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**DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES NEW MEASURES TO IMPROVE
SAFETY IN HOMELESS SHELTERS**

*NYPD to re-train DHS security staff, send management team to DHS to immediately develop
action plan to upgrade security at all shelter facilities*

New domestic violence program launched to combat domestic violence in shelters

NEW YORK—The de Blasio administration, as part of a comprehensive review of homeless services, announced today a program to improve safety in homeless shelters; New York City Police Department will immediately begin re-training all Department of Homeless Services security staff and send an NYPD management team to DHS to immediately develop an action plan to upgrade security at all shelter facilities; restoring a domestic violence program for family shelters; and a new more extensive reporting system for incidents that occur in shelters. The reforms respond to new data on violence in shelters developed as part of the 90-day review of homeless services ordered by Mayor de Blasio.

“I’ve been clear that we are going to own the challenges of homelessness and be transparent about how serious they are and what we are doing to deal with them,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “For the first time, we are reporting thoroughly on the problem. We have substantially increased security, and we are bringing in the NYPD to ensure it is managed effectively. In addition, we are offering enhanced domestic violence services to families. We want homeless shelters to be safe and clean, but at the same time we must and we will continue to move families out and prevent them from coming to shelter in the first place.”

“The NYPD is proud to play a role in the Mayor’s comprehensive program to improve safety in homeless shelters,” said **Police Commissioner William J. Bratton**. “We look forward to developing a plan of action with the Department of Homeless Services that will provide increased security for both DHS clients and their employees.”

“For many years, the agency mainly focused on incidents involving death or life threatening injury and individual staff exercised discretion to report as a priority individual incidents not rising to this level on a case by case basis. The 90-day review showed that this resulted in lost opportunities to target services because cases not involving death or life threatening injuries were

inconsistently categorized based on individual determinations. The review also showed that incidents that occurred off-site were also reported as critical incidents even though the incident did not occur at the shelter. We are reforming the process to broaden the criteria for critical incidents and will focus attention on the incidents that actually occurred in the shelters so that we can have a more complete picture of client service needs. For example, our review showed that more needs to be done to address domestic violence for families that have been placed in shelter together so the Mayor has authorized a new in reach program for family shelters that we will be including in the Executive Budget. During the course of the review, the Mayor has already authorized additional security for mental health shelters and commercial hotels, and now the NYPD will ensure that security is handled as it should be,” said **Human Resources Administration Commissioner Steven Banks**.

There are three parts to the Mayor’s reform program for improving safety in shelters:

- 1. Starting immediately, the New York City Police Department will begin re-training all Department of Homeless Services security staff and will be placing an NYPD management team at DHS to immediately develop an action plan to upgrade security at all shelter facilities**
 - Total spending for security at DHS is approximately \$140 million annually – an increase of 35 percent over the previous administration.
 - All non-cluster shelters have some level of security provided by either DHS peace officers or by private security guards.
 - DHS provides security through a combination of DHS peace officers, FJC Contracted security guards and by directly funding shelter providers to provide security at their sites.
 - As part of the review, the Mayor has already increased security at mental health shelters and at commercial hotels.
- 2. The City will re-establish a domestic violence program in DHS shelters that was ended in 2010.**
 - A new analysis found that violence within families is the most common form of violent incident in family shelters. In Families with Children shelters, domestic violence was 60 percent of the violent incidents, while it was 80 percent in Adult Family shelters.
 - HRA’s NoVA (No Violence Again) Out-stationed Domestic Violence Services will be expanded to DHS Tier II family shelters to provide families with access to domestic violence services. Trained staff from HRA will go to a number of Tier II shelters to provide these services.
 - Existing social services staff in Tier II shelters will participate in enhanced training that will provide them with the tools to identify and refer families and individuals to

the NoVA team, a NYC Family Justice Center or other community-based domestic violence providers.

