

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

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March 26, 2014
Start: 9:46 a.m.
Recess: 10:39 a.m.

HELD AT: Council Chambers
City Hall

B E F O R E: STEPHEN LEVIN
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Ruben Wills
Carlos Menchaca
Donovan Richards
Vanessa L. Gibson
Fernando Cabrera
Annabel Palma
Corey Johnson

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Letitia James
Public Advocate
New York City

Patrick Markee
Senior Policy Analyst
Coalition for the Homeless

Joshua Goldfein
Staff Attorney
The Legal Aid Society

Stephanie Gendell
Associate Executive Director
Citizens' Committee for Children

Johanna Walczyk
Program Analyst
Supportive Housing Network of
New York

Sally Greenspan
Program Director
Enterprise Community Partners

Catherine Trapani
Housinglink Director
New Destiny Housing Corporation

Ted McCourtney
Director
Sarah Burke House Domestic
Violence Shelter
Sanctuary for Families

Gary Parker
Deputy Director
McSilver Institute for
Poverty, Policy and Research
NYU

Jeff Foreman
Policy Director
Care for the Homeless

Arvernetta Henry
Member
Picture the Homeless

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [gavel] Good

morning, everybody. I'm Steve Levin, chair of the New York City Council's General Welfare Committee. Today we are going to be hearing proposed Resolution 123A and voting the resolution out of this committee. The resolution, sponsored by Council Member Ruben Wills, and originally co-sponsored by Council Member Vanessa Gibson, Council Member Annabel Palma and myself, urge... and I urge my fellow committee members to vote in support of this resolution. The proposed resolution calls on the New York State Assembly and the New York Senate to pass and the Governor of the State of New York to sign a State budget which does not bar the City of New York from using state reimbursements for rental subsidy programs for the homeless and calls on the City of New York and the State of New York to create a rental subsidy program for the homeless here in New York City.

The State Budget Bill, which allocates State aid to localities, currently bars cities with populations of over five million, such as New York City, from paying for rental assistance subsidies with state funding unless the subsidies are

1 explicitly aimed at preventing eviction. In order
2 for the city to use state funds to create a rental
3 subsidy program for the homeless, the language in
4 the State Budget Bill must be removed before it is
5 adopted. The State budget is scheduled to be
6 passed by April 1st, 2014, next Tuesday. It is
7 imperative that this language is removed before the
8 State Budget is passed. With over 10,000 families
9 with children in the shelter system, representing
10 almost 38,000 individuals and the length of stay
11 now averaging 13 months, we, as a city, cannot
12 afford to wait another year to provide assistance
13 to these families. In addition, we have many
14 individual adults and families without children, so
15 the number of homeless individuals in New York City
16 every single night is over 52,000 people. That is
17 an unprecedented number. It is an unsustainable
18 number. It is an unacceptable number for anybody
19 here in New York City. We need to do something to
20 address it and we need to do something to address
21 it now. We need every resource available from the
22 city and from the state to do that. Since the end
23 of the former Advantage program in 2011, there has
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2 not been any assistance provided to help move
3 families out of shelter and into permanent housing.

4 At Monday's General Welfare Preliminary
5 Budget hearing, Department of Homeless Services
6 Commissioner Gilbert Taylor testified that there
7 are approximately 1,000 families living in the
8 shelter system and working full-time. The fact
9 that these families have full-time employment, but
10 are still unable to leave the shelter system is a
11 clear indication that we absolutely need to provide
12 some form of assistance right now. New York City
13 is currently facing a homelessness crisis. As I
14 said, there are over 52,000 homeless individuals in
15 the city and 22,000 of those individuals are
16 children. 22,000 children are homeless in New York
17 City tonight. Since 2008, the number of families
18 with children in the shelter system has increased
19 over 70 percent and unless we take steps to
20 transform the system, there is no indication that
21 this number will decrease. In fact, every
22 indication will increase at the same rapid rate as
23 it is now.

24 Again, I respectfully urge my fellow
25 committee members to vote in favor of this

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2 resolution and I want to turn it over to the
3 resolution sponsor, Ruben Wills, for some opening
4 statements.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: Good morning,
6 Mr. Chair. I want to thank you for leadership on
7 this. The Chair was actually up in Albany with
8 myself yesterday, and the Assistant Commissioner
9 from DHS, speaking. We had robust conversations
10 and dialogue with Republican and Democratic
11 Assembly and Senate staffs. We met with a lot of
12 the members. We are happy to report that a lot of
13 the members are on board with this. We think that
14 there was, indeed, a miscommunication on how it was
15 pushed or where this was on the agenda as far as
16 priorities in Albany. This is not a budget item
17 that should be discussed in the way it has been
18 presented in the media. We are asking for language
19 to be withdrawn so that we can use funds that we
20 already get from Albany to deal with a crisis, and
21 everyone should clearly understand that this is
22 indeed a crisis. 52,000 people in the shelter
23 system is something that we have never had to
24 experience before and it can only grow. This is
25 fiscally responsible. It will cost us less to

