

HEARING REGARDING HRA'S PROPOSED CITYFHEPS AND PATHWAY HOME  
RULES

August 21, 2018

BEFORE:

Bruce Jordan, Chief Homelessness Prevention Officer

TRANSCRIBERS AND COURT INTERPRETERS: Courtney Rishell

APPEARANCES:

On Behalf of the Petitioner:

None

On Behalf of the Respondent:

None

Additional:

None

I-N-D-E-X

Petitioner <u>Witness</u>	<u>Direct</u>	<u>Cross</u>	<u>Redirect</u>	<u>Recross</u>
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None noted.

Respondent <u>Witness</u>	<u>Direct</u>	<u>Cross</u>	<u>Redirect</u>	<u>Recross</u>
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None noted.

E-X-H-I-B-I-T-S

Petitioner <u>Exhibit No.</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>Identified</u>	<u>Received</u>
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None noted.

Respondent <u>Exhibit No.</u>	<u>Document</u>	<u>Identified</u>	<u>Received</u>
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None noted.

BRUCE JORDAN: Good morning, everyone.

Welcome and thank you for coming to this public hearing pursuant to the City Administrative Procedure Act, or CAPA, on the proposed rules concerning the New York City Human Resources Administration's CITYFHEPS and Pathway Home programs. My name is Bruce Jordan, and I'm a chief homelessness prevention officer at New York City Human Resources Administration, HRA. First, I'd like to introduce our interpreters. We have interpreters available in the following languages. Interpreters, please come up. Arabic, Cantonese, Mandarin, French, Haitian Creole, Korean, Polish, Russian, Spanish, Urdu, American Sign Language. Interpreters, please introduce yourselves in the languages you are available to provide assistance in and let the audience members know you are available to assist.

*[Interpreters introduced themselves]*

BRUCE JORDAN: Thank you, interpreters. This is a public hearing on the proposed rules concerning the CITYFHEPS and Pathway Home Programs. HRA's proposed City Fighting Homelessness Prevention and Eviction Prevention Supplement, or CITYFHEPS program, is a single streamlined program that will replace many of our existing rental assistance programs. A single streamlined program will be easier for our clients and

landlords to understand and for our own staff and providers to administer. Like our current programs, CITYFHEPS is targeted to households, both in shelter and risk of entry to shelter. It will be available to families with children, adult families, and eligible single adults. The rent levels and timeframes will be aligned with the state FHEPS program. We will also be taking comments today on the Pathway Home program, which helps households in shelter relocate to housing with friends and family for up to one year while they search for permanent housing. The program is available to households who have been in, in a DHS shelter for at least 90 days and who have identified a host family willing to host them for up to one year. Monthly payments to host families will generally range from \$1,200 to \$1,800 a month depending on the size of the household that is being hosted. Under this proposed rule, the program will also be available to certain individuals being discharged from Rikers Island. The program will replace the LINC VI program, which will continue for households already in that program but will not be accepting any new applications. Some housekeeping matters. Anyone may speak. If you wish to speak and haven't signed up already, please see this gentleman here, Jamar, and he'll sign you up. Jamar

will call your name, and you will have up to five minutes to speak. We will not be responding to comments today at this hearing, but we will take all comments into consideration when we finalize the rule. We appreciate you coming here today to comment on the rule.

JAMAR: Harold Alexis? Harold Alexis?

HAROLD ALEXIS: Thank you. Okay. Good morning, everyone. Hello. My name is Harold Alexis, and I'm here with the New York City Homeless Union. I currently have the SEPS voucher, and I have had it for over two and a half years. I have been in the shelter for five years. In that time, I have had over c--eight caseworkers, and they were all extremely limited in their ability to help me find housing. I have been searching for my own housing this entire time without assistance from anybody. While the voucher is a step in the right direction to get out of the shelter system, I am proof that these programs do not always work. The city believes that consolidating the vouchers will be a significant improvement, but I expect that this will just cause a traffic jam of clients from all of the current programs who are looking for answers and help from HRA. Many HRA workers have been notoriously unhelpful with clarifying questions around the vouchers thus far. I worry that all of these clients--I'm sorry,

all of these changes will help--will happen without proper education of workers or without informing clients in any meaningful way about changes to the vouchers, how to access it, and so on. The proposed voucher has many of the same problems as the current programs. For example, \$1,300 for an apartment is too low. Advertised costs are in the price range of \$1,800 to \$2,400. I'm not asking for \$1,800 for an apartment--I'm sorry, for \$800. But fair market rent in New York City right now is \$1,500. Looking for an apartment within the voucher price range that's livable, will pass city inspection, and will acc--actually accept the voucher is very difficult. I would challenge all of you sitting up there to try it out for yourself. See if you can find an apartment under the restrictions you have designed. Additionally, some clients have found apartments, agree with the landlords, only to lose the apartment because the city fails to complete inspections in a timely manner. This has happened countless times to friends and myself. I know that the HRA has a policy that will pay rent on the apartment to hold it while the paperwork goes through, but many case managers don't know that. Most voucher holders don't know that. If you have this rule, you need to advertise it. You need to make--landlords, uh, should know it, and is un--and is

available to all voucher holders. As a homeless New Yorker who has been stuck in the system far too long, I ask that you go further in this process of consolidation and address the problems that I have stated to fix the broken pipeline for the homeless people in New York City. Ensure that DSS workers have all the relevant answers and tools to our questions. Lay out a clear plan to communicate changes with clients and answer their questions. Raise voucher amounts to meet the fair market rent so that homeless New Yorkers complete city inspections in a timely manner so that homeless New Yorkers don't lose out on housing. Without addressing these problems, the programs will continue to fail thousands of people across the city.

