

Department of Homeless Services Testimony

New City Council General Welfare Committee *Preliminary Budget Hearing For Fiscal Year 2016* Tuesday, March 17, 2015, 10:00 a.m.

Introduction

Good afternoon Chairman Levin and members of the General Welfare Committee. I am Gilbert Taylor, Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Joining me today are Lula Urquhart, Deputy Commissioner for Fiscal, Procurement Operations and Audits, Diana Rodela, Assistant Commissioner for Budget and Revenue and Donald Brosen, Deputy Commissioner for Administration.

In my testimony this afternoon I will outline Mayor de Blasio's Fiscal Year 2016 Preliminary Budget for DHS. Mayor de Blasio's leadership and commitment to homeless issues in this city have enabled DHS to make significant strides in the past year. When I came to DHS it was quite clear that there were challenges ahead. Over the past year, DHS has embarked on an ambitious plan to improve the quality of life for clients within our system. At the same time, we are committed to creating a clear path for individuals to rejoin their communities. Our clients deserve the highest quality of services, and we will settle for nothing less.

Over the last year we have made substantial advances to reduce homelessness and to improve the lives of our clients. We have increased the financial investment into the Homebase program; we have increased our funding to do outreach for homeless New Yorkers in the streets and subways, and have committed significant resources to helping our clients make the journey from shelter to home. The Mayor's Preliminary Budget reflects over \$18 million in new needs to support our efforts to reduce our census and to ensure there is sufficient capacity in the system. This includes funding for LINC Support and Aftercare, the PATH Community-Based Model, Permanency Specialists, Routine Site Review Inspections, and to expand the hours at Drop In Centers.

DHS' current Fiscal Year 2015 expense budget is \$1.1 billion; for next year, Fiscal Year 2016, the budget will be \$1 billion. The \$1 billion for 2016 is comprised of:

- \$518.5 million in City funds
- \$132 million in State funds
- \$378. Million in federal funds
- \$4.1 million in CD grant funding
- \$851,000 in intra-City funding

The \$1 billion budget allocates \$505 million to services for families \$361 million to services for single adults, \$26 million to supportive administration services and \$141 million to agency-wide personnel services.

The DHS Capital Plan for the five-year period of Fiscal Year 2015 through Fiscal Year 2019 is currently \$107.6 million. Capital projects for homeless families total \$29 million; projects for

single adults total \$56 million; \$12.9 million has been allocated for administrative supportive services; and \$9.3 million is designated for City Council-funded projects.

As you know, this Administration truly believes we have a tale of two cities. New York City is facing pronounced economic inequality because of low wages, the lack of affordable housing, and the increased cost of living. Today approximately 46-percent of New Yorkers live near poverty and approximately 22-percent live below the poverty line. The reality of this income inequality, combined with the drivers of homelessness such as eviction, domestic violence, and overcrowding, manifests itself in the City's shelter system. At DHS we have a commitment to reducing homelessness and improving lives for all our clients.

On Monday, March 16th, DHS' total shelter census was 57,727 including over 24,000 children living in shelters throughout the five boroughs. With our \$1.1 billion budget we have the opportunity to substantially enhance our programmatic efforts and to develop effective strategies to reduce our census. We recognize that we must use every tool at our disposal to get our clients out of shelters and into permanent housing.

To that end, DHS recently introduced its 2015-2017 Operational Plan, which will be a roadmap for how our agency will do its work going forward. The Operational Plan delineates five goals: prevention, outreach, shelter, housing permanency, and organizational excellence. The plan encompasses the entirety of the work being done at DHS which is to guide clients on their journey home. The Operational Plan seeks to build upon and refocus our efforts to assist New Yorkers who are threatened with housing instability and homelessness. The plan requires us to coordinate services across the DHS system of care, use our existing resources to best serve our clients, improve case management, and identify long term-sustainable strategies to reduce our census and assist clients to achieve housing self-sufficiency.

Prevention Services

As I've testified to previously, prevention is the cornerstone of DHS' efforts to combat homelessness. We believe that shelter is a last resort. In collaboration with our partners, we provide comprehensive services that combat the many drivers of homelessness.

