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TRANSITION MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor-Elect Mamdani

FROM: Catherine Trapani, Eric Lee, Taysha Milagros Clark-Reid, Volunteers of America- Greater New York/
Northern New Jersey Policy Team

DATE: Thursday, December 4, 2025

RE: Congratulations and Transition Priorities

Congratulations on your election! As mayor there will be many challenges ahead, few more pressing than making sure New York can remain safe and affordable places to call home. Unfortunately, New York ranks as the 3rd most expensive state in the country for renter households¹ and homelessness among long term New Yorkers remains near record highs².

At Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY) it is our mission to end homelessness. We are an antipov-erty organization that has been in operation for nearly 130 years. At our 70+ programs we offer housing, shelter and behavioral health services to households with a range of challenges that make them vulnerable to home-lessness including youth, veterans, survivors of domestic violence, seniors, and people with mental health chal-lenges and disabilities. Our years of experience improving housing, health and wealth outcomes for these diverse populations make us uniquely qualified to offer ideas, support and scalable solutions to aid your administration as you work to enhance affordability for all New Yorkers.

Nonprofit homeless services and housing developers like VOA-GNY are some of your best partners in achieving your vision of affordability. We stand ready to develop deeply affordable homes for the New Yorkers that need them most. At VOA-GNY, our privately seeded housing innovation fund enables us to quickly mobilize to execute affordable housing projects from the ground up and, also allows us to reimagine underbuilt properties, creating thoughtful redevelopment plans that maximize deeply affordable housing and dignified shelters and other social services spaces.

Our rich history also affords us a long view of improving the city and supporting those with the most complex challenges. The pages that follow offer a roadmap of ideas rooted in this experience that we hope you will consid-er as you craft the priorities in your administration.

We welcome you to call upon us as partners, problem solvers and helpers and wish you much success in your mayoralty.

¹ <https://nlihc.org/oor>

² <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2025/>

Healthy non-profit organizations are strong partners for the city, providing lifesaving and transformative human services and affordable housing to our communities, but we need to be able to count on the City of New York as a reliable partner to answer the city's call to meet the moment. When adequately resourced and paid by our city contracting agencies on time, VOA-GNY can deliver based on our theory of change to address the most prevalent causes of homelessness by focusing on three pillars: **housing, health, and wealth**. Through developing innovative housing, health, and wealth-building services and providing them to people in that order, VOA-GNY not only addresses the immediate needs of our community, but also labor towards systemic change.

Timely and Adequate Payments to Nonprofits

Nonprofit organizations are the backbone of New York City. We offer services critical to the wellbeing of everyone from seniors to veterans, to young people just starting their careers. **VOA-GNY's programs act as the safety net for people in crisis**, with services for survivors of domestic violence, shelters, and supports for those struggling with mental health. Our mission calls us to do this work, but **we need your help** to ensure our organization can remain strong **to do it well**. The contracts that we receive from the City often underfund critical work, particularly as it relates to rates of pay for our workforce. Additionally, the City's chronic late payment of our service contracts is an existential threat to our success.

Your administration can finally end the cycle of late payments by doing the following:

- Empower and resource MOCS to fully implement Int. 1392 by the start of FY27, establishing quarterly advances for DHS and MOCJ providers

- The City must urgently restore cashflow to DHS shelter providers to shore up the fiscal health of qualified, experienced homeless services and shelter providers to ensure they can continue to answer the City's call to open new programs to meet the City's legal obligations of Right to Shelter. DHS-contracted non-profit providers collectively spend millions of dollars per year in unreimbursed interest for private loans to bridge the gap created by NYC's chronic fiscal and reimbursement delays.

- Budget additional funding to improve functionality and stability of PASSPort to make contract actions and reimbursements more user-friendly and streamlined for non-profits and vendors.

- DSS/DHS must clear the backlog of outstanding receivables for DHS and HRA contracted non-profit providers who are millions for services rendered. **VOA-GNY is owed \$40 million as of 6/30/25 for City contracts as far back as FY20.**

- Bolster headcount within MOCS, DSS, and DHS to ensure sufficient hands to address the fiscal backlog of budget actions like amendments and new needs while continuing to process new budget actions, advances, and reimbursements.

The nonprofit workforce can be strengthened by:

- Implement sector-wide investments to increase the wages of all City-contracted human services providers to parity with city-government equivalent positions and ensure our staff are paid fairly.

- Work with non-profit umbrella organizations including the Human Services Council, Homeless Services United, and the Supportive Housing Network of New York and city-contracted direct service providers like VOA-GNY to identify existing contract deficiencies and additional investments for our workforce.
- **Call on NYS to pass S3952/A5589 to establish a human services wage board** to investigate the pay gap between nonprofit and government human services workers and make recommendations for reform.

