



**NYS SFY 2025-26 Executive Budget Testimony
Joint Hearing of the Housing Committees
February 27th, 2025**

Introduction and Thanks: My name is Eric Lee and I am the Director of Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). Thank you, Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh and members of the Assembly and Senate, for the opportunity to submit testimony.

About Us: VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Thank you, Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh for your unwavering leadership on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers. As you both well know, housing is healthcare, and the work of your respective Committees is invaluable in ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to safe and stable housing, which facilitates better health, education, and employment outcomes to help people thrive. In this unprecedented time of uncertainty at the Federal level, New York State can and must step up as a bulwark to blunt the impact of anticipated cuts to critical support systems and benefits for vulnerable and low-income New Yorkers.

SFY25/26 Budget Priorities:

- 1. Fund a 7.8% increase for all NYS human services contracts to expand funding nonprofits receive for program costs and worker wages. (The Governor added 2.1%)**

While we appreciate the Governor's support for the human services sector through her inclusion of a 2.1% increase in the SFY 25/26 Executive Budget, it falls short of the current need, both to cover increasing overhead costs and service needs, as well as to improve wages for our workforce, which is one of the lowest paid sectors in New York. A 7.8% inflationary increase will ensure VOA-GNY's state-funded supportive housing and domestic violence programs and staff are able to keep pace with rising costs and better resourced to meet the growing need.

- 2. Add \$250M in the SFY25/26 Budget for statewide rental assistance and pass S72/A1704 (Kavanagh/Rosenthal) to establish the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP).**

VOA-GNY strongly supports Chair Kavanagh's and Chair Rosenthal's HAVP legislation to establish a statewide rental assistance program similar to Section 8.



While CityFHEPS is an invaluable tool for moving people out of shelter in New York City, both the City and State would benefit from the addition of HAVP which is a more flexible rental assistance voucher that can help unhoused New Yorkers in rural and urban areas to access permanent housing and tenants to remain stably housed. The inclusion of \$250 million in the SFY 25/26 Budget is essential to stand up the program and provide these critical vouchers to assist New Yorkers. This investment is particularly important now with the looming threat of cuts to the federal Section 8 program.

3. Adjust/Convert Outdated Supportive Housing Programs to be Sustainable

a. Add \$32M in the SFY25/26 Budget for the Supportive Housing Modernization Act S136/A2134 (Cleare/Hevesi) *(The Governor added \$17.8M)*

While we appreciate the Governor's proposed investment of \$17.8 million, the Supportive Housing Network of New York found that \$32 million is needed to preserve 9,000 units of supportive housing funded via the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP). This program's funding has been unchanged for almost 40 years, and 9,000 units are dangerously underfunded, receiving just \$2,964 per unit per year to serve individuals and \$3,900 to serve families, compared to modern programs which receive at least \$25,000 for services and operating funding.

b. Double the capital funding for the Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP) to \$256M to fund the construction and preservation of supportive housing. *(The Governor added \$25M)*

HHAP is a critical funding stream to develop housing outside the realm of traditional low-and-moderate income housing initiatives. It is often the sole funding stream for emergency shelters and smaller supportive housing projects in rural areas, as well as an initial funding stream to kickstart new supportive housing projects in suburban and urban areas, or a flexible source to fill gaps for very complex projects. Existing funding for HHAP is far outstripped by the need, as last year OTDA, which administers the program, closed the RFP after only 4 months due to funding being exhausted. We urge the Legislature to double the funding for HHAP to \$256M to preserve this essential pipeline for emergency shelter, transitional, and permanent supportive housing.

4. Add an additional \$3M for YouthBuild in the SFY25/26 Budget



YouthBuild is a critical workforce development initiative for young people ages 16 to 24, offering a comprehensive approach to youth workforce development to help young people get good-paying jobs and out of poverty and homelessness. The program combines education, workforce training, work experience, employment and leadership development with wraparound support and aftercare services to ensure young people have the tools they need to succeed. We urge the Legislature to add an additional \$3 million to enable YouthBuild providers across the State to help more young people break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

5. Add an additional \$280K for Volunteers of America- Greater New York (VOA-GNY) in the SFY25/26 Budget to strengthen services for survivors of Domestic Violence (DV) and/or human trafficking.

Domestic violence is a leading cause of homelessness. VOA-GNY operates 5 DV shelters and 2 Safe Dwellings programs serving NYC residents from all five boroughs, providing safe emergency and transitional housing for adults and families fleeing DV at confidential locations within the Bronx, Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan. This investment of \$280,000 would enable VOA-GNY to deepen our clinical expertise, partnerships, community awareness and outreach for our existing programs to better meet the unique and complex needs of survivors of domestic violence and human trafficking to help them achieve safety and stability.