JAMAR: Nathylin Flowers Adesegun?

NATHYLIN FLOWERS ADESEGUN: Yes.

JAMAR: Speak loudly into the mic.

NATHYLIN FLOWERS ADESEGUN: Okay. Okay. Good morning. Hello. Got me? Uh, my name is Nathylin Flowers Adesegun. I'm a member of NYCHU, New York City Homeless Union, Partnership for the Homeless, VOCAL, She's So VOCAL. And, um, I want to say that, um, I was evicted from my apartment of 34 and a half years when I lost my rent stabilization. Um, I was paying \$475 a month, and the rent w--was, uh--became \$1,319 -- 16 a

month. Living on my Social Security because I retired, SSA. Uh, so at age 69, when I was evicted, there was no way I could pay \$1,300 a month from \$475 a month as that being my main income. Um, so, I went to a homeless shelter, um, where I've been for almost three years. And in that time, um, I had to pray and hope for relief, and finally I was accepted for a LINC voucher. A LINC voucher says--but for--to get this LINC voucher, it took me, like, six months to get my birth certificate from Texas, my physical exam, my psychiatric examination, a, a tuberculosis test, Medicaid and Medicare verification, letters from SNAP and Social Security saying what my income was. At the end of that time, I'm like, I'm-- I've got it. I've, I've got a way out of homelessness. I'm, I'm, I'm gonna live and live well. And, um, what happened was it didn't happen. Consolidating the vouchers seems like a step in the right direction. The different programs have long been confusing to both homeless New Yorkers and landlords. They don't know what to do. Do you know the first page of the voucher says we do not guarantee this--the bottom where I highlighted? Disclaimer, this money is not guaranteed. This is not a contract or a lease between the city of New York and any entity, any entity. This money is not guaranteed. So, why would a landlord take that? So,

I've been looking for two and a half years, not getting an apartment, not finding an apartment. And then when you find one, they turn around and say, well, I need a credit score. Um, like, I need a credit check and a credit score like 650. I've been living in a shelter for three years. What credit do I have? Diddly. They're--they find ways to get around it. When the, the maximum voucher amount was \$1,270 -- \$1,268, they raised the rent to \$1,270. They're like, yeah, I've got a one bedroom, but it's \$1,270. I mean, so, they don't want to do it because of that very first page says we do not guarantee this. So, there's got to be a way out of this. And consolidating the vouchers seems like it would make it more respectable, decent, and acceptable, like Section 8, which is taken and accepted and know it's going to be paid for. But if--they're afraid you're not going to be paid, all this is is a paper tiger with no teeth.

JAMAR: Lani Shepherd?

LANI SHEPHERD: Greetings, greetings, everyone. Uh, my name is Lani Shepherd. And I'm with the New York City Homeless Union. I have been living in the New York City shelter system since December 22nd, 2016. And I've had a LINC voucher since 2017. The consolidation of vouchers into a single voucher,

CITYFHEPS, matters greatly to those of us who are homeless. For, for me, there are a couple of main reasons, and I'm gonna ad lib on some of it. Um, h--the housing specialists, the case managers are not really aware of how to help us best. And there's not a lot of activity. I have been on numerous housing interviews and had the agencies involved tell me, oh, we will accept you. We like you. And, uh, then nothing happens. And I've been told, oh, there's, there's a place where all you have to do now after the interview is just go look at the apartment, and nothing happens. And this has happened repeatedly. I have seen this happen to, um, a lot of my, uh--the--my fellows and my dorm mates and people in the shelter that I'm in. And they've got a lease lined up, the apartment lined up, and because of the slowness of HRA and DHS in inspecting the places and in cutting the money, the checks, they lose it. The landlords say, oh, okay. Somebody else came along. I tried to wait, but someone else came along. So, they lost the apartment. And it's depressing. Um, another thing. Because of, uh, the conditions in the shelters, which are really terrible, it is clear that finding s--sustainable housing is vital to achieving stability and moving forward with my life. Right now, there is no clarity within the current

voucher system for clients or case managers. I am hopeful that consolidating the voucher system will lead to a simplification of the process as well as the time it takes to apply and receive the new CITYFHEPS. My main concerns around the con--consolidation are as follows. There needs to be proper training for all staff that will be working with clients seeking these vouchers, and there must be timely communication between city agencies, clients, and landlords. Knowledge about how the voucher system works should be easy to access, not a maze for people in crisis to navigate. Current HRA contracted case managers and housing specialists have little correct information to offer voucher holders. So, what is HRA's outreach plan, and how do they expect to communicate this consolidation to landlords? Um, and this brings me to my next concern. Many landlords do not accept vouchers now, so what makes you think they will accept one just because it's got a new name? Source of income discrimination has kept too many people homeless for far too long. My other major concern is the voucher amount. How do we find landlords who will accept the new vouchers if the maximum rents we can lease are below fair market rent? The number of apartments accessible to us at the voucher price is incredibly low. And oftentimes hundreds of voucher

holders are vying for same three or four apartments. My main recommendation for CITYFHEPS is that the maximum rents meet the fair market rates charged in New York City. I also want to recommend creating a system where individuals with vouchers can access online accounts with their updated information about their vouchers. Lastly, a definite need for individuals with severe mental health and other disability issues who cannot function alone need to get help moving out of the cell--shelters. Thank you.

