



2022 NYC Policy Priorities

According to the most recent federal data, nearly 1 in 4 Americans experiencing family homelessness live in New York City, making our city the epicenter of family homelessness in the United States.¹

Domestic violence continues to be at the core of this crisis as the number one driver of family homelessness. In 2020, more than 9,400 individuals entered the Human Resources Administration (HRA) domestic violence shelter system, most of whom were families with children,² while thousands of others entering the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system identified domestic violence as the primary reason for their homelessness.³

With so few housing resources, once in the homeless system victims and their children are far more likely to exit shelter for another shelter rather than to a permanent home. Fifty-three percent of the 2,341 families with kids that left HRA domestic violence emergency shelter last year were transferred to other shelters upon reaching the time limit.⁴ That is more than 1 in 2 families with minors that left shelter for shelter. Single mothers of color are overwhelmingly impacted. In the DHS system, 94% of families with children are headed by a Black or Latinx New Yorker,⁵ and 9 of 10 are headed by women.⁶

Shelter will always be an important resource for victims of domestic violence, but it should not be their only resource. The incoming City Council and new Mayoral administration must do more to end this cycle of trauma, starting with publicly committing to ending family homelessness.

Family homelessness can be solved by increasing the resources for victims beyond shelter. This includes creating one census that shows the true scope of homelessness; expanding access to homeless-designated units financed by the city (aka "homeless set-asides"); focusing prioritization of supportive housing based on vulnerability; and increasing investment in prevention to mitigate those entering or returning to shelter.

Capture the True Scope of Homelessness

New York City cannot solve a problem it fails to measure correctly. We need one homeless census that includes all individuals and families experiencing homelessness in our city on a given night, not just those in one shelter system. Currently only one city agency, DHS, is required to provide a daily shelter census. New Yorkers living on the streets or in the other four municipal shelter systems are reported separately, with different methodology and less frequency. As a result, agency and legislative leaders, the press, and advocates inevitably focus attention, policy solutions, and resources on this one system, at the expense of the thousands of New Yorkers, including domestic violence survivors, living in other shelters. New Destiny urges reporting parity, requesting a combined daily census count of all New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, and that the same outcomes are tracked and reported in the Mayor's Management Report or another highly visible centralized dashboard.

Expand Access to Homeless Set-Asides

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) requires developers who receive certain capital subsidy to set aside at least 15% of their units for homeless individuals and families. While this program creates over 2,000 homeless set-aside units annually, none of them are made available to households in the HRA domestic violence shelters, youth shelters or any other population served in a specialized, non-DHS shelter.⁷ Currently, the administration

1 in 2

families leaving domestic violence emergency shelter will enter another shelter system instead of housing⁸

There is less than a

1 in 1,000

chance that a family leaving domestic violence emergency shelter will enter supportive housing⁹

89%

of survivors are Black or Latinx¹⁰

96%

of survivors are women¹¹

0

HPD units set aside for people experiencing homelessness are available to survivors exiting HRA shelter

41%

of families entering shelter report that domestic violence is the primary cause of homelessness¹²

only allows individuals and families in the DHS shelter system to access these units. This clear inequity based on classification is highly inefficient, since it leaves many of these apartments vacant for long periods of time due to the lack of competition and accountability to fill them. New Destiny urges the city to allow HRA shelter residents equal access to this housing.

Open Up Supportive Housing to Homeless Domestic Violence Survivors

Domestic violence victims and their children are excluded from NYC 15/15, the city's supportive housing program, despite comprising the largest share of New Yorkers in DHS and HRA family shelters. The city should make victims of domestic violence an additional priority population, like the state does, and amend the eligibility requirements for homeless families. Currently, families are required to be "chronically homeless" to be eligible for supportive housing. Because the definition of chronicity consists of a lengthy stay in DHS shelter, excluding time spent in an HRA domestic violence shelter, as well as a diagnosed disability such as serious mental illness or substance use disorder—something domestic violence survivors rarely divulge, for fear of losing custody of their children to their abuser—they are effectively shut out of this important housing resource. As demand for supportive housing in New York continues to outstrip supply, the city must open its supportive housing initiative to the domestic violence victims and their families, who are among the most vulnerable.

Increase Investment in Prevention to Mitigate Those Entering or Returning to Shelter

It is time for the city to change its approach from crisis intervention to proactively keeping New Yorkers housed. The city must invest in time-limited aftercare for families who exit shelter for permanent housing to ensure they do not lose their apartments due to common administrative issues, such as late rental subsidy payments or missed recertifications. This aftercare should also include services that strengthen the ability of families to maintain long-term housing stability, including financial counseling or access to educational/vocational classes. Additionally, the city must continue to prioritize Section 8 vouchers, like they did this past year with the Emergency Housing Vouchers, for domestic violence victims fleeing their abuser. This will reduce the number of families that enter shelter each year and prevent families who have gone through the trauma of abuse from the additional trauma of homelessness.

The pandemic has not only exposed our city's inequities, but also underscored the fragility of the mechanisms that are meant to provide a safety net for our most vulnerable neighbors. Every day, tens of thousands of New Yorkers are on the brink of eviction, and countless victims of domestic violence are forced to make the impossible choice between staying with their abuser or becoming homeless with their children. New Destiny looks forward to working with the incoming New York City Council and new Mayoral administration to end this cycle of homelessness and abuse.

To-do list:

- Reintroduce Intro 149 to create one homeless census
- Reinstigate an open HPD homeless set-aside referral process to make units available to domestic violence victims and their families
- Require HPD to include length of time that homeless set-aside units remain vacant in their annual Local Law 19 report and make the report public
- Amend NYC 15/15 supportive housing initiative to:
 - Include domestic violence victims as a priority population
 - Remove chronicity for families
- Invest in aftercare for families exiting shelters

As a co-convenor of the Family Homelessness Coalition, New Destiny encourages the new city leaders to implement its **recommendations to end family homelessness**. Additionally, we urge the administration to join other mayors in accepting the invitation from U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to join **House America: An All-Hands-on-Deck Effort to Address the Nation's Homelessness Crisis**, a federal initiative to address homelessness.

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References

- 1 "The 2020 Annual Homeless Assessment Report to Congress." The US Department of Housing and Urban Development, January 2021, page 38.
- 2 "2020 Annual Report on Exits from NYC Domestic Violence Shelters." NYC Department of Social Services, page 3.
- 3 Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer, Housing Survivors: How New York City Can Increase Housing Stability for Survivors of Domestic Violence, October 2019, page 4.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "DHS Data Dashboard Tables FY 2020." NYC Department of Homeless Services, page 3.
- 6 Kang, Sheena, "What the F is a Feminist Housing Plan?" Citizens Housing & Planning Council, page 62.
- 7 NYC Dept. of Housing Preservation and Development, The Housing Plan, www1.nyc.gov/site/hpd/about/the-housing-plan.page, accessed 12/6/2021. Units include both homeless set-aside and supportive housing units.
- 8 "2020 Annual Report on Exits from NYC Domestic Violence Shelters." NYC Department of Social Services.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 Office of the New York City Comptroller Scott Stringer, Housing Survivors: How New York City Can Increase Housing Stability for Survivors of Domestic Violence, October 2019, page 19.
- 11 Ibid.
- 12 Ibid, page 11.