aid Society, told us that housing exclusions often impact whole family units and are a common cause of homelessness. If a child gets convicted of a crime and their family lives in public housing, the family is faced with a difficult choice: let them stay and risk being evicted, or kick them out. “The systems have spent a lot of energy trying to exclude people and not a lot trying to figure out how to actually help them,” Ginsburg said.

<sup>19</sup> | These charges include but are not limited to murder, sex offenses, robbery, assault, drug dealing, and guns. (New York City Housing Authority n.d.)

In partnership with NYCHA, the Vera Institute of Justice recently released a report recommending significant changes to the permanent exclusion policies.<sup>20</sup> Vera's recommendations include focusing exclusions on violent conduct or serious threats to safety and clarifying and improving the process by which people can apply to have their exclusions lifted.

In our interview with NYCHA, we learned the agency rarely applies permanent exclusions to youth under 18 but that older youth are typically treated as adults. We agree with Vera's recommendations, particularly its recommendation that "Policies and practices should recognize that minors and young adults have unique needs, and permanent exclusion for younger residents must be handled differently than the permanent exclusion of adult residents, where permitted by law."<sup>21</sup>

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The systems have spent a lot of energy trying to exclude people and not a lot trying to figure out how to actually help them.

— Nancy Ginsburg, The Legal Aid Society

### Reentry Pilot Program

Staff from NYCHA also told us about its reentry pilot program, which "aims to help formerly incarcerated people by reuniting them with their families in public housing."<sup>22</sup> The program is open to people 16 and older with a variety of criminal backgrounds. In a 2016 program evaluation conducted by the Vera Institute, almost 50% of program participants said they would have been homeless if they were not accepted into the program.<sup>23</sup> This is another encouraging step by NYCHA to increase housing access for people with criminal records, and we are particularly pleased that it includes youth 16 and older. The program is still small (just over 100 people have participated in the two-year pilot) and, because of the shortage of available NYCHA apartments, is primarily focused on reuniting people who already have family in NYCHA buildings and providing supportive services. According to Sideya Sherman, executive vice-president for community engagement and partnerships at NYCHA, they hopes to attract the external funding necessary to expand the program and serve 100 new participants each year. We recommend that NYCHA prioritize enrolling youth aged 16 to 24 who might otherwise end up homeless and continue to increase the number of program slots annually.

<sup>20</sup> (DiZerega, Umbach and Ba 2017)

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> (DiZerega n.d.)

<sup>23</sup> (Bae, et al. 2016)

# 10.

## Provide the Department of Education with more resources to support homeless students

Arija Linauts, senior program associate at the New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students at Advocates for Children, told us that youth experiencing homelessness are at higher risk of dropping out of school, diminishing their earning potential and increasing their risk of justice-system involvement.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, it is especially important for youth experiencing homelessness to know about the supports available both inside and outside of school and receive help connecting with those services.

The federal McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act affirms each student's right to attend school, regardless of their housing situation, and requires school districts to ensure that students in temporary housing can continue their education.<sup>25</sup> The DOE's Students in Temporary Housing unit within the Office of Safety and Youth Development provides support to school-based liaisons and to students in temporary housing, along with trainings, technical assistance, and programming at shelters and schools. This unit includes nearly 120 Family Assistants who work in shelters and schools to assist homeless students and their families. Katherine Marshall-Polite, director at the Students in Temporary Housing Unit at the DOE, explained to us that each school in New York City has a McKinney-Vento liaison "who manages programs and services designed to

help homeless youth pursue their educations." We applaud New York City for exceeding the federal mandate in the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, which only requires a liaison (referred to as the "McKinney-Vento liaison") at the district level.

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Why don't the teachers or even the government officials let people know about these resources that could be available to people that have nothing?

— Focus group participant

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However, despite each school having a professional onsite responsible for supporting homeless youth, we heard from young people in focus groups and adult experts in our interviews that many students do not know they are eligible for support managing the logistics associated with school and housing, including enrollment, transportation, and free school lunch. One of our focus group participants asked, "Why don't the teachers or even the

<sup>24</sup> (Sum, Khatiwada and McLaughlin 2009)

<sup>25</sup> (New York City Department of Education 2016)

government officials let people know about these resources that could be available to people that have nothing?” We also heard that school support staff are overburdened and struggle to meet the needs of students.

In 2016, the city allocated nearly \$30 million in new funding to provide academic support for students living in shelters and to build school-based health centers in schools that serve a high percentage of homeless students.<sup>26</sup> We recommend additional efforts to support homeless youth in their schools.

#### **ADVERTISE RESOURCES TO ALL STUDENTS IN SCHOOLS**

School staff often don't know which students are experiencing homelessness, making it difficult for staff to reach out to them. A survey is administered at the beginning of each school year to learn about student housing and identify youth who might qualify for support under the McKinney-Vento Act. Yet students' housing situations can change at any time without school staff members' knowledge. Students might also not want to identify themselves as homeless because of the associated stigma. We recommend that schools clearly identify and promote the McKinney-Vento liaison to all students so that young people in unstable housing situations know where to go for support.

#### **INCREASE PERSONNEL IN SCHOOLS TO BETTER SUPPORT HOMELESS YOUTH.**

Students would also benefit from additional staff support, including an increased number of staff at the Students in Temporary Housing Unit run by the DOE, and a greater number of social workers in schools, particularly in schools with high levels of student poverty. The latter could be achieved by expanding DOE's "Bridging the Gap" program, which places social workers in 32 schools that have a large percentage of students in temporary housing.<sup>27</sup>

This support would help schools fully understand and address the needs of homeless students. As noted by Marshall-Polite, homeless

youth often struggle with timeliness and attendance because of transportation challenges, as well as the increased responsibilities they may bear for managing their personal lives. For example, a homeless student might have to take the subway for two hours each way between the shelter they were placed at and their school, or need to visit the Human Resources Administration office during business hours to apply for public benefits. As one youth in our focus group described, "Since I was homeless and jumping around, and having all these ACS cases and stuff like that, I was in court a lot or in a new group home or foster home... I wasn't going to school that often, and whenever I was able to it was once in awhile, and I got in trouble for it and punished a lot."