JAMAR: Fresca McAllister [ph 00:18:54]?

FRESCA MCALLISTER: My name is Fresca McAllister. I wasn't scheduled to speak today, but I'm speaking on behalf of, uh, Peter Malvan. This is his testimony that was prepared in advance. We belong to an organization called Safety Net Activists, which is a project under, uh, Urban Justice. Uh, the name of the person whose testimony is Peter Malvan. He is currently a street homeless person. I myself am homeless. I live in a shelter in Brooklyn. And, uh, the voucher program is one of great import--importance to us, of course. We've been in the shelter system, and he's been living on the street for entirely too long. You'll have to forgive my eyes. They're not so good. The New York City Council enacted a coordinating council to work

together on ending homelessness in the city to make a cooperative effort and communication transparent. This council is supposed to include government agencies with the work of ending homelessness as a goal to include major housing providers and consumers. The New York City Continuum of Care is supposed to report annually to City Council with their progress and accomplishments. Currently, the NYCCOC is not functioning as designed, so we question whether or not it will continue to not function as it was designed to function even with this new program. The New York City Human Rights Commission is a city agency which brings legal action for those who are denied housing due to their income. New York City, uh, Human Right Commission placed funding into their source of income discrimination department for the purpose of fighting for the rights of homeless and low-income New Yorkers. Why aren't Department of Homeless Services shelter residents, which are discriminated against, referred to in the Human Rights Commission? DHS shelters are not public accommodations. New York City Connect site--there has been an inordinate number of listings of affordable housing with tax breaks that are thousands of dollars above the amounts reflected in the consolidated vouchers. In recent months, those looking for housing have had to play a devil's advocate

in order to have some idea why the vouchers are not being accepted by brokers, landlords, and management companies. Possible reasons cited have been the fact that rent vouchers indicate no financial obligation on the part of New York City to pay the rent, which has already been stated by a number of people that have spoke here today. Voucher payments come through agencies which have been known to pay in partial payments two to four times per month. New York state, which funds some of the vouchers, has pulled out of voucher programs in the past, which actually makes landlords and tenants--prospective tenants very much afraid. Uh, one of the things that happens frequently at the shelter that I'm at is some of the staff will say, oh, I don't even know why you would do that after three or four years. You're not going to have your rent paid. You're gonna be right back here. That's what happens when the city doesn't guarantee in some fashion how this, uh, voucher is going to be paid or continue past a certain point. Statements on vouchers, such as that they will be extended beyond this point, uh, in the new proposal indicates that it would be extended, perhaps, for a good cause and for those who continue to maintain eligibility. Well, that would tend to act as a disincentive for those striving to become independent.

How do you maintain your eligibility for the, uh, voucher if part of the criteria for maintaining your support is--it's confusing. What is in the new consolidation of vouchers that addresses these issues? Those are the questions that are before us. Thank you.

JAMAR: Wendy O'Shields?

WENDY O'SHIELDS: Alright. Thank you. My name is Wendy O'Shields, and I'm testifying as a housing advocate and a member of the Safety Net Activists. I have a few suggestions for the CITYFHEPS vouchers. Number one, CITYFHEPS rent vouchers are inadequate. Um, please see my supporting data. I have some information I'm submitting to the commissioner. Um, Rent Jungle, July 2018, the average rent per month for New York, New York, New York is \$3,616. \$3,616 is an increase of 13.25 from 2017. \$3,585 is a 0.86 increase from June 2018. I have additional data I'm submitting to the commissioner. The CITYFHEPS vouchers begin at \$1,246 per month. Point two, the city of New York Department of Social Services disclaimer, which states the city does not agree to pay the rent should not be included on the CITYFHEPS voucher. Many landlords are rejecting the rent voucher holders because of this disclaimer. Number three, does the CITYFHEPS voucher keep a low-income tenant in their apartment and out of the Department of

Homeless Services shelter system? Point four, CITYFHEPS rent vouchers should be protect--should protect rent stabilized tenants that meet the eligibility requirements. Less low-income New Yorkers headed for the DHS shelters. I thank you very much for considering my suggestions. And let's ensure that New Yorkers, homeless or housed, are protected by the CITYFHEPS rent voucher.

JAMAR: John Sentigar? Speak into the mic.

