Committee on General Welfare

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**THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

**COMMITTEE REPORT OF THE HUMAN SERVICES DIVISION**

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**COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE**

**Hon. Stephen Levin, Chair**

**February 28, 2020**

**Oversight: Outreach NYC and**

**Barriers to Shelter for Individuals Experiencing Homelessness**

**Int. No. 1483:** By Council Members Levin, Levine, Brannan, Holden, Chin and The Public Advocate (Mr. Williams)

**Title:** A Local Law in relation to a plan to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families in the shelter system

**Int. No. 1484:** By Council Members Levin, Holden, Chin, Lander and Brannan

**Title:** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to reporting on the placement of pets whose owners enter homeless shelters

**Administrative Code:** Adds a new section 21-324

**Preconsidered Int. No. \_\_\_\_:** By Council Member Levin

**Title:** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the provision of case management services for homeless individuals

**Administrative Code:** Amends section 21-314

**Preconsidered Int. No. \_\_\_\_:** By Council Member Levin

**Title:** A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to rental assistance eligibility requirements for street homeless individuals

**Administrative Code:** Adds a new section 21-142

1. **Introduction**

On February 26, 2020, the Committee on General Welfare, chaired by Council Member Stephen Levin, will hold a hearing on Outreach NYC and barriers to shelter for individuals experiencing homelessness. Among those expected to testify are representatives from the New York City Department of Social Services, community organizations, and members of the public.

1. **Street Homelessness**

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines unsheltered individuals as those “having a primary nighttime location [that] is a public or private place not designated for, or ordinarily used as, a regular sleeping accommodation … such as the streets, vehicles or parks.”[[1]](#footnote-2) The HUD-mandated Homeless Outreach Population Estimate Count (the “HOPE Count”) has volunteers canvass streets and subway station and identified 3,588 unsheltered individuals in New York City in 2019.[[2]](#footnote-3) Additionally, since 2014, the Bronx Health and Housing Consortium has conducted a survey in hospitals in New York City on the same night as the Hope Count to capture the number of individuals in hospitals experiencing sheltered and unsheltered homelessness (the “Hospital Count”).[[3]](#footnote-4) In 2019, there were 326 unsheltered adults identified in the Hospital Count.[[4]](#footnote-5) Finally, since 2015, DYCD and the Center for Innovation through Data Intelligence (CIDI) have conducted a count to estimate the number of unsheltered youth, ages 24 and below, who are not counted during the HOPE Count (the “Youth Count”).[[5]](#footnote-6) On the Tuesday to Friday after the HOPE Count, youth are surveyed regarding where they spent the night of the HOPE Count.[[6]](#footnote-7) For the Youth Count, while 2019 data are not yet available, in 2018, 36 unsheltered youth were identified.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Individuals experiencing street homelessness are typically single adult males.[[8]](#footnote-9) A high percentage are over the age of 50.[[9]](#footnote-10) They have higher rates of physical health issues in part due to their age and also due to exposure to the harshness of living on the streets without access to routine medical care.[[10]](#footnote-11) Unsheltered individuals also have higher rates of mental and behavioral health issues and substance use disorders.[[11]](#footnote-12) In Fiscal Year (FY) 2019, the leading causes of death among unsheltered individuals in New York City were drug-related causes (29%) followed by heart disease (16%), alcohol misuse/dependence (9%), accidents (7%), and cancer (4%).[[12]](#footnote-13)

A subset of individuals experiencing street homelessness who have been unsheltered for an extended period are sometimes referred to as the chronically homeless. The City defines the chronically homeless as those who have lived on the street or subway for nine months of the past two years.[[13]](#footnote-14) Chronic street homeless individuals have more entrenched needs, as their physical and mental health conditions are complicated by years of living on the streets[[14]](#footnote-15) without access to routine medical, mental health, and dental care.[[15]](#footnote-16) They also often mistrust others and public institutions because of repeated attempts to navigate street homelessness and the complicated government services systems.[[16]](#footnote-17) Accordingly, they are often less responsive to traditional outreach efforts, such as offers of a warm meal or a night in shelter,[[17]](#footnote-18) and street outreach workers must repeatedly engage them to develop a rapport, bond, and trust.[[18]](#footnote-19)

