

Councilmember Bill de Blasio's Five Point Plan to Reduce Homelessness

Families in Shelter

1. Expand Homelessness Prevention Services

Advocates estimate that it costs approximately \$33,000 to shelter the average homeless family. In fiscal year 2008, actual spending greatly exceeded this average, with the city budgeting \$433 million to cover the cost of 8,848 families in shelter.

In contrast, according to legal services providers, providing anti-eviction legal services for renters in housing court costs approximately \$1,785 per case (this is based on the cost of a mid-level attorney with a rigorous case load

While it is not possible to know whether every family that receives anti-eviction legal services would have otherwise entered a homeless shelter, we do know that many families would enter homeless shelters if not for the legal services they received. Providing these services for 5,000 families would cost the City approximately \$8,925,000. If this measure prevented even 20%, or 1,000, of these assisted families from entering shelter, the City could save a conservative estimate of over \$23 million while helping 1,000 families remain in their homes.

2. Target Federal Housing Aid to the Homeless through Section 8 and NYCHA

In late 2004, Mayor Bloomberg's administration cut off homeless New Yorkers from longstanding priority for Federal housing programs, including Section 8 vouchers and public housing.

Over the past five years, the City has placed an average of 7,136 persons in housing through Section 8 per year – none of these vouchers were directed toward New Yorkers in shelter. The City should earmark 10% of future placements for homeless families, which would give at least 300 - 700 families vouchers per year.

In 2008, the City placed 5,220 applicants in public housing through NYCHA. Ten percent of future NYCHA placements should be earmarked for homeless families, giving approximately 500 families housing each year.

3. Repair the Flaws in Rental Assistance Programs for the Homeless

The "Work Advantage" program has unrealistic, one-size-fits-all time limits that will cut off rental assistance to struggling families after two years – regardless of a family's circumstances. This plan was originally offered to 750 families in shelter in the spring of 2007.

In contrast, acclaimed studies by the Vera Institute, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and academic researchers have found that long-term, flexible housing

assistance – like the Federal Section 8 voucher program – helps move families from shelter to their own homes and helps them stay there.

In spring of 2009, the first cohort who entered the Work Advantage program will see their benefits expire. Not all of these individuals will be prepared at that point to afford their full rents and support their families. The City should extend subsidies to any families that are still unable to afford their full rent, potentially helping hundreds of families remain in their homes and out of the shelter system.

Individuals in Shelter

4. Accelerate Construction of Supportive Housing

In 2005, New York City and State signed a ten-year agreement to provide supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other special needs.

However, more than half of the newly constructed supportive housing – 3,276 units of the planned 6,250 new units – will not be built until at least 2011.

City and State officials should accelerate the pace of supportive housing construction. If the city builds approximately 1,000 of these back-loaded units each year, all 3,276 could be available by 2011.

5. Halt Referrals of Homeless Adults to Illegal Dwellings:

New York City has referred hundreds of homeless adults – including many living with mental illness – to more than 100 boarding houses that have been identified as unsafe and illegal by advocates.

City inspectors have issued vacate orders to at least 11 illegal boarding houses due to health and fire safety risks – forcing the residents to return to shelters or the streets

City officials should continue to update and monitor the list of these illegal boarding houses, and immediately halt all referrals of homeless adults living with mental illness or other disabilities to them.

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