



Volunteers
of America®
GREATER NEW YORK

WRITTEN TESTIMONY SUBMITTED TO THE NYC COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON CITYFHEPS PROGRAM ON DECEMBER 3RD, 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 a local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc (VOA). I would like to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and members of the General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to submit written 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 of permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Background:

VOA-GNY has been providing shelter services to homeless families since 1991 when DHS first began contracting with nonprofits to do so. We operate five transitional housing programs for families in the New York metropolitan area which serve more than 430 families, three “emergency” shelters designed for newly arrived families seeking asylum, also under contract with DHS, serving an additional 244 families, 7 HRA domestic violence shelter programs serving families and individuals fleeing domestic violence, two single adult women’s and one single adult men’s DHS shelters which combined have a capacity to serve 552 individuals, and a DHS Street to Home Pilot program which places individuals experiencing unsheltered street homelessness directly into supportive housing within 1 to 2 weeks of first meeting them.

Implementing Local Laws to Improve CityFHEPS

DHS’ CityFHEPS rental assistance voucher is the primary tool New York City has for moving people experiencing homelessness into permanent housing. Through key investments and process improvements, even more households will be able to attain and stabilize their

permanent housing throughout the City. **VOA-GNY is extremely heartened by Mayor-Elect Mamdani's vow to fully implement Local Laws 99-102 of 2023, which the City Council courageously passed,overcame a veto and sued to enact to expand meaningful access to CityFHEPS rental assistance to help more New Yorkers.** As the transition of the incoming administration approaches, it is important to take stock of current efforts as well as opportunities for additional advancements in shortening housing instability and reducing the experience of homelessness for all New Yorkers.

VOA-GNY is extremely grateful for the Council's stalwart leadership and attention on behalf of New Yorkers who need housing assistance, and **we applaud Speaker Adams, Deputy Speaker Ayala, and the entire Council voting to override the Mayor's veto of Int. 1372,** to limit the rental contribution of tenants receiving rental assistance to 30% of their income. Through this bold move, the Council will help ensure that thousands of CityFHEPS households are not unduly rent-burdened and at risk of falling into arrears and housing instability.

New York State must also take decisive action

We recognize the increasing cost to the City to keep New Yorkers stably housed, and **VOA-GNY urges New York State to expand funding to \$250 million in next year's budget for the Housing Assistance Voucher Program (HAVP)** to help meet the growing need both in the city and statewide.

Continuing Collaboration between the City and Homeless Service Providers

VOA-GNY appreciates **DHS'** collaborative efforts creating a **CityFHEPS Workgroup** with key staff from shelter providers like VOA-GNY. Our **AVP of Family Shelters, Leslie Armstrong and Sector Director of Family Shelters, La'Tanya Johnson, help** inform the efforts of this critical workgroup which is focused on **streamlining how forms and processes interact to reduce bottlenecks** which will enable households to more quickly move from shelter to permanent housing. Together, DHS and providers are developing a more systematic way of communicating processes to all providers, and creating a guide for homeless services staff to use as a one stop shot for training, and obtaining information and updates on subsidies, forms, and submission. While this work is critically important, there are still structural barriers that must be addressed, and we thank the Council for working through these issues.

Legislation Heard:

Int 1366: VOA-GNY supports this legislation which requires the city to allow applicants to electronically sign for benefits and services. Through implementing **electronic signatures**, the city can modernize its processes for safety net supports and services, **saving time for applicants** and reducing paperwork for city workers.

Int 1430: VOA-GNY supports this legislation which would provide applicants with a receipt of their public benefits interview. This **confirmation of the interview will help** our clients and tenants have official documentation to **successfully challenge erroneous benefits denials** for failure to complete an HRA interview.

Int 1458: VOA-GNY supports the goals of this bill, to create a more efficient process to verify habitability standards and resolve concerns for potential housing opportunities through CityFHEPS. Defining the habitability assessment as an “inspection” and the people doing them as “**inspectors**” **may necessitate additional City funding to provide building code certification training for homeless shelter rehousing staff**. It may be prudent in this fiscal climate to modify the bill to conform to current “assessment” language to avoid this added cost and licensing burden.

The bill does offer important **flexibility to address minor issues same-day** within a 30-minute period. This **would save time** for the voucher holder, shelter staff, and landlord. Currently, one minor issue could mean waiting days for DHS to reschedule an assessment. The ability for building owners to submit electronic proof of corrections of unsatisfactory conditions will further hasten the review and approval housing conditions.

Our staff **support limiting the scope of re-inspections to only the flagged issues** from the initial assessment, apart from new emergencies that raise severe concerns such as leaking pipes, gas smells, broken windows, etc. which are witnessed in subsequent assessments. This will help to minimize iterative repeated assessments, and ensure the initial assessment is as thorough as possible. **Similarly, limiting the scope of reviews for resubmitted CityFHEPS packets to the requested corrections would help minimize iterative paperwork reviews** which prolong processing times and potential loss of housing opportunities.

Greater overall collaboration between providers, DSS, and landlords for habitability assessments, in terms of process and standards for the assessment can further save time for voucher holders and ensure the unit passes the first time.

Int 1459: VOA-GNY supports the goal of this bill to track average lengths of time for rental assistance applications, and **we recommend further disaggregation of the data by steps in the approval process and by different referral and eligibility mechanisms** to ensure

reporting more closely reflects the experiences of applicants and helps outline potential bottlenecks and areas for additional process improvements and resourcing:

- 1) Total average length of time: from issuance of a shopping letter to move-in
 - a) Average length of time to identify housing: from issuance of a shopping letter to initial submission of a rental assistance packet to DHS/HRA
 - b) Average length of time for DHS/HRA to review/process: from initial submission of a packet to DHS/HRA to move-in date
 - c) Average length of time for HRA to issue checks: from packet approval date by HRA to move-in date
- 2) Disaggregating Reporting by different referral and eligibility mechanisms:
 - a) CityFHEPS
 - i) In-community To Move
 - ii) In-community To Stay
 - iii) Residing in DHS Programs
 - iv) Residing in HRA DV Shelters
 - v) Residing in DYCD RHY Programs
 - b) FHEPS
 - i) in-community To Move
 - ii) in-community To Stay
 - iii) Residing in HRA DV shelters

Int 1477: VOA-GNY supports the intent of this bill to shorten the processing time for rental assistance vouchers. To improve consistency of response times, **we recommend changing the 15-day response time-limit to 10 business days.** Establishing time limits for the DHS/HRA to respond to submitted rental assistance applications can help reduce the number of submitted packages which grow “stale”, necessitating updated documentation, redrawn leases, and public assistance rebudgets.

Closing:

We are grateful for the opportunity to submit testimony and look forward to working with the Council and the Administration to continue to strengthen and improve CityFHEPS, a proven effective tool to prevent housing instability and address homelessness.

Respectfully submitted by Eric Lee, Director of Public Policy, Volunteers of America-Greater New York.