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**We want to make sure that students who are homeless know their rights and ensure these rights are never compromised or minimized. The need has grown.**

— Katherine Marshall-Polite, New York City Department of Education

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Some of the new city funding will support increasing DOE staff at DHS shelters that have the highest rates of attendance problems;<sup>28</sup> this is a promising step towards the significant personnel increases necessary to meet the needs of students. As Marshall-Polite said, "We want to make sure that students who are homeless know their rights and ensure these rights are never compromised or minimized. The need has grown."

<sup>26</sup> (Office of the Mayor of New York City 2016)

<sup>27</sup> (School Allocation Memorandum NO. 59, FY 2017 2016)

<sup>28</sup> (New York City Department of Homeless Services 2017)



## REMOVE TRANSPORTATION BARRIERS FOR HOMELESS YOUTH.

The DOE should work with DHS and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) to remove transportation barriers for homeless youth. We heard from young people that getting to and from school was challenging when they were in unstable housing situations. One focus group member said, “I wish shelters would actually help us with transportation. That is a big thing, to get anywhere really in New York City besides... 10, 15 blocks from where you’re currently residing.” The city is planning on increasing the number of neighborhood-based shelters<sup>29</sup> which will eliminate some but not all of the transportation challenges faced by homeless young people, especially since city high school students often attend schools outside of their neighborhoods. Currently, student Metrocards are available only to youth who live further than two miles from their school, and they expire at 8:30 pm every day. We recommend offering a low-income/student fare that always applies and doesn’t require a permanent home address to receive. If these cards were available to all low-income students all the time, it would support students not only in getting to and from school but also to work and other obligations. Further, students would not need to jump a turnstile—thus risking arrest—just to attend school.



Board members learn about the educational rights of homeless students from Arijia Linauts of Advocates for Children.



# Closing Message from the Youth Justice Board

As our year together comes to an end, we hope our work will serve as a catalyst for change. Youth homelessness and its relationship to the criminal justice system is a serious and growing issue in New York City. We believe these recommendations will be a stepping stone to improve housing stability for youth who are removed from their homes due to lack of acceptance from their families, financial hardships, or other traumatizing issues.

Through our recommendations, we hope to improve the lives of homeless youth and reduce arrest rates and recidivism. We also want homeless shelters in the city to improve their living conditions and increase the number of beds available. During the 2017-2018 school year, the Youth Justice Board will continue to push for these policy changes and implement projects to address some of the issues we raise in this report. We also want to work on finding solutions for these problems and eliminating the stigma associated with homelessness. We hope our recommendations become reality.

We want our report to call stakeholders and people in power to action. Any emotions evoked by the experiences of homeless youth as well as the information provided by our recommendations will spread awareness and begin further discussions about the issue. Thank you for taking the time to read our report!



Youth Justice Board members debrief after a successful focus group.

# Voices of Homeless Youth

## CLOSING THOUGHTS FROM THE YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD FOCUS GROUPS

**Find something that you like or that you find joy in, or you feel purpose in, even if it's something small... You invest your time into something, and people will invest in you. I feel like that's the biggest thing that I would tell someone, is just to like, invest in something.**

I feel like all the stuff that I went through as a homeless person has actually made me stronger, so I wouldn't change it.

**When I get older like 21 or 25, I want to be... I don't know what it's called, like a youth advocate or something to listen to the youth... Be there for them and talk to them and try to give them the best help I can. To let them know, 'Hey, I been through this, this is how it is, you could do it. If I could do it, you could do it.'**

Always keep your motivation. Even when you're at the lowest of your lowest, know that there is always going to be that one thing that is going to get you up. Whether it's school, or if it's work... whatever it is, it doesn't matter what it is, as long as it gets you to where you need to be in life, never stop your motivation.

**I was so afraid to say anything to anyone, and I wish I would have known just to speak out, and to try and get as much help as possible, because there is help out there. It might not seem like there's help out there, but there is.**

Thank God I'm very strong-minded and throughout all I've been through it makes me build myself up. Instead of breaking myself down, it's like 'Okay. Fine. I got my job back. I only got four more weeks of parole, and I'll be off and finally do what I have to do for myself, and make me go quicker because I don't have nothing else on my back.'

**Even though some people would call my life a rough life, I would say that my life has been a happy life. I've always stayed happy regardless of whatever I've been through... Keep positive and keep my head held high. Everything works out.**

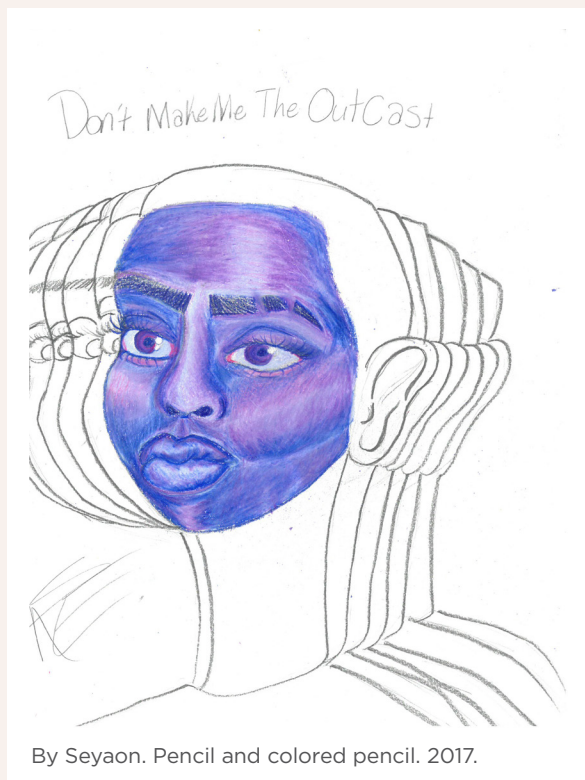
I have friends that tell me they quit high school, they felt like homelessness was going to stop them. I said it's not... Just never give up.

**I appreciate the Youth Justice Board... because I held this in for a very long time. I don't talk to nobody about my personal life, and I realized that when I cry, it makes me feel better. So I felt like this was a safe space for me to let me personal life out, so I wanted to say thank you.**

I want to be... self-sufficient, have my own apartment... In the future I see myself starting a nonprofit for young teenagers who want to get into the arts and photography or acting, spoken word, anything.