JOHN SENTIGAR: Good morning. My name is John Sentigar, and I'm a member of the advocacy team at Covenant House New York, where we serve runaway and homeless youth ages 16 to 24. I'd like to thank HRA for the opportunity to testify today. Uh, first and foremost, we appreciate HRA's proposal to amend Title 68 of the rules of the state of New York to establish a new city rental assistance program called CITYFHEPS. Creating a single streamlined program will enable HRA to more effectively and efficiently administer various city-funded res--rental assistance programs targeted to households at risk of entry to shelter. Um, although these proposed rules do provide an avenue for youth in a DYCD shelter to receive a CITYFHEPS voucher, it seems to be written as an exception as opposed to allowing for general eligibility for DYCD youth in the CITYFHEPS

program. This language is, uh, we believe a little vague and does not specifically state what circumstances must be met for the HRA commissioner to approve CITYFHEPS rental assistance for DYCD youth. So, specifically regarding the runaway and homeless youth population, we have a couple of recommendations. Um, in Section 10-03A2 and 3 and 10-04A3, the proposed rules would require that all individuals who receive CITYFHEPS and are eligible for public assistance to apply for public assistance. Although we believe that this is a fair requirement to, uh, those receiving CITYFHEPS to apply for PA, many of the young people we serve have difficulty applying for PA, often because their parents refuse to remove them from their PA case. DYCD providers need help alleviating these barriers, and we ask that HRA and DYCD work together to establish clear policies and procedures that will help young people applying for PA. Additionally, regarding Section 10-04B, where it says qualifying shelter stay, um, time spent in a DYCD crisis shelter or TIL should count as a qualifying shelter stay as this important program should not be limited to only those who stay in a DHS shelter. We join our voices with Homeless Services United in asking that when counting the cumulative time spent in any shelter for the 90-day requirement that the clock

should not reset for clients when they transition from one type of shelter to another. Homeless young people are transient and in crisis and often need to change shelters and plans due to their rapidly changing needs and circumstances, and this should not count against them. We thank you for the opportunity to testify today. We are greatly optimistic that streamlining rental assistance programs in the CITYFHEPS along with adding these recommendations will go a long way toward ensuring that every vulnerable New Yorker has a place to call home. Thank you.

JAMAR: Katherine Chopani? Katherine Chopani?  
Cynthia Fuller? Cynthia Fuller? Theodore Franklin?  
Theodore Franklin? Jamie Powlovich? Speak into the mic.

JAMIE POWLOVICH: Good morning. My name is Jamie Powlovich, and I'm the executive director of the Coalition for Homeless Youth. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before--and I thank you for the opportunity before HRA this morning. The Coalition for Homeless Youth has been meeting the needs of homeless young people across New York state for the past 40 years. We represent 60 agencies across New York state, 29 of them here in New York City. Today, CHY is thankful that after--at--that over two years after the

mayor stated homeless youth and DYCD programs would be given access to rental subsidies in his 90-day review, we are now seeing that come to fruition in the proposed rule for CITYFHEPS. CHY believes that if the recommendations that I'm about to outline are accepted, youth experiencing homelessness in New York City will finally have an equal opportunity to obtain their own apartment and exit homelessness. The first recommendation is regarding Section 10-1 and Section 10-3. Proposed regulations note that CITYFHEPS qualifying programs could include referrals from youth and Department of Youth and Community Development, DYCD, programs that are at risk of entering the DHS system. However, it is not specifically stated what would qualify youth in DYCD programs to be eligible, and the lack of categorical eligibility for anyone who is homeless implies these resources will only be available on a limited basis. We feel that eligibility for CITYFHEPS should be based on someone's lived experience with homelessness, not specific to DHS system contacts. We recommend that HRA allow for all homeless youth that receive services from a DYCD contracted runaway and homeless youth provider be given equal access to CITYFHEPS automatically based on the fact that they are currently and literally homeless. Similarly, we

recommend that the term outreach provider be used in lieu of DHS contracted outreach provider in the proposed regulations. DHS street outreach providers are only one of the many outreach providers who interact with the homeless youth--young people in New York City. Others include DYCD-funded outreach programs, federally-funded out programs, and many others. A homeless you--young person should not be found ineligible for CITYFHEPS assistance because they sought support from a non-DYCD outreach staff. Second recommendation regarding Section 10-3A2 and 3 and--Section 10-4A3. These proposed rules would require all CITYFHEPS recipients--recipients eligible for PA to apply for PA. Although we understand the need for a recipient of CITYFHEPS to have an active PA case, we feel that it is important that DYCD work with HRA to establish clear policies and procedures to alleviate the current barriers that homeless youth and young adults face when trying to open their first PA case. This must include situations where youth and young adults are listed under a guardian's case whom they no longer reside with and need to be removed before establishing their own case. Number three regarding Section 10-4. As stated--as I stated in recommendation number one, time spent in a DYCD crisis shelter or TIL should count as a qualifying shelter stay and should not

be limited to only those who stayed in a DHS shelter. We agree with the recommendation proposed by other advocates that when calculating the time that an individual has spent in shelter for the purpose of meeting the 90-day requirement, it should not matter if they have transit--transitioned between types of shelters. DYCD discharge data shows that youth experiencing homelessness often move in and out of systems, and this should not be held against them. Regarding Section 10-8 and 11-4, we support the recommendation put forth by the Legal Aid Society and the Coalition for the Homeless regarding the maximum monthly rents, which are below fair market levels. We believe that these levels should be increased to fair market rate. If the voucher rates do not reflect the realistic rents in the city, then it will make it almost impossible for individuals to secure apartments with the vouchers in today's rental market. And lastly, number five regarding Section 10-14. The proposed regulations do not include the same guaranteed lease rental language as the previous rental assistance programs did and therefore would put youth that secure unregulated apartments through CITYFHEPS at serious risk of not having their lease renewed after their first year despite maintaining eligibility for the program. This

would increase their risk of returning to homelessness. We recommend that the city re-add this language to help alleviate the chance that someone may be forced back into homelessness unnecessarily. Thank you.

