



HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

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**Testimony of Catherine Trapani, Executive Director, Homeless Services United
The New York City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings
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Intro 1211: Requiring developers who receive city financial assistance for housing development projects to set aside a certain of created or preserved dwelling units for homeless individuals and families.

Good morning, my name is Catherine Trapani and I am the Executive Director of Homeless Services United, an organization that represents approximately 50 mission-driven, nonprofit organizations providing a range of services to homeless New Yorkers including street outreach, prevention, shelter and aftercare services in all five boroughs. I want to thank the Committee for holding this hearing and for the opportunity to offer testimony on Council Member Salamanca's bill, Intro 1211.

The crisis of homelessness impacts approximately 62,000 New Yorkers using Department of Homeless Services shelters each night. Factoring in additional homeless people using the domestic violence and youth shelter systems along with persons living on the streets, the actual number of people experiencing homelessness is much higher. The Continuum of Care reported that 78,676 people were homeless at the annual 2018 Point in Time Count. Given the scope of this challenge facing our City, bold action is required to not only begin to change the trajectory and stem the growth of the homeless population but, to make real headway in reducing the number of people experiencing homelessness altogether.

The Mayor's plan to address homelessness dubbed "Turning the Tide" is an important first step. The plan includes a number of important initiatives that address the three essential components of ending the crisis of homelessness in our city (1) homeless prevention, (2) outreach and shelter services, and (3) permanent housing and many of the reforms have begun to take hold. For the first time in memory it appears as if the growth of the number of families experiencing homelessness has leveled off. This is welcome news and the de Blasio administration deserves credit for the progress that has been made; the tide is indeed starting to turn. Yet, given the scope and scale of the crisis of homelessness in New York City, turning the tide is simply not enough. We need to make sure that episodes of homelessness are rare, brief and never to be repeated. In order to do that, we need to make sure that access to truly affordable housing for homeless New Yorkers is robust and plentiful.

The Mayor has championed the largest "affordable housing" plan in New York's history promising to build or preserve 300,000 units of affordable housing. While the number of units pledged is certainly impressive, and in theory could be a boon for those hoping to address the homeless crisis, when you dig in to who the housing is being built for it becomes clear that there is a mismatch between the need and the number of units being produced. The New York Times published a story on housing lotteries on

1/11/19 noting that in many cases, landlord marketing “affordable units” to upper income households resort to listing them on Streeteasy and similar platforms to attract applicants looking for market rate homes given the prices are typically no lower than what is already available on the open market. While we appreciate that New Yorkers of all walks of life need housing, and some like one of the women profiled in the article would like to trade up to a more luxurious home¹, surely it is clear that persons who have no housing at all should be the highest priority for any new housing efforts being funded by taxpayers. It therefore makes sense to set a minimum threshold for new projects to commit to setting aside at least 15% of new housing units to persons experiencing homelessness. Doing so could prevent “affordable housing” from becoming a gentrifying force that exacerbates homelessness by concentrating upper income individuals in so-called affordable projects with few if any resources for truly needy households. There would still be ample room in the plan to offer many middle and even upper income households access to housing they need but, it would better balance projects by ensuring that at least some of the neediest people can benefit.

By aligning the housing and homeless plans New York could finally do more than turn the tide on homelessness, we could begin to end it.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and thank you for your support of Intro 1211.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/11/realestate/better-than-the-powerball.html?rref=collection%2Fsectioncollection%2Frealestate>