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2 house families. We will be able to track families
3 that have needs, whether they be social service
4 needs. Their children will be in a more stable
5 area, which is in a permanent housing situation so
6 that when they go to schools they have more of a
7 sense of pride and stability in the area in which
8 they are at. Taking this language out is common
9 sense. I want to thank all of the co-sponsors. I
10 want to thank... I was going to say Assemblywoman,
11 but Councilwoman Gibson, and I was going to make
12 that mistake because in the Assembly she was a
13 tried and true stalwart towards getting this thing
14 done. Assemblywoman Michele Titus, who was the
15 Social Services Chair and Council Member Levin's
16 cohort and the counterpart in the Assembly, has
17 been doing an incredible job at pushing this. We
18 also met several members of the majority and they
19 are all on board with this and several former
20 council members who are now in the Legislature, the
21 State Legislature. So while we do this, I would
22 implore the Governor and his staff to please look
23 this over and to know that we are not asking for
24 any additional money inside of the budget. We are
25 just asking that we do the responsible thing and

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2 help those who cannot or are not in the... don't
3 have the ability right now to help themselves.
4 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Council
6 Member Wills, and I just want to thank you very
7 much for your dedication to this issue and for
8 making sure that this is pressed now and has been a
9 priority, and I think without your efforts we
10 wouldn't be at the moment where we are today where
11 this issue is getting a lot of attention and it is
12 now on the radar of our colleagues at the State.
13 And I just want to reiterate something that you
14 said is that there is no cost associated with doing
15 this action today, so for the State to remove this
16 language it's not going to cost them a dime and if
17 we want to... if we have the ability to create a
18 program at the City using State dollars, that is
19 something that eventually could draw down State
20 dollars, so there would be an impact to the State,
21 but the State maintains the ability to sign off on
22 any such program. OTDA and the Department of
23 Budget at the State still maintain their ability to
24 sign off on any program, so by removing this
25 language in the State budget, that, in and of

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2 itself does not have a budget impact to the State.
3 I want to make that very clear. We're going to
4 hear public testimony on the resolution. We're
5 going to start with Patrick Markee of Coalition for
6 the Homeless, Joshua Goldfein of Legal Aid Society
7 and Stephanie Gendell of Citizens' Committee for
8 Children, and if you could come to the front row
9 here. And we've been joined by Public Advocate,
10 Letitia James. I'm sorry, and I need to... sorry,
11 introduce everybody, all the committee members that
12 are here and we have Carlos Menchaca of Brooklyn;
13 Donovan Richards of Queens; Vanessa Gibson of the
14 Bronx; Ruben Wills of Queens; Fernando Cabrera of
15 the Bronx and Annabel Palma of the Bronx, and to
16 the Public Advocate, do you want to say a few
17 words?

18 PATRICK MARKEE: Thank you. My name is
19 Patrick Markee. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at
20 Coalition for the Homeless. We and the Legal Aid
21 Society have submitted a written testimony and I
22 won't read it today. I think what we have to say
23 is fairly brief. It's clear there is an
24 unprecedented and historic homelessness crisis in
25 the city now; more than 53,000 homeless men, women

1 and children sleeping in city shelters tonight;
2 more than 22,000 of them children. In the past
3 year alone, as we reported in our recent State of
4 the Homeless Report, there was a seven percent
5 increase in the homeless shelter population and
6 eight percent in the number of homeless children on
7 top of historic increases that we saw in recent
8 years. A large part of the reason for that is the
9 lack of housing subsidies of permanent housing
10 assistance to help homeless children and families
11 leave the shelter system and secure their own
12 homes.
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14 What the City is trying to do right now
15 is essentially work with the State to remove
16 restrictive language in the State budget that's
17 been there since 2011 that prohibits the use of
18 State funds and federal TANF Block Grant funds to
19 finance a rent subsidy program that would do
20 exactly what we just talked about; provide a path
21 out of shelter for the most vulnerable children and
22 families in this city. That's all we're asking
23 for.

24 We really want to applaud the City; the
25 de Blasio Administration for pressing this case in

1 Albany, the State officials and State legislators
2 who have voiced support for this and to the City
3 Council, to Chair Levin, Council Member Wills, the
4 folks that have really been up there in Albany with
5 us yesterday and with the City pressing this case.
6 It's really urgent that we get it done. It's
7 something that can be done in the time remaining.
8 It's fairly simple to make this change in budget
9 language. Any report that this is something that
10 cannot be done is simply false. It absolutely can
11 be done and most important, homeless kids and
12 families in this city can't wait another year.
13 Another year without action on housing subsidies
14 for these vulnerable families will simply lead to
15 more homelessness on top of the record levels that
16 we have now. So again, thank you very much for the
17 work that you're doing and we full support the
18 resolution proposed today.

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20 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Patrick.

21 Two questions for you. Since the coalition has
22 done a very good job of tracking and presenting the
23 data of the number of homeless individuals,
24 homeless families, homeless children in New York
25 City, how much has the homeless population grown in

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2 the last year and how many more children are there
3 homeless today than there were a year ago?

4 PATRICK MARKEE: So last year when we
5 released our State of the Homeless Report, and that
6 was a little more than a year ago, that was the
7 first time that this homeless shelter population
8 had broken 50,000 people a night in the city's
9 history, and that time there were around 21,000
10 homeless children. There are now more than 53,600
11 homeless people in the shelter system each night,
12 including well over 22,000 approaching 23,000
13 children in shelter each night. If we don't... if
14 we had the same rate of increase in the past year
15 in the coming year, we'd be at more than 24,000
16 children a night; well over 55, maybe 56,000 people
17 crowding our shelters. This is just an
18 unacceptable you know, path to be on and that's
19 exactly why we need these kinds of housing
20 subsidies.