**I just want to further my education and go on a really nice vacation one day.**

# Youth Justice Board Member Reflections



13

**BY NAMRA**

when i was 13  
i ran away from home  
because of a reason too stupid to recall  
made it all the way until the end of the block  
before i realized that it was  
too cold  
too scary  
too dark  
so i went back home  
where my mother knowingly  
had some warm milk and cookies  
waiting for me

when she was 13  
she was kicked out of her home  
because she was pregnant  
she made it to the park  
and realized that it was  
too cold  
too scary  
too dark  
so she went to the trains  
where she had no choice but to jump the turn-  
stile  
unknowing that the cops were patrolling  
waiting for her

## WHY?

BY MELANIE

Sometimes after the chatter  
And the chaos of the world  
Has died down, gone to sleep, closed the shutters,  
and pulled up the covers, I start to wonder

Why do others go cold in the night, shiver as  
the wind

Howls its lonely cry, while I snuggle into my  
warm

Bed, safe, content, and dry?

Sometimes I just stop and take a second to  
wonder why

Why do I get to live the life I lead?

Was it the roll of the die,

The shake of the hands,

The clatter of the dotted cubes?

Was it all randomness,

And coincidence decided to give one a house,

And the other a cardboard box?

Are we all just debris, wisps of something past,  
floating in the wind,

Shifting and flipping whichever way the current  
leads?

I then wonder if I'll ever know

## UNTITLED

BY OUSMAN

stepping out in the street with a wondering  
face

looking at the people before me, seeing the  
suffering,

the anger, the unspoken justice and powerless  
people

consumed by jobs that give no room for social  
changes or time to care about things that

really matter. Should I just close my eyes like  
everyone did or should I break the cycle and do  
something about it. But how can I advocate for  
change? Where should I start? Who do I want  
to help? I constantly ponder about these ques-  
tions and

as everyone else I start to close my eyes to the  
far light in the horizon, until YJB amplified the  
light to a point where it was utterly impossible  
to not see it.

## VOICELESS

### ANONYMOUS

I never knew the day would come  
The day where all I was thinking about was,  
“where will I sleep next week?”  
These thoughts were the nightmares in my  
head  
that never left my side.

After a couple of weeks  
I was placed in a shelter  
where an apartment was called “a unit”  
where I had to tell them when I am going out or  
coming back  
where I had to ask permission to go on far  
away trips.

Not only that, but they had the key to my so-  
called home  
where privacy was nonexistent  
where my friends and other family couldn't  
enter my building.

Isolated is what I became,  
stripped of my freedom.  
A place where it was supposed to feel like  
home  
became the place to go to.

These places are supposed to be good –  
How come I felt alone and abandoned?  
This was the reality I had to face every day in  
shelter.

## YOUTH JUSTICE BARS

### BY RALIEK

My name is Raliek,  
And you know me  
Now let me tell you how I joined YJB:

I first found out in the penitentiary,  
but now I want to help out the community!

I got recommended,  
and now I'm up in it,  
so from now on,  
Raliek is committed. AY!

## UNTITLED

### BY JAIRE

Walking into YJB  
Feeling so happy  
Full of glee  
Glad to be part of YJB  
We are part of something bigger  
Ain't working for daily figures  
The problem can't get any clearer  
Let's all reflect and look in the mirror

We work to help the homeless youth  
And we always make sure to tell their truth  
We ask & find out about their life experiences  
and challenges  
It can be get a bit hard to balance this, but we  
are up for the challenges  
YJB ain't for short term satisfaction like daily  
allowances

## UNTITLED

### BY ERICKA

When I would get scolded as a little girl, I would  
go into my bathroom and convince myself into  
running away

While crying profusely, I would come up with a  
game plan on how I could execute this like only  
a child's imagination could

With a couple hours of sleep, my infantile exit  
strategy no longer existed once my mother  
would utter the words "I love you"

Those words alone would bring warmth  
throughout my four foot tall body as if it were  
the only thing that kept me from building gla-  
cial layers on my skin

When I am lectured as a teenager, I always lock  
myself in my room, thinking if all else fails, the  
tranquility in the silence of these four walls will  
bring stillness to my soul in the midst of havoc  
outside my door

In the core of my feelings, I'm unable to detect  
how fortunate it is to take myself out of a place  
I don't wish to be or how selfish it is not to  
think of the others that cannot do the same

When a bench or pavement is where you rest  
your head at night, the choices of locking your-  
self inside of a bathroom or bedroom to escape  
conflict is not given to you

When a bed placed in your room is where you  
rest your head at night, your privilege lays with  
you as well.

# Youth Justice Board Member and Staff Biographies

## ALDAIR

Aldair is a 17-year-old senior at Millennium Brooklyn High School and will be attending Baruch College in the fall of 2017 to pursue a career in finance. In his free time, Aldair likes to sleep, hang out, listen to Kendrick Lamar, play soccer, eat tacos, and go on bike rides all over the city. In the Youth Justice Board, Aldair is a committed member who is always present and ready to help the group with his ideas and questions. He joined because he wanted to be a positive contributor to his community by helping those who are in need. Over the course of the year, Aldair has grown in the program and values the opportunity to create change to better the lives of youth in the city.

## ALEX

Alex is a 17-year-old junior at the Bronx High School of Science. He is very active in his school and the local community, participating in sports every season through track and tennis, as well as finding time to volunteer as a tennis coach for underprivileged children at the local park in the Bronx. He is also a member of his high school's concert band and a research assistant at the Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. Alex has grown more and more active in the political and social spheres of New York through his involvement in the Youth Justice Board this year. He loves the goals of the program and the diversity among the members of the group. He is truly humbled to have had the experience to work with the Youth Justice Board staff and his fellow talented members. He hopes to continue making a significant impact in the lives of

those around him. Alex hopes to attend Columbia University in the fall of 2018 and pursue a career in business.

## ANANYA

Ananya is a 15-year-old Bangladeshi who is a freshman at the Bronx High School of Science. She enjoys reading books with LGBTQ protagonists and strong female characters. In her free time, she tries to learn as much as she can about intersectional feminism and social justice, as well as trying to be more politically active. In college, she wants to major in international law and psychology, while finding a field to accommodate both. Her hope in joining the Youth Justice Board was to explore law and policy to advocate for improvements in the government to better help people.