JAMAR: Council Member Stephen Levin?

STEPHEN LEVIN: Good morning, everybody. Uh, my name is Stephen Levin. I'm chair of the council's General Welfare Committee in the New York City Council. Um, I am, uh, appreciative of the opportunity to speak this morning. Um, I applaud the administration on today's proposed rule to streamline the city's rental assistance program, helping thousands of New Yorkers to find a home for themselves and their families. Consolidating the rental vouchers and removing the five-year limit will go a long way towards bringing some permanency to the system and addressing our city's homelessness crisis. New York City's rental vouchers help residents move into stable housing and get back on their feet, and this rule recognizes the need for a program that is clear, flexible, and accessible. Since the Advantage program ended in 2011, the city's homeless population has skyrocketed from 39,000 to over 60,000 New Yorkers living in shelter each night. Subsequent creation of a multi-voucher system with varied stipulations has been challenging for both residents and

landlords, who have net--have to navigate a complicated system and trust a program that has strict time limits. And while I commend the administration for today's proposed changes, there is more that we must do to combat homelessness and secure housing for New Yorkers in need. In support of our city's commitment to housing homeless New Yorkers, I would like to propose the following recommendations. Number one, expand voucher eligibility to reach more New Yorkers at risk of homelessness. The vast majority of voucher recipients currently live in shelter or have in the past. This rule allows households to have--that have been subject to, to eviction proceedings to be eligible for rental assistance, however, only applies specifically to households that either include veterans, receive adult protective services, have been referred by a city agency, or live in a rent-controlled unit or have previously lived in shelter. I strongly recommend that this rule be expanded to all eligible applicants facing eviction proceedings, including residents living in rent stabilized units and those eligible for SCRIE and DRIE. Far too many people are turned away from the rental assistance programs because they don't meet the very strict criteria set forward in the current rule. Number two, ensure voucher renewals for eligible residents

after five years. The administration's commitment to the goal of voucher permanency is laudable, and I recommend that the final regulation clarify the definition of good cause is based, based on eligibility so that no resident face unnecessary or discriminatory barriers in accessing vouchers for the long-term. Number three, increase the rental assistance eligibility to New Yorkers making up, making up to 250 percent of the federal poverty line--level and remove the requirement to meet New York standard of need. More than 65,000 residents are homeless, and an additional 400,000 New Yorkers are severely rent burdened, making 0 to 30 percent of the area median income. Yet fewer than 10,000 households utilize vouchers each year, significantly lower than the demand given the current need--sorry, significantly lower than the demand. Given the current need, we need to expand the size of the rental assistance pool overall. Number four, remove the required 90-day waiting period for street homeless applicants to--and those living in DHS shelters. Placing residents into housing sooner can connect people to need--needed care and services, minimize trauma, and support the city's Housing First goals. Street homeless applicants should also be exempt from the rules' requirement that individuals who are eligible must

receive public assistance as PA's complex appointment and work requirements can be difficult to navigate and disincentivizes engagement in the program. Number five, increase voucher amounts for all household levels. The current voucher amounts are simply too low to meet the cost of housing in New York. We need to commit to a process that meets rental needs for all households facing homelessness. And so, I urge the administration to adjust the rental assistance levels across the board. And I can just say anecdotally, I've talked to a lot of people who have rental assistance vouchers who cannot find an apartment. I spoke to somebody just yesterday who had, uh, a voucher for, uh, over a year and has not yet found an apartment. That is unfortunately all too often the case because we are not keeping up with the rental market in a meaningful way, and too many neighborhoods across New York City are closed off to people exiting the shelter system who have vouchers. Number six, commit to transparent implementation that includes outreach and education for community members and ongoing voucher transparency for the public and elected officials. I'd particularly like to see a regular review of voucher to housing placements and shelter impact. Uh, I want to thank, uh--I have written testimony as well that I'll be submitting for the

record. I want to thank, uh, HRA for the proposed rule change. I strongly urge our state partners at OTDA to work closely with the city or closely with the city council or closely, closely with our, our, uh, partners in the state legislature, um, to make these programs more effective. Um, as we have seen--I mean, I applaud the administration. They've, uh, made a tremendous effort since 2014 in implementing these programs. However, the programs are not nearly as effective as they ought to be and not nearly as effective as they could be. So, I want to strongly urge all interested parties to put politics aside and make sure that we are doing everything we can to serve the people of the city of New York. Thank you very much. [Applause] Lastly, I just want to thank Elizabeth Adams, my legislative director, for helping me to prepare for today's testimony. Thank you, Elizabeth.