21 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: And that would be
22 the likely scenario if we don't do anything.

23 PATRICK MARKEE: Absolutely, yes.

24 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.
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2 JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: Joshua Goldfein from
3 The Legal Aid Society. I just want to add briefly
4 to what Patrick said, that, and as Judith Goldiner,
5 my colleague said in *The New York Times* today, this
6 is... there are many complicated problems that
7 they're dealing with in the State budget; this is
8 not one of them. It's simple and it's something
9 that everybody wants to do. We don't doubt that
10 for a second, that you know, that all sides of the
11 state government and city government; everyone
12 would like to see some attention to this issue,
13 particularly when the barrier that's preventing
14 them from going forward is this budgetary language
15 that's not programmatic and so given that everyone
16 wants to get it done, we appreciate the attention
17 to ensuring that it can be done and the change
18 would enable a small part of the city's program. I
19 just also want to make sure we're clear that this
20 subsidy is going to be part of a broader approach
21 that the administration is developing that will
22 include the use of federally funded resources. It
23 will include prevention. There's a whole range of
24 efforts that are going to be put into place. This
25 is one of them that's a very important piece, but

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in order for all the pieces to work together, we need to have all of them to address all the different needs and the different kinds of ways that families end up in the shelter system.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much.

STEPHANIE GENDELL: Good morning, I'm Stephanie Gendell, the Associate Executive Director at Citizens' Committee for Children and I wanted to thank all of the council members who have introduced the resolution and the council members from the committee, all that here, the Public Advocate, as well as the de Blasio Administration for their attention to this issue. The 22,000 children in shelter cannot wait, and when we're talking about 22,000, if we are sitting here next year having this conversation again, as my colleagues have stated, it'll be much higher than 22,000. We know that we need to have a housing subsidy in the city's tool kit because we've seen what's happened since we lost it from the tool kit. Before the end of Advantage, there were about 16,600 children in shelter and now it's over 22,000, and that's in large part because the length

1 of stay in shelter has dramatically increased.
2 Before we lost Advantage, it was 258 days and as of
3 this past December it was 429 days. And so we know
4 that we need the subsidy back; I know you all know
5 that. I hope that our colleagues up in Albany
6 understand as well. They definitely have time.
7 That's why the budget's not adopted yet. They have
8 between now and when they adopt the budget, so the
9 argument that there's not enough time does not seem
10 to make sense to us over at Citizens' Committee for
11 Children and so we hope that by the time this is
12 resolved in Albany that we will have the permission
13 we need to create a new program because it's really
14 important and the children can't wait and so we
15 thank you for your support.

17 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

18 Stephanie, I wanted to ask you with regard to
19 children, what are some of the impacts that a child
20 has on their life...

21 STEPHANIE GENDELL: [interposing] Yep.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Living in the
23 shelter system?

24 STEPHANIE GENDELL: So at worst,
25 they're living in the conditions that we read about

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2 *The New York Times* that Dasani was living in where
3 it's unsuitable for children to be in that place at
4 all and at best, even in the best circumstances for
5 children, being homeless impacts their life. It
6 impacts their education; it impacts their
7 educational outcome; it impacts their sense of
8 self-worth; it impacts their sense of stability and
9 we've seen lots of research showing that it has
10 impact on their health and their mental health.
11 And so these are struggling children who we want to
12 give them all that we need. We, as an aside, know
13 that their rates of being involved in Pre-K are
14 lower than other kids and so we want to get all
15 kids Pre-K and so we want to make sure that we give
16 these kids the best chance to grow up into
17 successful, healthy, happy adults.

18 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, and I
19 just want to acknowledge Josh's work that was
20 documented in *The New York Times* article you know,
21 interceding when called upon for Dasani Coates'
22 case in making sure that she could stay in her
23 school, so.

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2 JOSHUA GOLDFEIN: Thanks. That was the
3 work of a lot of people, but I was the totem pole
4 for that.

5 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Well, thank you
6 very much for doing that and for all the work that
7 you all do. Thank you, thank you. Public Advocate
8 James?

9 PUBLIC ADVOCATE JAMES: Sure. I just
10 want everyone to know Dasani is still in school. I
11 met with her last week, her and her brothers and
12 sisters and her family, and she's doing fine and
13 she wishes you all the best... well.

14 The challenge of homeless in our city
15 has never been greater. New York City continues to
16 experience unprecedented levels of homelessness and
17 housing subsidies have proven to be effective to
18 enable the homeless to move out of shelters and to
19 provide them stability in their lives. Over the
20 past year, the average monthly number of homeless
21 people sleeping each night in the New York City
22 shelter system increased by seven percent, from
23 50,135 people in January 2013 to 53,615 in January
24 2014, the highest level ever recorded, and the
25 average number of homeless children living in

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2 shelters increased by eight percent over the year
3 prior, reaching an all-time high of 22,712 children
4 in January. The average number of homeless
5 families in shelters has also increased as well,
6 and so New Yorkers obviously are paying more for
7 their rent. There's a crisis in affordable housing
8 and as a result, we are experiencing high levels of
9 homelessness. We need help and the State must
10 assist us in this area because this is a
11 humanitarian effort to address the needs of these
12 families. By restoring the rent subsidies program
13 that was cut in 2011, we can help families stay in
14 their homes and avoid shelters or worse, prevent
15 them from sleeping on our streets and on our
16 subways.