2025-2026 Legislative Priorities:

1. S3669 (Persaud) Targeted Inflationary Increases for Human Services Programs

VOA-GNY supports a 7.8% increase for human services programs to better resource human services providers and staff and correct the inadvertent exclusion of critical programs like NYSHHP and STEHP programs from the NYS human services cost of living adjustment (COLA).

2. A3264 (Hevesi) Securing Access to Fair & Equal (SAFE) Shelter Act

VOA-GNY strongly endorses the SAFE Shelter Act which will help expand access to life-saving domestic violence shelter to single adult survivors of domestic violence, trafficking, and sexual violence. The existing reimbursement differential penalizes providers for placing one-person households into units with two beds, resulting in single individuals who are fleeing dangerous situations unable to access DV shelter. We urge the State to pass and sign the SAFE Act into law, so that survivors of domestic violence, trafficking and sexual violence do not have to choose between returning to their abuser or becoming homeless.

3. S72/A1704 (Kavanagh/Rosenthal) Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)



VOA-GNY strongly supports the creation of HAVP, which research from the NYU Furman Center for Real Estateⁱ and Winⁱⁱ finds would provide close to 13,000 households with vouchers which would help tens of thousands of New Yorkers across the state out of and avoid homelessness. New York State's Child Poverty Advisory Council's 2024 recommendationsⁱⁱⁱ included expanding housing assistance similar to Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers (HCV) to reduce poverty, as the limited availability of HCV results in only 3 out of 10 eligible households receiving assistance.

4. S136/A2134 (Cleare/Hevesi) Supportive Housing Modernization Act

VOA-GNY supports this bill to create a 5-year, phased in approach to convert 9,000 severely underfunded NYSSHP contracts to ESSHI, modernizing an antiquated underfunded model to better serve thousands of vulnerable tenants and over-stretched staff. These deeply underfunded units receive only \$2,964 per unit per year to serve individuals and \$3,900 to serve families, compared to at least \$25,000 which modern programs receive for services and operating funding. This phased in approach will enable supportive housing programs to preserve these 9,000 units of supportive housing which are crucial to keeping New Yorkers stably housed.

5. A712/S3937 (Cruz/Hoylman-Sigal) to prohibit time limits in shelter

VOA-GNY supports this legislation which would remove time limits for shelter, enabling all people in shelter but especially survivors of domestic violence and recently arrived households to better maintain their children's school attendance, progress towards accessing public benefits and housing, and continue to receive time-sensitive mail critical to their benefits or immigration cases.

6. A5589/S3953 (Bronson/Ramos) to establish a Human Services Employee Wage Board

VOA-GNY supports this legislation which would establish a Human Services Wage Board would examine these pay disparities and offer recommendations on adequate and equitable wages. A recent study of NYC human services workers found that highly educated non-profit staff (four-year degree or better) earned 22% to 37% less than comparable positions within the public or private sector.^{iv} Through exploring and addressing systemic deficiencies in how government contracts compensate human services workers, New York State can ensure a strong and well-staffed non-profit safety net to help all New Yorkers.

7. S246/A2500 (Persaud/Davila) to increase resource exemptions for applicants for public assistance programs



VOA-GNY supports this legislation to enable households to qualify for public assistance programs further upstream from crisis. When households are not required to fall deeper into poverty to qualify for public assistance, they can more easily stabilize and climb out of poverty.

Thank you to Chair Rosenthal and Chair Kavanagh and Members of the Assembly and Senate for your leadership and commitment to supporting New Yorkers. In this time of uncertainty, the Legislature and the Administration are positioned to lead the way as shining examples to New Yorkers and the entire country of how government cares for the most vulnerable and in need. VOA-GNY looks forward to our continuing partnership with you to meet the needs of our communities.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Eric Lee.

ⁱ Hayley Raetz, Jiaqi Dong, Matthew Murphy, Vicki Been, “A State-Level Rent Voucher Program,” *The NYU Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy*, https://furmancenter.org/files/publications/2_A_State-Level_Rent_Voucher_Program_Final.pdf

ⁱⁱ Hannah Tager, Martin Gamboa, Chris Mann, “The Housing Access Voucher Program: Saving New York State \$200 Million and Preventing Homelessness for Tens of Thousands of New Yorkers Every Year” <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/HAVP-Report.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ NYS Child Poverty Reduction Advisory Council, “2024 Recommendations and Progress Report”, pg. 16, <https://www.otda.ny.gov/cprac/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>

^{iv} James Parrott, “Moving Beyond COLAs to Salary Parity”, *Center for New York City Affairs at the New School*, January 2025, pg. 19. <https://www.centrernyc.org/s/Moving-Beyond-COLAs-to-Salary-Parity-For-New-York-Citys-Nonprofit-Human-Services-Workers-FINAL-ntbw.pdf>