



Department of
Youth & Community
Development

TESTIMONY

BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL

**COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES
OVERSIGHT HEARING ON**

**ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF RUNAWAY AND
HOMELESS YOUTH**

PRESENTED BY

DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SUSAN HASKELL

APRIL 24, 2023

Good afternoon, Chair Stevens, and members of the Youth Services Committee. I am Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner for Youth Services at the Department of Youth and Community Development. I am joined by my colleagues from Runaway and Homeless Youth Services, Tracey Thorne, Director of Strategic Planning and Data Analysis and Samantha Dawkins, Director of Program Management. Our pronouns are she/her.

On behalf of Commissioner Howard, thank you for this opportunity to update the Council about how we address the needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth.

Transformation of Services for Runaway and Homeless Youth

I want to take a moment to recognize the leadership of former Youth Services Chair Lew Fidler, on behalf of runaway and homeless youth. DYCD is grateful to have worked with the City Council over the years, including Chair Stevens and committee members, as well as providers and advocates to build a comprehensive continuum and ecosystem of RHY services.

To name a few of our major accomplishments, in recent years we have more than tripled the number of residential beds, increased the age for residential services to 24, lengthened the maximum stay, and opened new drop-in centers. There are currently eight DYCD-funded centers with at least one 24/7 center operating in all five boroughs. Young people can now access high quality mental health services in drop-in centers and in residences.

Opportunity Starts with a Home

Our system is unparalleled and demonstrates the City as a national leader in fighting youth homelessness and ensuring better outcomes for young people. In recognition of that, in 2021 HUD awarded New York City a \$15 million grant as part of the [Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program \(YHDP\)](#). DYCD is the lead agency for implementing the NYC coordinated community plan, called Opportunity Starts with a Home. Many city Agencies came together to develop and implement this plan, in partnership with youth who have lived expertise with homelessness, service providers and other community stakeholders. This funding supports a wide range of new housing and service interventions to prevent and end youth homelessness. To support the goals of this plan, the City has funded Financial Literacy coaches and Peer Navigators in drop-in centers. These areas were prioritized by members of the Youth Action Board and the Planning Committee during the planning process.

Youth Count 2023

The annual NYC Youth Count ran from Wednesday, January 25, through Friday, January 27, as part of the citywide effort to determine New Yorkers' housing situations on the night of Tuesday, January 24. During that time, RHY partner staff and volunteers asked young people between the ages of 14 and 24 to complete an anonymous survey on the real housing experiences of youth and young adults. The NYC Youth Count was conducted at various times and places, including at participating youth-serving programs, RHY drop-in centers, mobile outreach, virtual survey rooms, and other locations. Additionally, all elected officials and community board members were invited to participate and special training was available to them. We are hosting a feedback meeting this Thursday and we thank the

Committee and the Youth Action Board for their continued partnership to make continuous improvements to ensure every runaway or homeless youth is counted.

Permanent Housing for Young People

With support from the federal government and a pilot program for CityFHEPS, since the fall of 2021, 307 young people from Runaway and Homeless Youth programs were able to move into their own apartment with housing vouchers, with an additional 110 waiting to sign leases. DYCD utilized the federal Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) and CityFHEPS, supported by teams of Housing Navigators and Peer Navigators working out of RHY Drop-In Centers, directly with youth, to help them through the process of identifying and securing a permanent home.

Today's Legislation

I would now like to touch upon the three pieces of legislation being considered today:

Intro 54 would require DYCD to include financial literacy training as part of all youth employment programs and services for RHY. Currently, all DYCD workforce development programs, including the Summer Youth Employment Program, have financial literacy as part of their program curriculum. I would be pleased to facilitate a more detailed review of those services with my colleague, Deputy Commissioner Valerie Mulligan, and her team. In terms of financial literacy for young people in RHY, as my testimony touched upon, we offer a financial coach in each of our eight drop-in centers. Using a tailored financial counseling model to meet the unique needs of youth ages 14 through 24, trained financial coaches meet with young people one-on-one, host clinics, and join drop-in center activities to incorporate and build financial literacy and life skills to meet the needs and goals of youth participants. The goal of the program is to financially empower vulnerable youth, and the program model is being developed in conjunction with the Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP). We look forward to continuing discussions on this bill.

Intro 976 would require the Department of Homeless Services and DYCD to report quarterly on the number of LGBTQ persons who inquire about or seek DHS and DYCD services, as well as the number of beds received for such persons, and the rates and reasons, when given that such beds are refused. Pursuant to Local Law 86, twice per year, we report the data we collect on gender identity, sexual orientation, and other characteristics for youth in RHY residential programs. DYCD could expand this data reporting to include youth who receive services in DYCD-funded drop-in centers in the information we provide in our LL 86 RHY demographic reports. Please reach out to our partners at DHS about the impact of Intro 976 on their work.

Finally, **Intro 977** would require drop-in centers to participate in the streamlined intake process for RHY youth to transition into adult shelters. This bill would expand Local Law 81, which last year saw 61 youth referred through this process. Similarly, we suggest discussing Intro 977 with DHS, as another agency impacted by the bill.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to discuss how we are addressing the needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth and these three bills. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with you, advocates, providers, and youth in the time ahead to continue to improve services for youth. We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.



PUBLIC ADVOCATE FOR THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Jumaane D. Williams

**TESTIMONY OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON YOUTH SERVICES
APRIL 24, 2023**

Good morning,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Stevens, and members of the Committee on Youth Services for holding this hearing today.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been scary and stressful for New Yorkers, especially youth and young adults. Young people have experienced interruptions in schooling, after-school and summer programming, and employment. This has been particularly hard on runaway and homeless youth, many of whom rely on their schools for food. Additionally, the pandemic has compounded New York City's affordable housing crisis, with many unable to pay their rent and congregate shelter residents exposed to COVID-19 infection.

Approximately 7,300 young people in New York City below the age of 25 are experiencing homelessness.¹ This includes youth whose families are experiencing homelessness and those who are homeless for other reasons, such as those who have run away from home to escape abuse, homophobia, or transphobia, or those who have aged out of the foster care system. Runaway and homeless youth are extremely vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation, and often do not complete their education. People living in congregate shelters or on the streets are also at increased risk of exposure to COVID-19. About half of RHY identify as LGBTQ+, and nearly all people under 25 experiencing homelessness are people of color. Lack of education and job experience combined with the rising cost of housing in the city makes it increasingly difficult for these young people to find affordable, stable housing.

Youth and young adults are increasingly turning to the city's Department of Homeless Services-run adult shelters because youth shelters do not have room. Since 2021, the number of youth shelter beds has decreased, while the need has increased with the number of unaccompanied young asylum-seekers arriving in NYC in the last several months. Just last month, Sheltering Arms, a 200-year-old nonprofit serving 17,000 children and families, announced it will be shutting down. Sheltering Arms contracted with DYCD to provide youth homeless shelters, and cited a delay in payments from the city as a primary cause of their decision to close. This came on the heels of the Adams Administration's order to drop-in center

¹ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/cidi/downloads/pdfs/NYC-Youth-Count-Findings-2018.pdf>

providers to prohibit the young people who come in for services from sleeping in their facilities, which has been criticized by providers, advocates, and directly impacted people as inhumane. As NYC is in an unprecedented housing crisis, funding shelter and homeless services needs to be a priority.

Previously, those ages 18 to 25 staying in a shelter run by the Department of Youth and Community Development, were required to check into adult shelters in order to meet the 90-day minimum stay requirement to be eligible to receive housing aid. Adult shelters are crowded and dangerous, especially for LGBTQ youth. Intro 2405-2021, sponsored by former Councilmember Stephen Levin, changed this requirement: the Department of Social Services must consider the time runaway and homeless youth spend in youth shelters as “homelessness” when determining whether that youth is eligible for rental assistance through the city’s Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS) program. This important bill ensures that youth experiencing homelessness are as safe as they can be and are able to receive services designed for youth. However, the Adams Administration is not honoring the requirements of this law for reasons that are unclear, forcing young people into the overcrowded, overburdened, and sometimes dangerous adult shelter system.

The best solution to homelessness is to create affordable, subsidized housing, especially for youth who are more likely to lack the education and job skills necessary to secure employment. In July, the city began a pilot program that made 50 housing vouchers available to anyone receiving services at a city youth shelter or drop-in center, provided through CityFHEPS. Over 600 emergency housing vouchers were added to the total as part of a one-time federal relief package, worth \$1,945 for a one-bedroom or up to \$2,217 for a two-bedroom apartment as part of the Section 8 program. Unfortunately, housing in New York City is more expensive than the assistance the vouchers provide. Only 29 of the 2,791 young people discharged from DYCD shelters moved into their own unsubsidized apartments in fiscal year 2020.² Most youth will also likely require help to navigate the shelter and housing systems. Further, this pilot program will end in June, leaving young adults in youth shelters with no choice but to enter the adult system to access vouchers.

Our young people are the future of our city. As we are on the long road to recovery from COVID-19, it is imperative that we invest in our youth and their wellbeing. I look forward to working with Chair Stevens and the City Council to ensure that no young person is unhoused and without the services they need.

Thank you.

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<https://www.thecity.nyc/housing/2021/7/18/22582437/nyc-homeless-youth-finally-get-rent-help-deblasio-prmise>



Testimony of

The Coalition for Homeless Youth

on

Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth

Int. 0054-2022

Int. 0976-2023

Int. 0977-2023

Submitted to

The New York City Council's Committee on Youth Services

Verbal Testimony Given on April 24, 2023, by:

Jamie Powlovich, Executive Director

Lauren Galloway, Advocacy Coordinator

Gina Michu, Advocacy Fellow

Written Testimony Submitted: April 26, 2023

Introduction

The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) welcomes the opportunity to submit written testimony on Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth to the New York City Council Youth Services Committee. We greatly appreciate the Council's support in highlighting the needs of youth and young adults experiencing homelessness in New York City.

As stated during the verbal testimony of CHY staff on April 24, 2023, we are submitting this written testimony to amplify the needs of the DYCD Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers, and the runaway and homeless youth and young adults that they serve.

Who are Runaway and Homeless Youth?

RHY 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 years¹.

On a single night in 2022, 3,594 unaccompanied and parenting youth under age 25 were counted as experiencing homelessness in the NYC Point in Time (PIT) count.² In NYC Fiscal Year 2022, 3,027 RHY, were served in DYCD RHY residential programs, including 329 minors.³ Another 28,119 RHY received non-residential services at a DYCD RHY drop-in center or through street-outreach⁴. In 2021, DHS reported a total of 4,051 unaccompanied or parenting youth between the ages of 18 and 25 entering either single adult or family shelters,⁵ and the Department of Education (DOE) reported that during the 2019-2020 school year, almost 7,500 unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness attended NYC public schools.⁶

Like all other segments of NYC's homeless population, RHY experience harm that disproportionately impacts their health and creates roadblocks to long-term wellness. This is more recently detailed in "*Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness (OSH)*."⁷ The myriad of harms that confront RHY, include: increased mental health problems and trauma, substance use, exposure to victimization and criminal activity, and unsafe sex practices.⁸ Youth of color and LGBTQ/TGNC youth are also vastly overrepresented in the RHY population⁹.

Youth-Specific Shelters and Services Make a Measurable, Positive Difference

The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) has been designated the county youth bureau for NYC and is responsible for serving RHY under the NYRHYA.¹⁰ While many RHY also seek services within the DHS and HRA continuum of shelters, homeless youth, advocates, and RHY providers agree that the outcomes for many homeless youth improve with increased access to youth-specific shelters and services. This was proved in a groundbreaking white paper was released by the Center for Drug Use and HIV Research at NYU Rory Meyers College of Nursing in with the Coalition for Homeless Youth. 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.¹¹ ***In short, well-funded, high quality RHY programs make a positive impact on a youth's ability to stabilize and successfully***

¹ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EXC/A19-H>

² https://files.hudexchange.info/reports/published/CoC_PopSub_CoC_NY-600-2022_NY_2022.pdf

³ https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dycd/downloads/pdf/FY22_LL86_RHY_Demographics-and-Services_Report-final.pdf

⁴ Ibid

⁵ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf>

⁶ Ibid

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ New York State FY 2018-19 budget included amendments to the NYRHYA that expand the age range for RHY services and youth-centered beds to 25 years old. The amendments took effect January 1, 2018. (SFY 2018-19 Budget, Part M S2006-c/30060c; see https://www.budget.ny.gov/pubs/press/2017/pressRelease17_enactedPassage.html).