17 Rent subsidies programs are not a
18 giveaway. They require individuals to work and
19 contribute a portion to their income toward the
20 rent. Whether you call it the Advantage program or
21 anything else, our city is... I just lost my... our
22 city is at a disadvantage when we don't fund rent
23 subsidies. And so I know budget negotiations have
24 begun. It's also my understanding that the budget
25 bills have not even been printed, and so clearly by

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2 deleting a few sentences with the stroke of a pen
3 or by pressing a button, we could address the
4 homeless crisis in the City of New York. The State
5 budget can easily be shaped to allow rent subsidies
6 to be restored. We will not accept excuses. We
7 will not accept the fact that it's late in the
8 process. That is totally unacceptable when you
9 consider the human implications and so the time for
10 action is now and I urge Governor Cuomo to restore
11 these rental subsidies immediately. I thank you,
12 Mr. Chair and I thank the committee.

13 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Public
14 Advocate. Do any of my colleagues have any
15 questions for the previous panel? Okay, seeing
16 none, we will call up the next panel: Johanna
17 Walczyk of Supportive Housing of New York; Sally
18 Greenspan of Enterprise Community Partners;
19 Catherine Trapani from New Destiny Housing
20 Corporation and Ted McCourtney of the New York City
21 Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential
22 Provider. And we've been joined by colleague and
23 committee member, Corey Johnson of Manhattan.

24 [Pause]

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2 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Go ahead. Thank
3 you. Turn on the mic.

4 JOHANNA WALCZYK: Got it. Good
5 morning, Chair Levin and the members of the General
6 Welfare Committee. Thank you for this opportunity
7 to testify. My name is Johanna Walczyk and I'm
8 here today testifying on behalf of the Supportive
9 Housing Network of New York. We strongly support
10 Resolution 123 and want to thank you for making
11 this a priority.

12 The Supportive Housing Network is a
13 statewide non-profit membership organization
14 representing over 220 non-profits that develop and
15 operate supportive housing; affordable housing
16 linked to on-site services that help formerly
17 homeless, disabled and at-risk individuals and
18 families become and remain stably housed. Since
19 its inception in the 1980s, Supportive Housing has
20 become one of the most effective and cost-efficient
21 interventions ever devised to end homelessness
22 among the most vulnerable, including individuals
23 and families coping with mental illness, trauma and
24 abuse, addiction, chronic illness and most
25 recently, youth who have aged out of foster care.

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2 Supportive Housing is at a crossroads with the New
3 York/New York III initiative ending next year, the
4 city's main vehicle for providing funding for
5 Supportive Housing, but unlike this rental subsidy
6 crisis, there is an illegal restriction keeping the
7 City and State from negotiating a new program.

8 And Supportive Housing should not be
9 the only solution to homelessness. Many of our
10 60,000 homeless men, women and children simply
11 cannot make ends meet in a city where, according to
12 the National Low Income Housing Coalition's 2014
13 Out of Reach Report, the average wage needed to
14 afford a two-bedroom apartment is \$25 an hour. For
15 them, they just need a rental subsidy that can make
16 up the difference between their low wages and high
17 rent.

18 City Council Resolution 123 rightly
19 calls on the State to sign a budget that once again
20 allows the City to use State funding to create a
21 local rental assistance program and if, as we all
22 hope, the State lifts this restriction, then we
23 urge the General Welfare Committee to begin work
24 with the administration immediately to ensure that
25 we refund and implement a new program as soon as

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2 possible. We also ask that the committee and
3 administration work with the providers and
4 advocates that have experience with rental
5 subsidies to shape this new and improved program.
6 Many of us testifying today have done extensive
7 research on local rental subsidy programs here and
8 across the country and hope to help make this
9 program a successful one. Thank you for your time
10 and I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you, Johanna.

12 SALLY GREENSPAN: Great. Good morning
13 and thank you to Chairperson Levin and the members
14 of the committee and to Public Advocate James for
15 being here today, and for the opportunity to
16 testify in support of a new local rent subsidy
17 program for the homeless as outlined in City
18 Council Resolution 123. My name is Sally Greenspan
19 and I am the Program Director for Vulnerable
20 Populations at Enterprise Community Partners.

21 Enterprise creates and preserves
22 affordable housing connected to opportunity for
23 low-income individuals and families. Since 1987,
24 we've created 44,000 affordable homes in New York,
25 nearly a quarter of which have been set aside for

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2 vulnerable populations. At Enterprise, we
3 understand that our city's homelessness crisis is
4 caused largely by a lack of affordable housing. so
5 the incredible magnitude of this problem has
6 already been well outlined today, but I just want
7 to emphasize that driving this crisis the median
8 rent in the city has increased by almost nine
9 percent over the past half decade, while wages have
10 dropped by seven percent after adjusting for
11 inflation. Today, roughly half of low-income New
12 Yorkers pay more than 50 percent of their income on
13 rent, leaving them one paycheck away from losing
14 their homes.

15 As federal housing subsidies have
16 become increasingly unavailable, there are very
17 limited options for homeless New Yorkers to find
18 permanent housing. The absence of a local rent
19 subsidy program targeted to homeless households has
20 had a dramatic negative impact on both the number
21 and the length of stay of those in emergency
22 shelter at untold cost to families and their
23 children.