## CLARA

Clara is a 17-year-old junior at the Bronx High School of Science. In her spare time, she likes to paint, take photos, and write. She also enjoys reading; her current favorite book is *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, by Junot Diaz. She is especially interested in history and politics. The Youth Justice Board interested her because homelessness is such a relevant and important topic that needs to be addressed. She hopes to continue to impact positive change within her community and other communities. In the future, she aims to research other current social and political issues.

## ERICKA

Ericka is a 19-year-old senior at West Brooklyn Community High School. She is a writer and



aspiring social activist. In her efforts to become active in social and political issues, Ericka intersects her poetry with today's injustices and her psyche with being a black woman in the Donald Trump era. She promotes self-care for other social activists who are relied on to fight the powers that be. With years of educating herself, she also promotes intersectionality in activism; she has come to learn that people come in multi-layered facets and are oppressed in many different ways. In her process of wanting to end oppression for different minority groups, she joined the Youth Justice Board to be one more active voice participating in her community and to also speak for ostracized teens who don't conform. Being on the Youth Justice Board has taught her how to network and conduct research in order for her activism to be as effective as possible. As she goes on to college, she seeks to take all the tools taught by the program to reach out to people being oppressed and speak for the "round pegs in the square holes."

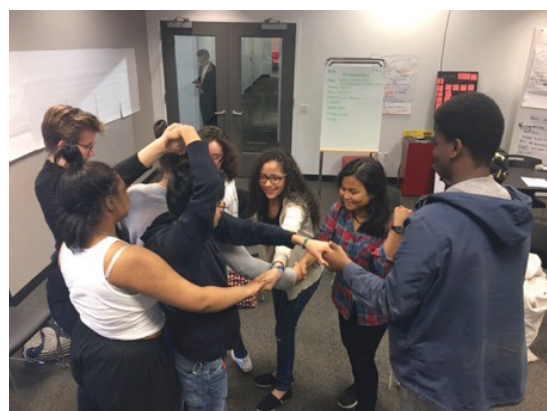
#### HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah is an 18-year-old senior at the Ralph R. McKee Career and Technical Education High School, and is a second-year member of the Youth Justice Board. Throughout his high school career, he has sought various external programs and opportunities to further enhance his aspirations and hone his skills in writing, leadership, and advocacy. In 2014, he was accepted into The Fellowship Initiative, a program sponsored by J. P. Morgan Chase designed to help young men of color and close the achievement gap. He also went on a 16-day

multicultural excursion to South Africa to learn about the Apartheid era through the fellowship. In December of 2016, Hezekiah won The Posse Foundation Scholarship, a leadership-based full tuition scholarship that aims to diversify top colleges and universities across the United States. He will be attending Lawrence University in the fall of 2017, and plans to major in international affairs and minor in economics.

#### IANDRA

Iandra is a 15-year-old sophomore at St. Catharine Academy. She came to New York City at the age of ten from the Dominican Republic. She enjoys living in New York City. Iandra is a very inquisitive young woman, which is why she joined the Youth Justice Board. The training, interviews, and focus groups have given her a different perspective on life. She hopes to take this learning experience with her to inspire kids in her neighborhood to learn about their



Youth Justice Board members and staff unwind during session with a game of Human Knot.

city and to make a difference in the world. She hopes she can be as brave as the inspiring Mirabal sisters and change even just a piece of the world. She loves science, math, and writing. She loves her family and friends. She is a social butterfly who enjoys making people laugh and have fun. Her motto is “con amor y cariño,” which means “with love and kindness.”

#### JAIRE

Jaire is a 15-year-old sophomore at Benjamin Banneker Academy. He enjoys analyzing movies and TV shows, reading comic books, writing, and discussing different topics. In his free time, he tries to be socially aware and politically active. He is very interested in film and wants to find a career in that field but is also interested in the justice system and making a difference. Through joining the Youth Justice Board, he acquired the skill of interviewing as well as strengthened his public speaking skills. He would describe himself as someone who is confident, eager to learn, and well-rounded.

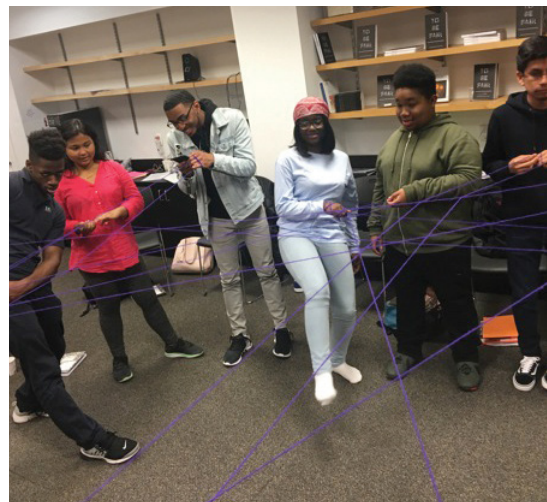
#### JORDAN

Jordan is a 17-year-old junior at Manhattan Early College for Advertising. Growing up in New York City, Jordan was always taught to give back in any way possible. Jordan aspires to attend Howard University to pursue a dual degree in fashion design and African-American studies. In his free time, Jordan likes to engage in many activities that focus on his values of service, determination, and creativity. Jordan is a part of many organizing clubs in school and a captain of a dance group. With all that Jordan does, he plans to donate money to an organization at the age of 25 and travel to Africa to build homes and schools. In the near future, Jordan sees himself owning a fashion brand. Jordan understands the world’s imperfections, but he doesn’t see it getting anywhere close to perfect without his help.

#### JOSIAH

Josiah is an 18-year-old senior in Manhattan Early College school for Advertising. He enjoys working with technology, including

building computers, robots, studying gaming software, and making music through music production software. He has benefitted from joining the Youth Justice Board by learning interview, social, and public speaking skills. The Youth Justice Board has opened up a new perspective for him, and he one day wishes to incorporate the hobbies he loves to make an impact on society.



Youth Justice Board members have fun with a team-building affirmations activity.

#### KHALEEK

Khaleek is a 17-year-old senior at Chelsea Career Technical Education High School. He is a very involved scholar who takes his work seriously. Khaleek is graduating on June 23, 2017, and wants to attend the Fashion Institute of Technology. In his free time, Khaleek enjoys shopping, watching movies, spending time with his family, and hanging with friends. When he is older, he wants to be involved with photography, graphic design, and fashion design. He is proud to be a part of the Youth Justice Board to benefit himself and his community.