¹¹ 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. See page 16.

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 have continued pushing for more shelter beds and services for youth experiencing homelessness.

Legislation

CHY is in full support of the intent of all three pieces of legislation that were heard at the hearing, however, we have outlined some recommended amendments, that will believe will strength the bills, and better support their implementation once passed.

Int. 0054-2022

CHY is in support the intent of Int. 0054-2022¹², which would amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to financial literacy education in department of youth and community development programs, including DYCD-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth Transitional Independent Living (TIL) support programs and Crisis Services Programs.

We thank council for your commitment towards ensuring that youth and young adults have access to independent living resources- including financial literacy. While we fully support the intent of this legislation, we have some concerns about how it will be implemented by DYCD once passed. DYCD recently funded robust financial literacy programming at the RHY Drop-in Centers, as one of the initiatives attached to “*Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City’s Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness (OSH)*,”¹³ but no funding was awarded to RHY TIL and crisis services programs to do the same. We also believe that financial literacy programs often fall short of meeting the actual needs of youth, because they often are under-resourced, and not developed specifically to target the needs of the intended population.

Therefore, we recommend that § 21-414(1)(c) be amended to read that RHY programs “shall provide access to at least two hours of financial literacy education to all program participants.” This would allow the residential programs the option to host on-site programming or refer youth to the financial literacy programming already happening at the drop-in center. We also recommend that language be added to clarify the frequency that these groups must be made available to youth during the annual reporting period.

Int. 0976-2023

CHY is in support of the intent of Int. 0976-2023¹⁴, which would amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to requiring the department of homeless services and the department of youth and community development to report data on the LGBTQ homeless population.

We thank the council for their commitment towards LGTBQ youth and young adults. For LGBTQ youth and young adults experiencing homelessness this legislation will produce cross-systems data that will paint a more accurate picture of the disproportionate impact that homelessness has on LGBTQ youth across homeless system. Having accurate data will make NYC better situated to ensure that we have services to meet their needs and identify gaps and barriers in current systems and services that need to be addressed. However, given that DYCD already reports on certain metrics required in this legislation through Local Law 86 of 2018¹⁵, and that there are vast differences in the intake and certification processes for DYCD and DHS shelters, we recommend the following amendments:

- § 21-329(c)(1): Remove the department of youth and community development from the requirements under Section 1. There is no centralized intake in the DYCD system, and therefore it would be almost impossible to capture accurate numbers of LGBTQ youth that seek services and are turned away from DYCD programs at a system level. Our fear would be that if DYCD is not removed from these reporting requirements, that they would use data

¹² Intro 0054-2022 via the City Council Website <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5465033&GUID=D3F2FA3C-F71D-4A4D-9825-55AF41158A64&Options=&Search=>

¹³ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf>

¹⁴ Intro 0976-2023 via the City Council Website <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6067643&GUID=0A978A4E-65A1-4F57-B67F-9EEED042956A&Options=&Search=>

¹⁵ <https://nyc.legistar1.com/nyc/attachments/b266ec2e-622d-4df1-a7c7-ed2d05272fb2.pdf>

from the Local Law 79 of 2018¹⁶ report to populate the data for this report, which we believe would cause harm since the LL79 numbers are inadequately collected and reported, and therefore we believe are inaccurate.

In addition, specifically regarding Section 1(c), as written we believe would lead to DYCD reporting zero. This is because the New York State Runaway and Homeless Youth Act of 1978¹⁷ (RHYA) does not allow for RHY residential programs to be certified by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to “reserve” or exclusively serve sub-populations of youth, including those that identify as LGBTQ. Although, RHY programs can “specialize” in serving LGBTQ youth, as many in NYC do. Again, we anticipate that if the legislation is not amended, DYCD would report zero for this section, which we believe could be harmful, although it would be true given the legislation language.

Int. 0977-2023

CHY is in full support of Int. 0977-2023¹⁸, as written, which would amend Local Law 81 of 2018¹⁹ to allow DYCD-funded drop-in centers (DIC) to participate in the streamlined intake process for runaway and homeless youth to transition into adult shelters.

Although we do not believe that a young person transitioning from one homeless setting to another is a positive outcome, we know that it is unfortunately a reality that many young people face, especially given the lack of access to housing options. Also, given the aforementioned “no sleep” directive that is in place for the 24hr DICs, once passed, this legislation will allow youth in the impacted programs to bypass DHS intake and be placed directly into a DHS shelter, which will minimize the impact that the directive will have on some youth. We would also like to note, that DHS has already committed to extending this policy via Action Step 6.1.1 in “*Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City’s Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness (OSH)*.”²⁰

Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth

Under the previous Administration the City did put forth more resources to increase the number of beds in the DYCD system, that are available to youth experiencing homelessness. This was complimented by City Council passing a system-changing package of bills over four years ago. More recently, many new investments, including both funded projects and policy commitments have been made through “*Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City’s Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness (OSH)*,”²¹ but overall, there is still room to go.

CHY understands the financial strain that NYC is facing, and we are grateful that funding for RHY programs are largely being kept whole by a Legal Aid Society class action settlement.²² However, despite baselined funding being maintained, and the new investments, there continues to be vital supports and services that remain underfunded or not funded at all, as well as other systems gaps that need to be addressed.

DYCD 24-hr Drop-in Center Directive

Since their inception, the 24-hour Drop-in Centers (DICs) have played a crucial role in the NYC RHY continuum, and providers have gone above and beyond to create safe, supportive spaces for some of the most vulnerable youth experiencing homelessness, many of whom do not have access to the more traditional crisis and TIL settings for a variety of reasons. They are a service that youth rely on, nightly, and the numbers of

¹⁶ <https://nyc.legistar1.com/nyc/attachments/501c5c80-6b58-4f74-aaad-9ff5c6e6f3b5.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/laws/EXC/A19-H>

¹⁸ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=6067642&GUID=FA139A42-5A29-415F-9532-FOECC6E81A20&Options=&Search=>

¹⁹ <https://nyc.legistar1.com/nyc/attachments/bb910a7c-9955-46ec-b159-01d95155af38.pdf>

²⁰ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf> (page 19)

²¹ Ibid

²² On March 2, 2020, DYCD and The Legal Aid Society finalized a settlement in the class action matter *C.W. v. The City of New York*. This settlement includes provisions that protect current funding levels of DYCD-funded shelter and services for New York City’s RHY.

youth that they serve every year, speaks to not only the success of the 24hr DIC model, but the program's success in how they operate their services, even minus adequate funding by DYCD to do so.

Unfortunately, on January 13, 2023, DYCD issued a "no-sleeping" directive²³ to the 24hr RHY DICs. Over the past three months this directive has impacted RHY, providers report low utilization of overnight services, and youth who previously sought safe refuge in the programs overnight report that they no longer see them as viable options during overnight hours since they can no longer use them to get the rest that they need.

CHY maintains that this directive is not only inhuman, but that it was unjustified. Despite DYCD testifying at the March 22, 2023, Youth Services Preliminary Budget Hearing²⁴ that they have met with the 24hr DIC providers, advocates, and youth more than a dozen times. To the best of our knowledge, this is untrue. CHY knows for certain that DYCD has only held one meeting with all of the impacted providers, on February 13th, 2023. One meeting with the NYC Youth Action Board (YAB) on February 15th, 2023, and they have never met with CHY regarding the directive. In addition, they have not responded to any of correspondences sent to them by CHY on behalf of the providers regarding the directive, including our initial letter sent on February 8, 2023, which is attached. We are unaware of any other meetings that have been scheduled with young people other than those attached to the YAB. CHY echoes the call by City Council and other City and State elected officials, to rescind this directive and respond to providers' request for guidance to ensure that youth are able to rest. We thank the Speaker and Chair as well as other members of the council for their support in righting this wrong.

Access to CityFHEPS Vouchers

On November 23, 2021, council passed two groundbreaking pieces of legislation, intros 2405-A²⁵ and 148-B²⁶. In April 2022, Local Laws 170 and 157 went into effect making youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded RHY programs as well as youth transitioning out of ACS care eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having to first enter DHS shelters. For runaway and homeless youth specifically, this was celebrated as a significant victory by the council and the community.

Unfortunately, DSS/DHS is not moving forward with what CHY believes is required under the laws -- meaning that DYCD-RHY and ACS youth would get access to CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter DHS shelter, and that they would be awarded the same HRA-administered (funded) vouchers that individuals in the DHS and HRA shelters get. DSS/DHS is instead going to continue to force young people into the DHS shelter system before they can access vouchers -- even if they are otherwise eligible. More specifically their interpretation is that:

1. The legislation allows for time in DYCD-RHY programs or ACS to count towards the 90-day requirement, but that the youth would have to still enter DHS shelter to be awarded a voucher. This is the exact opposite of the intent of the legislation when we fought for it to be passed. Also, if true, it would mean that all the legislation would be doing, at least for RHY, would be to solidify a process already happening through an MOU²⁷.
2. That the phrase "Subject to appropriation..." in the laws means that in order for RHY or ACS youth to access vouchers directly, ACS/DYCD would need to advocate for funding with OMB to cover the cost of administering vouchers to their respective populations. During the negotiation process with the admin prior to the bills aging, the admin insisted on including this language, despite concerns being raised that what is now happening, would happen. At that time, we were assured by the admin that it was boilerplate language that was included on many pieces of legislation implicating entitlement

²³ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DHLu9Ww-Q2AZipx1dx9BD1TVfQq0vqZD/view?usp=sharing>

²⁴ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/MeetingDetail.aspx?ID=1085120&GUID=D62DA19B-DAA0-493C-BB38-03A6480332D1&Options=info&Search=>

²⁵ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5146237&GUID=1A2F9094-0130-46E0-9C4A-D9A5AC55F8A5&Options=ID>

²⁶ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3331970&GUID=FFD262A3-0EF3-4E53-819A-4FD46EECF43&Options=&Search=>

²⁷ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/20785760-dhs-hra-dycd-cityfheps-mou>

programs, and that it DID NOT indicate their intent to not fully implement the provisions of the legislation.

Let us be clear. Youth in the RHY system are homeless. PERIOD. And by the City requiring them to move from one shelter system to another to access a way out of homelessness is not only cruel, but it also makes no sense. At a time when the DHS shelter census is at an all-time high, why is the administration forcing young people into the DHS system unnecessarily?

DSS's interpretation of the laws is not only a slap in the face to the youth, programs and advocates that fought for these bills to be passed, but it is also another clear example of how in New York City homelessness = DHS, when in fact homelessness is a traumatic experience that far too many people endure in this city, and we believe resources should be based solely on that lived experience and not the system that you enter.

Youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) programs as well as youth transitioning out of the Administration for Children Services (ACS) care must be made categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having first to enter Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system. This is a critical investment that will support the Administration's initiatives to eradicate homelessness, to prevent people from entering DHS shelters unnecessarily and to make access to vouchers easier, and we look forward to continuing to work with Council to address this issue and have attached a unanswered letter that was sent on behalf of 42 organization to the Mayor on February 13th, 2023, regarding this matter.

Maintain Vital Positions in the RHY System

The current sixteen Housing Specialists at the DYCD-funded drop-in centers are temporarily funded through federal Emergency Housing Voucher funding which is set to expire at the end of the fiscal year (June 2023), despite CHY confirming with the Administration that DYCD is the only agency whose positions were not extended. Since housing navigators were funded in the DYCD system in FY21, available data shows that there has been a 350% increase in youth exiting homelessness into their own apartments, since their inception. These are amazing outcomes for RHY, and maintaining these positions will ensure RHY continue to successfully transition to their own apartments and support the Administration's goal to address the homelessness crisis. Similarly, in response to the priorities set forth in *Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness*²⁸, funding was allocated for sixteen full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers in FY23. These critical positions provide peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults. If this funding is not maintained youth with lived experience will lose their jobs, and countless other youth will miss out on the benefit or peer-on-peer support.