- Families not identified with intimate partner violence but experiencing unhealthy relationships and conflict will be offered referral to supportive services.
- The Mayor’s Office to Combat Domestic Violence will coordinate with DHS to implement system-wide intimate partner violence (IPV) training for DHS employees and contracted staff.
- A senior DHS official will be in charge of coordinating the delivery of domestic violence services and other related services.

3. The administration has instituted new more comprehensive and accurate reporting of critical incidents in shelters, including for the first time separately reporting violent incidents.

- For many years, DHS reported “critical incidents”, which included some but not all violent incidents. In addition, data was not systematically collected to identify problems.
- A systematic review found “critical incident” definitions were unclear and inconsistently reported across agency divisions.
 - Overly-broad type categories limit the agency’s ability to identify trends and quantify specific types of incidents.
 - Existing types of categories include both violent and non-violent incidents within the same category, limiting the ability to quantify the volume of violent incidents.
- New reporting categories have been created and applied to all 2015 incidents reported to DHS. The new procedure found:
 - Under the old definitions, there were 620 critical incidents. The new analysis defined 1,687 incidents as critical of which 826 were categorized as violent.
 - To ensure that problems are identified, violence is now defined much more broadly than, for example, the FBI crime reports. For the shelter critical incidents, violence includes broad definitions of domestic violence, assault and both child abuse and neglect – even if there was no violence against the child.
- The administration is implementing thorough reforms to ensure that all critical incidents and especially violent incidents are appropriately categorized and that there is appropriate follow-up.

“Every New Yorker deserves the same level of safety and security. As we work to combat homelessness, it is imperative that we prioritize the protection of those staying in shelters,

particularly those at risk of being victimized by domestic violence. The resources that the de Blasio administration are deploying to improve safety at homeless shelters are critical to advancing accountability and shielding some of our most vulnerable from harm and abuse,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams**.

“Our shelter system can only work if homeless individuals know they’re safe when they enter it,” said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. “Disproportionately, the violence we see in shelters is domestic violence – which is a scourge on our society, and a terrible obstacle for any individual to overcome on the path out of homelessness. I commend the mayor for taking proactive steps to prevent violence, especially domestic violence, in our shelters.”

“By expanding efforts to reduce domestic violence and increasing services to better support survivors of domestic violence in DHS shelters, the de Blasio administration is smartly addressing the number one cause of violence in the shelter system. Now with real-time and accurate data on violence in shelters, we can bring oversight and accountability to improving safety for clients in shelter,” said **Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi, Chair of the Committee on Social Services**.

“I applaud the de Blasio administration for bringing to bear the significant expertise of the NYPD to strengthen security in the DHS shelter system. I also applaud the administration for taking a much more comprehensive look at critical incident data to help guide resources in the best and most appropriate way,” said **Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the Committee on General Welfare**.

“We cannot tolerate violence within the shelter system. I applaud the administration for this multipronged effort to improve safety through the enhancement of DHS officer training by the NYPD, the reestablishment of a domestic violence program, and improved reporting on violent incidences. I commend Mayor de Blasio for taking another important step in reforming the shelter system and his commitment to New Yorkers in transitional housing,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson, Chair of the Committee on Public Safety**.

“We welcome the uniform standards of professionalism NYPD training can bring to frontline security officers in NYC shelters. Violence – both physical attacks as well as serious threats of bodily harm – is undoubtedly the major deterrent preventing our most marginalized neighbors from accessing lifesaving shelter. Moreover, we see time-and-again families seeking shelter who are reluctant to share details of a dangerous history at intake interviews, often for fear of retribution from an abusive partner or parent. Restoring in-reach programs throughout the shelter system will help identify many more New Yorkers, who otherwise would suffer in silence. Homelessness may be synonymous with despair – but protecting homeless women and children from brutality and providing them the emotional support to heal are the two keys essentials to shifting their lives towards hope and prosperity,” said **Mary Brosnahan, President and CEO of Coalition for the Homeless**.

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