Our Homebase Prevention Program is nationally-recognized and proven to be 95-percent effective in helping clients remain stably housed and out of shelter. In FY15, a \$20 million investment allowed us to increase Homebase's offices from 14 to 23. These are located in the neighborhoods where DHS sees the largest number of shelter entrants. We know Homebase works, which is why we recently launched our largest media campaign called "Imagine" to raise public awareness of Homebase and the prevention services it offers. The "Imagine" campaign is targeted to the communities with the most shelter entrants and urges those at risk of homelessness to reach out for assistance, before shelter is the only remaining option. We are being extremely aggressive in our marketing efforts for Homebase with ads featured on subways and buses, local establishments, faith-based institutions, and community based organizations. In addition, we have recently launched a 30 second television ad for there to be greater awareness of the program and what it has to offer.

DHS is also seeking to strengthen our work by pursuing a new community based family shelter intake model. The Community-Based Demonstration Project for PATH (Prevention

Assistance and Temporary Housing) aims to improve services to families, with the ultimate goal of keeping them stably housed in their communities of origin and making shelter an option of last resort. Instead of using a single point of access for family intake as we do now, we will be opening additional family shelter intake offices – with an emphasis on prevention first- in four of the five boroughs, which will be co-located with HRA and Homebase. Community-based family shelter intake will allow for a more effective diversion model focused on counseling, prevention, and other resources in a community-based context in order to enable families to remain stably housed in their own boroughs and neighborhoods.

In addition to the prevention and diversion efforts being made through Homebase and the new community based family intake model, DHS received \$200K in funding to enhance diversion efforts at the front door of the single adult system. These funds are administered through our partnership with Palladia Homebase, which provides on-site diversion services and aftercare. The clients will continue to receive these benefits if they remain out of shelter and maintain regular contact with the provider for aftercare services. We have been able to rapidly return clients to the community who we otherwise would not have been able to divert.

Street Outreach

In addition to prevention, DHS is committed to serving all unsheltered individuals across the city. This work came into particular focus this past winter, one of the coldest on record. Throughout the city, we deployed teams around the clock to encourage people living on the streets and in subways to move into transitional and permanent housing. We have expanded our street and subway outreach work within the past year, and developed a network of transitional housing specifically to serve this population.

DHS added more Safe Haven and stabilization beds to our system in FY15. Stabilization beds provide an alternative housing option for individuals who are unwilling to enter traditional shelter. Safe Havens are shelter options for street homeless individuals who do not want to enter traditional shelter. Clients are referred to Safe Havens by outreach teams, who prioritize Safe Haven beds for street homeless individuals who are the most vulnerable and who have been outdoors for the longest period of time. DHS has also increased its efforts to work collaboratively with community organizations and religious institutions across the City to help expand the reach of this valuable program.

Similar to Safe Havens, DHS also added stabilization beds, which are also a low-threshold shelter option. Outreach providers are able to place clients directly from the streets into these beds and provide on-site services. There are 545 Safe Haven beds and 326 stabilization beds in the DHS system. Street homeless clients also have access to overnight respite beds, which are linked to drop-in centers at houses of worship. These respite beds are usually located in extra spaces at churches or synagogues and are staffed by volunteers who provide dinner and breakfast.

Last year, as part of a new contract with the MTA, DHS combined funding with the MTA to invest \$6 million for outreach services to be provided in all 468 subway stations. DHS now has outreach teams working in subways 24/7, ensuring that all subway stations and train cars are assessed for homeless activity on a routine basis. Thus far we have been able to successfully place 30% of these chronically homeless individual into shelter, which is a significant increase from the

previous year. Our goal is to get as many people as possible off of the streets and subways and into shelter.

Shelter

Providing shelter and social services for those in need continues to be DHS' core function and mandate. We provide temporary, emergency, and safe transitional housing to eligible families and all individuals presenting needing shelter.

Social Services

DHS is seeking to improve social service delivery in shelter by creating a new model of practice. Using already established methods, the new model will be a four layered approach to providing quality services to all clients in shelter.