We thank the City Council for including funding for these vital positions in their FY24 Budget Response and urge the Administration to maintain the funding.

More Beds for Homeless Young Adults

There are currently only 60-funded young adult beds in the DYCD RHY system for youth ages 21-24 yo, however only 45 have been online this fiscal year, and even when all 60 are operational they do not come close to meeting the need of young adults in need. In order to ensure that older youth can benefit from the safety and security of youth specific shelter supports, CHY echo's council's call for funding for at least be 40 additional young adult beds in the DYCD RHY system.

Addressing the Needs of Migrant Youth & Young Adults

Like many nonprofits in other sectors, RHY service providers, the majority of whom are funded by DYCD, have been seeing an influx of migrant youth arriving to their programs seeking shelter, housing and in need of services and support. CHY and its member providers are confused and concerned by the lack of system coordination the city has implemented to support the needs of migrant youth, as well as the RHY providers that are serving them.

²⁸ <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2022/NYC-Community-Plan-DIGITAL.pdf>

This concern was only elevated, when the Administration neglected to even mention the needs (or existence) of unaccompanied migrant minors and youth in their recently released plan “*The Road Forward: A Blueprint to Address New York City’s Response to the Asylum Seeker Crisis*.”²⁹ As well as when CHY visited the Asylum Seeker Navigation Center in Midtown, to inquire – in person, as what policies were in place for when unaccompanied minors and youth presented, including any information that was being shared with about the RHY system, and staff their reported that there was no policy, nor was information being shared.

Providers already report hundreds of migrant youths accessing services in the RHY system, and despite working tirelessly to meet the needs of this growing population of young people, without additional funding or city support, some RHY providers have already been faced with having to implement long waitlists and having to turn youth away due to lack of capacity to serve them. Although this level of capacity strain is currently isolated at a number of programs, the entire sector is concerned that as the number of migrant youths presenting at their programs continues to grow, they will also be faced with having to turn youth away (both migrant and not), due to their lack of capacity to serve them.

In the absence of city coordination and guidance, CHY has been hosting regular convenings with RHY providers where they can support and learn from each other. However, the sole burden of coordination of this magnitude cannot be placed on the programs. It is time for the city to step-up and support.

The city must acknowledge and support the needs of the RHY-system now, before this becomes a system-wide crisis, by implementing the following supports and services:

- Policies that support coordination between the DYCD and the Mayor’s Office of Immigration Affairs (MOIA) and Health and Hospitals (H&H)
- Policies that support coordination between DYCD and ACS regarding the needs of unaccompanied minors
- Access to 24hr translation services
- Transportation support for family reunification, when applicable
- Youth-specific legal services
- Access to permanent housing
- Pathways to employment and income access

We also call on council to echo CHY’s support of the New York State’s Access to Representation Act³⁰, which will support migrant youth with legal services, and well as our objection to Federal policies, that are harmful to asylum seekers at the US/Mexico border, such as Title 42³¹.

We look forward to providing more detailed testimony regarding the needs of unaccompanied migrant minors and youth, before the City Council Committees on Immigration and Governmental Operation at the upcoming hearing on Meeting the Needs of Asylum Seekers in New York City. We have also attached our most recent (unanswered) letter to DYCD regarding this matter.

For questions please contact:

Jamie Powlovich

Coalition for Homeless Youth, jamie@nychy.org, (347) 772-2352

The Coalition for Homeless Youth

Founded in 1978 as the Empire State Coalition of Youth and Family Services, The Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) is a consortium of 65 agencies whose mission is, as a membership organization, to use its collective voice to promote the safety, health, and future of runaway, homeless and street involved youth through advocacy, authentic collaboration with youth and young adults (YYA) with lived expertise and training and technical assistance.

²⁹ <https://www.nyc.gov/assets/home/downloads/pdf/press-releases/2023/asylum-seeker-blueprint.pdf>

³⁰ <https://www.nysenate.gov/legislation/bills/2021/S81>

³¹ <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-42>

CHY is primarily an advocacy organization, leveraging the expertise and experience of its membership as well as YYA with the lived experience of homelessness to shape the landscape for runaway and homeless youth across New York State. This is achieved by increasing public awareness, coalition building, policy work and public advocacy campaigns for pertinent legislation and funding. Notably, in 2015, CHY was instrumental in the advocacy efforts that resulted in the doubling of the State budget for runaway and homeless youth services. CHY's advocacy also contributed to the development of NYS statutory and regulatory changes that became effective in 2018, permitting localities across the State to extend length of stay and increase age of youth served by RHY programs in their communities. Most recently, we passed state legislation this session that will grant decisionally capable runaway and homeless minors the ability to consent to their own health care, including gender-affirming care. As well as NYC legislation that we maintain gives both homeless youth and youth aging out of foster care access to city-sponsored housing vouchers.

An additional area of focus for CHY is the strengthening of service delivery for runaway and homeless youth, primarily through the provision of specialized trainings and technical support. Until 2019, CHY held the state contract to provide annual web-based trainings, on diverse topic areas, to providers across the state, reaching hundreds of professionals working with homeless and runaway youth. Since 2019, CHY has continued to provide training and technical assistance on a smaller scale due to funding restrictions; however, resuming this service remains a top priority for our membership.

Lastly, and most importantly, as a coalition and voice for a community that is often overlooked, underrepresented and under-resourced, CHY prides itself on ensuring that the majority of our staff have the lived experience of youth homelessness. Our commitment to giving power to those with lived experience is also prioritized through our support of the New York City Youth Action Board (YAB), as well as our annual Youth Advocacy Fellowship Program and new Homeless Youth Peer Navigation Pilot. These initiatives not only expand the way that CHY is authentically collaborating with YYA who have the lived experience of homelessness, but it also awards us the ability to work together with YYA, to give them the tools and supports needed so that they can effectively create change.



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February 8, 2023

Keith Howard, Commissioner
Department of Youth and Community Development
Via Email Transmission

Re: DYCD 24hr Drop-in Center Directive

Dear Commissioner Howard,

This letter is being sent by the Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY) on behalf of the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) contracted 24-hour Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) Drop-in Center providers, in response to the directive that was issued by DYCD on Friday, January 13th, 2023. This is also a follow-up to the email correspondence that CHY sent to you on January 13th, with a request by the providers for a meeting, which was declined by DYCD. Both are attached. We kindly ask that you respond to the providers request for a meeting to address their collective concerns outlined in this letter, as soon as possible.

As stated in our initial emailed response to the directive, the providers continue to lack clarity around what is being asked of them, and justification as to what prompted this directive. DYCD has yet to offer any contractual basis for issuing this directive to providers, despite them informing providers that they are in violation of their contracts if they do not comply. Furthermore, the fact that this directive was issued without advance consultation with providers, after years of them requesting more clear policies and guidance to inform their programming, does not align with their desire to work in collaboration with DYCD to address the needs of the youth they are contracted to serve.

Since their inception, the 24-hour Drop-in Centers (DICs) have played a crucial role in the NYC RHY continuum, and providers have gone above and beyond to create safe, supportive spaces for some of the most vulnerable youth experiencing homelessness, many of whom do not have access to the more traditional crisis and TIL settings for a variety of reasons. They are a service that youth rely on, nightly, and the numbers of youth that they serve every year, speaks to not only the success of the 24hr DIC model, but the program's success in how they operate their services, even minus adequate funding by DYCD to do so.

Below we have outlined the collective concerns and requests regarding this directive, and again, are requesting a meeting with DYCD to discuss this matter.

Directive Action: Providers are required to discontinue the practice of allowing youth and young adults to sleep overnight

The providers understand that youth and young adults are not permitted to sleep in their DIC programs, since they are not certified by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) to operate residential services. However, one of the vital



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services that the DICs offer is providing youth a safe place to rest. Ample research shows that sleep deprivation is detrimental to humans emotional and physical health. For many of the youth, the short periods of rest that they get in the DICs is all that they have. In addition, there is nowhere in the DYCD DIC RFP, contract language or in the DYCD *Policy on Program Operations for RHY 24-Hour Drop-in Center*, that states that programs are not permitted to allow youth to rest. To the contrary, when DYCD asked the programs to expand their services to operate 24 hours, they were told that a part of their overnight programming needed to be to allow for youth to rest in a safe place, as opposed to on the streets or in other unsafe situations.

Provider Follow-up

- DYCD needs to update their *Policy on Program Operations for RHY 24-Hour Drop-in Center* and needs to solicit comments from the providers before it is finalized. At minimum the updated policy must:
 - Explicitly state that youth are permitted to rest in the programs.
 - Detail the physical structure, staffing and programming requirements for the DICs.
 - These cannot include things that are not already contractually required
 - Detail any activities that are not permitted at the DICs as outlined in the contracts.
 - For any activity that is not permitted based on relevant State or City, statute, regulation or other government policy or guidance must be directly cited in the document.
- DYCD needs to create a DIC-specific monitoring tool, so that providers are clear on what they will be evaluated based on, and so that DYCD Program Managers are only evaluating DIC programs based on DIC-specific metrics.

Directive Action: *Remove cots or furniture designed for sleeping*

As stated above, when the current 24-hour DIC programs were expanded to operate 24 hours, they were instructed by DYCD staff to ensure that they not only create a safe space that allowed for youth to rest during overnight hours, but they were specifically asked to purchase furniture to serve as “resting pods,” leading them all to allocate funding to execute these purchases. To ask them to remove this furniture now, not only has fiscal implications, since the initial funds spent could have been utilized for other programming related expenses, but it is not in the best interest of meeting the needs of the youth that enter their programs. As per the DYCD *Policy on Program Operations for RHY 24-Hour Drop-in Center*, one of the service expectations is to “Ensure a safe and welcoming environment for all youth.” Removing furniture that supports safe resting, goes against this expectation. Youth being forced to rest on chairs and other traditional office furniture is neither safe nor welcoming.

Provider Follow-up

- DYCD needs to allow programs to continue to offer youth the existing furniture that was purchased by the programs to rest on. None of the programs have resting furniture that mirrors the stand-alone beds that are used in residential programs.

Directive Action: *DYCD expects providers to make referrals to DYCD-funded Crisis Services programs, Transition to Independent Living programs, DHS-operated shelters and other available housing options... Youth and young adults should not expect to use the Drop-In Centers as a substitute for one of the other aforementioned residential services,*



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including those that are regulated by New York State

The providers agree that all youth that enter their programs that need placement in a shelter, should be referred into a bed as soon as possible. However, there continue to be barriers to executing the placement of some youth into shelter beds in a timely manner. These long-standing barriers are the primary reason why some youth are left with no choice but to utilize overnight DIC services for extended periods of time. Although some improvements have been made by DYCD to support the immediate placement of youth into shelter beds, there continue to be barriers that DYCD must address.