JAMAR: Katherine Chopani? Cynthia Fuller?  
Theodore Franklin? Beth Hofmeister? And Giselle  
Routhier?

BETH HOFMEISTER: Yes. Giselle's going to  
begin, actually.

GISELLE ROUTHIER: Thank you. Uh, my name is  
Giselle Routhier. I'm the policy director of the  
Coalition for the Homeless. We've submitted joint

testimony with Legal Aid. Um, we want to thank DSS for beginning the process of streamlining its vouchers. Uh, while the proposed CITYFHEPS and Pathway Home rules may in some cases increase assistance and protections for New Yorkers at risk of entering shelters or already homeless, uh, they also have the potential to exclude certain vulnerable populations and pose new challenges for implementation. Uh, furthermore, the rules are not fully clear on some important points, so we're gonna go through those. Uh, number one, we believe that the maximum monthly rents should match fair market rents. Um, Sections 10-8 and Sections 11-4 detail the maximum monthly rents, which are below HUD fair market levels. Um, we believe these levels should be increased to FMR and indexed accordingly. Current market forces make it almost impossible for low-income families to reside in New York City, and the rents should be at levels that allow families to find and maintain apartments and avoid entering into shel--to the shelter system. Uh, when CITYFHEPS was first introduced in 2014/2015, the maximum monthly rents were set above FMR. Um, but as those FMRs have increased over time, their value is now approximately \$250 below FMR. Uh, and the new consolidated subsidy does not help close this gap and begins rent levels at an average of \$240 under FMR. Uh,

secondly, limited eligibility excludes certain vulnerable homeless populations. As was mentioned in some other testimony, the regulations as written would largely exclude vulnerable New Yorkers who are homeless but not in contact with DHS or HRA shelters. For example, Sections 10-1 and 10-3 define CITYFHEPS qualifying programs which allow for certain agencies to prevent or abbreviate a stay in a DHS or HRA shelter by making a referral for a voucher. However, there are no standards or procedures to regulate how clients will be referred from these qualifying programs, and the lack of categorical eligibility for anyone who is homeless implies these resources may only be available on a limited basis. We believe that eligibility for CITYFHEPS should be based on lived experience of homelessness, not necessarily specific to the DA--DSS shelter system. Um, this is particularly relevant for the Department of Youth and Community Development, DYCD shelters, which serve run--which serve runaway and homeless youth. Uh, youth in those shel--shelters currently have no access to housing assistance that will bring them out of temporary shelters other than supportive housing, which has restricted eligibility and is not appropriate for all youth experiencing homelessness. So, we ask that HRA reconsider this

provision and allow for all homeless youth residing in DYCD shelters to access these rental vouchers automatically by reason of their current homelessness. Uh, we have a few other comments that Beth is going to go through, but I also just wanted to mention that there are several ambiguities in the new rule as it's currently written, um, that I wanted to specifically mention, the first one being the safety and habitability assessments. As advocates, we often learn about terrible conditions under which our, our clients live while using vouchers. And we urge the city to set an explicit and appropriately high standard for this assessment to ensure that people exiting shelters are entering safe, habitable environments free from the pressures of unscrupulous landlords. And the second thing that should be clarified more explicitly, uh, regards the appeal process for both CITYFHEPS and Pathway Home. Um, as described in the proposed pr-- regulations, they provide for aid to continue only if the appellant, appellant raises an issue relating to the calculation of the benefit or an incorrect factual determination. A contin--to continue should also be provided for appeals based on the household's inability to comply with the program requirements due to a disability that the agency has not accommodated.

BETH HOFMEISTER: I'm gonna touch on a couple housing issues. I'm Beth Hofmeister from the Legal Aid Society. And again, we submitted joint testimony with Coalition for the Homeless. Um, this was just touched on by the council member, but lease renewals--the language in the lease renewals provision, which is Section 10-14, takes away the automatic pr--the provision that automatically allows for lease renewals, uh, which, because about two-thirds of families who get these vouchers go into unregulated apartments means they're at much higher risk of ha--of being, of being kicked out after a year. We would strongly encourage HRA to, uh, reinstate the language that causes the automatic lease renewal from year to year. Um, alternatively, we would suggest that they either delay paying out the bonus that landlords get for using--or having someone rent their apartment who gets a voucher, they delay it over multiple years so that there's some encouragement for them to continue to renew the lease or that they refuse to grant any additional bonuses to landlords who are kicking people out after a year, um, because as we all know, that's just one more way that landlords can, can discriminate against clients who are using vouchers. The last thing I want to touch on is something, uh, related to our housing practice, which is

how they use the current CITYFHEPS voucher system to help prevent homelessness. Um, we all know that with stagnating wages and raising rents that it's very difficult for anyone in New York City to be able to pay for their rent. Uh, but we also know that, um, people whose wages are slightly too high to entitle them to cash assistance would be effectively excluded from retaining this voucher. So, that means people who may have been getting a voucher in the past who then find full-time employment but are barely making slightly over what they--what their rental--uh, rent is would actually be unable to continue using the voucher and would likely become homeless and have to enter the shelter system even though they're doing something that is beneficial for their families and is something I think all of us would want to have happen if we, if we could and were moving on, um, to the next stage of our lives. So, we would encourage, uh, HRA to continue to allow this exception which would permit families who are--and individuals who are not actually in shelter yet but are at high risk of entering shelter if they weren't able to have this exception that would permit them to, um, access the vouchers even though they don't qualify for cash assistance. We go into great detail about this in our testimony because we know it's a little bit