This model of practice will require that going forward all DHS shelter providers use the following things in their work with DHS clients.

1. Consistent and comprehensive documentation in the Client Assistance and Rehousing Enterprise System (CARES)
2. Critical Time Intervention Services.
3. Rapid Rehousing Techniques and Principles
4. Motivational Interviewing Techniques and Best Practices in work with Clients.

The CARES System (Client Assistance and Rehousing Enterprise System) is an electronic case management system that is used by all DHS providers and direct run shelter staff to document all work that is being done with clients who we serve. We will be strengthening case work documentation requirements throughout the system and upgrading the CARES system itself to keep pace with practice refinements that will be taking place within the agency. All case management services provided to clients are required to be documented in CARES.

Critical Time Intervention is an evidence-informed model of practice used to work with homeless clients. NYC will be using two versions of CTI in our practice with clients in shelter. A full intensity version of CTI will be delivered to clients who have the most substantial barriers to housing and who are most likely to return to shelter after locating permanent housing. A lesser intense version of CTI will be made available to all clients who are in temporary emergency shelter. CTI is a means by which customized services can be offered to families and individuals so that they can exit shelter into permanent housing faster. An assessment tool will be used to determine the level of CTI required.

Principles and best practices of Rapid Rehousing will be incorporated into all of our work with clients in shelter. Now that there are more housing resources available to assist homeless New York City residents to exit shelter- we will require that rapid-rehousing efforts be pursued more aggressively for all clients in our shelter system. Rapid re-housing will include identifying a housing resource and will begin as soon as an individual enters shelter.

Motivational Interviewing techniques will be incorporated into our system-wide work with all clients in shelter. This practice of meeting clients where they are at and focusing on collaborative conversations with clients to strengthen their motivation and commitment to change is at the center of Motivational Interviewing. It is a person-centered counseling style that is not directive, but rather allows the client to identify his/her own needs to achieve change; in this case permanent housing. This method of delivering services has demonstrated success in helping clients achieve their goals across many systems. As such it permeates all layers of our proposed model of practice.

The combination of all four of these elements will strengthen our system wide work and will improve outcomes for our clients.

DHS will also be creating Permanency Specialist Teams within the agency to work with program and shelter staff to support their work of helping clients to obtain housing independence. These highly trained teams will be comprised of 30 licensed social workers who will review cases; offer technical assistance to providers and DHS staff and will support agency efforts to create Independent Living Plans for all clients in shelter. The Permanency Specialist Teams will also be available to support our agency after care efforts to connect clients to community based supports and services to help them maintain housing

The continued support of the Safety First Team is a major part of this Administration's vision and efforts to improve shelter conditions and social services. As my staff testified to on February 27th, the safety of all children in shelter is of the utmost importance. Due to the significant number of children in our system it is critically necessary that our agency be attentive to child safety and well-being. The additional 19 Safety First Social workers will engage and assess high risk families with children to determine an appropriate plan of action and services when needed. The Safety First staff will coordinate with DHS Family Services and shelter providers through case conferencing, effective case management, coaching, and interventions to support the family in keeping children safe with their parents and caretakers while they are in shelter. The Safety First staff will identify necessary services and interventions to assist families in need.

Shelter Conditions

Preventative maintenance and necessary repairs are essential components of our agency's work to improve shelter conditions for individuals and families within our system. As such, DHS has expanded its budget for maintenance and repair work. The Routine Site Review Inspection (RSRI) is DHS' primary tool to inspect and assess the physical plant conditions of our shelters to ensure that they are in compliance with codes, regulations and laws governing Temporary Housing. The RSRI allows our agency to evaluate providers' use of City funds budgeted for the maintenance of shelters. The RSRI also identifies problematic building conditions. Preventative maintenance can be used to minimize larger issues down the line, and has recently been revamped to more efficiently predict the physical plant needs of shelters. Additionally we recently updated and strengthened our agency's policy guidance on shelter inspections to raise standards across our system. We are also in the process of creating a new regulatory compliance unit to ensure that appropriate and safe conditions are maintained at all of our sites.