By enacting fiscally sound government contracting and reimbursement practices and investments in the human services workforce, non-profit human service providers like VOA-GNY will be better positioned to nimbly adapt programs and services in response to the ever-evolving needs of vulnerable New Yorkers.

Housing

We greatly appreciate your campaign's focus on addressing homelessness and lack of affordable housing for New Yorkers. With nearly 1 in 7 public school students in New York experiencing homelessness³ and over 350,000 New Yorkers without homes⁴ last year, the need has never been greater, both to ensure that the city's aging emergency shelter system is resourced to provide compassionate wraparound services for New Yorkers in need and to expand access to public benefits, housing assistance, affordable housing to prevent and end homelessness.

Your administration can make homelessness rare, brief, and nonrecurring:

- Invest and expand in proven Housing First models like VOA-GNY's Street to Home DHS pilot program to move people experiencing street homelessness in permanent supportive housing often within days of meeting them, bypassing shelter. People living on the street ought not wait for months to access supportive housing. When offered the immediate option for permanent housing through our Street to Home program, many unsheltered individuals chose to come inside and are thriving in permanent housing years later.

- Ensure everyone has access to safe and appropriate shelter

- Protect the right to shelter for all populations, regardless of the reason for their homelessness, immigration status or other characteristics

³ <https://www.nydailynews.com/2025/10/20/nearly-1-in-7-nyc-public-school-children-are-homeless-all-time-high-report/>

⁴ <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/state-of-the-homeless-2024/#the-scope-of-homelessness-in-nyc>

- **Update the model budget for DHS shelters to restore dignity to residents and staff by modernizing aging facilities.** Many of these buildings were retrofitted and quickly opened as shelters in response to the urgent needs of the city over the past four decades. Despite historic investments in 2018 to improve conditions with the implementation of model budgets, the rates were not indexed to inflation and shelters are struggling. A comprehensive examination of these 400 plus shelter programs is needed to assess and update rates to ensure access to quality food, robust services, dignified living spaces, and high-quality care that will help people get back on their feet.
- **Call on NYS to pass A3264/S7738 (SAFE Act) to help individuals fleeing domestic violence and human trafficking access shelters** by adding flexibility to the current funding model to fully reimburse DV providers serving single adult households in 2-bed units.
- **Eliminate or reform the “Conditional Placement” process for families with children (FWC) applying for DHS Shelter** to address needless churning and time spent in shelter waiting to qualify for assistance.
 - **Eliminate the housing history verification and Conditional Status process entirely for DHS FWC Intake by mirroring the DHS Single Adult Shelter Intake assessment process.** Like individuals, families which children should be taken at their word that they are homeless and require shelter instead of having to prove they have no other option.
- **To reduce the disruptions of “Conditional Placements”:**
 - **Shorten the prior housing address verification period from two-years down to one-year** to reduce potential gaps in documentation for prior housing locations.
 - **Allow families to remain within their current shelter placement while in “Conditional Status”** to avoid additional disruptions/uprooting for parents and children.
- **Hasten access to public benefits and rental assistance through targeted investments within HRA**
 - **Expand HRA headcount** responsible for processing public benefits, one shot deals, cash assistance, SNAP, and rental assistance, to accommodate record high numbers of households applying for benefits or in need of rental assistance, as well as help process new federal work requirements for SNAP.
 - **Streamline overly bureaucratic application and recertification processes** to ensure households can more easily access/renew public benefits or housing assistance.
 - **Address the “indexing” processing delay for submitted/uploaded personal documentation** to a person’s public benefits case or rental assistance renewal/application. This manual process puts low-income New Yorkers at risk of interruptions in public benefits, inability to secure a one-shot deal in time to keep their housing, or denial or non-renewal of their rental assistance voucher which could result in the loss of their housing. HRA must find a way to automate this process to eliminate delays for applicants while less labor intensive for staff.
 - **Create a more reliable mechanism than “Single Issuance” (SI) public assistance cases** to approve rental assistance vouchers for households who earn too much for ongoing Cash Assistance (CA). The SI status is an antiquated electronic workaround which is prone to errors that result in a household’s rental assistance application to be rejected, forcing the person to resubmit their rental assistance application and go through HRA’s benefits interview process again, needlessly lengthening the time they spend in shelter.

- **Expand funding for eviction prevention and aftercare services** to stabilize more households and break the cycle of homelessness through benefits access assistance and accessing rental assistance vouchers and housing resources.

Housing is the solution to homelessness, and VOA-GNY, as a non-profit affordable housing developer, is committed to preserving our city's affordable housing stock, and creating vibrant new buildings for low and extremely low-income New Yorkers to be able to live with dignity in the city they love. We are extremely excited to break ground on our transformative Hillside Grove project on Staten Island which will turn blight into beauty⁵.

