



**Volunteers
of America®**
GREATER NEW YORK

TESTIMONY ON BEHALF OF VOLUNTEERS OF AMERICA-GREATER NEW YORK THE NEW YORK CITY COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE PRELIMINARY BUDGET HEARINGS MARCH 17, 2026

Introduction and Thanks

My name is Catherine Trapani, Assistant Vice President 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). I would like to thank Chair Hudson and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify today.

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 oldest and largest human service providers, founded 130 years ago and serving more than 12,000 adults and children annually through 70+ programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester and thousands more via our Operation Backpack® initiative. 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. VOA-GNY is a member of Homeless Services United (HSU), The Supportive Housing Network of New York, the Human Services Council (HSC), and the Family Homelessness Coalition (FHC).

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 DHS transitional housing programs for families in the New York metropolitan area which serve 456 families, three DHS “emergency” shelters serving an additional 244 families, seven HRA Domestic Violence programs serving families and individuals fleeing domestic violence, two DHS adult women’s shelters, one DHS adult men’s shelter, a DHS safe haven for unsheltered individuals, and a DHS Street to Home Pilot program which utilizes a Housing First approach to place individuals

experiencing unsheltered street homelessness directly into supportive housing within 1 to 2 weeks of first meeting them.

Thank you to Chair Hudson and Members of the General Welfare Committee for your unwavering leadership and commitment to all New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, housing instability, and poverty, and for your unquestioning dedication to nonprofit providers like VOA-GNY who have answered the city's call to help our neighbors stabilize and thrive within our communities.

VOA-GNY urges Speaker Menin and Chair Hudson and the entire City Council to protect and expand the human services safety net for vulnerable New Yorkers at risk of or currently experiencing homelessness and housing instability. This Budget is an opportunity to build upon what the Council knows works as well as take bold action to address longstanding issues leftover from prior administrations.

Full Implementation of CityFHEPS Laws

The Council rightfully passed a comprehensive bill package, Local Laws 99 to 102 of 2023, to widen access to CityFHEPS, our City's most effective tool to reduce homelessness and maintain permanent housing. Today, VOA-GNY stood with members of the Homes Can't Wait coalition on the steps of City Hall to urge the administration to fully implement these laws without further delay.

Through the foresight of the Council, CityFHEPS would be able to help tenants at risk of eviction to stay in their homes regardless of whether they were previously in shelter. These laws would also help survivors of domestic violence and runaway and homeless youth to find permanent housing without forcing them into DHS shelters to qualify for a voucher. Families and single adults in our DHS shelters would be able to find permanent housing, as a significant number either work too few hours or earn too much to qualify for a voucher but too little to afford rent. An analysis of our own shelter portfolio revealed that at any given time, as many as two-thirds of our residents are not eligible for a subsidy, leaving them few options to successfully move beyond shelter. The laws passed by the Council would remove the tightrope walk our clients must walk for permanent housing, and **full implementation of CityFHEPS is critical to protecting affordability within New York City.**

Preserving and Strengthening the Human Services Safety

To ensure that the City and its contracted non-profit human services providers can administer timely and high-quality services for New Yorkers in crisis, **VOA-GNY urges the Council to use your Budget Authority to prioritize preserving and expanding headcount for DSS/DHS/HRA safety net services and non-profit providers.** While there could be cost savings found by

eliminating vacant positions in City agencies, we caution against reducing vacancies for the Department of Social Services in roles where government is already struggling to meet its most basic mandates with limited staff capacity. Given longstanding challenges vulnerable New Yorkers face accessing public benefits, rental assistance, and senior services, as well as continued fiscal delays which are draining the health of New York City's non-profit safety net, we cannot afford to lose ground.