24 So we all know that there's no one size
25 fits all solution to homelessness. Unquestionably,

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2 some households with permanent disabilities, fixed
3 incomes or high service needs will require a
4 permanent housing voucher or supportive housing.
5 However, the majority of households in shelter face
6 primarily economic barriers and National Best
7 Practices demonstrate they can be helped with
8 rental assistance coupled with services.

9 A new local rent subsidy program must
10 be developed in cooperation between public and non-
11 governmental partners. It must be large enough to
12 adequately address the pronounced need and flexible
13 enough in enrollment criteria to allow numerous
14 households to access it. It should include a
15 service component to help families secure and
16 maintain housing and in order to ensure the
17 greatest possible success for participants, it
18 should be calibrated to families needs, both in
19 terms of amount and duration and include features
20 to ensure that families that are in danger of
21 returning to homelessness at the conclusion of the
22 subsidy are transitioned to other programs and
23 resources.

24 In order to fund an effective rent
25 subsidy, the City must secure the State's financial

1 support and associated federal matching funds. The
2 City, together with their non-governmental
3 partners, must work actively in the coming days,
4 both to secure a change in State budget language
5 and to ensure robust funding, if possible, for an
6 essential rental assistance program in New York
7 City.
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9 So in conclusion, we strongly support
10 City Council Resolution 123. We urge the City to
11 continue to do everything possible to ensure that
12 the prohibitive language is removed in this year's
13 State budget. However, in event that the State's
14 final budget does not include either or both of
15 these components, we urge the City not to give up
16 on this essential priority. Remind the Council
17 that the Advantage program was created and funded
18 mid-budget year and regardless of the outcome of
19 this year's State budget negotiations, we must all
20 push forward together on this essential policy
21 priority. Homeless and at-risk families in our
22 city are counting on us. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
24 and I want to thank Enterprise and your work on
25 this issue. You've done a great amount of the

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2 groundwork in laying out potential solutions to the
3 problem and I want to just thank Enterprise for
4 dedicating the resources to making sure that that's
5 out there and that's a reality.

6 SALLY GREENSPAN: Anything we can do to
7 help.

8 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you.

9 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Good morning. My
10 name is Catherine Trapani and I'm the Housinglink
11 Director at New Destiny Housing Corporation, which
12 is a 20-year old non-profit organization dedicated
13 to the long-term safety and stability of survivors
14 of domestic violence and others at risk of
15 homelessness. Thanks very much for the opportunity
16 to testify this morning.

17 New Destiny is the only non-profit in
18 the city exclusively dedicated to the permanent
19 housing needs of survivors of domestic violence and
20 during a recent hearing before this committee, we
21 heard Commissioner Gilbert Taylor testify to
22 something that we've known all along: domestic
23 violence is one of the leading causes of
24 homelessness in our city and according to the 2010
25 Consolidated Plan, which was the last time such

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2 figures were made available, as many as 31 percent
3 of homeless families using New York City shelters
4 were there because of domestic violence, which was
5 the largest subpopulation that was counted.

6 Historically, City policy regarding
7 housing and homelessness has routinely ignored
8 survivors of domestic violence using HRA as a
9 domestic violence shelter system from their
10 planning of housing subsidies or excluded them from
11 available resources outright, as is currently the
12 case with HPD's Homeless Housing resources. We're
13 hopeful that with the new administration that this
14 will change, which is why I'm here to testify this
15 morning.

16 The lack of housing resources is taking
17 a terrible toll on survivors and their families.
18 New Destiny's research indicates that as many as 80
19 percent of survivors, most of whom are mothers with
20 young children, leave the time limited emergency
21 domestic violence shelter systems still homeless
22 and at risk of abuse. It should therefore come as
23 no surprise that the lack of housing resources has
24 been cited in reports by New York City's Domestic
25 Violence Fatality Review Board as a deterrent for

1 survivors considering leaving abusive
2 relationships. This is cause for grave concern,
3 given that while other major categories of crime
4 are down in our city, domestic violence rates are
5 holding steady, and in some precincts are on the
6 rise. In fact, according to NYPD statistics for
7 several years in a row, domestic violence has been
8 the leading cause of murder for women in the City
9 of New York.
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11 No one should ever have to choose
12 between abuse and homelessness. Victims of
13 domestic violence need to know that if they choose
14 to leave an abusive relationship, there will be a
15 place for them to go in the long-term. It is for
16 this reason that New Destiny strongly supports the
17 creation of a housing subsidy for homeless New
18 Yorkers including those that are residing in HRA's
19 domestic violence shelters.

20 The subsidies design must be sensitive
21 to survivor needs coupled with the available
22 voluntary support services for those who need them
23 and be flexible such that those who cannot attain
24 self-sufficiency before any associated time limit
25 is reached are not thrust back into homelessness or

1 abusive situations. Working collaboratively with
2 the Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential
3 services providers and other stakeholders, New
4 Destiny is confident that there is broad support
5 for such a subsidy and urge the council to adopt
6 the resolution in support of changing State budget
7 language that would facilitate its creation. Doing
8 so will send a powerful message to our partners n
9 Albany and allow the city and the state to work
10 together to craft a responsible program for the
11 many homeless New Yorkers in need. Thank you for
12 the opportunity.