VOA-GNY leverages our Housing Innovation Fund⁶ to cover the upfront costs of new affordable housing projects and nimbly compete with for-profit developers. To increase the city's affordable housing development and preservation rates, non-profit developers need not only expanded financing options and access to Capital dollars but also legislative solutions to promote greater volume of deeply affordable housing. Additionally, investments are needed to reinvigorate older supportive housing models to preserve the integrity of the programs and increase the level of services for tenants aging in place.

Your administration can expand housing availability and resources by enabling non-profit developers like VOA-GNY to build more affordable and supportive housing and help more New Yorkers afford their rent:

- **Pass and Enact Int 909-2024 (Community Opportunity to Purchase Act or COPA) to enable more non-profit owned affordable housing.** Giving qualified non-profits including community land trusts the first opportunity to purchase properties for sale can help combat unchecked real estate speculation that have destabilized Black and brown working-class communities, preserving and expanding new affordable housing developments across the City.
- **Invest in sufficient staffing for HPD to ensure affordable housing projects can seamlessly move through the development pipeline.** Affordable housing takes time to build but shouldn't be mired in paperwork delays. Expanding HPD headcount can turbocharge the City's ability to get new projects approved and shovels in the ground.
- **Develop and Resource permanent affordable and supportive housing for those who need it most**
 - Update rates for 15/15 NYC Supportive Housing to enrich on-site services and staffing, as stagnant funding levels resulted in service dollars being cannibalized over years to cover increased overhead costs for the buildings like utilities and insurance.
 - Tilt the share of City subsidy towards deeply affordable programs like the Supportive Housing Loan Program (SHLP) and the Extremely Low & Low-Income Affordability Program (ELLA). Through this targeted approach, the city can laser focus financing for deeply affordable housing which includes homeless set aside units to help the most in need of housing.

⁵ <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-is-turning-a-home-for-garbage-trucks-into-affordable-housing-on-staten-island>

⁶ <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-04-23/new-york-s-20-million-housing-innovation-fund-targets-predevelopment-costs>

- Strengthen Rental Assistance Vouchers:

- **Fully fund the CityFHEPS rental assistance program and implement its legally mandated expansion (LL. 99-102 of 2023)** to prevent homelessness for renter households on the brink of eviction and, to qualify thousands of homeless households for rental assistance who are currently languishing in shelters.
- **Repeal the recent CityFHEPS rule change that increased rent contributions from 30% to 40% of income for households receiving the voucher longer than 5 years.** Int. 1372-2025 (Ayala) would have corrected this rule change but was vetoed by the outgoing administration. The city should not seek to save money by rent-burdening low-income New Yorkers.
- **Restore unit hold fees for rental assistance vouchers like CityFHEPS and FHEPS to compensate landlords for the time it takes for HRA to process the paperwork.**
- **Maintain the 15% broker fee for CityFHEPS** to compensate brokers for their time completing the application process and maintain interest in rehousing people with vouchers. **Additionally, increase the state FHEPS broker fee to match the CityFHEPS broker fee for uniformity.**
- **Call on the Governor to expand funding for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) to \$250 million in the SFY26-27 Executive Budget,** to help more households across New York State, given the recent funding exhaustion of Emergency Housing Vouchers.

Health

Simplifying the pathway to health and mental health services for people experiencing homelessness or living in supportive housing will take the onus off vulnerable New Yorkers to navigate complicated bureaucratic processes to access services. VOA-GNY's holistic approach for our shelter residents and supportive and affordable housing tenants aids them in their healing journey and provides support to age in place and thrive in their communities.

- Improve screening and access to treatment for DV survivors impacted by Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI).

- Quickly implement Int 29-A to create trauma-informed trainings for first responders to recognize the signs of TBI when responding to domestic violence situations and launch a public awareness campaign to destigmatize and increase understanding of the connection between DV and TBI.
- Implement TBI screenings as a best practice at H+H and DOHMH and other public health sites and ensure child welfare specialists and family court judges understand the connection between DV and TBI.
- Improve care coordination between housing, shelters, hospitals, and community providers with streamlined referrals and data sharing.

- Expand funding for behavioral health services in shelter and housing

- Scale mobile social work programs like VOA-GNY's Home:BASE and OMNIA! models to layer supportive services over existing housing and shelter programs where the needs of residents are evolving and existing funding streams have failed to keep up. The hub and spoke model enables VOA-GNY to strategically deploy behavioral health services to individuals across multiple programs, which is cost-effective for programs while bringing the services on-site to the client/tenant.

- Expand staffing and services provided by Adult Protective Services, to support more vulnerable and aging New Yorkers, and work more collaboratively with supportive housing providers to maintain stability of their residents. Supportive housing tenants' quality of life improves from APS assistance for situations like decluttering hoarded-up situations and representative payee services to help manage their finances, but APS denies 95% of the cases referred due in part to the proportionately limited number of staff fielding referrals.

