



**Testimony of Commissioner Gary P. Jenkins  
New York City Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council, Committees on Finance and General Welfare  
NYC Department of Social Services Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget Hearing  
May 20, 2022**

Good morning, I want to thank the Finance and General Welfare Committees and Chair Brannan and Deputy Speaker Ayala for holding today's hearing and giving us the opportunity to testify. We look forward to updating the Committees on the Department of Social Services' Fiscal Year 2023 Executive Budget and our work to support vulnerable New Yorkers.

My name is Gary P. Jenkins and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS), where I oversee the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Joining me today are DSS First Deputy Commissioner Jill Berry, HRA Administrator Lisa Fitzpatrick, DHS Administrator Joslyn Carter, DSS Chief Performance Planning and Financial Management Officer Ellen Levine and DSS Chief of Staff Karen St. Hilaire.

Today, we will update the Committees on the DSS/HRA/DHS FY23 Executive Budget and highlight the many investments, several of which are historic in scope, that the Adams Administration is making to uplift communities across the five boroughs.

I am eager to return to discuss the concrete steps that this Administration is taking in this Executive Budget to fight income-inequality, poverty and homelessness. As I've mentioned before, this work is deeply personal to me: I know firsthand the impact that our agencies' programs have on our clients and families. We are often the safety net of the safety net for many vulnerable New Yorkers, and this budget ensures we have the services needed to support them.

Before we discuss our Executive Budget, I would like to provide a brief overview of the State landscape and its impact on our agencies and clients. While we continue to advocate for the State to pay its fair share for critical resources to support the City in its efforts to reduce homelessness, we were pleased that this year's enacted State budget included much-needed resources for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program, better known as ERAP, and the Landlord Rental Assistance Program, or LRAP. ERAP has been a critical support for New Yorkers at risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability by providing rental and utility arrears assistance, and we strongly supported this timely investment which couldn't come soon enough as the State's evictions moratorium expired.

Moreover, the final State budget also included adjustments to the State FHEPS rent levels up to the FMR, with year over year adjustments to the maximum rents. This initiative ensures that State and City FHEPS rents are aligned and will help more vulnerable New Yorkers with access to critical rental support to avoid housing insecurity or potential homelessness.

Taking a look at the FY23 Executive Budget, the plan includes funding for critical areas in DSS/HRA/DHS, with some highlights such as: adding funding for housing vouchers for homeless and at-risk New Yorkers; additional resources for emergency food programs; and as announced a few weeks ago, an historic investment of funds to expand street outreach programs and low-barrier programs for New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Moreover, this budget will ensure that as we continue to deal with the lingering impacts of the pandemic and that our recovery is equitable and inclusive of all New Yorkers, particularly those who are often forgotten. In this administration we pride ourselves on giving the most vulnerable members of our community a seat at the table.

## **DSS/HRA**

It is important to remind this committee and the public that the Department of Social Services is made up of two agencies – HRA and DHS. During the Preliminary Budget hearing earlier this year I provided this committee with an overview of HRA programs and services. I would like to do so again. Due to the challenges around homelessness, HRA can sometimes be overshadowed by its smaller sibling agency—DHS, despite its nearly \$11 billion budget. The Executive Budget will allow HRA to continue to provide essential services and supports to New Yorkers in need, through programs and services such as:

- Education, training, and job placement services to assist low-income New Yorkers in obtaining stable employment
  - HRA's Career Services offer Cash Assistance clients opportunities to help them increase their job skills and build a career that will lead to success and financial security. HRA's Career Services works closely with clients to find opportunities that match their skills, needs, and career goals, and help them work toward opportunities to grow and build a successful career. Career Services serves more than 70,000 job seekers annually (pre-pandemic).
- Cash Assistance (CA) to meet basic human needs
  - Provides Cash Assistance benefits to families with children and adults without children under the Family Assistance and Safety Net Assistance programs. As of March 2022, there were 413,376 people in approximately 228,000 households receiving Cash Assistance.
- Rental assistance to prevent and reduce homelessness
  - Our rental assistance programs help New Yorkers experiencing homelessness move out of shelter and into stable housing by providing monthly rent supplements. Since 2014, DSS/HRA and DHS have helped more than 189,000 New Yorkers secure housing or remain in their homes using City rental assistance and federally funded vouchers and public housing units.
- Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits

- SNAP (formerly known as "food stamps") provides food assistance for over 1.72 million low-income New Yorkers including families, people who are aging and people with disabilities, as of March 2022. This program helps families and individuals incorporate nutritious foods in their diets.
- Emergency food assistance to food pantries and community kitchens to fight hunger
  - EFAP provides funding to more than 500 soup kitchens and food pantries citywide. In Fiscal Year 2021, EFAP distributed a total of 13,767,104 lbs. of food. The breakdown is as follows: 12,922,338 lbs. of shelf-stable food and 844,716 lbs. of frozen food.
- Adult Protective Services to assist adults with mental and/or physical disabilities
  - The Adult Protective Services Program, or APS), provides services for physically and/or mentally impaired adults. APS works to help at-risk clients live safely in their homes. APS clients can be referred by anyone.
- Access to public health insurance through the Medicaid Assistance Program
  - HRA's Medical Assistance Program helps a segment of vulnerable and qualified New Yorkers enroll in Medicaid public health insurance programs. HRA accepts applications from residents who are age 65 or over, persons of any age who are living with a disability or blindness, persons who are in receipt of Medicare and are not a parent or caretaker relative of minor children, and former foster young adults under age 26. Other New Yorkers can apply for Medicaid and other public health insurance through the New York State Department of Health portal.
- Services and emergency shelter for survivors of domestic violence
  - Survivors of domestic violence may receive temporary housing, emergency shelter, and supportive services for themselves and their children. All programs provide a safe environment as well as counseling, advocacy and referral services.
- Services for New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS
  - HIV/AIDS Services Administration, or HASA, assists individuals with AIDS or HIV illness to live healthier, more independent lives. HASA clients receive ongoing case management and are assigned to a caseworker at one of our HASA centers, located in all 5 boroughs. As of March 2022, the HASA caseload was 32,958.
- Child Support Services (OCSS)
  - HRA's Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) serves custodial and non-custodial parents (both mothers and fathers) and guardians, including young parents, regardless of income or immigration status, lifting tens of thousands of New York City children out of poverty every year.
- Childcare for Cash Assistance employed families and for Cash Assistance participants engaged in work, school or training activities. This is to assist low-income families in achieving self-sufficiency by guaranteeing the childcare subsidies needed to maintain employment or engagement.
- Home care for seniors and individuals with disabilities
  - Home Care programs are Medicaid-funded long-term-care programs designed to help eligible elderly or disabled individuals remain safely at home, rather than in a nursing home. As of March 2022, there were 234,073 total homecare cases, the majority of whose care is managed by New York State Department of Health.
- Home energy assistance

- The Home Energy Assistance Program, also known as HEAP, is a federally funded program that helps low-income homeowners and renters pay for heating-related utility or fuel costs, heating equipment repair or replacement, and cooling equipment and installation, if eligible.
- Legal services to assist New Yorkers facing housing instability
  - Since 2014 through 2021, over 574,000 New Yorkers had received free legal representation or assistance in eviction and other housing-related matters through legal services programs administered by DSS.
- IDNYC to ensure that every New Yorker has access to a safe, secure and trusted form of identification, regardless of immigration status.
  - Managed by DSS in close collaboration with the Mayor’s Office of Immigrant Affairs, IDNYC is the largest and most successful municipal ID program in the nation, with 1.45 million cardholders. IDNYC benefits all city residents, including New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, the formerly incarcerated, and others who may have difficulty obtaining other government-issued photo IDs – and we ask for your help in promoting IDNYC and its many benefits to your constituents.
- Burial assistance which provides financial assistance to help New Yorkers in need meet funeral and burial-related expenses; and
- Fair Fares to provide low-income New Yorkers with assistance for their transportation costs
  - With the Fair Fares NYC discount, participating New York City residents can receive a 50% discount on either subway and eligible bus fares, or Access-A-Ride. There are currently approximately 270,000 individuals enrolled in the program.

Next, I would like to outline the major components of the DSS/HRA Executive budget, which reflect this Administration’s continued commitment to improving our policies, programs, and operations to address income inequality, fight poverty and homelessness, and help New Yorkers recover in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Fiscal Year 2023 Executive budget for HRA/DSS is \$10.9 billion, of which \$8.6 billion are City funds, with 12,945 positions, of which 10,093 are City funded.

The DSS/HRA FY23 budget increased by \$119 million in total funds and \$107 million in City funds between the January and Executive Plans due primarily to the tax levy investments in the emergency food program, City FHEPS rental assistance, supportive housing placement resources as part of the Subway Safety Plan and the Hart Island Burial Operation.

Shifting to some of the major DSS/HRA investments, we have the following:

- Emergency Food: \$30 million in FY23 and FY24 for shelf stable and fresh food purchases and delivery for the Emergency Food Assistance Program, or EFAP, bringing the total budget for EFAP to a record \$54 million;
- Subway Safety Plan: 10 positions and \$5.8 million in funding for supportive housing staff to expedite client placements into housing units;

- Rental Assistance: \$25 million in FY22 and \$118.5 million in FY23 for City FHEPS rental assistance, which includes budget increases related to the FMR;
- HIV/AIDS Services Administration, or HASA, Housing: \$33 million in total funds and \$24 million in City funds for HASA emergency and transitional housing in FY23;
- Hart Island Operations: \$14 million in FY22 and \$11.9 million in FY23 for the Hart Island contract for burial operations and maintenance; and
- Immigrant Affairs: \$3.3 million in FY23 for the Office of Immigrant Affairs to support Haitian and Ukrainian communities in NYC.

## **DSS/DHS**

Now, I would like to transition my testimony to the Department of Homeless Services.

DHS is committed to preventing and addressing homelessness across our city. The mission of DHS is to prevent homelessness whenever possible, address street homelessness, provide safe temporary shelter and connect New Yorkers experiencing homelessness to suitable permanent housing. We carry out this mission with care and compassion for each client and their circumstances. Moreover, our staff and providers employ many innovative strategies to help individuals who are in temporary shelter or are unsheltered to come in off the streets and to successfully transition to permanency.