 Numerous entities in the city work to engage these individuals and attempt to bring them off the streets and into transitional and permanent housing. For example, the public and the HOME-STAT canvassing team report individuals who appear to be street homeless by calling 311 and using the 311 app.[[19]](#footnote-20) The HOME-STAT canvassing team traverses each block in Manhattan from Canal Street to 145th Street, as well as hot spots in the outer boroughs, to identify and inform the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS)-contracted street outreach teams about unsheltered individuals.[[20]](#footnote-21) Additionally, five DHS-contracted homeless services nonprofits respond to 311 requests in their respective catchment areas and conduct daily street outreach across the five boroughs as follows:

* Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) (110th Street and above), Goddard Riverside (to 10th Street and 59th Street to 110th Street), and Breaking Ground (10th Street to 59th Street) constitute the Manhattan Outreach Consortium and conduct homeless outreach in the four Manhattan catchment areas;[[21]](#footnote-22)
* Breaking Ground provides street outreach services in Brooklyn and Queens;[[22]](#footnote-23)
* BronxWorks conducts street outreach in the Bronx;[[23]](#footnote-24) and
* Project Hospitality provides street outreach services in Staten Island.[[24]](#footnote-25)
1. **Outreach NYC**

In November 2019, the de Blasio Administration announced a new initiative, Outreach NYC to address street homelessness by training additional frontline city workers.[[25]](#footnote-26) The plan calls for the training of 18,000 City employees across five Agencies, including the Department of Sanitation (DSNY), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the Fire Department (FDNY), the Department of Buildings (DOB), and the Parks Department, on how to use the 311 app in all of its platforms to submit Service Requests related to individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness.[[26]](#footnote-27) The submitted service requests will be filtered through to the newly established Joint Command Center, which was previously announced as an interagency partnership lead by DHS, NYPD and other relevant city agencies to address the unsheltered homeless on the subway.[[27]](#footnote-28) Interagency staff will analyze trends, triage requests, and prioritize and deploy multi-Agency responses as appropriate, including to provide collaborative assistance to more challenging cases involving high-needs individuals.[[28]](#footnote-29) The City is also in the process of hiring additional outreach workers to bring the total number to 550, which is triple the number at the start of the Administration.

1. **Barriers to Shelter**

In a press release last year, The Coalition for the Homeless stated that “[p]eople avoid services and shelters for a variety of legitimate reasons, the most important being the shortage of safe, welcoming shelter beds and permanent and supportive housing.”[[29]](#footnote-30) The 30th Street Men’s Intake Center in particular has a reputation for being violent and unwelcoming, and this is the only intake center for single men in the city.[[30]](#footnote-31) The news outlet *The City* conducted its own outreach to New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness and were told “in interview after interview” that “they’d rather take their chances on trains or sidewalks” than enter the shelter system. [[31]](#footnote-32) While the recent announcement by the de Blasio Administration that an additional 1,000 safe haven beds will be opened has been viewed as a positive step in the right direction, some expressed concern about the feasibility in getting these beds up and running considering delays in previous safe haven beds that were promised in the fall of 2015.[[32]](#footnote-33)

Individuals living on the streets often report that they are more likely to enter a safe haven than a traditional shelter.[[33]](#footnote-34) A safe haven is a facility operated by DHS or a DHS-contracted organization that provides low-threshold, harm-reduction transitional housing to chronic street homeless individuals to reduce barriers to coming inside from the streets.[[34]](#footnote-35) The housing is considered low-threshold because it is less restrictive to enter[[35]](#footnote-36) and does not require individuals to participate in treatment programs.[[36]](#footnote-37) Currently, there are 18 safe havens in the City.[[37]](#footnote-38) On January 6, 2020, 1,067 individuals were utilizing a safe haven bed.[[38]](#footnote-39) The de Blasio Administration announced in December 2019 plans to open an additional 1,000 safe haven beds, bringing the total of safe haven and stabilization beds to approximately 2,800.[[39]](#footnote-40)