We urge the Council to prioritize preserving and expanding headcount for the following:

- **HRA staff** that conduct eligibility screening and interviews, review and approve applications and issue payments **for public benefits including ongoing Cash Assistance and SNAP, one-shot deals, and ongoing rental assistance.** While HRA has made strides towards compliance with Federal guidelines for timely provision of SNAP benefits, our clients in shelter continue to experience delays with public benefits rebudgets which delay processing of their CityFHEPS applications. HRA will also need staff to help SNAP recipients meet stricter work requirements implemented by H.R. 1, including processing paperwork throughout the year to document hourly compliance. Implementation of the CityFHEPS laws will also need more HRA staff capacity to process the increased number of vouchers.
- **HRA Adult Protective Services staff** that determine eligibility and provide **services for elderly and extremely vulnerable New Yorkers.** In line with APS' 95% denial rate as confirmed¹ by HRA, our supportive housing programs need to refer tenants multiple times before APS approves them for services, if at all. APS needs more staffing to keep up with the spike in referrals citywide. Our staff report that APS staff sometimes come after business hours to conduct preliminary assessments, when our case workers are not on-site to help engage the tenant. IBO's recent report reinforces this staffing deficiency, finding a significant exodus of experienced staff with a high number of new staff leaving within a year.²
- **DSS and DHS Fiscal Staff, and Mayors Office of Contract Services (MOCS) staff to address long-standing reimbursement backlogs for shelter providers.** As of June 30th, 2025, **Volunteers of America-Greater New York was owed approximately \$40 million for services rendered through our city contracts as far back as Fiscal Year 20, with the lion's share owed by DHS (\$18.7 million) and HRA (\$10 million).** As a result, VOA-GNY was forced to rely on our private line of credit and incurred non-reimbursable interest costs to bridge the gap created by City reimbursement delays. **VOA-GNY spent 1.08 million for FY25, and budgeted \$1.14 million for FY26,** money we could use to do a lot

¹ David Brand, Gothamist, NYC Agency Meant to Help Vulnerable Adults Rejected 95% of People Referred for Aid, April 16th, 2025 <https://gothamist.com/news/nyc-agency-meant-to-help-vulnerable-adults-rejected-95-of-people-referred-for-aid>

² NYC Independent Budget Office, Adult Protective Services: Higher Demand and Fewer Staff, November 10th, 2025, <https://www.ibo.nyc.gov/content/publications/2025-november-aps-higher-demand-and-fewer-staff>

of good, if not for the City's fiscal delays.

Improving DHS Shelter Conditions and Services

We seek the Council's support in calling on the Administration to revisit the DHS model budget, to right-size programmatic funding for DHS' aging shelter portfolio. The DHS model budget, which was created in FY18, sought to bring up the most underfunded contracts within DHS' portfolio, but budgets have remained flat since then, lacking annual increases and were not indexed to inflation. While budgets have remained fixed, our costs have only increased, with more needed for rent, utilities, health insurance, and competitive wages. A comprehensive examination of the City's 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 to help get people back on their feet. Without additional investments, shelters face a starvation cycle which sees headcount stretched thin and services reduced to make do with less.

In addition to flat budgets, **unfunded mandates from local legislation make the work even less sustainable and must be avoided at all costs.** Without additional funding to comply with **Local Law 35** which went into effect in July 2025, **VOA-GNY had to reduce headcount for our Clinical Care Coordinators (CCCs) across four of our Family with Children shelters from thirteen LMSWs down to six to increase their salaries, while also doubling their caseloads from 1:25 to 1:50, with the scope and intensity of tasks remaining largely unchanged.**

Int 452-2026

VOA-GNY supports this legislation to establish wage requirements for city-contracted human services workers. Our staff work tirelessly and deserve to be paid at rates that comport with industry standards and match their government counterparts. The contract funding and budgets **MUST** reflect this and allow us to pay our workforce the compensation they deserve.

Even though VOA-GNY increased our CCC's starting salaries to \$70,000, we still see staff leave within two months of gaining their license, as LMSWs can make ten to twenty thousand more in other social work settings. Likewise, our LCSW Social Work Supervisors are also hard to attract and retain, as starting LCSWs can earn forty thousand more in other settings. The City must invest in our human services workforce to value their work and help us to retain dedicated, compassionate front-line heroes who save lives every day.

Conclusion

Thank you, Chair Hudson and Members of the Committee on General Welfare, for your unwavering leadership and support of New Yorkers experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and the non-profit homeless services sector. By ensuring existing homeless services are sufficiently resourced and expanding housing resources targeted to our lowest-income

residents, the City can realize its affordability agenda for all New Yorkers.

Testimony respectfully submitted by Catherine Trapani. For more information, please contact me at ctrapani@voa-gny.org