Provider Follow-up

- The contract amounts for the 24-hr DICs have never covered the true cost of operating the programs 24 hours, nor does the funding for the 24-hr DICs reflect two-times the funding awarded to the non-24hr DICs. The lack of adequate funding limits the programming that can be provided during overnight hours, including appropriate staffing to support the level of case management assessments that would be needed to refer every youth in need of a shelter placement around the clock, if all the other barriers outlined were addressed.
 - DYCD needs to increase the 24-hr DIC funding for FY24 by 60%. This increase will ensure that providers have adequate funding to support around-the-clock case management services and programming.
- Many of the DYCD-funded Crisis and TIL programs do not conduct intakes during overnight hours and at times, over the weekend. This makes it hard to expedite the placement of eligible youth presenting at the 24-hr programs outside of traditional business hours.
 - DYCD needs to work with their contracted crisis and TIL providers to identify what funding and other supports they need to be able to expand their current capacity to process referrals and intake youth into their programs and address those needs.
- Youth that are more frequently utilizing 24-hr DICs for longer periods of time, are homeless young adults (ages 21-24), as well as homeless youth (ages 16-20) who are not able to access available beds in the DYCD system due to previous incidents at programs that prevent them from being able to return. Many of these incidents are directly related to their mental health.
 - DYCD needs to increase the number of both Crisis and TIL beds for young adults 21-24yo. Since opening 60 beds for young adults, they have remained consistently at capacity, which demonstrates the overwhelming need for beds for young adults to be expanded.
 - DYCD needs to fund at least two 10-bed programs for youth with more significant mental health needs. These beds must be funded at a rate that will support on-site clinical services, lower youth to staff ratios and housing specialists that will expedite the placement of youth into appropriate long-term housing, such as permanent supportive housing.
 - Many youth continue to not feel safe entering the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) intake shelters, for many of them these feelings are based on past negative experiences that impact their willingness to return. Although the DYCD to DHS Referral Policy (DHS-PB-2017-05) has somewhat addressed this barrier by allowing youth to bypass the DHS intake shelters, barriers remain for this process to be successful in securing beds in a timely manner.
 - DYCD needs to ensure that the Department of Social Services (DSS) DYCD to DHS Referral Policy (DHS-PB-2017-05), is amended to include referrals from DYCD DICs.



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- DYCD needs to ensure that DSS is complying with Local Law 81 of 2018 and is not limiting referrals to placement in DHS youth-specific shelters if youth consent to being placed in a non-youth specific DHS program.

We look forward to meeting with you in the near future to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,

Jamie Powlovich (She/Her)
Executive Director
Coalition for Homeless Youth



February 13, 2023

Honorable Mayor Eric Adams
City Hall
New York, New York 10007

Dear Mayor Adams:

We the undersigned are writing to express concern at the City's handling of the [groundbreaking legislation that was enacted in 2021](#) that would finally make youth experiencing homelessness in the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) funded Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) programs as well as youth transitioning out of the Administration for Children Services (ACS) care eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having first to enter Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter.

It is our understanding that ACS's and DYCD's interpretation of the law is consistent with the law - meaning that DYCD-RHY and ACS youth would get access to CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter DHS shelter, and that they would be awarded the same Department of Social Services (DSS) / Human Resources Administration (HRA) administered (funded) vouchers that individuals have access to from DHS shelter. Unfortunately, DSS/DHS's interpretation of the laws is different. The resulting interagency disagreement was brought to the City Law Department, which issued guidance that essentially ignores the legislative intent that led to the enactment of the laws.

As you know, New York City is in the midst of a homelessness crisis that is not limited to those in the DHS shelter system. Every year there are [thousands of youth and young adults](#) who find shelter and support in the DYCD RHY System, and around [40% reported having been in the child welfare system](#) at one point in their lives. Unfortunately, lack of access to permanent housing resources has led to almost [50% of youth being discharged from DYCD RHY shelters back into another homeless situation](#). It is clear that to prevent young people from entering the DHS system, thus increasing their likelihood of experiencing prolonged homelessness, they must be given a way out - this must include having access to CityFHEPS vouchers while still in the DYCD or ACS systems.

In light of your Administration's important initiatives to eradicate homelessness, to prevent people from entering DHS shelters unnecessarily and to make access to vouchers easier, it is unconscionable that DSS would force youth in the DYCD RHY system and those transitioning from foster care to enter DHS shelter before they can get access to CityFHEPS vouchers.

We urge you to require that DSS uphold [Local Laws 170](#) and [157](#) of 2022 as the City Council intended and the community supported, and grant youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded RHY



programs as well as youth transitioning out of ACS care, who are otherwise eligible, access to HRA-funded CityFHEPS vouchers without forcing them to enter DHS shelter.

Sincerely,

Coalition for Homeless Youth
Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies
(COFCCA)
The Ali Forney Center
Ballroom We Care Inc.
Callen-Lorde Community Health Center
Cardinal McCloskey Community Services
Center for Fair Futures
Children's Defense Fund - New York
Children's Aid
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
City Relief
Cortland LGBTQ Center
Covenant House New York
The Door
Fair Futures Youth Advisory Board
Fostering Youth Success Alliance
Girls Educational and Mentoring Services
Good Shepherd Services
Graham Windham
Hetrick-Martin Institute
Homeless Services United

Housing Works, Inc
Lawyers for Children
The Legal Aid Society
Mobilization for Justice
Neighbors Together
New Destiny Housing
New York City Fund to End Youth & Family
Homelessness
New York City Youth Action Board
New York Legal Assistance Group
Open Hearts Initiative
The Pinkerton Foundation
Point Source Youth
Rising Ground, Inc
Safe Horizon
Safety Net Activists at the Urban Justice Center
Safety Net Project at the Urban Justice Center
SCO Family of Services
Sheltering Arms
Supportive Housing Network of NY
VOCAL-NY
Youth Represent

CC:

Sheena Wright, First Deputy Mayor of the City of New York
Gary Jenkins, Commissioner of the Department of Social Services
Jess Dannhauser, Commissioner of the Administration for Children's Services
Keith Howard, Commissioner of the Department of Youth and Community Development
The Honorable Adrienne Adams, Speaker of the New York City Council
The Honorable Diana Ayala, Chair of the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
The Honorable Althea Stevens, Chair of the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Jumaane Williams, Public Advocate of the City of New York
Jessica Katz, Chief Housing Officer



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January 30, 2023

Keith Howard, Commissioner
Department of Youth and Community Development
Via Email Transmission

Re: Follow-up to DYCD's 12/23/22 Response Re: Supporting the Needs of Migrant Youth and Young Adults

Dear Commissioner Keith Howard,

Thank you for responding to our letter regarding supporting the needs of migrant youth and young adults. This letter is in response to the letter you sent on December 23rd, 2022, which outlined the Department of Youth and Community Developments (DYCD) work thus far to meet the needs of migrant youth and young adults outlined in our initial letter sent November 21st, 2022. On behalf of the NYC-based members of the Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY), we would like to thank you for the updates and information that you provided; however, we maintain DYCD has still not satisfied our concerns, and that there continues to be a lack of satisfactory coordination and guidance by DYCD in response to our initial recommendations.

Without implementing the necessary changes needed to support migrant youth and young adults coming into the city, and more specifically those seeking services and support in the DYCD Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) system, we believe the needs of both migrant young people and the providers, will continue to worsen, and grow. Below we are highlighting our recommendations further to get a clear understanding of what the city is currently doing for migrant's support and needs.

We would appreciate the city addressing the following questions and realities to further understand how our recommendations will be addressed.

Translation Services

- DYCD's Response

As the city welcomes future New Yorkers from every corner of the globe, it is more important than ever that DYCD and our sister agencies reach the communities we serve in the languages that they speak or write. DYCD's Language Line contract offers translation services to the public who are reaching out with inquiries about available city services. From a parent who requests a Spanish-language application to providers requiring translation services for their participants, Community Connect is available at 1-800-246-4646. DYCD is also exploring additional tools to help meet the needs of the population and our community partners.

- Follow-up Questions/Concerns

Providers maintain that they do not have streamlined access to Language Line.

- How can providers access translation services through Language Line?
- DYCD needs to issue guidance to their RHY providers outlining step by step instructions on access and use of translation services through Language Line.

Transportation

- DYCD's Response

RHY partners are currently accessing the "Home Free Program" offered by Greyhound, in conjunction with the National Runaway Safeline. This was shared with DYCD-funded providers during the October meeting, to remind them that this resource is available for their young people. DYCD is also looking into whether additional resources, similar to Project Reconnect, can enhance transportation options, and we look forward to sharing



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more information.

- Follow-up Questions/Concerns

During CHY's ongoing communication with DYCD staff about the migrant crisis, we have made it clear that although the "Home Free Program," which is administered by our partners at the National Runaway Safeline, continues to be a resource for some young people (both migrant and not), that due to the eligibility requirements for the program, it is unable to meet the needs of many youth, specifically migrant young people. More specifically, the Home Free Program can only be used one time and by people who have legal guardians. Therefore, youth and young adults under the age of 18 cannot access the Home Free Program if they are not being transported to a place with a legal guardian, which leaves out most migrant youth and young adults, who are over 18yo and/or in the country unaccompanied.

- Has DYCD created a simple process for DYCD programs to utilize the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) Project Reconnect program to support youth that want to reunify with family members outside of the city, who are not eligible for the Home Free Program?
- Has DYCD created a simple process for RHY programs to utilize the transportation resources available through the Humanitarian Emergency Response and Relief Centers (HERRC) to reunify recently arrived migrant youth with family members outside of the city?

Legal Supports

- DYCD's Response

Although the City has increased funding over the past few years, the influx of migrants this year has increased demand for legal services. To help RHY access available services, DYCD partnered with the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to help eligible migrants make appointments at the City's Navigation Center, connecting them to health and mental health care, school enrollment, immigration legal services, and IDNYC enrollment. Our team is in regular communication with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA), to ensure that runaway and homeless youth have the most recent information about what is available. DYCD will continue to explore additional resources.

Additionally, DYCD hosted a presentation for our staff by David Miranda of Covenant House New York about RHY legal services, to bring us up to date on the challenges faced by migrants, and how we can best support our partners. We continue to explore other opportunities for staff to learn about the legal hurdles confronting asylum seekers.

- Follow-up Questions/Concerns

This remains an urgent need. Providers report that no legal service appointments have been able to be obtained at the City's Navigation Centers, therefore we feel that no adequate solution or support has been offered by DYCD.

- Although we appreciate DYCD scheduling for Covenant House staff to facilitate training about RHY legal services, this training did not meet the need outlined in our initial letter. Therefore, our recommendations stand:
 - DYCD and the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs (MOIA) need to share available legal resources with RHY providers. This must include resources that providers can refer migrant youth to that have immediate (within one month) availability to support.
 - DYCD needs to coordinate with a legal assistance agency that specializes in doing immigration law with youth to conduct training for the RHY community. This training should provide an overview of the various application processes and eligibility criteria. CHY is happy to supply a list of training facilitators that providers feel would be most appropriate to conduct this training.



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- DYCD and MOIA need to make immediate funding available to expand and support the on-site legal services at RHY programs.

System Coordination

- DYCD's Response

DYCD and the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) are in regular communication to coordinate placement and services for any minors that present in DYCD-funded RHY programs, including unaccompanied migrant youth. Providers rely on our support, and we appreciate immediate outreach to a Program Manager or either of the RHY Program Directors, on behalf of any young person who needs help.

At this time, our goal is to ensure that there is support for migrant youth at the eight DYCD-funded Drop-In Centers, acknowledging that so far this year, Manhattan has experienced the highest volume of contact. Rather than identify a single point of connection, there will be uniform access to resources at any site, including mental health services, clothing, hygiene products, and other basic needs.

- Follow-up Questions/Concerns

- Regarding unaccompanied migrant minors:
 - As per DYCD staff, ACS is sharing sensitive information regarding certain unaccompanied youth with ICE. This is not only extremely concerning, but we feel is also a violation of Executive Order 41.
 - DYCD needs to author a policy that outlines their coordination with ACS, that includes what information will be shared with Federal agencies and why and make it available to providers.
- Because DYCD has elected not to partner with H&H to work with HERRC sites to provide a streamline of supportive services offered, the onus is falling on the providers, which is unacceptable. Without having clear processes in place, it is impossible to ensure consistent care and service access for migrant youth arriving from the border.
- Can you please expand on how DYCD is providing uniform connection to the 8 DYCD Drop-in Centers?
- Providers report a lack of communication from DYCD regarding HERRC resources, services and policies, and no knowledge of what information the HERRCs are sharing. Considering this information, how is DYCD supporting uniform access to the DYCD RHY Drop-in Centers?

