

**Testimony Of Grace Bonilla, Administrator, New York City Human Resources Administration**

**Oversight: HRA's System of Domestic Violence Shelters Hearing before New York City  
Council's Committees on General Welfare and Women's Issues**

**October 30, 2017**

Good morning. Thank you Chairs Levin and Cumbo for giving us this opportunity to testify and respond to committee questions today. My name is Grace Bonilla and I am the HRA Administrator, I am joined by Marie Philip, Deputy Commissioner for Emergency Intervention Services and Elizabeth Dank Deputy Commissioner and General Counsel for the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence. As we near the end of Domestic Violence Awareness month, I look forward to updating these committees on the important work we are doing to provide assistance and support for survivors of domestic violence.

HRA is the nation's largest social services agency assisting over three million New Yorkers annually through the administration of more than 12 major public assistance programs including cash assistance, employment programs, food stamps, public health insurance and other supports that help New Yorkers remain in the workforce. HRA also plays a role in the administration of housing programs such as supportive housing and services, designed to assist individuals with HIV and survivors of domestic violence among others. Much of our work focuses on advancing one of this Administration's chief priorities: reducing income inequality and leveling the playing field for all New Yorkers.

We know that domestic violence is far too common and regardless of one's socio-economic status, immigration status, gender identity and sexual orientation – any of us can fall victim to violence, including sometimes in our own homes perpetrated by the person we love. HRA addresses the scourge of domestic violence, a major driver of poverty and homelessness, by ensuring survivors and their families have access to a safe living environment and linkages to comprehensive services, both within the shelter systems and as they transition back into communities, to assist them as they recover from the trauma they endured.

The New York State Domestic Violence Prevention Act was enacted in 1987 to support services for survivors of domestic violence and their children. The law requires counties to provide shelter and services to survivors of domestic violence and establishes funding for these programs. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services promulgated and maintains regulations as to the standards for the establishment and maintenance of residential

and non-residential domestic violence programs, and authorizes the local department of social services with the responsibility for financial and contractual arrangements with providers of domestic violence residential services.

New York City's Domestic Violence shelter system overseen by HRA is the largest in the country. Domestic violence shelters work with individuals and families impacted by domestic violence to address the trauma of domestic violence, strengthen coping skills and enhance self-sufficiency by including economic empowerment services. The system provides temporary emergency housing and supportive services designed to stabilize families in a safe environment, this includes 47 confidential emergency domestic violence facilities throughout all five boroughs. HRA's Office of Emergency Intervention Services is responsible for these 47 provider-run shelters and one directly administered facility. Additionally, there are eight DV Tier II/transitional shelter facilities totaling 263 Tier II units. In 2016, the HRA domestic violence system served 9,205 individuals, which included 3,596 adults and 5,609 children.

Specialized shelter support services include mental health, expressive therapies (art, play therapy, recreational and stress reduction), substance use counseling and onsite medical collaborations with hospitals/medical centers such as the Floating Hospital and crisis mobile van programs. DV shelter providers offer an array of services to children, including, but not limited to, individual counseling for children through dedicated therapeutic Child Care - an example of enhanced services for children as well as programs with onsite licensed Mental Health Services while in shelter which are then linked to continued services with the same therapist once discharged from the shelter. There are 19 shelter provider organizations that include agencies with expertise in working with specific populations such as persons with disabilities and the Latinx, Orthodox Jewish, LGBTQ and Asian communities.

Over the course of the past four years, this Administration has advanced substantial policy changes that have had both immediate and long-term positive impacts for survivors of domestic violence accessing the shelter systems.

### **Domestic Violence Shelter Capacity Increase**

In September 2015, Mayor de Blasio announced that the City would develop 700 additional DV Tier II units and emergency beds – an unprecedented addition by the City to address capacity in the domestic violence shelter system. Under the prior Administration, the City added 736 emergency beds and Tier II units between 2002 and 2010, of which 85 percent were emergency beds, and none since 2010.

As Commissioner Banks testified at HRA's preliminary budget hearing, there was a \$17 million increase in 2018 compared to 2017 for the full expansion of the Domestic Violence Shelter system, which includes 300 emergency beds and 400 Tier II units.

To date 150 of the emergency beds have already been brought online, an additional 89 beds are under development, and the remaining 61 in the pipeline are pending State licensure by OCFS.