14 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
15 much, Catherine. Thank you very much for all the
16 work that you and New Destiny does in this very
17 important issue.

18 CATHERINE TRAPANI: Thank you.

19 TED MCCOURTNEY: Good morning. My name
20 is Ted McCourtney and I work for Sanctuary for
21 Families as the Director of the Sarah Burke House
22 Domestic Violence Shelter. I'm here today as a
23 representative of the New York City Coalition for
24 Domestic Violence Residential Providers. This
25 coalition is a partnership of all the licensed,

1 non-profit domestic violence shelter providers in
2 New York City. The mission of the coalition is to
3 advocate with a unified voice for a continuum of
4 care that provides quality housing and services for
5 all domestic violence survivors.
6

7 We fully support the City Council in
8 their request to the State to permit TANF dollars
9 to be utilized for rental subsidies in New York
10 City and for the City and the State to work
11 together to create a rental subsidy program. Due
12 to federal cuts to Section 8, there has not been a
13 rental subsidy available to families in domestic
14 violence shelters since the termination of
15 Advantage in 2011.

16 It is more effective to assist a low-
17 income family with their rent than it is to shelter
18 them. More importantly, providing rental subsidies
19 to families allows them to regain their dignity and
20 to work toward real independence as they transition
21 from shelter. This assistance is especially
22 important for victims of domestic violence, who
23 have often been kept out of the workforce by an
24 abusive partner. Although many victims are able to
25 obtain employment while in domestic violence

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2 shelter, they are not able to afford the high cost
3 of rent in New York City. As a result, the
4 majority of families timing out of domestic
5 violence shelter go into the homeless shelter
6 system. These families not only remain homeless,
7 but are also at higher risk for further abuse. A
8 subsidy which would allow them to access housing
9 will give them a better chance of obtaining the
10 stability needed to obtain a living wage employment
11 and to remain free from further abuse. For these
12 reasons the New York City Coalition of Domestic
13 Violence Residential Providers strongly supports
14 the passage of Resolution 123-A. Thank you.

15 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
16 much. I want to thank this panel very much for so
17 forcefully advocating the position of providers
18 because it's an essential component of the broader
19 coalition that we have in New York City advocating
20 for the rights of homeless individuals and homeless
21 families, and hearing from the provider community
22 is absolutely essential as part of this effort, so
23 thank you very much for your testimony this
24 morning. Do any of my colleagues have any
25 questions for this panel? 'Kay, seeing none, thank

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2 you very much. The last panel is... we're going to
3 call up Arvernetta Henry from Picture the Homeless,
4 Gary Parker from NYU McSilver Institute and Jeff
5 Foreman from Care for the Homeless.

6 [Pause]

7 GARY PARKER: Good morning. Thank you,
8 Chairman Levin. Thank you, members of the General
9 Welfare Committee. My name is Gary Parker. I'm
10 the Deputy Director of the McSilver Institute for
11 Poverty, Policy and Research, which is located
12 within NYU's Silver School of Social Work. Our
13 mission is a simple one: to better understand what
14 causes poverty and then to develop interventions to
15 address its consequences, so we should have that
16 wrapped up in just about a year or two I think.

17 I'm here to present testimony in
18 support of Resolution 123-A. Also we have two of
19 our community partners: the Institute for
20 Community Living and Community Life, who have asked
21 to sign onto our testimony this morning.

22 The McSilver Institute's work is
23 defined by research partners with policymakers and
24 service organizations, community stakeholders and
25 we have projects happening not only in New York,

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2 but throughout the globe. And we try to understand
3 the links between individuals, families,
4 communities and their external environments and we
5 pay particular attention to the relationship
6 between race and poverty and we apply an anti-
7 oppressive lens to all of the projects that we
8 have.

9 I'm going to skip some of the
10 statistics that were very well stated by the
11 Coalition and some of our other partners and by the
12 Chairman and the Public Advocate this morning and
13 I'll move down just a little bit in my testimony.
14 At the McSilver Institute, we approach homelessness
15 as a serious physical and mental health issue,
16 which ultimately becomes an expensive living
17 condition from which people seek services. In
18 addition to costing New York City \$3,000 to house a
19 homeless family for one month and \$2,300 for an
20 individual adult, emergency room visits, temporary
21 incarceration and other realities are all too
22 familiar to homeless new Yorkers and far more
23 costly than investment in subsidized housing and
24 preventable services.

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2 Research has shown that investing in
3 subsidized housing in New York City can reduce
4 health costs by 40 to 60 percent. And I'd also
5 just like to state that in the research projects
6 that we have done at the McSilver Institute, we
7 have seen a correlation between youth that stay in
8 shelters and an increase in high risk activities,
9 including drug and alcohol use and risky sexual
10 behavior. In addition to significant healthcare
11 costs, lack of housing is a significant barrier to
12 employment for homeless individuals. Coordinated
13 efforts linking job training and preparedness along
14 with housing assistance have shown positive
15 results, and our partners at the Nathan Kline
16 Institute created an extensive literature view on
17 children and homelessness. The report highlights
18 recent research that found that homelessness and
19 highly mobile children who changed residences three
20 or four more times in 12-month period did
21 significantly worse in school than their peers who
22 were also living poverty, but in more housing
23 secure situations. And dating back to the 1990s,
24 studies have found homeless families who receive
25 housing subsidies are far less likely to return to

1
2 the shelter system and far more likely to attain
3 long-term sustainability.

