



HOMELESS SERVICES UNITED

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**Testimony of Catherine Trapani, Executive Director, Homeless Services United, Inc.
Before the NYC Council Committee on Finance
May 23, 2019**

Introduction

My name is Catherine Trapani, and I am the Executive Director of Homeless Services United (HSU). HSU is a coalition of approximately 50 non-profit agencies serving homeless and at-risk adults and families in New York City. HSU provides advocacy, information, and training to member agencies to expand their capacity to deliver high-quality services. HSU advocates for expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers.

Homeless Service United's member agencies operate hundreds of programs including shelters, drop-in centers, food pantries, HomeBase, and outreach and prevention services. Each day, HSU member programs work with thousands of homeless families and individuals, preventing shelter entry whenever possible and working to end homelessness through counseling, social services, health care, legal services, and public benefits assistance, among many other supports.

HSU is grateful to the City Council for including many of our priorities in its response to the preliminary budget including social workers for homeless families placed in hotels, "bridging the gap" social workers in schools for students living in temporary housing, an education support center at PATH and, funding to fill the gap between provider's indirect costs and the contract reimbursement rates from the City.

I am here in partnership with the City Council to make it clear to OMB and Mayor de Blasio that it's crucial this vital investment makes it into the Adopted Budget.

I would like to use the opportunity to testify today to reiterate a few points we made during the preliminary budget hearings and to urge the Council and the administration to work together to deliver a budget that reflects our shared values. Every New Yorker deserves a safe place to call home but, if ever a New Yorker should fall into homelessness that must be a safety net that is available and fully equipped to support them in that time of crisis so that they can quickly and safely return to permanent housing.

"Model Budget" Implementation

Nonprofit service providers like HSU's members must receive the appropriate level of funding to staff programs with qualified professionals to support families and individuals struggling with homelessness. It is equally important to make sure promised investments in the sector are implemented quickly via timely contract and amendment registration so we can put those dollars to work for our clients. **We are once again calling upon the City to accelerate the pace of registering the necessary model budget amendments so that nonprofits can finally**

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put the resources promised in fiscal year 2018 to work and continue to improve the conditions and programs in our shelters throughout the DHS portfolio.

I would also like to note for the record that the DHS Street Solutions Programs did not go through a model budget process and Safe Havens and Drop-In Centers that have been operating with the same rates for years have yet to receive a rate adjustment. **We request that the administration partner with the nonprofits holding contracts for safe havens and drop-in centers that have not received an adjustment in 10 or 20 years to ensure that they will be able to continue to provide the high level of service we rely upon to keep our most vulnerable residents safe.**

Indirect Rates

The rate that nonprofits are allowed for the running of their organizations was not part of the DHS model budget exercise. It remains capped at the arbitrary level of 10% despite the fact that many independent auditors confirm the true cost of operating a nonprofit organization can be considerably higher.

The gap between what the City funds on our contracts and what we can supplement with private and philanthropic dollars has grown too wide. The Council recognized this in its response to the Preliminary Budget by calling for an investment of \$106 million in fiscal year 2020. This investment cannot be left on the negotiation table. The new *Health and Human Services Cost Policies and Procedures Manual*, which was developed as part of the Nonprofit Resiliency Committee, lays out standardized indirect costs for our sector. However, without increased funding to address the gaps this manual displays in our contracts, the fiscal crisis we are facing remains unaddressed.

Homeless Prevention Programs

We have long said that the best way to end homelessness is to prevent it from happening in the first place. We are grateful that the City has continued its commitment to fund prevention programs and that the Administration added funding in the Executive Budget to reflect the additional City share of the State's FHEPS program. However, the City has still not committed to support the Community Based Organizations that play a vital role in ensuring tenants are able to access the FHEPS benefit and retain their housing by advocating with landlords and guiding families through the housing court process as they work to obtain and maintain their benefits. **We urge the Council to join us in advocating for the City to invest in these critical prevention programs and add \$3 million to HRA's budget to ensure that CBO tenant advocates will be available to support tenants with accessing the State FHEPS program.**

While the State program covers families with children on public assistance being evicted from their homes, the City version (CityFHEPS) covers a host of other groups who are also at high risk of entering shelter. Unfortunately, even with the expanded coverage, there are still groups who have been left out of the program either by design or failure to implement critical components of the program.

Despite the regulations stating that homeless youth living in DYCD shelters may be referred to the CityFHEPS program, the City still has not created a referral protocol or mechanism for them to do so. **Young people in DYCD shelters need access to the CityFHEPS program and the budget should reflect an increase to accommodate enrollment of runaway and homeless youth.**

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Educational Supports for Homeless Children

We are pleased that Mayor de Blasio has baselined funding for 53 Bridging the Gap social workers who work in schools with high concentrations of students living in shelters and has agreed to restore funding for FY 20 for the 16 additional Bridging the Gap social workers. However, there are still 100 schools with 50 or more students living in shelter and no Bridging the Gap social worker. **We urge you to ensure that the adopted budget includes and baselines an additional \$5 million to increase the number of Bridging the Gap social workers from 69 to 100 to help address the needs of students living in shelters.**

We also appreciate that the City Council's response to the preliminary budget called on the City to launch and fund an education support center at PATH, so that families applying for shelter can have the opportunity to meet with Department of Education staff and get important information about their children's educational options as they enter a shelter. However, there is no funding in the executive budget for this purpose. **We urge you to ensure that the adopted budget includes and baselines \$500,000 for an education support center at PATH.**

Social Workers for Children in Hotels

Thanks to support from the Thrive Initiative, Tier II shelters serving families with children were able to add social workers to their staff. These new staff members known as Client Care Coordinators have been able to assess the mental health needs of families in shelter, link clients to care, conduct assessments necessary for supportive housing entry and support parents of chronically absent children to improve school attendance.

These staff members have been critical to the success of families in shelter. **HSU is grateful that the Council included a call to invest \$4.9 million for 57 social workers in hotels housing homeless children in the response to the preliminary budget and hope this money is included in the adopted budget for Fiscal Year 2020.**

Conclusion

HSU is grateful to the administration and the Council for the continued investments in our sector. We understand that these are uncertain economic times yet we know we must not balance the budget on the backs of the poorest New Yorkers. Now more than ever, a robust safety net is necessary to ensure the resiliency of our City no matter what changes to the economy may come down the road. Thank you for your time and commitment to addressing the needs and concerns of homeless and at-risk New Yorkers and those who serve them.