Emergency Shelter

- DYCD Response

Thank you for expressing the needs for additional housing models to support youth with mental health challenges. DYCD has initiated conversations with stakeholders, including DSS and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), to understand residential program models to serve young adults with mental illness challenges. We plan to connect with shelter providers, health care experts, and youth with lived experiences to hear about their perspectives on what makes a high-quality model.

- Follow-up Questions/Concerns

- Why is a DYCD shelter that specializes in serving youth with significant mental health needs not being created?
- What number of shelter beds are being reported for migrant youth?
- How are migrant youth at the HERRC, Port Authority and DHS receiving information on how to access DYCD RHY shelter beds?
- What is the DYCD process for when the RHY system is at capacity, and migrant youth, including minors, present needing placement?



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Housing Access

- DYCD's Response

We appreciate your advocacy for additional permanent housing resources to support young adults. We have had tremendous results from our access to EHV and CityFHEPS vouchers for RHY and will continue to seek opportunities for homeless youth to secure housing. DYCD and the Public Engagement Unit (PEU) are planning how to better coordinate the City's investments in outreach to landlords, to facilitate access to housing for voucher-eligible youth.

DYCD's investments in Housing Navigators, Peer Navigators, Financial Literacy, and Mental Health Hubs offer services to support young people to maintain permanent housing resources. The Housing Navigator position has been effective, and we look forward to exploring the opportunity to extend this role into the next fiscal year through the city budget process.

In addition, the Mayor's Blueprint for Housing and Homelessness directed a review of housing options available across all shelter systems that will ensure that the broadest possible array of options can be offered within current laws, City rules, and funding.

Federal law does not permit the city to pay ongoing rental assistance to undocumented individuals, without a state law expressly authorizing such assistance; however, the administration supports two bills in Albany that address this issue.

- Follow-up Questions/Concerns

- What voucher access will youth in the DYCD RHY system have access to after the current allocation of EHV vouchers and CityFHEPS vouchers are exhausted?
- What is DYCD doing to advocate for ongoing CityFHEPS access for youth in the DYCD RHY system?
- How is DYCD working with DSS to ensure youth & young adults have access to vouchers without entering DHS shelter?
- Is DYCD advocating for additional funding in FY24 to meet the needs of migrant youth, and will the DYCD providers have access to any Federal funding allocated to NYC to support the needs of migrant youth?

We look forward to your response, and meeting with you in the near future about this urgent situation.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jamie', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Jamie Powlovich (She/Her/Hers)
Executive Director

Cc:

Nina Aledort, Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Children & Family Services
Susan Haskell, Deputy Commissioner of Youth Services, DYCD
Ahisa Badi, Senior Advisor, Office of the Deputy Mayor of Health and Human Services
Michael Nolan, Chief Strategy Officer for Deputy Mayor Strategic Policy Initiatives
Tracey Thorne, Director Runaway and Homeless Youth Services, DYCD
Opportunity Starts with a Home Management Team



moving victims of violence from crisis to confidence

April 24, 2023

New York City Council
Committee on Youth Services
Hon. Althea Stevens, Chair

**Testimony of Jimmy Meagher, Policy Director, Safe Horizon
Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY)**

Good afternoon and thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony to the Committee on Youth Services. My name is Jimmy Meagher, and I am Policy Director at Safe Horizon, the nation's largest non-profit victim services organization. Safe Horizon offers a client-centered, trauma-informed response to 250,000 New Yorkers each year who have experienced violence or abuse. We are increasingly using a lens of racial equity and justice to guide our work with clients, with each other, and in developing the positions we hold.

We are grateful that the committee is holding this hearing today, as Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) and their needs are too often ignored and dismissed, even though they are one of our most marginalized populations. Safe Horizon's Streetwork Project provides shelter, showers, hot meals, therapy, service linkage, safer sex supports, case management, and so much more, in a therapeutic harm reduction community serving homeless youth ages 13 to 25. We work with homeless and street-involved young people to help them find safety and stability. Many homeless young people face a day-to-day struggle to survive, which can lead to physical and emotional harm. Homeless youth may have experienced family abuse, violence, rejection, and instability that led to their homelessness. We welcome these young people, help them navigate complex systems, and provide essential resources at our drop-in centers, at our overnight shelter, and through our street outreach teams. This work can be incredibly challenging but also rewarding. Streetwork has been doing this community-based work since 1984, and we will continue to do so for as long as our services are needed. In FY22, Streetwork provided services to over 1,200 clients across our drop-in centers and overnight shelter, while our overnight street outreach team engaged in over 10,700 contacts with homeless and at-risk young people.

Streetwork Project is a proud member of the New York Coalition for Homeless Youth (CHY), which is a consortium of over 60 agencies working to improve the lives of runaway, homeless, and street-involved youth across New York State. We work to recognize and uphold the plight of homelessness among young people across ethnicities, genders, and orientations and promote the safety, health, and future of unhoused youth across New York State. We echo CHY's testimony today.

My testimony will focus on areas where this committee can hold our city to account in addressing the needs of RHY and ultimately ending youth homelessness. But first I would like to emphasize that we all must listen to Runaway and Homeless Youth. When they say they need something, **listen** to them. **Trust** them. They understand their safety and experience better than anybody else.

DYCD 24-hr Drop-in Center Directive

Safe Horizon and Streetwork believe that the recent 24-hour drop-in center no sleeping directive issued by DYCD is inhumane and harmful. Having the ability to rest is vital to a person's overall health and wellbeing, and lack of sleep impacts their ability to function at a level needed to find and maintain employment. If we deny young people the ability to sleep safely, they will not be able to function, which impacts their ability to find and maintain employment, which impacts their ability to find and maintain stable housing. Even though Streetwork doesn't operate a 24-hour drop-in, we stand with our sibling organizations in calling out the violent nature of this directive. The City is hurting RHY and driving more vulnerable unhoused young people out onto the street overnight. This directive also negatively impacts RHY programs' ability to engage with RHY, build trusting relationships with them, and connect them to the services and support they need and deserve.

The DYCD-funded 24-hour drop-in centers have been operating as instructed since 2019, which is why we are confused about this directive. DYCD must immediately rescind this directive and respond to providers' and advocates' request for guidance to ensure that youth are able to rest, and that providers are supported in providing the services that youth have been relying on since the inception of the 24-hour drop-in center programs. Of course, we would prefer that RHY did not *have* to rest in 24-drop-ins, but the City is not doing much to increase the number of shelter beds for RHY or to increase access to long-term, stable housing.

Make youth categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers and grant RHY equal access to housing resources

Many years ago, when the City first introduced LINC vouchers, the City promised DYCD programs that our clients would have immediate access to those vouchers. Our clients did not receive access to those vouchers. Now, as housing advocates fight to improve City and State vouchers, which we recognize is vitally important, RHY providers are advocating that our clients have equal access to the same housing resources as other homeless New Yorkers. We are not asking for a "special" housing voucher for RHY; we are asking for equal access. Over the years as new vouchers have been introduced, RHY have had **zero** access to the vouchers that already existed. The City has introduced vouchers for folks on public assistance (PA), for folks who are working, for folks on disability income, for folks who went in and out of shelters, etc. We have worked with clients who have met all these criteria, except they weren't Department of Homeless Services (DHS) or Human Resources Administration (HRA) shelter residents, so they were unable to access these essential vouchers. When the City announced that they had created a voucher that would help clients like ours, we discovered that this was yet another voucher for DHS clients - DHS residents who are young adults. The young people we work with do not go into DHS shelters for many reasons, including safety concerns.

In 2021, our community of RHY providers and youth advocates helped pass legislation that we believed would finally give homeless youth in the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth system, as well as youth exiting foster care, access to CityFHEPS vouchers, without first forcing them to enter the DHS shelter system. Unfortunately, this is not how the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Law Department interpret these laws. After the DYCD & Administration for Children's Services (ACS) CityFHEPS

pilot vouchers and one-time allocation of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) are exhausted, youth will still be forced to enter DHS shelters before they can get vouchers.

We are demanding that our clients have equal access to the housing resources that DHS and HRA shelter clients have. Right now, many of our clients have begun leaving youth shelters to enter DHS shelters just so they can get housing assistance. Young people know that if they remain in youth shelters, they will have fewer paths out of homelessness. DHS shelters are not always safe for the young people we work with. We work with so many clients who will not go (back) to DHS shelters, and since that is currently one of the only ways that they will be able to exit homelessness, they become chronically street homeless.

Youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded RHY programs as well as youth transitioning out of ACS care must be made categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having first to enter the DHS shelter system. DYCD should not be the "wrong door" when trying to obtain a housing voucher or supportive housing. We demand that our clients have equal access to the housing resources that DHS and HRA shelter clients have. This is a critical investment that will support the Administration's initiatives to eradicate homelessness, to prevent people from entering DHS shelters unnecessarily, and to make access to vouchers easier. We are pleading for the City to stop discriminating against RHY and help them **now**.

Maintain funding for vital positions in the RHY system

The current Housing Specialists at the DYCD-funded drop-in centers are temporarily funded through federal Emergency Housing Voucher funding which is set to expire at the end of the fiscal year (June 2023). Since housing navigators were funded in the DYCD system in FY21, available data shows that there has been a 350% increase in youth exiting homelessness into their own apartments, since their inception. These are amazing outcomes for RHY, and maintaining these positions will ensure RHY continue to successfully transition to their own apartments and support the Administration's goal to address the homelessness crisis.

Similarly, in response to the priorities set forth in Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness, funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded drop-in centers in FY23. These critical positions provide peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and young adults. If this funding is not maintained, youth with lived experience will lose their jobs, and countless other youth will miss the benefit of peer-on-peer support.

Meeting the needs of older youth (21–24-year-olds)

There is an obvious need for more youth shelters, and especially more crisis beds for older young adults. There are currently only 60-funded young adult beds in the DYCD RHY system for youth ages 21-24 years old, however only 45 are currently online, and even when all 60 are operational they do not come close to meeting the need of young adults in need. It can take up to 6 months for youth aged 21-24 to be placed into these beds. Additionally, the vacancies that do exist are mostly for Transitional Independent Living facilities (TILs), which are notoriously high threshold. To ensure that older youth can benefit from the safety and security of youth-specific shelter supports, we need more RHY shelter beds for this population.

Of course, Streetwork would prefer that additional DYCD shelters were brought online, but something is better than nothing. DHS has the capability of opening more shelters dedicated to youth today. If DHS were to open additional youth shelters, that would not preclude or prevent DYCD from opening their own newer, better shelters for RHY. Currently, RHY are ending up in shelters not dedicated to young people and unable to meet their needs.

DYCD drop-in centers are often one of the first points of contact for newly homeless young adults who just became homeless and have nowhere to go. These young people may have spent one or two nights on the street, but oftentimes they have not been street homeless. DYCD drop-in centers also serve many young adults who are couch-surfing and need a shelter referral because they have run out of people to stay with. Many young adults refuse to go to or return to DHS shelters because these shelters can be traumatizing and violent for them. When youth shelter placement is not available, many young people opt for street homelessness or risky housing options (like living with an abusive intimate partner). NYC must continue to increase the number of DYCD RHY beds available for youth aged 21-24 years and expand the options available to them.

What we and our partner RHY organizations have come to understand is that RHY often have higher rates of experiences with trauma and mental health issues. Even folks who do access RHY beds have limited options for next steps – limited income and economic options, limited access to permanent affordable housing options, etc. – which results in these young people returning to homelessness and/or cycling in and out of homelessness. This is retraumatizing and perpetuates a dangerous, violent, damaging cycle for unhoused folks. While we advocate for additional shelter options, we also desperately need to prioritize connecting RHY to affordable subsidized housing options for young adults and to making all subsidized housing options accessible to all New Yorkers across our multiple shelter systems. For example, young people in homeless youth shelters have no priority status to apply for public housing, unlike their peers in the other shelter systems.