4 As per the Center of Housing Policy, an
5 astonishing 59 percent of low-income New Yorkers
6 spend over half their incomes on housing. This
7 unfortunate and unsustainable reality more than one
8 in four homeless adults and New Yorkers are
9 employed, yet without a place to live. At the same
10 time, homelessness has decreased nationally,
11 including the 48 largest cities other than New York
12 and Los Angeles. New York's lack of affordable
13 housing options is a leading cause of the record
14 high level of homelessness in shelter populations
15 in all five boroughs.

16 In closing, the City and State must
17 work together to ensure access for all to shelters
18 and assistance through subsidies and other
19 programs. The evidence is clear that having a
20 place to live is a critical component to helping
21 get housing insecure families back on their feet.
22 The McSilver Institute strongly supports any work
23 that the City and State, and ideally a coordinated
24 partnership of resources and services that can help
25 make this a reality. I want to thank the committee

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for your leadership on this issue and all of the issues that affect poverty impacted families and we are grateful for your consideration in passing Intro 123-A.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much, Mr. Parker.

GARY PARKER: Thank you.

JEFF FOREMAN: [off mic] My name is Jeff Foreman and I'm the Policy Director...

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: [interposing] Make sure the microphone is on.

JEFF FOREMAN: My name is Jeff Foreman. I'm the Policy Director for Care for the Homeless. We're a non-profit that provides healthcare to homeless people in the Bronx, Brooklyn, Manhattan and Queens through more than 30 federally qualified and state licensed clinics in your districts. We provide over 35,000 clinic visits a year, providing primary and specialized healthcare, as well as street medicine, behavioral and mental health visits and health education and prevention programs.

I'm here today... we've submitted testimony, which I won't go into, that does discuss

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2 the rental program in more substance, but I have
3 two primary reasons for being here today. First is
4 to let you know that we very strongly support the
5 resolution that you are to take action on today,
6 and secondly is to thank you. We want to thank
7 Councilman Wills for this resolution, Chairman
8 Levin for moving the resolution and really all the
9 members of the committee and all the members of the
10 council who are champions in this effort.

11 The basis for our policy advocacy at
12 Care for the Homeless is that modern day
13 homelessness was created through poor policy
14 choices and modern day homelessness can be ended
15 through better policy choices. The resolution that
16 you have before you today is the better policy
17 choice and it does promise better outcomes for
18 people who are homeless as well as our communities.
19 It promises a chance to end homelessness in New
20 York City and it promises substantial tax savings
21 to the taxpayers of New York. As this
22 disappointing March spring turns to April Fools'
23 Day, the door is closing on over 53,000 people in
24 homeless shelters, including over 22,712 children
25 that we know are in those shelters, and this policy

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2 that you're talking about today is one of the
3 absolutely necessary tools that could allow for
4 moving people out of shelter to stable housing.
5 This is something that we have met with most of the
6 members that are here today in your offices at City
7 Hall or your district offices or with your staff to
8 talk about and it's something that we have been
9 advocating for a long time. You can't end
10 homelessness in New York City without a substantial
11 significant flexible rental subsidy program and
12 that's the opportunity that you have today.

13 The problem of homelessness in New
14 York... ending the problem of homelessness in New
15 York is not unsolvable and changing the language
16 and creating a rental subsidy program that works is
17 not unsolvable either. It's just something that
18 has to be done very urgently. So we thank you very
19 much for taking this action. We appreciate your
20 fighting for our clients and we very much support
21 this resolution. Thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much
23 and thank you for all that you do in ensuring that
24 homeless individuals and homeless families in New
25 York City and especially homeless children are

1 receiving adequate medical care and healthcare.
2 It's absolutely essential and it's something that
3 we're going to be taking a look at more in depth in
4 the months ahead. Thank you.

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6 ARVERNETTA HENRY: Good morning. My
7 name is Mrs. Arvernetta Henry. I am presently a
8 member of Picture the Homeless and actively
9 involved in the housing campaign at Picture the
10 Homeless, and I am presently also in the New York
11 City shelter system. I thank you for allowing me
12 to have this time to speak about rental subsidies
13 and how the homeless people are in dire need of
14 such subsidies today.

15 We have so many families that are
16 housed in the shelter system and living on the
17 street. We also have too many people on fixed
18 incomes who are being evicted from their homes
19 because the rent is outrageously high. I have
20 recently met an elderly lady of 87 years old, a
21 senior citizen who was evicted from her home,
22 although she had Section 8. She had her rent
23 increased and she was unable to pay her portion.
24 The landlord proceeded to evict her and she came
25 into the shelter system last week.

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2 If we had a permanent rental subsidy
3 program, a family with low annual income should
4 have to pay no more than 20 to 30 percent of their
5 income on rent. They could be living in a decent
6 space and providing meals for their loved ones.
7 With a rental subsidy, families would stay together
8 and be united. Children wouldn't have to be
9 uprooted from their schools and it would give the
10 family a helping hand, preserving communities in
11 the process. While new shelters are opening up all
12 over the city, some costing over \$3,500 a month per
13 person, many properties remain vacant. We could
14 renovate and rehabilitate some of these city vacant
15 properties and use rental subsidies to pay people's
16 rent instead of warehousing them in the shelter
17 system.