#### KIANNA

Kianna is a 15-year-old freshman at Hunter College High School. Some of her favorite

subjects to study include English and Global History. Outside of school, Kianna enjoys studying photography, dancing, writing, and playing numerous instruments, including the saxophone and guitar. She expresses an interest in the justice system and hopes to enter the criminal psychology field in the future, which is one of the main reasons why she joined the Youth Justice Board. Through the Youth Justice Board, she has not only strengthened her data analysis skills, but also has developed public speaking as a new skill.

#### MELANIE

Melanie is a 17-year-old sophomore attending Cristo Rey New York High School. She is very dedicated to her work and responsibilities outside of school. Outside of the Youth Justice Board, Melanie works at Citibank one day a week. She works with the Credit Markets Department, helping them with headcount spreadsheets, PowerPoints, and different projects throughout the year. Melanie loves to travel and enjoys new adventures. In the summer of 2016, Melanie went to Villanova University for The Great Debate program and traveled to Spain to spend time with her family. In the summer of 2017, she is going to Ohio for the Kenyon Review Young Writers Program, and to the University of San Diego for the California Lorenzo de Zavala Youth Legislative Session (LDZ) program. Later on in the summer, Melanie will also go to the Dominican Republic to visit her family. Melanie wanted to be part of the Youth Justice Board to learn more about youth homelessness and to make a change.

#### NAMRA

Namra is a 17-year-old senior at Stuyvesant High School. She loves being involved in her community and frequently volunteers at nonprofits throughout the city. In school, she has been active in the student union, as well as the theater and dance communities. In her free time, she loves to binge watch shows on Netflix, eat good food, and dance. Through the Youth Justice Board, and other internships this year, Namra has discovered her love for social

justice activism. This fall, she will be attending Yale University to study in its Ethics, Politics, and Economics program. She hopes to pursue a career in government because she feels that there is a severe lack of female and minority representation in the current political sphere.

#### ODETTE

Odette is a 15-year-old sophomore at the High School for Health Professions and Human Services. Growing up, Odette has always been a force to be reckoned with. Odette aids the elderly in her community by making sandwiches for the homeless, and is an usher at her church. She is very competitive. All that matters to her is being the best she can and continuously improving. Upon joining high school, her eyes were set on medicine. She then became more opinionated and strong-willed, and she acquired an interest in law. Miraculously, the Youth Justice Board came upon her. She still feels stuck between two fields. Odette is working to develop her public speaking and advocacy skills and always strives to be her best self.

#### OUSMAN

Ousman is an 18-year-old senior at Hillcrest High School in Jamaica, Queens. He is a very driven person who always finds a way to contribute to the betterment of the society. When he lived in Guinea, he volunteered for United African Youth, a non-profit organization dedicated to helping underprivileged children in Guinea-Conakry. He is also a student leader in his school's leadership program through which he continues to impact both the school and the local community. He organizes blood drives for New York City hospitals, toy and coat drives for underprivileged kids in the city, and collects funds for UNICEF and the March of Dimes. Ousman joined the Youth Justice Board because he wanted to impact the society on a broader scale and help young people realize their potential. He wants to further develop his knowledge and grow as an individual in an environment where he can impact and be impacted. Ousman will double major in political science and economics at the University of Buf-

falo in the fall of 2018. His dream is to become a diplomat and work for the United Nations where he can impact the world.

#### **RALIEK**

Raliek is a 16-year-old sophomore at Harlem Village Academies High school. Raliek is a very charismatic, relaxed, cool, and chill dude that gets the job done. Raliek's dark past in the justice system is what brought him to the Youth Justice Board; he is proud that he turned his life around in the blink of an eye. Raliek's hobbies are his very intense workouts and his deep passion for drawing and writing poetry. Raliek aspires to become a superstar boxer one day. Raliek puts one hundred percent effort into everything he does.

#### **ROSEMARY**

Rosemary is a 17-year-old senior at Rachel Carson High School for Coastal Studies. In her free time, she loves to write and spend time with friends and family. She joined the Youth Justice Board because she wanted to help other young people who are experiencing what she once experienced in a homeless shelter and to learn more about the criminal justice system. Throughout her senior year, she has learned new skills such as public speaking. She is the 2017 winner of the Beat the Odds scholarship, an award given by the Children's Defense Fund that honors top high school students who have overcome personal hardship and contribute to their communities. She plans to attend college and double major in criminal justice and psychology, as well as a minor in journalism.

#### **SEYAON**

Seyaon is a very outspoken young woman from Harlem. She is a 14-year-old freshman who attends Thurgood Marshall Academy and plans on graduating with a full scholarship to Howard University. She usually spends her spare time reading and drawing and has even found a way to incorporate that into her work with the Youth Justice Board. She joined the program as an effort to help those less fortunate than herself. During her time with the Youth Justice

Board, she has developed better people skills and has become an exceptional interviewer. Seyaon has a goal to change the world with the skills she acquired while being part of the Youth Justice Board.

#### **TERRELL**

Terrell (also known as Rell) is a 16-year-old junior at Manhattan Early College School for Advertising. He usually spends his spare time playing basketball, singing or dancing. Terrell is known by his friends as a funny, smart, outspoken, and willing young man. Terrell often makes sure that he is able to get his point across in a respectful manner. Terrell wants to go to Syracuse University to pursue his dream in basketball and business. This is Terrell's second year on the Youth Justice Board and he joined to make a change in his community. When he found out he had the opportunity to come back for the second year of the program, he knew he would be making a big change and was happy to jump at the chance. Terrell plans to do two years at Borough of Manhattan Community College to get his degree in business and advertising.

#### **ZHIYA**

Zhiya is a 16-year-old junior who attends Manhattan Center for Science Mathematics. Zhiya intends on graduating in 2018 with a full Regents Diploma. Through all the hard work that comes with being a junior in high school, Zhiya has been committed to attending the Youth Justice Board twice a week and following through with her schoolwork, even if it means working on weekends. Aside from academics, Zhiya spends her spare time reading, writing, listening to music, and practicing different make-up looks. She joined the Youth Justice Board to make a positive impact on society and plans to be a part of next year's cohort. Through the program, Zhiya has developed her leadership, note-taking, and listening skills and has been offered amazing opportunities.