For the new 400 DV Tier II units, there is currently an open RFP out and we encourage providers to submit proposals. So far, 54 Tier II beds have been awarded and 20 units are operating. And just last week, an additional DV Tier II proposal was submitted and is under agency review.

### **Enhanced Domestic Violence Services in DHS shelters**

As we reported in April of this year when Commissioner Banks testified at the post-90 day review hearing, as of December 2016, Policy and Training Institute staff from the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence (OCDV) go to designated Tier II shelters to provide access to domestic violence services and provide Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) specific training for shelter staff, contracted staff, Peace Officers, and security. OCDV and DHS worked together to create a work plan for providing these trainings. Existing social services staff in Tier II shelters participate in enhanced training to provide them with the tools to identify and refer families and individuals to the HRA No Violence Again (NoVA) team, a NYC Family Justice Center (FJC), or other community-based domestic violence providers. To date, more than 2,600 DHS employees and contracted staff system-wide have undergone intimate partner violence training and presentations provided by OCDV staff, and a total of 116 trainings/presentations have been conducted.

HRA's Office of Domestic Violence provides oversight for the 24-hour NYC domestic violence hotline which serves as one of the entry points for the domestic violence shelter system, but also provides safety planning and referrals. Safe Horizon, a private not-for-profit social service agency and DV service provider, is the City contracted provider operating the hotline. In CY16, the DV hotline received 10,453 requests for domestic violence shelter.

Additional policy changes made by this Administration have focused on clients as they transition out of shelter back into the community.

### **Reinstating Rental Assistance**

In 2011, the State and City cut the Advantage rental assistance program, which had devastating impacts on the number of New Yorkers in need of shelter and the DHS shelter census. This negatively impacted survivors of domestic violence, because at that time this was the only

rental assistance program available to facilitate exiting shelters. For those living in the community, State FEPS (the Family Eviction Prevention Supplement), which was intended to prevent homelessness by supplementing the low Public Assistance shelter allowances for families, was not an option unless survivors could demonstrate that they were in eviction proceedings, which most domestic survivors fleeing their abusers were unable to do. This often forced survivors to make impossible decisions concerning their safety and well-being, and their housing options.

Implemented in September of 2014, the City's LINC rental assistance programs help families move from temporary, emergency shelter back to the community by paying a portion of their rent for up to five years, if they continue to qualify. LINC III is specifically designated for domestic violence survivors. To date, LINC III has assisted 1206 households move out of shelter into permanent housing. In 2015, the Administration implemented CityFEPS which has helped 707 households impacted by domestic violence move out of shelter.

Pursuant to the recent Legal Aid - State FEPS settlement, up to 1,000 survivors of domestic violence who are in receipt of cash assistance may now be eligible for shelter allowance supplements each year. These supplements, available under FHEPS, the new City-State Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement, Part B, will enable survivors of domestic violence to be able to remain in their apartments or move to new apartments if they have already lost or are otherwise unable to stay in their apartments.

With the implementation of the new FHEPS program, we are now able to finalize the streamlining of the rules for our own rental assistance programs, and we will continue to update these committees on our streamlining process.

### **Streamlining NYCHA Application Process**

Under the Bloomberg Administration there were no New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) priority referrals or set asides for clients in the HRA or DHS shelter systems. The de Blasio Administration reversed course on both of these decisions.

HRA and NYCHA worked together to streamline the NYCHA application process for families in HRA domestic violence shelters who HRA's NoVA staff certified as survivors of domestic violence. Previously, families were required to obtain duplicative documentation to obtain the N1 NYCHA needs based priority, despite HRA's determination that they were domestic violence survivors,. As a result, this made receiving the N1 NYCHA priority difficult and time consuming. This process has now been reformed so that HRA's certification is sufficient. For those clients in HRA's DV shelter system interested in seeking NYCHA housing, individuals and families are eligible for an N1 NYCHA priority due to their NoVA certification or DV shelter certification of

DV, and eligible for this upgrade after 45 days in the DV system – in CY16 there were 736 N1 NYCHA priority upgrades.

This Administration additionally reinstated the N0 priority for survivors of domestic violence and eligible DHS shelter residents. This designation is especially beneficial for families in DV shelters who have reached the 180-day state-set limit and would otherwise be discharged to a DHS shelter. From the beginning of this Administration, to date through September 2017, as a result of this policy change, 1,163 DV families have moved from HRA or DHS shelter into NYCHA units through an N0 priority.