18 The Department of Homeless Service
19 budget was close to \$1 billion last year. If we
20 took even a small percentage of this budget and put
21 it towards housing people in permanent housing, we
22 could reduce the shelter population and house
23 thousands of men, women and children.

24 For myself being on a fixed income,
25 every apartment I'm looking at costs too much and

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2 if I paid a rent of \$900 or more, I couldn't afford
3 to pay utility or buy food. If I had a rental
4 subsidy, that would allow me to pay less, I could
5 live in an apartment and I wouldn't have to be in
6 the shelter system or move out of a city I have
7 been in all my life. I have a lot of medical
8 expenses, but I am ineligible for Medicaid or
9 Medicare payments. My medical payments come out of
10 my own pocket. I have medical bills coming out of
11 my ear and it's constant, so I am stuck in the
12 shelter system. I have to make these payments and
13 I also have a student loan to pay off and I could
14 use some assistance.

15 I applaud the City Council and
16 encourage both the Governor and the State Assembly
17 to amend the language in the current budget to
18 allow State reimbursement to go towards rental
19 subsidies for homeless New Yorkers. The City
20 Council should continue to meet with the people
21 directly facing these struggles. Both the City and
22 State should involve homeless people and those at
23 risk of homelessness in these conversations so we
24 can create an effective, flexible and permanent
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2 rental subsidy program in New York City. I thank
3 you for allowing me to address this issue.

4 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
5 much, Miss Henry, for your very effective testimony
6 and very moving testimony and for helping us see
7 some of the on the ground real life impacts of the
8 issues that we're talking about today. So I want
9 to thank you very much. Now, do any of my
10 colleagues have any questions for this panel?

11 Okay, seeing none, thank you very much for your
12 testimony. Do any other members of the public wish
13 to testify on this resolution? Seeing none, I will
14 ask Andrea Vasquez, Counsel to the Committee, to
15 call the roll. Okay, Council Member Gibson.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: Thank you very
17 much, Chairman Levine and to... sorry, Chairman
18 Levin, goodness, and to all of my colleagues as
19 well as the lead sponsor, Council Member Wills. I
20 truly want to thank all the advocates that came
21 this morning to testify. I share the sentiments of
22 many of my colleagues and all of you and our firm
23 appreciation to the work that you do; the fact that
24 you are in the community each and every day serving
25 so many families that are in need of permanent

1 housing, social services, mental services and all
2 the other components of living a quality of life.
3 And as someone who served in the Assembly, who was
4 a true supporter of programs like Advantage, I know
5 all too well the ramifications that we're now
6 dealing with in the crisis and so I am certainly
7 supportive of this resolution. I think it's a
8 unique opportunity for the City of New York to take
9 what I believe is the lead in making sure that we
10 provide that rental subsidy program, as I continue
11 to say I applaud all the programs that we are
12 providing, but the fact that we have working people
13 in homeless shelters is unacceptable and this
14 rental subsidy will go a long way in making up that
15 difference in providing the stability and the
16 longevity that is needed for many of our families.
17 And so this resolution is just our collective voice
18 in urging the Governor to do what is necessary and
19 what is right. This will not hold up any budget
20 process in Albany, but it will simply allow the
21 City of New York to do the work that we need to do
22 with continued support from the State. So I want
23 to thank our Chair of General Welfare, as well as
24 Council Member Wills for their leadership, for
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2 taking the lead, going to Albany, making sure that
3 our voices will continue to be heard and even
4 beyond this resolution, I am committed to making
5 sure that we all work together, not just for the
6 families that need this intervention, but certainly
7 for all New Yorkers that unfortunately, are living
8 in shelters each and every night. So I thank you
9 again for allowing me to speak and I express my
10 firm support on this resolution. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very
12 much, Council Member Gibson. I also want to thank
13 all the members of this committee and this council
14 for taking on this issue and for making sure that
15 this body's voice is heard and our opinion is known
16 to the State Legislature and to the Governor and
17 that we are on the record firmly in support of
18 taking care of New York City's homeless population.
19 I just want to acknowledge the members of this
20 committee and the council for that. With that, I'm
21 going to call... ask William Martin to call the
22 roll on this resolution.

23 COMMITTEE CLERK: William Martin,
24 Committee Clerk. Roll call vote for the Committee
25 on General Welfare. Council Member Levin.

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Palma.

COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Cabrera.

COUNCIL MEMBER CABRERA: I want to commend Council Member Wills for the resolution and it only makes sense that Resolution 123 should be simple: Governor one, Senator two, the Assembly three and I wish we had a ABC. Thank you so much. I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Wills.

COUNCIL MEMBER WILLS: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Richards.

COUNCIL MEMBER RICHARDS: Congratulations, Council Member Wills and I vote for the Miss Henrys out there. Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Gibson.

COUNCIL MEMBER GIBSON: I vote aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Johnson.

COUNCIL MEMBER JOHNSON: Aye.

COMMITTEE CLERK: Menchaca.

COUNCIL MEMBER MENCHACA: I proudly vote aye.

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COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE

COMMITTEE CLERK: By a vote of eight in the affirmative, zero in the negative and no abstentions, the item has been adopted. Members, please sign the Committee Report. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON LEVIN: Thank you very much. Hearing is adjourned.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Date: 04/18/2014