We also remain committed to meeting our legal and moral mandates to provide temporary emergency shelter at request to all eligible New Yorkers in need. Our staff and providers also help these individuals access a variety of social services, employment opportunities, work supports, public benefits and housing, all to ensure a seamless transition back to independent living and stability.

As we continue our discussion today, it is important to contextualize the environment in which we do this work. In recent years, New York City has seen significant decreases in affordable housing. In the decade between 2005 and 2015, household rents in the city increased by 18.4%, while at the same time incomes failed to keep pace, increasing only by 4.8%. Looking at affordable housing supply, between 1994 and 2012, the city suffered a net loss of about 150,000 rent-stabilized units. As a result, by 2015, the city had insufficient housing for millions of low-income New Yorkers.

These trends, along with an economy that leaves too many living paycheck-to-paycheck, and in situations that include domestic violence, overcrowding, evictions, untreated mental health challenges and inadequate discharge planning from mental health institutions and state correctional facilities, have resulted in homelessness and displacement throughout the City. As these challenges persist, we are steadily working to address the multifaceted drivers of homelessness.

The Fiscal Year 2023 DHS Executive budget is \$2.4 billion, of which \$1.6 billion are City funds, with 2,012 positions, of which 1,991 are City funded. The FY23 budget increased by \$206 million since the Preliminary Plan. The change is primarily due to over \$200 million in tax levy initiatives added in the Executive Plan.

Looking toward new DHS needs, we see the following:

- Mayor Adams recently announced an historic investment of \$171 million for the Subway Safety Plan and Street Solutions, on top of the \$3 million already allocated in the November Plan. This \$171 million includes:
  - \$140 million for Stabilization Beds and Safe Havens;
  - \$19 million for New Drop-in Centers and Medical Services;
  - \$12 million for outreach, which includes 20 positions for homelessness outreach at end-of-line subway stations; client transportation; and client warming buses
- This investment funds the newly announced 1,400 beds, as well as funding for beds brought on during the pandemic that are currently funded with FEMA and will continue operating with City funding in the baseline. This investment is the largest increase in the Street budget and brings the overall Street Solutions budget to an historic level of over \$300 million; and
- \$32.8 million in total funds and \$20.3 million in City funds for Prevailing Wage for contract Shelter Security Staff in FY23.

These investments, coupled with the tireless work and expertise of our DSS/HRA/DHS staff and providers, will help us create a more just City where no New Yorker is left behind. We are leading with care and compassion each day, and we are confident that our budget plan lays a blueprint that uplifts our clients and promotes an equitable recovery for all from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

The budget plan being presented by this Administration will allow us to continue supporting New Yorkers most in need. As I've said previously, our frontline staff are out in our communities every day serving clients and ensuring they have access to the benefits and programs they deserve. Each client that we help – whether it be by connecting them to Cash Assistance, SNAP or a safe place to take shelter – is a success.

## **Pandemic Recovery**

Before we close today, I want to provide a top-level summary of our work to recover from the pandemic. I've said this before and I'll say it again: our city's recovery over the last two years wouldn't be the same without the commitment and expertise of our dedicated staff and providers, many of whom were in the front lines during the pandemic's peak supporting New Yorkers in need. I am truly proud to be their colleague.

HRA took several steps during the pandemic to ensure our clients and New Yorkers in need could access critical programs. For example, pursuant to our aim to increase access to services, we worked with our State colleagues to allow New Yorkers to apply for Cash Assistance online and conduct interviews via phone, instead of needing to visit a center during the pandemic. DSS/HRA was able to stand up this system in a week's time, which was made possible by the successful blueprint our agencies built when pioneering remote SNAP access via Access HRA. Moreover, following the passage of a state law that we advocated for, this remote Cash Assistance application and recertification option is now permanent, giving New Yorkers more access to critical resources.

At DHS, we mobilized all of our efforts and resources to ensure the lives of our clients and staff were safeguarded. At the pandemic's outset, we followed the science and advice of health experts

to protect our sheltered and unsheltered clients, and the data shows that our actions and strategies worked, helping save lives and limiting the spread of the virus. Among these strategies, we de-densified our dormitory locations, and opened isolation spaces for clients who tested positive or were exposed to the virus. These steps, along with our testing, tracing and vaccination efforts, have helped protect the health and safety of our clients.

## **Conclusion**

As we close today, I want to highlight several key takeaways from our presentation:

- The FY23 Executive Budget plan makes critical investments to support children, families and individuals, with key programs like food support, and rental assistance being funded and expanded in this plan;
- This budget makes unprecedented investments, unmatched by any prior Administration, to help New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness come indoors through low-barrier programs and supports; and
- Lastly, we can't do this work alone: homelessness has been a decades-long challenge, and we need every New Yorker to help us shoulder the fair share of the responsibility to help shelter our neighbors experiencing homelessness.

We appreciate the opportunity to present on the Administration's Executive Budget plan and we look forward to an informed discussion. Thank you, and I welcome any questions you may have.