



A Division of Volunteers of America-Greater NY

TESTIMONY

Testimony before Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee March 24, 2026

Introduction and Thanks:

My name is Taysha Milagros Clark-Reid, and I am the Public Policy Director for Volunteers of America-Northern New Jersey (VOA-NNJ), a division of Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY), an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in the region.

I would like to thank Chair Sarlo, Vice Chair Greenstein, and members of the Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony today. I would also like to thank Governor Sherrill for her leadership and commitment to New Jerseyans.

About Us:

Volunteers of America-Northern New Jersey provides innovative housing, health, and wealth-building services to youth and adults who are experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. We help more than 400 people achieve housing stability each year, with a focus on behavioral health services for adults and independent living services for youth working towards self-sufficiency.

VOA-NNJ presently operates 11 Community Support Services (scattered sites) in Northern New Jersey, along with 4 residential sites, and 5 Youth Services program sites, primarily assisting persons with mental health challenges and youth aging out of foster care. Presently, we serve clients across Middlesex, Union, Bergen, and Hudson Counties. Through our work in Northern New Jersey, we have been able to ascertain community needs and know intimately, as providers and constituents, the depth of the affordable housing crisis in the State.

Background:

As service providers for low-income New Jerseyans, we are well aware of the State's affordable housing crisis. Data recently published in the National Low Income Housing Coalition's (NLIHC) *The Gap* report highlights that New Jersey has a deficit of 197,110 units, and 85% of low-income New Jerseyans are cost-burdened¹ or spending more than

¹ <https://nlihc.org/gap/state/nj>



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30% of their income on rent and utilities. This affordable housing crisis directly contributes to our homelessness epidemic, and homelessness has risen over 50% the past

few years. Addressing our affordable housing crisis requires significant investments, a multi-pronged, collaborative, whole-of-government approach, co-designed solutions, and a sustained commitment to developing and preserving affordable housing in the State.

FY27 Budget Recommendations: At a time when values and priorities are shifting at the federal level and our social safety net is increasingly frayed, it is more important than ever that we stay closely attuned to the needs and values of our constituents. The Governor's proposed budget restores more than \$70 million to the Affordable Housing Trust Fund and commits \$25 million to expand rapid rehousing programs for households at imminent risk of homelessness. Investments like these are essential to addressing existing needs and must be expanded so that no New Jerseyan continues to languish amidst our affordable housing crises. Understanding the need to balance multiple, and competing, priorities, we respectfully request the protection and expansion of the Affordable Housing Trust Fund at the previously committed level of at least \$130 million.

It is often said that our budget reflects our values and commitments. This budget, like many of its predecessors, raises questions about the importance we place on housing and community stability when the state agencies tasked with responding to these needs are not adequately resourced to do so at scale. The Department of Community Affairs (DCA) has long served as a key pillar in addressing the state's affordable housing crisis, while also functioning as a catch-all agency responsible for a wide range of additional issues. Of the nearly 9,000 bills introduced in the 2026-2027 legislative session, 980 assign responsibility to the Department of Community Affairs, yet fewer than half—just 427—appropriate funding to ensure the Department has the capacity to carry out these mandates.

While staff at agencies like DCA have been remarkably adept at stretching limited resources and continue to do their best to serve constituents despite fiscal and personnel constraints, this approach is neither tenable nor sustainable. Investing in DCA and other key agencies—including the Department of Children and Families (DCF) and the New Jersey Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (HMFA)—that work to ensure housing is accessible, affordable, and of quality for New Jersey residents is essential to strengthening our social safety net. These investments must be commensurate with the scope of the



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challenges these agencies are tasked with addressing. For this reason, we respectfully request increased funding for DCA and similarly tasked state agencies so they can continue their work serving New Jerseyans and bring critical programs to the scale needed to meet the state's housing challenges.

As the State grapples with a structural deficit, it will increasingly rely on nonprofit partners to help carry out essential public services. Though this partnership with the State is vital, it also underscores the importance of ensuring that contracts are both sustainable and equitable. Many of our youth-serving programs report that their contracts have remained stagnant and underfunded, an issue that mirrors challenges across the broader human services workforce. As a result, these programs often operate at a deficit while continuing to meet critical community needs. As we work to ensure New Jerseyans are cared for and expand public-private partnerships to meet the scale of demand, we must also ensure that we do not replicate poverty wages or perpetuate the very conditions we are seeking to address. For this reason, we urge the Legislature to prioritize sustainable and adequately funded contracts for the human services workforce when developing budgets and making related appropriations.

While the Governor's proposed budget makes important progress, it leaves room for additional investment. We urge the Legislature to strengthen its fiscal commitment to housing by investing in key social safety net agencies such as DCA and protecting and expanding the Affordable Housing Trust Fund.

Closing: We are grateful for the opportunity to provide an overview of New Jersey's affordable housing crisis and ways to address it through our state budget. We look forward to working with the Legislature to continue to tackle this important issue and better serve our shared constituents. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Should you have any questions, I can be reached at treid@voa-gny.org.

Respectfully submitted by:
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