esoteric, but, um, again, we want to make sure that as much prevention opportunity, uh, for, for--as, as much opportunity to prevent clients from entering shelter continues to exist. Um, I also just want to mention that, um, I think it's incredibly valuable that so many people who are having a lived experience of using the vouchers and living in the shelter system are here testifying today, um, and were actually the ones who started off the testimony today. And I hope that the agency--I want to amplify their voices and hope that the agency really listens to the other issues that they brought up that are related to these rules, particularly in regards to making sure we're supporting New Yorkers who are facing significant income discrimination by using vouchers.

JAMAR: Lolan Sevilla?

LOLAN SEVILLA: Good morning. My name is Lolan Sevilla, and I'm the training coordinator of the New York City Anti-Violence Project, a crisis organization that serves LGBTQ-identified survivors of violence through services and advocacy. Thank you for this opportunity to speak on the new proposed rules concerning the consolidation of city rental assistance programs. As longtime advocates for our clients and community members, we witness on the daily how

transgender and gender nonconforming, TGNC, uh, TGNC people are explicitly impacted by the intersections of housing and security, lack of economic access, and discriminatory practices, further compounded by rapidly gentrifying neighborhoods faced by all New Yorkers. Whether it is TGNC young adults aging out of shelters or services--survivors of violence being denied access to crucial services, we have hope that, that CITYFHEPS and HRA will take into consideration the needs and barriers that the city's most vulnerable populations often face when trying to access their services. Specific to the communities we serve at AVP, we have been able to compile data regarding the housing issues our clients experience as it relates to the proposed changes. For instance, the switch from LINC III to state FEPS has left--uh, excuse me, for, uh, SID FEPS has left many of our clients without housing subsidies because of new income requirements or lack of information regarding how to access them, etcetera. Most alarmingly, our clients have been unable to get safety transfers to move to new apartments under CITYFHEPS because of a lack of a streamlined process responding to these requests. One proposed rule says applicants and shelter residents are responsible for identifying potential housing. Yet a majority of our clients are also facing huge

difficulties in getting landlords to accept housing subsidies due to skyrocketing rent prices and landlords often not getting paid on time through these subsidies. Clients who are LGBTQ and specifically TGNC face double-edged discrimination by landlords because of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation in tandem with their housing subsidies. Given this, recipients of CITYFHEPS should receive support in securing housing from case managers and their counterparts. We ask that rules such as needing to be on public assistance or stipulating work requirements in order to qualify for CITYFHEPS be drafted with enough nuance to consider the many barriers that TGNC survivors of violence often face. Thank you for your consideration of these comments, and I look forward to working with HRA in making a CITYFHEPS final rule in line with the needs of TGNC-identified New Yorkers.

JAMAR: Beverly Franklin?

BEVERLY FRANKLIN: Hello. Good morning. My name is Beverly Franklin, and I'm here with Neighbors Together. CITYFHEPS seems like a step to--in the right direction. The different programs has come, has come to be confusing to both the homeless New Yorkers and landlords alike. But many people have unanswered questions and concerns about these changes which have--

which will impact them, and they will not go as far. Here are some of my recommendations. One, raise the amount of the vouchers to meet fair market rent. Rental assistance programs s--like Section 8 have a, have a track record that they work. What seems--what seemed doesn't--it makes--apologize. What seems, what seems that it makes to pay \$2,026 per month rent to have me stay in a shelter when the city could find me a rental assistance program to get me a fair chance to find permanent housing. Two, losing criticism for assisting vouchers. Thousands of homeless people outside of the, outside of the shelter system need assistance to rent--uh, to, to rental assistance. The rule plus dif--the rule puts different difficulty restrictions on people who are living in the streets and/or housing--and, and/or housing stipulations. Three, programs such as permanent as long as the individuals are home--are--as long as the individual household meet the income eligibility through changed states after five years renew--renewal are subjects to change, good cause. What good cause does that mean, and who decides? If someone continues to need rental assistance, they should have, have assistance--have the assistance to do it. Four, HR--HRA should get serious about confirming source of income discrimination. During my housing search,

landlords regularly break the rules and refuse to accept my voucher. Five, language matter. At the bottom of the link--voucher, it reads, money not guaranteed. If the city wants landlords to accept CITYFHEPS, they should eliminate doubts landlords may have about the program. Six, great problem with input from, from New York--from homeless New Yorkers to educate the programs about the quali--qualified--qualifications for the voucher and how to accept the vouchers and other details without creating a voucher system that is respectfully by landlords and pay market rent. This voucher should cons--consist--consolidate. It's just, just a name change.

JAMAR: Theodore James Coleman?