1. *“Sightings Process”*

While unsheltered homeless individuals are encouraged to engage in outreach efforts the City undertakes to ultimately result in placement into shelter, there are additional barriers they experience throughout the process. Such barriers include delays associated with not having the necessary documentation to apply for housing and accessing services, as well as delays with the process that outreach teams use to sight people on the street multiple times to determine they are homeless, known on the street as the “sightings” process.[[40]](#footnote-41) A study examining barriers to shelter found that many unsheltered homeless individuals are confused about the number of times they need to be sighted by outreach workers in order to be eligible for services.[[41]](#footnote-42) One man interviewed in the study explained that “[the outreach teams] want to see you on the street for like a year or whatever”.[[42]](#footnote-43) Another individual stated:

…if you're gonna help me, help me. Take me off the street now. Help me get on my feet, you know. A few dollars and a place to sleep is what it would take, you know…All right, well what's going on with you? Well I'm a plumber, I don't have any tools. I need some clothes…If I had a pair of boots, I could work tomorrow, you know. It's simple….but they make it a big, drawn-out process.[[43]](#footnote-44)

 Currently, in order to be eligible for City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (CityFHEPS), street homeless clients are required to receive case management services (otherwise known as “being on case load”) for 90 days.[[44]](#footnote-45) CityFHEPS is the City’s supplemental rental assistance program which recently streamlined several City and State programs into one City-run program.[[45]](#footnote-46) Through CityFHEPS, eligible applicants may receive a voucher through which they can pay for private, rented housing.[[46]](#footnote-47)

1. *Co-Sheltering with Pets*

 Another barrier to entering shelter is limited to no access to co-sheltering. Co-sheltering, or the sheltering of people and animals together at the same emergency or temporary housing facility, is a critical solution to bringing humans experiencing homelessness and their companion animals inside together and thereby reducing the overall number of street homeless that do not access existing services.[[47]](#footnote-48) There are models across the country for successfully co-sheltering humans with their animals,[[48]](#footnote-49) yet DHS shelters do not accommodate pets.[[49]](#footnote-50) Pet owners who seek shelter services face the difficult problem of finding temporary pet care solutions, surrendering their pets to an animal shelter, or forgoing shelter services altogether.[[50]](#footnote-51) While there are some not-for-profit organizations that foster the pets of homeless owners,[[51]](#footnote-52) there are not enough to meet the demand for such services, and for many people already in crisis, the prospect of parting with a pet only compounds the trauma of homelessness (and the issues that bring about homelessness).[[52]](#footnote-53)

 The prohibition of animals in shelters, drop-in centers, and transitional housing programs presents a major barrier for those who may otherwise accept placement into such programs. According to one woman:

We don’t wanna give our animals up because they’re our children!...And they’re our protectors. And they’re also mental, and, um, emotional support for us. So, you know it’s like having a child. Would somebody give up their child just to go into a shelter? No they wouldn’t! They would wanna keep their child with them. So, it’s the same for me!

Domestic violence is the single largest cause of homelessness among families in DHS shelters.[[53]](#footnote-54) Research demonstrates the cross-therapeutic effects of a human-animal bond for domestic violence survivors and their pets.[[54]](#footnote-55) Many abuse victims often refuse to leave their pets behind when fleeing dangerous situations, with 48% of domestic violence victims choosing to remain in a dangerous situation to avoid separation from a pet.[[55]](#footnote-56) However, only 3% of shelters nationwide accommodate clients with pets.[[56]](#footnote-57) In 2019, the Urban Resources Institute opened PALS Place in Brooklyn, the first domestic violence shelter in the U.S. sheltering pets alongside their families in the same apartment unit.[[57]](#footnote-58)

1. **Legislation**

**Int. No. 1483**

City-provided homeless shelters do not accept pets. Int. 1483 would require the Department of Homeless Services, in collaboration with the Department of Social Services, to develop a plan to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families with the objective of providing pet-friendly shelters and identifying other temporary pet care arrangements that would allow homeless pet-owners to keep their pets. This local law would take effect immediately.