Our clients have benefited from access to stabilization beds, but there remain some issues:

- Stabilization beds and Safe Havens are significantly more expensive than congregate young adult shelters. This results in the city preferring to invest in congregate shelter over stabilization beds and Safe Havens, which are safer options for many of our clients. While the City has added Safe Haven capacity over the last several years, which we appreciate, there is still not enough capacity to respond to youth, LGBTQ+ folks, and women.
 - People are only eligible for Safe Havens if we can document that they are chronically street homeless – 9 out of the last 24 months – which is a challenge to prove.
 - NYC does not have enough stabilization beds. There are hardly any Safe Haven and stabilization beds for women.
 - NYC does not have LGBTQ-specific Safe Havens and stabilization beds, which is a real need that we see. We consistently hear from many LGBTQ+-identified clients that they do not feel safe or respected in the existing Safe Havens and stabilization bed sites. This is particularly true in Safe Havens. We hear this feedback most from transgender and gender-non-conforming clients.
 - And there are no young adult-specific Safe Havens and stabilization beds. It is especially disheartening that with the expansion of Safe Havens and stabilization beds, the city explicitly declined to make a young adult-specific site.

The Need for Mental Health Shelters for RHY:

We are concerned that DHS does not have a completely accurate picture of what street homelessness looks like, what street homeless young adults look like, or what their service needs are. We, of course, work with young adults who are truly chronically street homeless – and we generally refer them to stabilization beds and Safe Havens because those are the appropriate referrals for those folks. We desperately needed a way to directly refer our clients to Safe Havens and stabilization beds because DHS outreach teams (and DHS-contracted outreach teams) were not seeing or serving our clients – even when they were chronically street homeless. The most common scenario that leads to young adults becoming chronically street homeless is a young adult being placed into a DHS mental health shelter and leaving because they are not comfortable and do not feel safe in a shelter with older adults. They feel safer on the streets.

New York City needs a youth shelter that has the capacity to work with youth who have serious mental illness and/or substance use issues. This currently does not exist in NYC. As the agency that works with more street homeless youth than any other, the most common pathway that we see to chronic street homelessness is that our clients try to access DHS shelter, are assigned to an adult mental health shelter, they do not feel safe there (and the primary reason we hear that they do not feel safe is due to the older adults who are also residents there), and they leave for their own safety. In our experience, RHY with serious mental health needs feel safer on the street than in their assigned shelter, so they remain on the street. Because they have an assigned shelter, that shelter is the only one they are allowed to access. This leads to chronic street homelessness amongst youth and young adults. The creation of a mental health shelter for youth can interrupt this pipeline to chronic street homelessness. Additionally, the longer someone remains on the street, the greater likelihood they will experience additional trauma(s), which only exacerbates and worsens mental health and substance use issues.

Young people often share that they wish they had better access to meaningful mental health supports. Providers continue to express that they often do not have the staff capacity or appropriate structure to support RHY who have significant mental health needs. The City should fund new pilot programs to serve RHY with mental and behavioral health needs that would include on-site clinical services, and intensive case management to provide these youth with the services they need.

Streetwork's holistic program model specifically tries to offer as many services as possible under one roof. We know from experience that our clients are often unlikely to make appointments at outside organizations that they have not been to before, even when we help make the appointment. When we can offer a service on-site, more of our clients access that service, especially because our clients find our program safe and welcoming. Offering in-house mental health supports is necessary. Clients with serious mental health and/or behavioral health issues are the hardest to place into shelter, and therefore the most likely to become chronically street homeless. Many youth shelters discharge clients who have mental health issues, sometimes because they do not have the staffing or resources to support young people with increased needs. By offering TILs with on-site clinical services and intensive case management for RHY with significant mental health needs, the City would fill a gap and create meaningful opportunities for this chronically underserved population.

Meeting the needs of Migrant Youth

For the past year, NYC has seen an unprecedented number of migrant youths arrive, however, there continues to be little to no coordination by the City to meet their needs. The City needs to acknowledge and support these new New Yorkers, which includes meeting the needs of the RHY-system. This includes:

- o Translation services
- o Transportation support for family reunification
- o Legal supports
- o Access to permanent housing and pathways to employment
- o Policies to specifically support the needs of unaccompanied minors

Legislation

Safe Horizon Streetwork Project offers the following feedback on the three bills on today's agenda.

Int. 0054-2022

We are grateful to Council Member Farah Louis and her colleagues for their commitment towards ensuring that youth and young adults have access to financial literacy training. Instruction on banking, budgeting, credit, debt, saving, and taxes is important when partnering with young people to ensure they are on a path towards empowerment. However, we are concerned that the legislation as it stands can lead to unfunded mandates on DYCD programs that don't currently receive funding for financial literacy programming and training. Currently, our DYCD-funded RHY drop-in centers receive this funding, but TILs and crisis programs do not. We therefore recommend funding be provided to RHY residential programs to mirror the financial literacy programming being funded at the drop-ins.

Int. 0976-2023

We are grateful to Chair Stevens and her colleagues for their commitment towards LGBTQ+ youth and young adults and for introducing Int. 0976-2023. Due to their age, LGBTQ+ youth and young adults experiencing homelessness are served across shelter systems. DYCD currently tracks the number of LGBTQ+ RHY in their system, but DHS does not. DHS is notoriously unsafe for LGBTQ+ folks, and not tracking data on the number of LGBTQ+ folks in the DHS system allows for DHS to ignore this population and their needs and to discriminate. By ensuring that we have more accurate data about LGBTQ+ youth and young adults that are experiencing homelessness across systems, we will be better situated to ensure that we have services to meet their needs. We recommend, however, that this data is asked for and tracked in ways that prioritize self-determination and safety.

Int. 0977-2023

We are grateful to Chair Stevens and her colleagues for their commitment towards ensuring that it is easier for all youth and young adults to transition from one shelter system to another, when needed.

We have worked with many young adults who are willing to reside in a young adult DHS shelter but for whom the large, intimidating intake shelters are a real barrier to accessing shelter. Some clients flat out refuse to go back to a DHS intake shelter because they have already been to one

and experienced violence, harassment, and/or other forms of mistreatment. Other clients have attempted to complete the intake process but gave up before their intake was complete because they did not feel safe there. Intake and assessment shelters are specifically unsafe for our clients. We have seen much greater success when we have been able to complete the DHS intake form for a client, send in the intake form to generate a CARES ID, and directly request a transfer to a youth shelter. To put it more directly: drop-in centers need to have access to do "streamlined referrals" directly to the DHS young adult shelters, bypassing the intake shelters entirely. However, DHS makes this difficult.

We believe that it would be best practice for our staff that already know RHY to assist with the intake and assessment process.

We endorse this legislation, as it would benefit our clients. However, we still need more shelters serving RHY and we need increased access to long-term, stable housing. Currently, young people are waiting for over a month for placement into DHS young adult shelter, and once they have been waiting a month, they are then placed into any DHS shelter with a vacancy, thereby losing the opportunity for placement in a young adult shelter. This is because there are not enough young adult shelter beds. And when streamlining from drop-ins, our clients remain street homeless while waiting for placement. Additionally, bypassing intake and assessment via the streamlining process still does not address issues around transferring from one shelter to another. DHS requires somebody who has resided in DHS shelter to seek a transfer from the shelter they left. We have clients who refuse to return to the shelter they left because they experienced violence, abuse, or discrimination in that shelter, sometimes from shelter staff. Lastly, we want to flag that DYCD's streamlining report does not count streamlined referrals from drop-in centers. By not capturing this data, the City is not reporting the full picture of what RHY need.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

4/24/23

Title: Youth Services Committee Hearing on Runaway and Homeless Youth

Nadia Swanson, LCSW
They/Them
Director of Technical Assistance and Advocacy
The Ali Forney Center

Hello my name is Nadia Swanson, I am the Director of Technical Assistance and Advocacy at The Ali Forney Center. Thank you to the committee and Chair Stevens for your leadership and advocacy for our youth.

I am testifying in support of Int.0976 and 0977. The needs of LGBTQ+ youth have been categorically underserved across all RHY programs in NYC. The lack of accurate data reports from DHS and DYCD has been a major contributing factor. Time after time the numbers contradict what we all know as providers to be the reality of increased LGBTQ youth in our services, this has now been exacerbated due to the increase of migrant youth, trans rights being stripped across the country and an overall increase to 51% of youth identifying as LGBTQ as a generation (2022 Gallup Poll)

All of that makes Int.0977 equally as important. While DHS is not where we want youth, especially LGBTQ youth to have to go, until there are enough quick and safe options for stable housing for RHY it is our duty to minimize the trauma and barriers that exist in the system for those who need it. Int.0977 does that to streamline the intake process for youth to adult shelter.

In regards to the other funding issues being discussed today I would like to state our alignment with the Coalition for Homeless Youths asks for the budget and focus my testimony on the need for more beds for our 21-24 year olds and DYCD's 24-hr drop in center directive.

When we advocated for raising the DYCD rhy age to 24 it was because of the 6+ month wait and exacerbated trauma that our youth, especially LGBTQ+ youth 21 and over were dealing with. Now fast forward 5 years, the wait is down to 3 months but for the 34 youth currently on our waitlist that come to us at night that can feel like a lifetime.

Where do you expect them to go for those 3 months?

How bad is their mental health supposed to get before they deserve housing?

How much more trauma must they endure before they deserve housing?

We don't want youth to have to rely on drop in centers for sleeping each night but without safe stable housing options they are left with no other choice. Without it they will be forced to seek out high risk couch surfing, the subways, and the streets. For trans youth they risk death every night they are forced to stay outside.

Ultimately we need more youth specific permanent supportive housing but until then It is our duty to meet their immediate need for safety , especially for the LGBTQ+ youth who are at higher risk without it.

This shouldn't even be a debate, it is common sense and decency to fund safety for youth that are forced to rely on these systems. The answer to the problem is right in front of us it is now the city's job to listen and take the obvious and appropriate action for the safety of our LGBTQ+ youth. Without this they will not be able to focus on the necessary next steps to get out and stay out of homelessness. DYCD needs to immediately rescind this directive, fund an adequate increase of at least 40 more youth adult beds, and respond to our request for guidance so that we can provide the best support to youth have rely on our 24 hour drop ins and housing.

Thank you

**Testimony of Caitlyn Passaretti
Policy and Advocacy Associates
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services
Oversight Hearing Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth
April 24th, 2023**

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York is a 79-year-old independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through research and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

We would like to thank Chair Stevens and all the members of the Committee on Youth Services for holding this oversight hearing on the needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY). This testimony highlights the following issues impacting youth: accessing CityFHEPS housing vouchers, funding for vital positions within the RHY system, the DYCD drop in directive prohibiting RHY from sleeping in drop-in centers, providing more beds for young adults, and ensuring the needs of migrant youth are met.

Numerous challenges currently face Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) in New York. The Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) is mainly responsible for supporting this population; however, it is not uncommon for RHY to also be involved with ACS, DHS, and HRA in the efforts to find housing or social services.

Drop-In Centers

When DYCD made the announcement forbidding the 24-hour drop-in centers to allow youth to sleep, there was immediate outcry. Sleeping is essential to human functioning and should be a right that every young person has. RHY often do not have a safe place to sleep, and therefore, the drop-in centers became a space where they knew they could rest without fear. This directive is therefore inhumane by preventing young people the chance to sleep where they feel safe, ultimately enabling them to better participate in school, jobs, and beneficial city programs. **We urge DYCD to rescind this policy and instead offer guidance and support to providers who are working with RHY to connect them to more sustainable housing options.**

Addressing Shelter Needs and Permit Access to Housing

RHY currently have limited options for a permanent exit out of homelessness, as they can currently only access CityFHEPs and Emergency Housing Vouchers through a pilot that is scheduled to expire. Outside of that pilot, RHY must go through the DHS shelter system and wait 90 days before they are able to access CityFHEPS. As a result of these limitations, in NYC Fiscal Year 2022, 39% of youth were discharged from a temporary shelter into another shelter or into an unknown housing situation, while only a small fraction secured permanent housing.¹

It is critical to ensure that young people experiencing homelessness, aging out of foster care, or leaving detention and placement can utilize the CityFHEPS voucher immediately, without having to register the DHS shelter system and wait 90 days for eligibility. If we can ensure young people can access housing, it is more likely they will be able to find stability, sustain employment, and thrive. **City leaders must reform CityFHEPS so that runaway and homeless youth can utilize vouchers without having to enter the DHS shelter system and must also eliminate the 90 day stay rule for CityFHEPs eligibility.**

Additionally, RHY need access to more beds and more support. DYCD does not have enough beds for young people (especially older youth), so many young people are driven into dangerous living situations. There are currently only 60 funded young adult beds in the DYCD RHY system for youth ages 21-24, but only 45 are currently available. Even when all 60 are operational, they do not come close to meeting the need of young adults in need. To ensure that older youth can benefit from the safety and security of youth specific shelter supports, DYCD must prioritize funding for more beds for the older youth population. **Therefore, the City must invest \$2.42 million to create 40 additional DYCD RHY beds for youth ages 21-24.** This investment will provide safe, temporary housing for youth who otherwise would be without a stable option.

We also urge the city to invest \$1.62 million to maintain funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System. The housing and youth services systems are complex and convoluted, and it is critical to have a trusted support person to offer advice, resources, and answers for young people.

Needs of Migrant Youth

For the past year, NYC has seen an unprecedented number of migrant youth arrive. However, there continues to be minimal coordination across city agencies and systems to meet their needs. The City needs to acknowledge and support the youth, which includes meeting the needs of the RHY-system. This includes providing:

- Translation services for youth navigating a multitude of systems
- Transportation support for family reunification
- Legal supports for migrant youth
- Access to permanent housing and pathways to employment
- Policies to specifically support the needs of unaccompanied minors

The City must devote greater resources to young people in the runaway and homeless youth system. Homeless young people are some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers and if we want to eliminate youth homelessness, we must ensure there are structures of care in place that can connect youth to needed support and permanent housing.

ⁱ Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness. New York City YHPD Planning Committee. 2022.

New York City Council, Committee on Youth Services

April 24, 2023

My name is Jayne Bigelsen, and I am the Vice President of Advocacy at Covenant House New York (CHNY), where we serve young people experiencing homelessness and human trafficking ages 16 to 24. I would like to thank the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services, especially Chair Stevens, for the opportunity to testify today.

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 programs. Our youth are primarily people of color and over a third of our young people have spent time in the foster care system. 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 and job-training programs, as well as specialized services for survivors of human trafficking/commercial sexual exploitation. All of these services help young people overcome the trauma of homelessness and abuse and move toward stability, security, and a successful future free from exploitation.

Migrant Legal Services

As we all know, NYC is experiencing a rapid increase in the number of immigrants seeking services in our city. Although significant attention has been paid to the current immigration crisis, that attention has not led to corresponding increases in resources for social and legal services agencies on the frontline of this crisis. Additionally, public discussions have focused primarily on undocumented families and unaccompanied child migrants. Little to no attention has been paid to the plight of young adult migrants between the ages of 18-24, who have unique developmental needs. CHNY has become the entry point into the youth shelter system for many of these young adults. Since the last time CHNY testified, the number of undocumented youth we have served has almost doubled and is now over 125. For context, in previous years we often saw less than 10 undocumented youth.

Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) providers across the city have stepped in to meet the immediate needs of this population. However, now that many migrant youth have been in NYC for 6-12 months, we need to focus on long-term needs, including immigration and housing. CHNY has one legal services attorney who has had to transition to almost full-time immigration work, thereby causing other legal cases to require outside referrals or significantly longer periods of time before resolution. Unfortunately, undocumented youth also have fewer options for housing vouchers. The lack of housing options combined with their inability to obtain lawful

employment can make exit planning for these young people seem insurmountable. Increased funding for civil legal services and a housing voucher program specifically for RHY, with a priority given to undocumented youth, is urgently needed.

Access to City FHEPS Vouchers

Long-term housing options are far from sufficient for both documented and undocumented young New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Even when our young people do everything that is expected of them while in our transitional housing programs, including saving money, they usually still do not have enough money to afford to live independently in NYC. Housing vouchers are therefore crucial in enabling young people to stay housed and avoid returns to homelessness. Yet, despite last year's passage of a city council bill with the intended purpose of rectifying the discrepancy in access to housing vouchers between people receiving services in the adult versus the youth homeless system, RHY do not currently have access to NYC CityFHEPS vouchers. It is illogical, expensive, and traumatic to deny youth access to stable, safe housing simply because they chose to receive services in an age and developmentally appropriate system.

We call upon the NY City Council to quickly pass legislation that makes it unmistakably clear that youth can access CityFHEPs vouchers from RHY programs and that also provides sufficient funding to ensure the availability of these vouchers.

21–24-year-olds experiencing homelessness

Although most homeless youth under the age of 21 seeking shelter will be able to find a bed in an RHY program, the same cannot be said for young people between the ages of 21 to 24. There are far from enough beds for this age group in the New York City homeless youth continuum of care. This leaves a majority of homeless youth in this age range forced to choose between going to an adult homeless shelter or sleeping on the street. Scientific research on brain science has made clear that the passage of a 21st birthday does not negate the need for developmentally appropriate services for this age group. Youth in this age group have repeatedly told us that they do not feel comfortable in adult shelters. We call upon New York City to provide enough beds for this older population so that no young person will ever be turned away from youth specific shelter programming.

Transportation

An essential need of our youth that is often forgotten is transportation. Young people experiencing homelessness need to travel to get to job interviews, school, and work, as well as to off-site medical and legal appointments. \$2.75 per trip is cost-prohibitive for someone experiencing homelessness. RHY programs provide our young people with as many MetroCards as we can. Yet, RHY programs pay full cost as we do not have access to the Fair Fares program. We, therefore, have to limit the number of MetroCards we give out and can only cover essential travel. Although our youth can access the Fair Fares Program as individuals, they often do not have enough money to even pay for the reduced-cost MetroCards. We are

therefore seeking the New York City Council's assistance in developing a process where RHY programs can access MetroCards at the Fair Fares rate.

Right Size DYCD Contracts/COLA increase for Human Service Workers

DYCD-funded RHY provider contracts continue to fall short of covering the true cost of running these programs, and NY City and State continue to underfund social services for vulnerable populations. This leaves frontline staff, who show up for our youth every day despite emotionally demanding jobs and even in a Pandemic, with stagnant and low wages far unbecoming their heroic work. Low wages lead to high turnover rates which are detrimental to the young people we serve. We are echoing the request by the Coalition for Homeless Youth that all current DYCD-funded crisis and Transitional Independent Living (TIL) contracts be increased to the 2019 contract rate of \$50,410, and that a 10% general contract increase be implemented for all current DYCD-funded residential, street-outreach and drop-in center RHY contracts.

Youth Specific Mental Health Beds

One of the greatest needs for young people experiencing homelessness and human trafficking is mental health care. These experiences can lead to PTSD, anxiety, depression, and many other mental health issues. CHNY is fortunate to have 12 social workers on staff but no program serving RHY in New York City can afford a full-time psychiatrist. The waitlist for psychiatric appointments for homeless youth across the city can be long, thereby leading to unnecessary delays in care.

Additionally, there are currently no specifically dedicated youth mental health beds in New York City. Our mental health staff is adept at dealing with a myriad of mental health concerns including anxiety, depression, PTSD, and bipolar disorder, among many other disorders. However, in recent years we have seen an increase in young people experiencing homelessness and trafficking with schizophrenia, psychosis, and active suicidality. Young people with these conditions often need more mental health support than we can provide. Yet, more often than not, there is nowhere safe for us to refer them. We continue to request that the city dedicate funding for mental health beds for young people.

I again thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

Jayne Bigelsen
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Testimony of Good Shepherd Services
Before the New York City Council Committee on Youth Services

Submitted by
Nickesha Francis, Policy and Advocacy Manager
Good Shepherd Services

April 24, 2023

Thank you, Chair Althea Stevens and the Members of the Committee on Youth Services for the opportunity to testify. My name is Nickesha Francis, I am the Policy and Advocacy Manager at Good Shepherd Services. Good Shepherd's Chelsea Foyer residential services, provides supportive housing to young adults in their teens and early twenties who have aged out of the Child Welfare system, are homeless, or at risk of homelessness. As a Runaway Homeless Youth provider, Good Shepherd supports the Coalition for Homeless Youth priorities and specifically, I will highlight the need for Youth to access CityFHEPS vouchers and for the City to maintain funding for Housing Specialists.

In 2021, CHY, providers and youth advocates helped pass legislation that we believed would finally give homeless youth in the Department of Youth & Community Development (DYCD) Runaway and Homeless Youth system and as well as youth exiting foster care access to CityFHEPS vouchers, without forcing them to enter the DHS shelter system first. Unfortunately, this is the not interpretation of the laws that is being upheld by DSS. After the DYCD & ACS CityFHEPS pilot vouchers and one-time allocation of Emergency Housing Vouchers (EHV) are exhausted, youth will be forced to enter DHS shelters before they can get vouchers. Youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded Runaway Homeless Youth (RHY) programs as well as youth transitioning out of the Administration for Children Services (ACS) care must be made categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having first to enter Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system. This is a critical investment that will support the Administration's initiatives to eradicate homelessness, to prevent people from entering DHS shelters unnecessarily and to make access to vouchers easier.

The City should **maintain funding for the** Housing Specialists at the DYCD-funded drop-in centers that are temporarily funded through federal Emergency Housing Voucher funding which are set to expire at the end of the fiscal year (June 2023). Since housing navigators were funded in the DYCD system in FY21, available data shows that there has been a 350% increase in youth exiting homelessness into their own apartments, since their inception. These are amazing outcomes for RHY, and maintaining these positions will ensure RHY continue to successfully transition to their own apartments and support the Administration's goal to address the homelessness crisis. Similarly, In response to the priorities set forth in [*Opportunity Starts with a Home: New York City's Plan to Prevent and End Youth Homelessness*](#), funding was allocated for 16 full-time Peer Navigator positions across the DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers in FY23. These critical positions provide peer-to-peer support to some of the most vulnerable youth and

young adults. If this funding is not maintained youth with lived experience will lose their jobs, and countless other youth will miss out on the benefit or peer-on-peer support.

We are also calling for more beds for homeless young adults and better coordination by the city to meet the needs of migrant youth.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.

Good Afternoon everyone. My name is Onyx Walker. I'm 25 years old. I am Co-chair Coordinator of the Youth Action Board or YAB for short. I want to thank council members Farah N. Louis and Althea V. Stevens for sponsoring this work.

For a long time the folks alongside me have been powerful advocates in combating the cycle of homelessness in this city and state. From our allies at the Coalition for Homeless Youth to my colleagues at the NYCYAB the tenacity and shared fight remain the same.

I represent young people who are and have been homeless.

As I have been homeless before.

I represent service providers who want to aid and empower young people to lift themselves out of their circumstance.

As I work with those providers.

I represent a collective voice of young people who despite their struggle continue to hold systems and decision makers accountable by taking up space in those conversations.

For I am one of the people.

I exist at this intersection of those who need aid and those who provide. Intersectionality is important to acknowledge as we continue to talk about financial literacy and challenge our thinking about what it means to be homeless and how to lift yourself out of that struggle.

Make no mistake, homelessness is an intersectional issue. It combines the issues of gentrification, health both mental and physical, financial literacy, general education and many more systematic struggles.

If we fail to provide adequate learning and resources to unstably housed individuals we in turn enable a cycle of chronic homelessness. I ask everyone listening, where do you think young people who have had a history of unstable housing learn to budget or do taxes? How do they acquire the knowledge needed to build credit (a necessity for acquiring new housing)? Is there reason to believe that they/we couldn't use a minor lesson in financial literacy? [In the city where the cost of living is the highest on Earth](#), why wouldn't financial literacy resources be a priority?

If you believe yourself to be an advocate this is a clear direction to aiding folks who are unstably housed. Support this bill and we can work towards lowering the amount of young people who are currently or chronically homeless.

The NYCYAB continues to inform decision makers on approaches that actually can help and consider the affected population. We look forward to what will come of this and thank you for your time



**NYC Council Hearing Addressing the Needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth
April 24, 2023**

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss two bills that aim to make our emergency housing systems safer and easier to navigate for one of our most vulnerable populations: young people. My name is Stacy Stewart. I am a Licensed Social Worker and the Managing Director of Housing and Runaway and Homeless Youth Services at The Door.

Since its 1972 founding, The Door has met young people where they are in a trauma-informed manner, providing comprehensive, integrated services that empower them to reach their potential. We serve up to 11,000 young people between ages 12 and 24 annually, across all five boroughs as well as from neighboring states. Our Soho location houses our runaway and homeless youth (RHY) programming, including a drop-in center, as well as our adolescent health and counseling centers. We also have two Lower East Side supportive housing sites and an expanding Bronx Youth Center. The young people The Door serves are able to access comprehensive services—health care, education, mental health counseling, crisis intervention, housing support, high school equivalency, college prep, legal assistance, career development, arts, and nutritious meals—all for free, in a diverse, caring environment.

I see firsthand that transitioning from youth shelters to adult housing placements is a bureaucratic abyss that discourages young people who need immediate help. When youth shelters are full—as they usually are—or if young people are over 18, they try to get housed through DHS. Between a lengthy intake process, delayed response times to referral requests, and a lack of beds, young people can be in temporary shelter for a week or even a month before placement in longer-term spaces.

Our young people are suffering as a result, with their biggest needs remaining unmet. Some stay at the temporary shelters, which lack trauma-informed services. Others get fed up and try to find somewhere to sleep on their own. Either way, they often become despondent. Forced into spaces where the social and environmental determinants of health, safety, and stability aren't addressed, out of frustration, they often disengage from drop-in and emergency-care systems altogether, returning to dangerous environments that place them in harm's way.

Passing Int. 977 would ensure that the process between DYCD-funded drop-in centers and DHS is timely and seamless for all our young people, keeping their safety and health in the forefront. The streamlined process would allot sufficient time for assessing and meeting ongoing care needs—services that The Door provides internally and those provided through external partners. With more efficiency and transparency, youth can navigate the appropriate assessments for their best housing options (i.e., supportive housing, rapid rehousing, etc.) without interrupting access to other crucial services they are already engaged in that facilitate healing and growth—food, mental health care, job training, medical care, art therapy, and more.

Similar factors are in play with Int. 976, which aims to address the unique needs of homeless LGBTQ+ young people and the lack of sufficient shelter beds for them in the DYCD and DHS systems. From July 2022 through March 2023, The Door had 543 new members who identify as LGBTQ+. Nearly 100 of those LGBTQ+ Door members received services through our drop-in center. Many young people are aware of the few LGBTQ+-specific shelters available; however,

those beds fill up quickly, leaving staff to default to the DHS shelter system, where unsafe conditions are common and LGBTQ+ people are often targeted. On multiple occasions a LGBTQ+ young person has confided to me that they'd rather resort to sex work and other survival tactics to have a place to stay than risk physical and mental harm at a DHS shelter. By enabling the sharing of vital data information between both city agencies, Int. 976 could ensure sufficient resources for our LGBTQ+ young people, starting with more shelter beds in welcoming and safe environments.

We need more permanent solutions to address the housing crisis, but until those infrastructures are expanded, we must make sure our interim safety nets that provide shelter for young people are plentiful, accessible, and safe—and both these bills help that effort. Thank you again for your time and consideration.



Free to
Be Youth
Project

Free to Be Youth Project

40 Rector St.
9th Floor
New York, NY 10006

April 24, 2023

To the Members of the City Council Committee on Youth Services:

Good afternoon. Thank you so much for the opportunity to speak with you today. On behalf of the Free to Be Youth Project (FYP), formerly the Peter Cicchino Youth Project, of the Urban Justice Center, I'd like to thank the New York City Council's Committee on Youth Services for convening this important hearing on the needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth, and convey our appreciation to the Council Members for their commitment towards LGBTQ+ youth and young adults. My name is Amy Leipziger and I am the director of the Free to Be Youth Project.

Free to Be Youth Project

The Free to Be Youth Project is dedicated to serving homeless and at-risk lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) youth. We provide free legal services for individual LGBTQ+ young people up to the age of 24 and systemic advocacy for the LGBTQ+ youth community. The Project is housed at the Urban Justice Center, a non-profit law collective serving New York City's most disenfranchised poverty populations. Since 1994, we have been providing legal services to LGBTQ+ youth and young adults who are poor, living on the streets, in homeless shelters, in the juvenile justice system or in foster care. We regularly travel to drop-in centers where homeless youth congregate to offer our services. We have helped hundreds of LGBTQ+ youth with legal problems like applying for legal immigration status, fighting wrongful denials of disability benefits, changing their names, fighting terminations of their public assistance benefits, overcoming barriers to obtaining safe and stable housing, and being wrongly turned away from our City's homeless shelters.

Notably, LGBTQ+ youth become homeless at a significantly higher rate than the adolescent population as a whole and are vastly overrepresented in the Runaway Homeless youth (RHY) population. One out of four LGBTQ teens in the United States at some point either runs away or is thrown out of his or her home, and upwards of 40% of teenagers living on the streets today self-identify as LGBTQ+.

I am here today to speak about some of the current needs of Runaway and Homeless Youth, and offer my support for the proposed legislation that would require both DHS and DYCD to report quarterly on the number of LGBTQ homeless persons who inquire about or seek their services. (Int. 0976-2023)



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DYCD 24-hr Drop-in Center Directive

On January 13, 2023, the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) directed overnight drop-in centers to discontinue allowing homeless or street-involved youth from sleeping in their facilities, and directed providers to remove cots and resting places. DYCD claimed the ban was to ensure that drop-in centers were in compliance with state law and not operating as “unlicensed shelters.”¹ This no sleep directive was not only wide reported for the chaos and confusion it created among service providers,² but has been widely, and correctly criticized as an inhumane policy directive by city officials that serves no purpose. Having the ability to rest is not only vital to a person’s overall health and well-being, but a lack of sleep impairs a person’s ability to function at a level needed to function in any academic or vocational setting. This directive has, therefore, created an additional barrier to youth gaining and maintaining employment. DYCD needs to immediately rescind this directive and provide guidance to advocates and provider to ensure that youth are able to rest at the drop-in centers.

More Beds For Homeless Young Adults

It’s no secret by now that New York City is in the midst of a homelessness crisis that is not limited to those in the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system. Young people become homeless for many complex reasons including family conflict, shortage- of affordable housing, and family poverty. Youth run away for many reasons including violence, abuse or neglect in the home; mental illness or substance abuse among family members; challenges at school. Others are rejected by their families or experience family conflict as a result of their sexual orientation or gender identity, an unplanned pregnancy, use of drugs or alcohol, or inability to comply with parent/caretaker rules. Lacking the financial resources and basic life skills needed to live independently, they can experience criminal victimization, including commercial sexual exploitation and labor trafficking, resulting in traumas that jeopardize their well-being and development into thriving adults.

¹ Needelman, Joshua. *After a Ban on Sleeping at Homeless Youth Centers, a Center Resists*. The New York Times. (Feb. 26, 2023) Available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/02/26/nyregion/homeless-drop-in-center-youth.html>

² Honan, Katie. *Despite Pleas, City Sticks to No-Sleep Order at Youth Drop -In Centers*. The City. (February 16, 2023) Available at <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/2/16/23603228/sleep-youth-dropin-center;>



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There are currently 813 total allocated beds in the youth shelter system; however, only 60 of them are allocated for young people ages, 21 to 24. In a city where roughly 3,800 youth are homeless every night, advocates and providers have repeatedly stated that these 60 beds are

insufficient to address the growing homeless youth crisis. Those that don't have a bed must sleep on subway trains, on park benches, and many have no choice but to engage in dangerous activity to ensure they have a bed or a couch for the night. It should come as no surprise that young adults ages 21 to 24-year-olds fare best in age-specific shelters, much like teens and adolescence, that practice trauma informed care, have educational and vocational training, medical and mental health care, life skills workshops and intensive case management. This youth specific shelter programming is critical to helping young people transition effectively into adults. In order to ensure that young adults can receive the benefit of shelter supports, we urge DYCD to prioritize funding for more beds.

Response to Proposed Legislation

The Free to Be Youth Project would like to publicly issue its support for **Int. 0976-2023**. The bill, which would require DHS and DYCD to report quarterly on the number of LGBTQ+ homeless persons who inquire about their services, is a critical first step to ensuring that there are appropriate services providers, and advocates, to meet the needs of this population.

LGBTQ+ youth are disproportionately represented among New York City's homeless youth, the majority of whom are youth of color. While all homeless youth may experience negative outcomes, those who identify as LGBTQ+ are even more vulnerable, and in many instances, they experience different patterns of risk from other homeless youth. LGBTQ+ homeless youth are more likely to experience bullying, sexual assault, violence, trauma, HIV infection, and substance abuse than either heterosexual or stably housed LGBTQ+ peers. Moreover, homeless LGBTQ+ youth, in particular youth of color, are at high risk of involvement with the juvenile or criminal justice system due to their homelessness.

Historically, city agencies and service providers working within homeless system have focused their efforts on helping youth acquire the skills needed for independent living. Accurate information about the number of LGBTQ+ youth and young adults in the system would help those programs, like the Free to Be Youth Project, create better-coordinated services to address the needs of these youth. The cornerstone of the Free to Be Youth project is providing high-quality free legal services to homeless youth by reducing the barriers that prevent them from



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accessing traditional legal services. We do this by operating legal clinics in LGBTQ+-affirming spaces, like shelters and drop-in centers, many of them funded by DSH and DYCD. The data generated by this legislation would help ensure us make strategic decisions about how best to use our resources to meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth within the five boroughs of New York City.

Thank you to the members of this Committee and to the community of youth advocates who have been working hard to address the needs of this community. The Free to Be Youth Project stands ready to assist the Committee on Youth Services in any way that we can.

Sincerely,

/s/ AL

Amy Leipziger, Esq.
Project Director
Free to Be Youth Project
Urban Justice Center
40 Rector Street, 9th Floor
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aleipziger@urbanjustice.org
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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 54-2022 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 7/24/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Joseph Dill-D'Ascoli

Address: [redacted] 29th St. [redacted] LIC, NY 11101

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: 04/24/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gina Michie

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for Homeless Youth

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: JOSH Beard

Address: [redacted] E 9th Street

I represent: Al: Forney Center

Address: 721 W 125th St

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. 0976 Res. No. 6977

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/24/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Nadia Swanson

Address: 307 W. 38th St

I represent: The Al Forney Center

Address: Abail

**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: Jimmy Meagher (pronounced Mar)

Address: Bond St, BK NY 11231

I represent: Safe Horizon

Address: 2 Lafayette St. NY NY 10007

**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: 4/24/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Onyx Walker

Address: 147-48 Hook Creek Blvd

I represent: NYC4AB

Address: _____

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**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: _____

Name: JAYNE (PLEASE PRINT) BIGELEN

Address: _____

I represent: COVENANT HOUSE

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: 4/24/23

Name: Jamie Powlowich (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 495 Flatbush Ave Brooklyn 11225

I represent: Coalition for Homeless Youth

Address: same

**THE COUNCIL
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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/24/23

Name: Zagarah Stephens (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

I represent: Youth Action Board

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 4/24/23

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: doobreen

Address: 332 E 53

I represent: NYC YAP

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
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Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 04/24/2023

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Lauren Galloway

Address: _____

I represent: Coalition for homeless youth

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: Therese Samantha Dawkins

Address: 2 Lafayette Street

I represent: DYCD/RHY

Address: _____

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**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: SUSAN HASSELL

Address: 21 AMYETTE

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: TENEY ADAMS

Address: 21 AMYETTE

I represent: DYCD RHY

Address: _____

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