THEODORE JAMES COLEMAN: Thank you. Hello, everyone. Good morning. Um, I'm here also for Neighbors Together. And today pretty much I'm just gonna be the voice for--I'm homeless right now, and I want to be the voice for every homeless person in New York. That goes for the veterans, people who has mentally--I seen it all. And I get why some people chose to be in the streets, because I'm saying I seen horrific things, people suicidal who hanging themselves, people attacked viciously. And I get--because if you ask them--I'll come with you out in the streets of New

York. And they want to ask this. And I, I've been in the shelter, so I see why they out there. And I'm glad that a person and stuff here said they also offer service that can also help them as well because some of them is scared. And the mental--it's a lot of things that go into being homeless. So, when it comes to the housing and programs, I know that some people [unintelligible 00:56:29] cut short and they wind up going back in the shelter. It's a lot of stuff that goes on with that. So, if we want to have a program that's gonna really help everybody, there has to be a stability. And no--some people mentioned the cost of living. That's a realistic. You're not gonna be able to live nowhere, no, no tenant gonna take any housing that's gonna be below what they feel they should be getting. So that's a lot that goes into the system, this problem. This is a worldwide thing. And us being a metropolitan city, a big city, I feel like if we do stuff that increase--gonna help us, maybe others can live by example. We can help America. And that's all I'm gonna say. Thank you.

JAMAR: Scott Hutchins?

SCOTT ANDREW HUTCHINS: My name is Scott Andrew Hutchins, and I am a six-year resident of the New York City Department of Homeless Services system. I am

medically limited to a desk job due to issues in my lower back and limbs, and my CUNY master's degree has not been enticing to employers. The past two jobs I've had have been temporary, and yet I've been expected to leave the shelter on them based solely on the fact that they lasted longer than expected. Both ended suddenly, and both were before March 2018 when the client contribution for a mere room was 30 percent of income, the same as for an apartment. From August 2015 to June 2016, I was employed as a temp in the exams unit at MTA making \$12.60 an hour. On Thursday, June 2nd, 2016, a number of us were taken individually to a conference room and told that tomorrow would be our last day. The project to which they had assigned us was deemed not worth finishing, and they believed that they were overstaffed. At least the most recent of us got an accurate estimate of three months for the assignment. My first LINC voucher came the following week, and my case managers actually expected me to use it despite my already low income being replaced with unemployment insurance paying less than half of what I was receiving when working. With the Obama era unemployment insurance extensions long gone, I extec--I accepted an assignment paying even less, the soon-to-be minimum wage of \$11 an hour in late October 2016. This assignment was expected

to last only a few weeks, but when the project started getting three-week extensions every few weeks, my case manager started to interpret that the job would become permanent, no matter how much I explained that when the project reached the quorum of proxy votes, the assignment would be over. The final extension was for April 18th, 2017. On April 10th, about 45 minutes into the workday, they announced that the quorum had been reached, and nearly 70 of us were to c--told to clock out, laid off permanently. When my case managers harassed me for not using my LINC voucher for a room, there's no way I would consider giving up my stored property to rent a room that would never hold the majority of it, particularly when the job--with a job ready to evaporate at any time. Had I been able to successfully use the LINC voucher, I would have both lost everything I own and been sent back to housing court. I do not understand why anyone would act so incredulous that I would not elect to do this. What could be more stressful than losing all one owns and going back to housing court so soon after getting out of the shelter system? Oh, yeah, I lost my mother during that time, too. The system is designed to fail. By lasting only five years and expecting formerly homeless people to get a 70-percent raise over the course of that

time to make up for the progressively reduced subsidy each year, nearly everyone in the program was cycled back into the shelter system, but not until Mayor De Blasio had been, had been, had been term, term limited out. I think most New Yorkers would berate you in town halls if you tried to claim that 70-percent raises over five years is normal. With the average annual raise of 3 percent per year, it is totally unrealistic to expect low-income subsidized tenants' income to go up 70 percent in five years, yet you will force them to pay 70, 70 percent more toward rent in the course of five years. Even with the changes from LINC to CITYFHEPS, the income levels and expectations are still far from realistic and do nothing for someone whose income is unsteady as mine. I am a freelance writer currently on a W-2 to remote employer whose estimate of \$1,000 a month in income from working has yet to be reached. A retaliatory transfer from a hotel shelter with wi-fi to an armory shelter near a library with brief hours and no air conditioning had a direct impact in reducing my ability to do my job, as did financial issues on my employer's end. I implore the city to come up with more realistic solutions for ending the housing crisis. Thank you. [Applause]

JAMAR: Katherine Chopani? Cynthia Fuller?

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Theodore Franklin?

BRUCE JORDAN: So, it appears we've gone through our list of, uh, scheduled speakers. If anyone else wants to speak, please let us know. Sign up. If not, we're gonna hold the hearing, the floor open another 15 minutes before we close out the hearing.

FEMALE SPEAKER: And we're testing one, two, three, four. Can you hear me clearly? Okay.

BRUCE JORDAN: Thank you for coming to today's hearing and sharing your thoughts on HRA's proposed rule. This concludes the public hearing on the CITYFHEPS and Pathway Home proposed rule.

(Whereupon, the foregoing matter went off the record at 10:42 a.m.)