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**

**April 23, 2020**

**Int. No. 1927:** By Council Member Levin and the Speaker (Council Member Johnson)

**Title:** A Local Law in relation to requiring private rooms for single adults

1. **Introduction**

On April 23, 2020, the Committee on General Welfare, chaired by Council Member Stephen Levin, will hold a hearing on Int. No. 1927, a bill requiring private rooms for single adults while a state of emergency is declared in New York State in relation to COVID-19. Among those expected to testify are representatives from the New York City Department of Social Services, community organizations, and homeless service providers.

1. **Health and Those Experiencing Homelessness**

Physical health concerns often persist in people experiencing homelessness. Individuals who are unstably housed have a life expectancy that is significantly lower than the average American.[[1]](#footnote-2) For some of these individuals, a health crisis could be the reason they lost their job and became homeless.[[2]](#footnote-3) Once an individual becomes homeless, managing an illness or chronic disease and gaining access to medication poses an even greater challenge. While homelessness can worsen sickness for those who are already ailing, it can also lead to once-healthy individuals becoming sick.

An unstably housed individual age 50 years or older has rates of chronic medical conditions similar to or higher than a stably housed individual who is 15 to 20 years older.[[3]](#footnote-4) In New York City, the most common self-reported physical health conditions that were self-reported among adults within Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters were asthma, hypertension, and diabetes.[[4]](#footnote-5) Those experiencing chronic street homelessness have exacerbated physical health conditions,[[5]](#footnote-6) including higher rates of hypertension, tuberculosis, diabetes, and asthma.[[6]](#footnote-7) Adults with histories of street homelessness are frequent users of healthcare systems, namely the emergency departments of public hospitals.[[7]](#footnote-8) In fact, they are hospitalized at rates four times the U.S. average.[[8]](#footnote-9) They also use the emergency department at rates three times higher than the general population[[9]](#footnote-10) and have longer emergency department stays.[[10]](#footnote-11)

1. **COVID-19 and Homelessness**

Due to the prevalence of underlying health conditions mentioned above, those who are experiencing homelessness are more vulnerable to viruses such as the coronavirus (the virus that causes COVID-19). According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), homeless services provided in congregate settings could facilitate the spread of infection.[[11]](#footnote-12) Those in congregate shelters, those in crowded drop-in centers, and those on the street have an inability to self-isolate during the current pandemic, increasing their chances of being stricken with COVID-19. The vast majority of single adults in the DHS shelter system are placed in congregate settings including assessment shelters, general shelters, and program shelters.

On April 11, 2020, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that 2,500 hotel beds would be made available for single homeless adults to allow them to self-isolate.[[12]](#footnote-13) In addition to the 3,500 clients in commercial hotels before the pandemic, the 6,000 total in hotel beds would be about one-third of the single adults in the shelter system.[[13]](#footnote-14) The announcement was unclear on how many of those 6,000 individuals would be in their own private units and how many would be sharing a unit with a roommate. On April 16, 2020, there were 17,382 single adults in the DHS shelter system.[[14]](#footnote-15) The 2019 Homeless Outreach Population Estimate (HOPE) Count identified 3,588 unsheltered individuals on the streets and in subway stations[[15]](#footnote-16) and the Hospital Count identified 326 unsheltered adults within hospitals in the 2019 survey.[[16]](#footnote-17)

1. **Legislation**

**Int. No. 1927**

This bill would require DHS to provide all single adults in the DHS shelter system, as well as single adults experiencing homelessness who are currently unsheltered, with the option of a private room. It would require that DHS provide a daily report to the Speaker of the Council regarding the number of rooms DHS has made available to single adults and that are occupied by single adults, the unmet need for private rooms among this population and aggregated demographic information on single adults occupying private rooms. The bill would also require DHS to create and implement a plan that would ensure that shelters reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 by locating beds at least six feet apart, unless they are located in a private room occupied by members of the same family.

1. **Conclusion**

At the hearing, the Committee will explore how the COVID-19 pandemic is affecting individuals experiencing homelessness in New York City. The Committee would like to understand what steps DHS is taking to meet the needs of individuals experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic and what actions have been taken to reduce the risk of infection among this population.

Int. No. 1927

By Council Member Levin and the Speaker (Council Member Johnson)

A LOCAL LAW

In relation to requiring private rooms for single adults

Be it enacted by the Council as follows:

Section 1. Private rooms for single adults. a. For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

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

Private room. The term “private room” means a room used for sleeping with an internally adjoining restroom that is assigned to no more than one person.

Shelter. The term “shelter” means temporary emergency housing provided to individuals experiencing homelessness by the department or a provider under contract or similar agreement with the department.

Single adult. The term “single adult” means an adult without an accompanying adult or child experiencing homelessness.

b. The department shall provide all single adults residing in a shelter or eligible for placement in a shelter with the option of a private room. The department shall provide all single adults residing in a shelter with 24 hours notice before they are transferred to such private rooms.

c. The department shall ensure that all shelters implement protocols to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection spread through such facilities, including but not limited to, ensuring that beds are located at least six feet apart from each other, unless located in a private room and requiring that, where practicable, staff of such facilities maintain a distance of at least six feet from one another at all times.

d. No later than one day after this local law takes effect, and every day thereafter, the department shall provide the speaker of the council with a report including the number of rooms the department has made available to single adults and are occupied by single adults pursuant to subdivision b of this section; the unmet need, if any, for private rooms for single adults; and aggregated demographic information, including race, age, gender identity and previous residence, of single adults occupying private rooms provided by the department.

e. The department shall develop a plan for shelters to reduce the risk of COVID-19 infection spread. The department shall publish such plan on its website and distribute such plan to each shelter no later than one day after this local law takes effect. Each shelter shall implement such plan immediately upon receipt.

f. The requirements imposed pursuant to subdivision b of this section shall no longer apply upon the expiration or repeal of an executive order declaring a State disaster emergency pursuant to section 29-a of article 2-B of the executive law or an executive order by the mayor in relation to COVID-19 that restricts gatherings of individuals in the city.

§ 2. This local law takes effect immediately.

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