### **Streamlining DV to DHS Shelter Moves**

New York State Social Services law mandates the provision of shelter services for domestic violence survivors, which HRA provides in accordance with the State Office of Children and Family Services regulations concerning emergency shelter, services and care for survivors of domestic violence.

Emergency domestic violence shelters provide temporary housing and supportive services such as onsite case management, access to social service and crisis intervention in a safe environment for survivors and their families. State regulations limit placements in emergency shelter beds to 180 days. For those clients who time-out of these domestic violence shelters, the Administration has implemented a streamlined transfer process, in consultation with advocates, so that these families can avoid having to go to DHS intake at the PATH (Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing) Family Intake Center in the Bronx.

This streamlining results in immediate placement in a DHS Tier II facility, avoiding the PATH eligibility process and conditional DHS placement status. There are clear benefits to families who can avoid re-traumatization and disruption to family functioning that might occur in having to complete the intake process which would require a client to disclose their abuse yet again.

While streamlined clients are waiting for DHS placement they maintain their housing in the domestic violence shelter, and as part of their transfer process they complete discharge plans which include links to services such as mental health services. This streamlining also allows the provider to verify the safety of the client's placement within the DHS Tier II system. And finally, this process ensures that when transfers directly to DHS from HRA occur, our clients maintain their N0 priority NYCHA status.

As clients move back into communities it is important to take a moment to highlight the ways in which programs and services continue to be made available to them through the NYC Family Justice Centers (FJCs) and non-residential community based services. These non-residential services include crisis intervention, case management and advocacy, counseling, support

groups, housing advocacy, and economic security advocacy. Other non-residential services include legal advocacy and assistance in obtaining orders of protection, securing U-visas, and navigating divorce and child support proceedings, as well as services for adolescent and child witnesses of domestic violence. We recognize that oftentimes clients wish to receive services outside of their residence, including shelter if they are homeless, and/or community. It is our goal to ensure that clients are aware of the client-centered service options available to them and are able to access the services of interest to them through referrals and direct linkages.

Under this Administration, the Mayor's Office to Combat Domestic Violence (OCDV) opened Family Justice Centers (FJCs) in Manhattan and Staten Island, finalizing the vision of one FJC in every borough and creating the largest network of FJCs in the country. OCDV operates the City's five Family Justice Centers (FJCs) which provide comprehensive, multi-disciplinary and trauma-informed services for survivors of intimate partner violence, sex trafficking and elder abuse in one location. Last year, the FJCs had over 62,000 client visits across the boroughs. We recognize that FJCs are critical for clients in shelter in receiving the support they need as they are a one-stop shop for a wide range of programs and services. OCDV's FJCs and HRA's domestic violence shelters work closely together to provide a continuum of care through cross-referrals and linkages to crisis intervention and ongoing supportive services for survivors. In 2016, a total of 1,275 FJC clients reported being in a shelter at the time of initial screening.

Recently, through ThriveNYC, OCDV and Health + Hospitals have implemented mental health teams at each FJC with psychiatrists and psychotherapists to provide trauma-informed mental health services to FJC clients. Columbia University Medical Center's Department of Psychiatry, through private funding support, provides ongoing training and technical assistance to the H+H staff providing these services.

### **NYC Domestic Violence Task Force**

The NYC Domestic Violence Task Force, launched in November 2016 by Mayor Bill de Blasio, co-chaired by First Lady Chirlane McCray and Police Commissioner O'Neill, and co-led by OCDV and the Mayor's Office of Criminal Justice (MOCJ), is charged with developing a coordinated, citywide strategy to address domestic violence broadly within NYC. Last week the First Lady announced an additional almost \$4 million in funding for Task Force recommendations, building on the initial investment of \$7 million earlier this year, bringing the City's total investment to almost \$11 million to fund 32 recommendations for new programming, initiatives, research and evaluation. Several of the DVTF recommendations directly impact survivors' access to housing and legal assistance:

- In FY18, \$500,000 was added to existing HRA-contracts for the non-residential (community based) DV programs to expand capacity for domestic violence related

immigration legal services in targeted communities with large, underserved immigrant populations and high levels of domestic violence. The focus will be on providing holistic legal assistance that meets survivors' linguistic and cultural needs and building capacity within these CBOs to provide legal services to their clients. The two legal providers are Sanctuary for Families serving the Bronx and Manhattan and the Urban Justice Center – Domestic Violence Project serving Brooklyn, Queens, and Staten Island.