**Int. No. 1484**

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| Shelters provided by or under contract with the Department of Homeless Services (Department) do not accommodate pets. Int. 1484 would require the Department to report, on a monthly basis, information on the placement or disposition of pets that belong to people who enter homeless shelters. This local law would take effect 120 days after it becomes law. |

**Preconsidered Int. No. \_\_\_\_**

This bill would require the Department of Homeless Services to provide case management services to everyone assessed by either DHS or by an organization that contracts with the City, who is reasonably believed to be living on the street. This local law would take effect 180 days after it becomes law.

**Preconsidered Int. No. \_\_\_\_**

This bill would set 30 days as the maximum time that the Department of Social Services/Human Resources Administration may require a street homeless applicant to have received case management services to be eligible for certain rental assistance programs. This local law would take effect 120 days after it becomes law.

1. **Conclusion**

At the hearing, the Committee will explore barriers to housing for those who are unsheltered and address whether the City is doing enough to engage these individuals. The Committee would like to understand how Outreach NYC works in practice, what the program’s allocated budget is, and what existing resources are already in place for individuals that are homeless.

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Int. No. 1483

By Council Members Levin, Levine, Brannan, Holden, Chin and The Public Advocate (Mr. Williams)

..Title

A Local Law in relation to a plan to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families in the shelter system

..Body

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Pet accommodation plan. a. Definitions. For purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

City. The term “city” means the city of New York.

Department. The term “department” means the department of homeless services.

Pet. The term “pet” means a domesticated animal that is in the lawful possession of a person whose primary purpose in possessing such animal is to keep such animal as a pet.

Shelter. The term “shelter” means any form of temporary housing, including emergency housing, provided by the city to homeless individuals or families.

b. No later than 180 days after the effective date of this local law, the department shall submit to the speaker of the council a plan to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families with the objective of ensuring that homeless individuals and families that possess pets need not surrender their pets upon entering shelter or forgo shelter to avoid surrendering their pets. Such plan shall:

1. Prioritize acquisition of facilities and contracting for services that will permit homeless individuals and families that possess pets to enter shelter with their pets, and ensure that such facilities or services are available in every borough;

2. Explore temporary arrangements for the care of pets of homeless individuals and families that will promote the return of such pets to the possession of their owners, including not-for-profit organizations that provide foster care for such pets;

3. Identify city-provided and other resources available to homeless individuals and families with pets, including but not limited to not-for-profit organizations that provide housing that accommodates pets or that arrange foster care placements for pets of homeless persons, and develop an efficient method for consolidating and sharing information about such resources;

4. To the extent possible, estimate the following information:

(a) The average numbers of homeless individuals and families with pets that enter shelter on a monthly basis, disaggregated by individuals and families and by the type of animal owned;

(b) The amount of funds required to implement such plan, disaggregated by such plan’s distinct initiatives and functions;

5. Identify barriers, if any, to the city’s ability to accommodate pets of homeless individuals and families, and potential ways of overcoming such barriers; and

6. In collaboration with the department of social services, address the accommodation of pets of individuals and families provided shelter under programs managed by the department of social services, including pets of victims of domestic violence who seek shelter pursuant to section 131-u of the social services law.

§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.

NC

LS #8840

2/7/19

Int. No. 1484

By Council Members Levin, Holden, Chin, Lander and Brannan

..Title

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to reporting on the placement of pets whose owners enter homeless shelters

..Body

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Chapter 3 of title 21 of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by adding a new section 21-324 to read as follows:

§ 21-324 Reporting on the placement of pets. a. Definitions. For purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

Family. The term “family” means any two or more people, one of whom is 18 years of age or older, who accompany each other upon entering shelter.

Individual. The term “individual” means any person who is 18 years of age or older who enters shelter without an accompanying person.