- Expand funding for Food Pantries programs, to resource non-profit providers to stand up food pantries within our affordable and supportive housing buildings to help low-income households maintain food security.

- Reform/streamline the supportive housing application/placement process so that all providers can more quickly place households experiencing homelessness into supportive housing.

- Organize existing programs for people experiencing unsheltered homelessness

- Improve coordination of existing city and state street homeless outreach programs, hospitals, and care networks to align efforts and engagements to bring someone inside.
- Utilize a clinical rationale to prioritize access for unsheltered individuals to the limited number of service-rich safe haven beds, and warm-handoffs to ensure the placement meets individual expectations and enables the safe haven to better support the client.

Wealth

VOA-GNY is committed to ending homelessness in New York through helping households attain stability and generate wealth. Your affordability platform resonates with many New Yorkers, as growing numbers of households cannot make ends meet and must rely on public benefits to help bridge the gap. Key investments on the City level can help low-income households avoid disruptions as Federal changes continue to take effect, and expansions of successful programs to build credit and employment opportunities in good-paying sectors can help lift New Yorkers out of poverty. In line with your commitment to universal childcare, specialized preschools like our Bronx Early Learning Center (BELC) helps ensure low-income households with children with developmental delays receive specialized, compassionate support to thrive, setting them up for success while holistically supporting their families' needs.

- Minimize disruption to public benefits:

- **Implement a vulnerability assessment** at City agencies (DSS/HRA, ACS, etc.) and human services providers akin to VOA-GNY's tool developed to preemptively identify which households are most at risk of reductions or loss of benefits from changes to SNAP and Medicaid eligibility, to provide additional assistance maintaining benefits or seeking alternatives.
- **Create streamlined user-friendly processes for SNAP and Medicaid benefits and widen HRA's real-time support** to assist applicants to ameliorate anticipated additional Federal reporting requirements.

- Expand funding for YouthBuild, a highly successful youth employment program to help young people earn credentials in good paying job sectors including construction, healthcare, culinary, information technology, and advanced manufacturing.

- Scale up free rent-reporting programs for low-income tenants in partnership with lenders and affordable and supportive housing providers to establish and build their credit. VOA-GNY's EmpowerRent Program, the largest rent reporting program run by supportive housing provider in New York State, offers 1,500 of our supportive housing tenants the ability to report on-time rent payments, helping many establish a credit score for the first time. When paired with financial and credit counseling services such as through NYC Financial Empowerment Centers, households gain tools to work towards achievable financial milestones and wealth generation.

- Maintain funding for VOA-GNY's Bronx Early Learning Center (BELC), a 22-classroom preschool special education program for children 2.9 – 5 years with developmental delays or disabilities.

- Continue NYCDOE Enhancement Program for 4410 programs for the 2026-27 school year to provide multi-disciplinary evaluations and special education services
- Continue including BELC in salary increases for NYC childcare providers and NYCDOE-contracted Head Start Programs to retain and attract qualified childcare staff.

Conclusion

While uncertainties continue to grow at the Federal level, New York City can rise to meet the moment and continue to be a shining example for how responsive government, in partnership with non-profit providers, to meet the evolving needs of the people. Through innovative solutions, key investments, and a whole-of-government and community-wide response, we can meet these challenges together to make our great city a more equitable place for all New Yorkers.

ABOUT VOA-GNY

Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY) is an anti-poverty organization with a rich 125+ year legacy of serving individuals and families in need.

Our vision is to end homelessness* in the New York area by providing innovative housing, health and wealth-building services to our neighbors who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Through 70+ programs located in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester, we deliver services to more than 35,000 adults and children annually. One of the nation's earliest adopters of the supportive housing model, VOA-GNY is now the fifth largest provider of supportive housing in the region.

*Can we end homelessness?

VOA-GNY is working towards “functional zero” – a national standard of quickly re-housing anyone who does become homeless. Homelessness may always exist to a degree, but it should be uncommon, brief and a one-time occurrence.

IMPACT

11,655

people had a place to sleep in one of our temporary or permanent housing programs in 2024

95%

of residents at our supportive housing programs have a stable income

337

people with behavioral health disorders received stable housing and support in 2024



“I finally feel relaxed, secure. I don’t always have to worry and watch my back all the time.”

YOUSEF, CLIENT

Yousef’s Story

After years of homelessness, often sleeping on benches and trains, Yousef connected with VOA-GNY’s Street to Home Program in 2023. The Housing First initiative helped him move directly into permanent supportive housing at Eden House, where he now receives medical care, job counseling, and financial literacy support. With stability for the first time in years, Yousef says he finally feels safe and is working toward building a more secure future and learning a trade.