### ZOE RIDOLFI-STARR

#### PROGRAM COORDINATOR, YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD

Zoe is the Youth Justice Board program coordinator at the Center for Court Innovation. Prior to joining the Center, Zoe served as deputy director of Know Your IX. There, she trained and mobilized college students to end gender violence and led legislative advocacy efforts to strengthen campus reporting options and reduce reliance on the criminal justice system. She earned her B.A. from Columbia University, where she spearheaded the creation of an Emergency Health Care Fund for students in need and was the lead complainant in a prominent Title IX complaint against her school. She co-founded and currently runs the Fund for a Safer Columbia, which raises money from alumni to support student activism on campus, and volunteers with the New York Abortion Access Fund and the Red Umbrella Project. She adores working with young people and is also passionate about improving the way our legal system interacts with gender, reproductive health, family building, and sexuality. Her writing on these topics has been published in the Yale Law Journal, ReWire, the Huffington Post, and more. She loves dancing, writing, shoes, and cooking yummy vegetarian food for friends and family.

### KRISTINA SINGLETON

#### PUBLIC ALLY, YOUTH JUSTICE BOARD

Kristina is the Youth Justice Board Public Ally at the Center for Court Innovation. As an AmeriCorps member of the Public Allies New York program, Kristina has developed her leadership and facilitation skills in her work with the Board. She earned her B.A. in Criminal Justice from Southern Vermont College. Kristina is very passionate about her work with young people and is changing the world with her kind and determined demeanor. From co-facilitating Youth Justice Board sessions to writing alumni newsletters, Kristina is grateful to have been given the opportunity to work with such intelligent and willing young people, and will always remember each and every Youth Justice Board member.



# Appendix: Research Design

## TRAINING

Prior to conducting their fieldwork, Youth Justice Board members learned about youth homelessness and its intersections with the criminal justice system. Members also received training in skills such as interviewing, teamwork, and focus group facilitation.

## INTERVIEWS

The Youth Justice Board met with a wide range of New York City stakeholders and community leaders. Members, working in small groups, conducted 27 interviews with 34 participants:

### Advocates for Children

- Arija Linauts, Senior Program Associate, New York State Technical and Education Assistance Center for Homeless Students

### Ali Forney Center

- Bill Torres, Director of Community Resources

### Broome Street Academy

- Dr. Barbara McKeon, Head of School

### Center for Court Innovation

- Ignacio Jaureguilorda, Director of Poverty Justice Solutions
- Tracey Little, Women's Wellness Navigator
- Shernette Pink, Youth Development Coordinator, Queens Youth Justice Center
- Sally Sanchez, Project Director, Queens Youth Justice Center
- Haddijatou Waggeh, Youth Justice Coordinator, Midtown Community Court

### Coalition for Homeless Youth

- Jamie Powlovich, Executive Director



Youth Justice Board members learn about New York City government during their training.

### Covenant House

- Tina Kelly, Writer

### Day One

- Audace Garnett, Training Coordinator

### The Door

- Victor Furtick, Runaway Homeless Youth Supervisor
- Katy Kam, Crisis Coordinator

### The Legal Aid Society

- Nancy Ginsburg, Director, Adolescent Intervention and Diversion Team
- Beth Hofmeister, Staff Attorney, Homeless Rights Project

### National Law Center on Homelessness & Poverty

- Michael Santos, Attorney

### New York City Administration for Children's Services

- Shaquana Green, Community Liaison, Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice
- Denise Niewinski, Deputy Director, Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice

- Lisa Parrish, Senior Advisor, Office of LGBTQ Policy & Practice

#### **New York City Children’s Cabinet**

- Benita Miller, Executive Director
- Chansi Powell, Policy Advisor

#### **New York City Department of Homeless Services**

- Judge Jody Adams, Retired Judge of the Family Court of the State of New York and former Senior Advisor for Children and Families in Shelter to the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Homeless Services

#### **New York City Department of Youth and Community Development**

- Randy Scott, Unit Head, Vulnerable and Special Needs Youth Division, Runaway and Homeless Youth Services

#### **New York City Department of Youth and Family Justice**

- Leslie Britt, Executive Director of Programming, Close to Home Initiative

#### **New York City Department of Education**

- Katherine Marshall-Polite, Director, Students in Temporary Housing

#### **New York City Housing Authority**

- Dan Hafetz, Senior Advisor to the General Counsel, Law Department, Strategic Initiatives & Special Policies
- Sideya Sherman, Executive Vice-President for Community Engagement and Partnerships

#### **New York City Police Department**

- Detective Tanya Duhaney, Community Affairs Division, 113th Precinct

#### **New York County District Attorney’s Office**

- Imogen Carr, Supervisor of Alternatives to Incarceration Programming

#### **New York State Office of Children and Family Services**

- Betty Pierre, Deputy Director of Preventive Services, Children and Family Specialist

#### **Make the Road New York**

- Kendal Nystedt, Immigration Staff Attorney

#### **Office of Council Member Corey D. Johnson**

- Louis Cholden-Brown, Deputy Chief of Staff for Legislation, Planning and Budget
- Matt Green, Deputy Chief of Staff for Community Affairs

#### **Sylvia Rivera Law Project**

- Kyle Rapiñan, Director of Survival and Self Determination



Youth Justice Board members and staff visit New York City Hall for a meeting with the Children’s Cabinet.



### FOCUS GROUPS

The Youth Justice Board designed, recruited for, and ran three focus groups for young people who have personally experienced homelessness. Twenty-five young people 16- to 24-years-old participated.

### SYNTHESIS AND ANALYSIS

After each interview, site visit, and focus group, members identified key information learned. Then, they presented this information to the entire group. Members then discussed how each interview fit into the larger context of homelessness and its intersections with the criminal justice system. As their body of knowledge grew, members reviewed common challenges and recurrent issues and themes. The Board then prioritized areas where they, as young people, could contribute meaningful insights and ideas, eventually developing recommendations to address these issues. Staff at the Center for Court Innovation advised the Board on which ideas were strongest and would be most consistent with their goals. The recommendations presented in this report are the Board's final product for the 2016-2017 year.