- In 2016, through the DV Task Force, funding was added to the existing HRA Anti-Harassment Tenant Protection (AHTP) contracts to implement housing legal assistance at each of the FJCs to assist survivors and their families in maintaining their current housing, prevent unfair eviction and avoid homelessness. The contracted housing providers onsite at the FJCs have assisted 566 clients since the program launched in November 2016.
- Through DV Task Force funding, OCDV is partnering with HRA to implement the new Home + Safe program which will provide enhanced safety measures, through alarm systems, for survivors with a full order of protection to remain in their home. The program will also connect survivors with financial assistance and economic empowerment programming to provide additional supports for survivors to help families remain in their home.

### **Paid Safe Leave Legislation**

I want to congratulate the Council and thank Council Members Ferreras-Copeland and Miller on the passage of the “Earned Sick and Safe Time Act,” which Mayor de Blasio cosponsored. Amending the NYC Earned Sick Time Act to the Earned Sick and Safe Time Act expands the acceptable reasons to use earned sick days, including paid leave, where applicable, to allow a survivor of domestic violence, sexual assault, trafficking or stalking to take time off of work in order to plan their immediate next steps and focus on safety, without fearing a loss of income. As OCDV and the Department of Consumer Affairs testified during a hearing on this legislation earlier this year, this is critical for survivors of domestic violence who are seeking financial independence from an abusive partner since we know that success in obtaining legal and social services and taking measures to increase personal safety is greatly impacted by employees' ability to take paid leave from work without facing the risk of penalty.

### **HRA Domestic Violence Programs and Services**

#### **No Violence Again (NoVA)**

NoVA, established in 1991, addresses the needs of domestic violence survivors seeking emergency housing from the Department of Homeless Services. When a family member discloses that she/he has experienced domestic violence during the DHS intake process (at PATH for families, AFIC for adults without minor children, and single adults), the family or

individual is sent to NoVA for a domestic violence safety assessment and possible placement in a DV shelter. NoVA staff use a set of criteria to determine eligibility based on the following:

- Whether s/he is a domestic violence survivor in accordance with New York Social Services Law § 459 and the definitions and procedures specified in 98-ADM-3;
- Whether there is a relationship between the need for emergency shelter for current safety and the incident of domestic violence; and
- Whether the perpetrator meets the definition of “family or household member” in accordance with NoVA procedures.

### **Domestic Violence Liaison Unit (DVLU)**

The Domestic Violence Liaison Unit (DVLU) is a service mandated by the Family Violence Option Act (FVO), which is intended to protect survivors of domestic violence, both living in shelter and in communities, who could be further endangered through compliance with public assistance requirements, particularly those related to employment and child support.

Liaisons serve all HRA FIA Job Centers and determine eligibility for waivers from work and other requirements as the client’s confidentiality needs dictate. These waivers give some clients a greater opportunity to avoid activities that put their safety in jeopardy and give other clients an opportunity to safely comply with federal and state work requirements, so that they can pick up the skills and training necessary to locate a job, quickly transition off of HRA benefits and services and maintain their financial independence. In CY16, the DVLU assessed 8,274 clients for safety and DV service needs and 5,850 clients received waivers.

### **Anti-Domestic Violence Eligibility Needs Team (ADVENT)**

In CY16, the Anti-Domestic Violence Eligibility Needs Team (ADVENT) provided specialized services to an average of 1,264 clients in DV shelter each month. ADVENT conducts routine and ongoing eligibility determinations, provides case management, and engages survivors of domestic violence in activities designed to address their individualized needs. ADVENT works closely with DVL to monitor and respond to the needs of survivors of DV and their families. The Unit also processes housing applications and lease ups for HRA housing programs for clients in DV shelter.

### **The Alternative to Shelter (ATS)**

The Alternative to Shelter (ATS) program minimizes the need to enter shelter by giving survivors of domestic violence – who have orders of protection – the option of remaining safely in their home. An ATS client’s safety needs are assessed and a safety plan is put in place with close coordination with the NYPD to ensure that the individual and/or family are able to quickly alert the authorities when in danger. The program provides clients with a personal electronic

response alarm system linked to the local police precinct. Survivors of domestic violence can also receive crisis intervention counseling, advocacy and referrals to services. In CY16, ATS had an active caseload of 230 clients per month.

### **DV Survivors and NYCHA**

HRA oversees two programs that provide supportive services for survivors living in NYCHA developments. The Domestic Violence Intervention, Education and Prevention (DVIEP) program is a close partnership between NYCHA and HRA aimed at preventing one of the collateral consequences of domestic violence, homelessness. The program is based in NYCHA police service areas where case managers work closely with Police Officers to respond to domestic violence incident reports and provide crisis intervention, counseling and advocacy for DV survivors in NYCHA housing. In CY16, the DVIEP program engaged 6,000 families in domestic violence services.

The Domestic Violence Aftercare Program (DVAP) works closely with the DVIEP program. DVAP is staffed with case managers and MSW social workers who provide NYCHA residents who are survivors of DV with home-based assessments, case management, referrals and information, advocacy, safety planning, and relocation assistance. In CY16, DVAP provided case management services to an average of 275 NYCHA residents upon approval of their application for an emergency DV transfer.

### **DV Legal Services**

Legal Services are also available for DV shelter residents and survivors in communities, including orders of protection, child custody, child support, immigration issues and divorce. In CY16, HRA contracted non-residential providers assisted an average of 2,040 families each month, and offered legal services to an average of 270 families each month. OCDV's FJCs also have City contracted legal providers onsite to provide legal consultation and representation for family and immigration law related matters.

The following is a summary of FJC clients seeks legal assistance. For Civil Legal Services, in CY16, 12,106 clients received legal services; this includes clients receiving at least one service for any of the following: immigration, family, matrimonial or other civil legal assistance. And in CY17, through (October 27th) an additional 12,096 clients received such services.

### **Prevention**

These programs and services I just discussed are a snapshot of the diverse and multidisciplinary response to domestic violence across agencies, organizations, community stakeholders and faith-based leaders in the City. Although crisis intervention and ongoing supportive services to

domestic violence survivors is critical, we know that in order to reduce the incidence of domestic violence in the City and interrupt the intergenerational cycle of violence, education and prevention efforts with youth is key. HRA's innovative Teen Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP) has helped teens attending public high schools and middle schools develop healthier relationships. Social workers (MSW) deliver an array of relationship abuse services through four components: prevention classes, intervention counseling, staff development and training, and community outreach. RAPP fosters a school climate with zero tolerance for abusive behavior in all of its forms, thereby promoting a safe and productive learning environment for students and staff. For several years, RAPP has also focused on pregnancy prevention efforts. Currently, 32 MSWs are serving 93 schools citywide. During the 2016-2017 school years, over 7,000 students received RAPP intervention services and counseling, and more than 3,600 completed the three session curriculum.

OCDV's Healthy Relationship Training Academy provides educational workshops to youth, staff and parents, reaching almost 9,000 participants in 2017. The Academy provides free interactive and discussion-based workshops on the topics of teen dating violence and healthy relationships for youth (11-24), parents, and staff/service providers in English + Spanish. Workshops are led by Peer Educators, who are generally young professionals who have received extensive training and ongoing skills development in this area.

Through DVTF funding, healthy relationship education will now be expanded, through the Early-RAPP initiative, to youth in middle schools. OCDV, HRA and DOE will work with community providers to bring healthy relationship education to 128 middle schools throughout NYC with a graduated rollout beginning in the 2017-2018 school year. Early-RAPP incorporates key components from OCDV's Healthy Relationship Training Academy (Academy) and HRA's Relationship Abuse Prevention Program (RAPP) into a new education model that targets middle schools in every borough where high incidents of domestic violence occur.

### **Response to Legislation**

Intro 1739 – The proposed legislation would require the Human Resources Administration (HRA) to issue an annual report on the number of individuals and the number of families who exit domestic violence emergency shelters operated by HRA and the type of housing where the individuals and families would be residing upon exiting emergency shelter.

The report would include, but not be limited to, the total number of individuals and the total number of families who exited a domestic violence emergency shelter during the preceding calendar year, disaggregated by the type of housing such individuals and families would be residing in upon their exit.

The Human Resources Administration regularly reports on move-outs, including the 71,596 men, women and children who have utilized our rental assistance programs to move into permanent housing from the beginning of this Administration through September 2017. Our discharge reasons and corresponding codes are aligned with OCFS regulations concerning exits.

We have some operational concerns about the reporting that would be required, particularly in light of the existing OCFS requirements, but we look forward to working with the Council on a feasible alternative.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I look forward to your questions.