As part of the Mayor's "One City" initiative to reduce energy costs by nearly 30-percent, expanding our in-house preventative maintenance programs will help further the work by properly

maintaining and replacing mechanical systems with new and improved technologies. In doing so, DHS will see a reduction in equipment failures as well as a reduction in fuel usage and costs. With the investment of Capital Funds, DHS will be able to maintain its investment in new mechanical equipment and ensure its full life expectancy.

We want to also ensure that all viable shelter sites are contracted and that such contracts contain provisions for active enforcement of any code or regulatory violations. DHS has reviewed lease and other site control agreements between provider agencies and landlords to ensure that they contain repair clauses and have language consistent with the standards promulgated in the shelter Inspection Policy and Procedure. During the FY16 contracting process, DHS will review contract language with provider agencies and will ensure that there is a separate allocation for ongoing maintenance and repair. A contract clause will be included prohibiting providers from using these funds for non-related maintenance expenses. DHS understands that we are judged by the performance of our shelter providers, and we are establishing clear expectations and accountability for all who do this work.

Housing Permanency

The LINC rental assistance program helps move individuals and families who need additional assistance from shelter into permanent housing. Our Homebase Program provides initial support to all clients who exit shelter with LINC vouchers.

- I. LINC I – assist families in shelter who are working full-time but are unable to afford stable housing on their own to relocate from the City shelter system.
- II. LINC II - assist families in shelter with multiple shelters that need additional assistance and support.
- III. LINC III - provide rental assistance for families recently affected by domestic violence.
- IV. LINC IV – assist single adults and adult families shelters, safe havens and drop in centers that are working that include someone who is age 60 or above.
- V. LINC V – assist single adults and adult families in shelters, safe havens and drop in centers that are working
- VI. LINC VI - assist families with children who exit shelter by moving in with relatives or friends

For LINC I families and LINC V single adults, the Human Resources Administration's (HRA) employment vendors will be available to support these clients with after care when they exit shelter.

We have been granted \$2.1 Million for LINC II Family Aftercare Services in FY2015 and 6.3 million in 2016 to support families who have multiple shelter stay. DHS issued a Request for Proposals and awarded four providers with contracts to deliver aftercare services following the Critical Time Intervention model.

LINC III families can receive services from HRA's Non-Residential DV Service contracts. For LINC IV, DHS is in discussions with the Department for the Aging (DFTA) to provide aftercare support to seniors, singles, and adult families, through their subcontract providers.

In addition, we are also moving forward with LINC VI, which will be targeted to families with children who exit shelter and move in with relatives or friends.

Organizational Excellence

The final goal of our operational plan is striving towards organizational excellence in all of the work that we do. We are striving to ensure that we have systems in place within DHS to support best practices in all aspects of our work to improve outcomes for our clients. This includes training for DHS staff and shelter staff; clear and consistent policies and procedures on the various aspects of our work and professional development opportunities for all DHS and provider staff.

We must invest in DHS staff and provider agency staff to ensure that they have what they need to do their best work. Human service work and specifically work in DHS shelters is difficult and not without complication. Countertransference and emotional fatigue can take a toll on our staff who work with clients in shelter and clients threatened with housing instability. We must be attentive and responsive to the vicarious traumatic effects of our systems work on those who do this critically important and necessary work each and every day.

Organizational excellence must include strategies to support both our system and our staff who are committed to doing the work of reducing homelessness and improving lives.

Conclusion

The Mayor's Fiscal Year 2016 budget builds upon this past year's efforts to reduce the census, improve conditions, and enhance services for our homeless clients across the city. This budget invests in the necessary supports to ensure that homeless clients are safe, have access to comprehensive social services, and are able to achieve housing stability, independence, and permanency.

DHS' partnership with City Council is vital to ensuring we are successful in reducing homelessness and improving lives. I know that all of you on this Committee, and the Council as a whole, are equally committed to ensuring our most vulnerable New Yorkers are assisted on their journey home. I look forward to talking with all of you over the coming weeks and months to solicit your input and ideas on how we can improve upon this collaboration.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. My colleagues and I will now answer any questions you may have.