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**FOR THE RECORD**

A Program of the Center for Court Innovation

Zoe Ridolfi-Starr, Program Coordinator

**Testimony of the Youth Justice Board  
A program of the Center for Court Innovation  
before  
The New York City Council  
Committees on General Welfare and Youth Services  
regarding  
Proposed Int. Nos. 1700, 1699, 1705, and 1706  
Providing services and shelter for runaway and homeless youth  
September 28, 2017**

Thank you to Chairman Levin; Chairman Eugene; Councilmembers Gibson, Salamanca, and Torres; and members of the Committees for the opportunity to submit this testimony on the importance of providing shelter and services to runaway and homeless youth. We are submitting this testimony on behalf of the Youth Justice Board, a youth leadership and public policy program for teens in New York City.

The Youth Justice Board is a project of the Center for Court Innovation. It was established in 2004 to give young people a voice in policies that affect their lives. Each program cycle, a team of teenagers from across New York City investigates a current justice system or public safety issue, formulates policy recommendations, and works to promote and implement key ideas.

For the past year, our group has been researching the relationship between homelessness and justice system involvement for New York City youth ages 16 – 24. In June 2017, we released a report entitled *Homeless Not Hopeless: A Report on Homeless Youth and the Justice System in New York City*. This report outlined what we learned about youth homelessness and the justice system, and proposed ten policy changes that we believe will help reduce both homelessness and incarceration in New York City. Our goal is to improve the lives of homeless youth by proposing effective policy recommendations to help youth access resources and avoid criminal records.

We believe the issue of homelessness is urgent and it affects many of us and our peers. Some members of our group have experienced homelessness, justice system involvement, or have been part of the foster care system, while others stand in solidarity. Every member of the Board believes that a safer New York City for youth means reducing homelessness and incarceration, and we are excited to see the City Council take up these issues. We also believe that it is important to listen to the voices of youth when making public policy; otherwise, our experiences will not be understood.

During our research process, we looked at the relationship between youth homelessness and the justice system in New York City to identify opportunities to better support homeless youth, minimize justice system involvement, and prevent homelessness in the future.

To do this, we conducted interviews with 34 topic experts and led three focus groups with young people who have had personal experience with homelessness. We then developed ten recommendations to support homeless young people in New York City and limit their interactions with the justice system.

We also want homeless youth to have the opportunity to stay in transitional independent living facilities (“TILs”) for up to 24 months instead of 18 months, and for up to 120 days in crisis shelters. Giving homeless youth these opportunities will help give them more time to plan ahead for their departure. Oftentimes when youth are kicked out of facilities too early, they are more likely to resort to crime in order to survive, and end up at greater risk for incarceration.

The homeless youth we spoke to said the current time limits hurt them. They want more time in shelter programs in order to look for jobs, continue their education, and seek long-term housing. “Being in different youth shelters, they’re really helpful... but the only problem is that it’s so short term, so everything that you want to do you have to do at a fast pace, because after 60 days you’ll have to get out,” said one young person during our focus group. Another told us, “Going from crisis shelter to this one to this one ... in my experience, it’s not set up in a way where you’re built to succeed.”

More time spent in shelters and TILs allows more preparation and stability, and gives youth more time and energy to try and find a job or another shelter if necessary. This would greatly benefit the city as it would decrease the amount of youth without shelter. This decreases the amount of city crime and allows for a more productive community in general. As one of our focus group participants said, “If you’re homeless, you should always have somewhere to go. No matter what, somebody should help you. Don’t matter where, because nobody deserves to sleep outside.”

And lastly, we believe that it would be beneficial to extend the age limit for DYCD shelters and services through 24 years old. Many youth over 18 we spoke to (who have the option to go to DHS once they are discharged from DYCD shelters) expressed anxieties about being discharged from DYCD programs and forced to choose between living on the street or in a DHS shelter. They felt safer and more comfortable in youth shelters than in adult ones. They want to be able to stay in the youth shelters up to the age of 24 instead of being discharged into the adult system. One young person in our focus group talked about their frustration at being discharged from shelters at age 18, saying, “I think that age is one of the most biggest things, because it’s like some people don’t even get into this predicament until they’re 18 or after that.”

We believe that if you extend the age limit, more young people will get help. Also fewer kids will be on the street, and can find a way to take care of themselves and get on their feet. Extending the age limit will give youth more access to food, showers, referrals, a safe place to sleep, and all the necessities to keep them safe. They do not have that now.

Youth homelessness and its relationship to the criminal justice system is a serious and growing issue in New York City. As determined and diverse teens, we hope that our research inspires you to act on these issues. We want our report and our testimony today to call stakeholders and people in power to action. Any emotions evoked by the experiences of homeless youth as well as the information provided by our recommendations will spread awareness and begin further discussions about the issue.

Thank you for reading our testimony today, for caring about homeless youth, and for taking our perspective seriously. Please let us know if there is any way we can support your efforts to protect youth from homelessness and the justice system. We hope you continue to focus on this work and solve the issues we have talked about today – New York City youth are depending on you.

*With questions or comments regarding this testimony or the Youth Justice Board, please contact:*

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# HETRICK-MARTIN INSTITUTE

EMPOWERMENT, EDUCATION & ADVOCACY FOR LGBTQ YOUTH

Hetrick-Martin Institute applauds the city council for commitment to support homeless youth with this new legislative package regarding the following:

**Int. No. 1619 under the jurisdiction of the department of youth and community development.**

**Int. No. 1699: In relation to time frames for runaway and homeless youth shelter services.**

**Int. No. 1700: In relation to shelter for runaway and homeless youth.**

**Int. No. 1705: In relation to runaway and homeless youth entering department of homeless services shelters.**

**Int. No. 1706: In relation to runaway and homeless youth services for homeless young adults.**

This package focused on raising the age for youth shelter access, increasing the length of stay in shelter and ultimately increasing the access homeless youth in NYC have to shelter will strengthen the safety net for LGBTQ identified young people. As the nation's oldest and largest LGBTQ youth program we serve approximately 2,000 LGBTQ youth each year, 98% youth of color, and traveling from over 200 zip codes to receive support and participate in programming at HMI. 20% of these young people between the ages of 13 and 24 are street homeless at the time of intake. Many of these young people tell us they feel safer on the streets than accessing shelter because there are not enough youth specific LGBTQ culturally supportive shelter beds.