Shelter. The term “shelter” means housing provided to homeless individuals and families by the department or a provider under contract or similar agreement with the department.

b. No later than the fifth day of every month, the department shall post on its website and submit to the speaker of the council and the mayor a report that contains the following information for the prior month:

1. The number of individuals and families who entered shelter and reported that they had a pet; and

2. For each pet reported:

(a) Whether such pet is a dog, cat, rabbit or other animal, and the kind of animal if another animal;

(b) The amount of time such pet was in the possession of the individual or family prior to such individual or family entering shelter;

(c) Whether, upon such individual or family entering shelter, the pet was placed with a family member, friend or foster care provider, surrendered to an animal shelter or, in the case of any other placement or disposition of such pet, the details of such placement or disposition;

(d) Whether the individual or family reported forgoing shelter because they could not find an acceptable placement for their pet and, if so, the number of days such individual or family reported having forgone shelter for that reason;

(e) Whether the individual or family would have entered shelter with their pet if permitted to do so; and

(f) Whether the individual or family intended to regain possession of their pet upon obtaining housing that would accommodate their pet.

c. The information reported pursuant to subdivision b of this section shall be disaggregated by the borough in which the individual or family entered shelter. Where foster care providers are identified as placements, the name of any affiliated not-for-profit organization shall be identified. Where surrender to an animal shelter is identified as a placement, the name and location of the animal shelter shall be identified.

d. The department shall develop and use a questionnaire for the purpose of obtaining and reporting the information this section requires.

§ 2. This local law takes effect 120 days after it becomes law, except that the commissioner of homeless services shall take such measures as are necessary for the implementation of this local law, including the promulgation of rules, before such date.

NC

LS #8841

2/4/19

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Preconsidered Int. No.

By Council Member Levin

..Title

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to the provision of case management services for homeless individuals

..Body

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Section 21-314 of the administrative code of the city of New York, as amended by local law number 19 for the year 1999, is amended to read as follows:

§ 21-314 Case management services. The commissioner shall provide case management services to all persons assigned to stay at the department's facilities or the facilities of organizations contracting with the department who are either waiting for the department to determine their eligibility for shelter or are receiving such shelter[.], and to all persons whom the department otherwise reasonably believes, based on information gathered from one or more assessments from either the department or from organizations contracting with the city, are living on the street. The commissioner shall begin providing case management services as soon as the department becomes aware that such persons have been assigned to stay at its facilities or the facilities of organizations contracting with the department or it otherwise begins to hold such reasonable belief. Such case management services shall include, but not be limited to, assistance obtaining (a) medical treatment, (b) federal, state and local government documents including, but not limited to, birth certificates, marriage licenses, and housing records, and (c) food, medicine and other necessary supplies; and shall address issues such as domestic violence, child abuse and mental illness, when needed.

§ 2. This local law takes effect 180 days after it becomes law.

SJ/ACK

LS #9863

2/12/2020

Preconsidered Int. No.

By Council Member Levin

..Title

A Local Law to amend the administrative code of the city of New York, in relation to rental assistance eligibility requirements for street homeless individuals

..Body

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Chapter 1 of title 21 of the administrative code of the city of New York is amended by adding a new section 21-142 to read as follows:

§ 21-142 Rental assistance for street homeless individuals. a. Definitions. For purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

Street homeless. The term “street homeless” means an individual who (i) is living on the street or in a place not meant for human habitation or (ii) is receiving services from the department of homeless services or the human resources administration because such individual is currently or was formerly living on the street or in a place not meant for human habitation.

Rental assistance program. The term “rental assistance program” means any city rental assistance program that is designed to help homeless individuals by subsidizing rent in which (i) the human resources administration or the department of homeless services determines eligibility and (ii) the program’s eligibility requirements do not require approval from an agency of the state of New York.

b. Rental assistance program eligibility. When an applicant’s eligibility for a rental assistance program is dependent upon being considered street homeless and having received case management services for a specified amount of time is a factor in such consideration, the department shall not require such applicant to have received case management services for more than 30 days as a precondition to such eligibility.

§ 2. This local law takes effect 120 days after it becomes law, except that the commissioner of social services shall take such measures as are necessary for the implementation of this local law, including the promulgation of rules, before such date.

SJ

LS #9872

4/15/2019

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2. Dept. of Homeless Services, NYC HOPE 2019 Results, *available at* <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/dhs/downloads/pdf/hope-2019-results.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
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57. *Id.* [↑](#footnote-ref-58)