If passed, this package of legislation will have a significant and tangible impact on the lives of the homeless LGBTQ youth we work with every day that are forced nightly with making the decision to go to an adult shelter where they don't feel safe, or staying on the streets. DHS and DYCD having a more streamlined connection to services will only serve to improve the quality of care and access to shelter experienced by youth. On a regular basis our case managers and counselors safety plan sleeping on the streets with young people too afraid to return to DHS shelters. Even as we applaud the tremendous achievement that is DHS opening Marsha's House, there is a continued barrier to access those LGBTQ affirming and safe beds because the only point of access is through DHS intake which many youth feel too unsafe doing. To have DHS and DYCD fully develop a streamlined system would eliminate that barrier and allow homeless youth to access the most culturally age appropriate shelter services without being re-traumatized.

Providing youth with more time in youth appropriate shelter will support young people with stabilizing and ultimately with gaining access to and keeping long-term housing. 30 or 60 days (the current amount of time a youth can remain in crisis shelter) is not nearly enough time for a young person to recover from the daily lived trauma that led to their homelessness, or the trauma they experienced living on the streets. Every day we witness the impacts that stable housing has on the lives of youth in our programs. Similarly, youth in Transitional Living Programs who are making great progress in stabilizing their lives need more time. We all know how expensive it is to live in New York City; it's no wonder that young people need more than 18 months to go from homelessness to employed at a level where they are financially ready to live independently. Stopping the cycle of homelessness, bridging the gap from crisis to stability takes time. Every day we witness homeless LGBTQ youth working hard in school in our



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on-site HSE program or gaining workplace skills through our job readiness internships. Their ability to succeed in these programs is often derailed when youth must leave youth shelter or transitional living programs because of arbitrary length of stay deadlines. No homeless young person should be faced with the reality of earning a High School Equivalency (formerly the GED) while living on the streets.

We believe enacting this new legislation is the right thing to do for runaway homeless youth in NYC, and especially given the specific needs of LGBTQ youth. Not only will this new legislation bring NYC into alignment not only with the recently passed extended age for youth shelter in NY State, but also federally with HUD's definition of youth (under 25). We know from our 35+ years of work with LGBTQ youth that these young people have unique needs that cannot be well met within a system designed for adults.

Respectfully Submitted,

Lillian Rivera  
Director of Advocacy & Capacity Building  
Hetrick-Martin Institute

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1706 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 09/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Reed Kreebold

Address: 500 St John Place, Brooklyn, NY

I represent: Hausig Works

Address: 81 Willoughby St. Brooklyn, NY

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JENNIFER STRASHNIK

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: COVENANT HOUSE NY

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Amy Kilfer son

Address: 89-74 162nd Street Jamaica, NY

I represent: Sheltering Arms Children and Family Services

Address: 305 7th Ave N.Y. N.Y.

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1706 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Cole Giannone

Address: 224 West 35th street, New York, NY 10001

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aaron Goodman

Address: Senior Deputy Counsel,

I represent: Dept. of Social Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1706 Res. No. 1706

in favor  in opposition

Date: 09.28.17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JAWANZA JAMES WILLIAMS

Address: 80 4th Ave BROOKLYN, NY 11217

I represent: VOCAL-NY (QUEEROCRACY)

Address: 80 4th Ave BROOKLYN, NY 11217

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jeff Foreman

Address: 30 E. 33rd St, 5th fl, NY 10016

I represent: Care for the Homeless

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1706 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: 09/28/2017

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Ramon Leclerc

Address: 225 E 31st Street

I represent: Queerocracy / New Alternatives

Address: 80 4th Ave Brooklyn, NY 11211

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor     in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Randy Scott

Address: 2 Lafayette

I represent: DyCD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Deputy Commissioner Susan Haskell

Address: 2 Lafayette St

I represent: DyCD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Commissioner Bill Chong

Address: 123 William St

I represent: DyCD

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1706-207 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nadia Swinson

Address: 321 W. 125<sup>th</sup> St NY NY 10027

I represent: The Ali Forney Center

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1706-207 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Alexander Perez

Address: 321 W. 125<sup>th</sup> St NY NY 10027

I represent: self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 17062-27 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Charles WhiteWolf

Address: 710 East 9<sup>th</sup> St. Apt. 3B 10009

I represent: SELF/TONYC

Address: 68 Jay Suite 220 Brooklyn 11201

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Tawaki Komatsu

Address: 802 Fairmount Pl.

I represent: Self

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9-28-17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Sarah Meckler

Address: 121 Avenue of the Americas, 5<sup>th</sup> Fl, NY, NY

I represent: The Door

Address: Same as above

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Catherine Trapani

Address: 446 W 33<sup>rd</sup> St 6<sup>th</sup> Fl NY, NY 10001

I represent: Homeless Services United

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1619, 1699, 1700, 1705, 1706 Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenn Strashnick

Address: (see below)

I represent: Covenant House

Address: 460 W 41<sup>st</sup> St. New York, NY 10036

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Craig Hughes

Address: 40 Rector St 19th Fl

I represent: NYP/SNP/PCYP at Urban Justice Center

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jamie Powlorich

Address: 460 W 41st St - C511 NY, NY 10036

I represent: Coalition for homeless youth

Address: Same

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_  
 in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: ORAYNE Williams

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Bronx Defenders

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms



THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 1100 Res. No. 1105

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: CAROLYN SPRUDWICK

Address: 2 Lafayette St

I represent: SAFE HORIZON

Address: 2 Lafayette St, NY NY

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 09/28/2017

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Elicia Johnson

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: Brooklyn Defender Services

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

[ ]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Dr. Jeremy Kohomban

Address: 2139 Adam Clayton Powell Jr. Blvd

I represent: Children's Village

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. All Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/28/17

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lew Fidler for Brooklyn BP Eric Adams

Address: Borough Hall Brooklyn

I represent: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL  
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. \_\_\_\_\_ Res. No. \_\_\_\_\_

in favor  in opposition

Date: 9/27

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Kate DeZengotita + Gisselle Routhier

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

I represent: The Legal Aid Society + Coalition for the

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Homeless

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms