

**Testimony of Annette Holm
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**Before the New York City Committee on General Welfare
Oversight Hearing: Supportive Housing
December 14, 2020**

Good morning. Thank you Chairperson Levin and members of the City Council's General Welfare Committee for the opportunity to testify today about Supportive Housing, a critically necessary resource in the fight against homelessness. I'm Annette Holm, Chief Special Services Officer at the New York City Human Resources Administration. Today, I am joined by colleagues from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) Emily Lehman, Assistant Commissioner for the Division of Special Needs Housing, and from the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) Gail Wolsk, Senior Director, Office of Housing Services as well as my Human Resources Administration (HRA) colleagues Deputy Commissioner of the Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services Jennifer Kelly, Deputy Commissioner of Customized Assistance Services Michael Bosket, and Erin Drinkwater, Deputy Commissioner of Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs.

Supportive Housing

It has been forty years since the first supportive housing project residence in New York City opened its doors. While much has changed since that time, we continue to rely on and benefit from this proven, evidence-based resource which combines permanent affordable housing with supportive social services, so individuals and families are able to achieve their maximum level of independence and health in a safe supportive environment. Supportive Housing projects provide high quality independent living environments for vulnerable New Yorkers who might otherwise find themselves in more restrictive and more expensive institutional settings such as psychiatric hospitals, emergency rooms, jails and shelter. This permanent housing model includes voluntary services that are focused on positively impacting tenants' quality of life, assisting in their personal path of addressing mental health challenges and/or substance use. Services are customized to meet the unique needs of each resident and can include mental health and substance use services, employment services and resources, and education services and resources. For families with children, the program provides the supports needed to maintain a safe home environment conducive to healthy development of their children

In 1990 the NY/NY I agreement between the Dinkins and Cuomo Administrations created 3,615 units of supportive housing. This first of its kind agreement licensed permanent and transitional housing for individuals experiencing homelessness who have been diagnosed with mental illness in New York City.

NY/NY I population groups targeted single New Yorkers experiencing homelessness with a Serious Mental Illness (SMI) or who individuals with Serious Mental Illness with a co-occurring substance use disorder.

The second NY/NY II in 1999 under the Giuliani and Pataki Administrations created an additional 1,500 units of supportive housing for individuals experiencing homelessness who have been diagnosed with mental illness. This Agreement resulted in \$45.7 million and \$85 million in State and City capital funding for supportive housing, respectively.

Finally, the NY/NY III agreement in 2005 between the Bloomberg and Pataki Administrations committed to create 9,000 units of supportive housing in New York City over ten years. As of September 2020, of the 9,000 planned units for NY/NY III, 8,900 have been awarded. Of those 8,900 awarded units, 8,487 are fully developed for occupancy.

Of those 8,487 ready units, the overall State-City occupancy rate is 90%, with a total of 7,593 New Yorkers moving into NY/NY III units between January 2014 and September 2020 —and the remainder having moved in prior to 2014. The occupancy rate for the City-contracted NY/NY III units is 95%, as it has been for many years.

These 14,115 units were not enough to meet the need of vulnerable new Yorkers, and in November of 2015 Mayor de Blasio announced NYC 15/15, which is the largest municipal commitment to Supportive Housing. NYC 15/15 will result in the development of 15,000 units of supportive housing over 15 years and is modeled on the New York/New York agreements.

Over 15 years, the City will create 7,500 newly-built congregate units and obtain an additional 7,500 scattered-site units. These residential units are equipped with on-site case management and supportive services and adhere to safety and quality standards in accordance with local, state, and federal laws and regulations. Funding for 5,306 NYC 15/15 units has been awarded, which is more than a third of the 15-year total. Through September 2020, more than 2,300 people had already moved into nearly 1,800 NYC 15/15 units, and another 109 were linked to homes and in the process of moving in.

In supportive housing, a family or individual pays 30 percent of their income towards rent, participation in services is not required to maintain their tenancy, but many tenants do, in fact, take advantage of the comprehensive services including:

- Case management;
- Educational, vocational, and other recovery-oriented services;
- Individualized service planning and supportive counseling;
- Assistance in navigating and gaining access to community services and government benefits, such as food stamps, legal advocacy;
- Referrals to medical and behavioral health care and treatment; and
- Recommendations and support in developing skills for financial self-sufficiency.

This stable and permanent housing for New Yorkers with mental illness and substance use challenges who have experienced homelessness, as well as other vulnerable populations such as New Yorkers with HIV, provides an environment of support and increases connections to services, increasing positive outcomes for those living in Supportive Housing. Supportive Housing reduces the City's reliance on homeless shelters, hospitals, mental health institutions, and incarceration, setting up these individuals and families for success and in the long-term saves the taxpayers higher costs.

The Role of HPD

The Department of Housing Preservation and Development, DHS, and HRA communicate daily to coordinate our response to the homelessness crisis. One of the major avenues is through our efforts to refer and place homeless households out of shelters and into permanent housing. For supportive housing projects, HPD, DOHMH and HRA conduct regular meetings so that HRA knows when specific HPD buildings will be completing construction and when apartments will become available.

HRA also attends marketing and lease-up kick-off meetings with HPD and the project development teams so that they are aware of construction and marketing timelines. When an apartment is available, HRA refers three eligible shelter clients to the apartment, and the service provider makes their decision. Communication between our agencies occurs at several points during the referral and placement process. Our agencies will continue to seek ways to streamline the supportive and homeless housing referral process such as partnering on the design and implementation of CAPS and ensuring that the shelter system's most vulnerable clients receive the housing and the rental assistance they need.

It is essential that we continue the progress we have made to create even more supportive housing, and the Council has been a critical partner in helping us build more of it. The administration is extremely grateful to the Council Members here today for helping us educate New Yorkers about the benefits of supportive housing and for welcoming a number of wonderful supportive housing developments throughout the neighborhoods you represent. Together, since the start of Housing New York, we have financed more than 6,250 supportive housing homes with many more being closed on this month, in NYC 15/15 and other programs.

The Role of DOHMH

The NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) has been contracting and providing program monitoring and technical assistance to supportive housing providers since the initial development of programs in the Mid-1980's. Currently, DOHMH plays a lead role in contracting, monitoring and evaluation of services for individuals in 9,718 units of the City's supportive housing units. These units are in 170 congregate site buildings and 80 Scatter Site programs. These units were developed under the following program initiatives: NY/NY I, II & III, High Service Need I & II, Justice Informed Supportive Housing (JISH) and NY 15/15. Additionally, HRA oversees services to 1,000 units for individuals with HIV/AIDS, while services in 4,150 units are supported by State agencies.

In addition to working with HRA and HPD to develop units in the NYC 15/15 initiative, DOHMH is currently monitoring provision of services in this program to more than 2,300 people who have already moved into 15/15 supportive housing through 12 contracts providing congregate housing, and an additional 26 contracts of scattered site housing. Moreover, HRA works to refer clients to these units while confirming that the recommendations from the 2016 Mayor's Task Force on Supportive Housing are fulfilled. As mentioned, DOHMH will continue to provide programs the technical and contract management support necessary to ensure services meet the needs of tenants, are evidence-based, and focus on the recovery of individuals and families.

Service evaluation plays a critical part in the City's supporting housing program, and DOHMH coordinates with partners at the City and State level to measure a wide range of quantitative and qualitative data on the programs above. With DOHMH's support, we are able to gather and understand the health, social and fiscal impacts of these supportive housing programs via feedback collected from tenants and providers. Based on this information, which is highlighted by the NY/NY III interim evaluation report, we have seen net savings at above \$10,000 annually for single adults housed in supportive housing.

The Human Resources Administration's Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services

The Human Resources Administration's Office of Supportive and Affordable Housing and Services (OSAHS) is focused on permanent housing solutions for individuals and families who have experienced homelessness.

OSAHS works closely with other divisions of HRA, our sister agencies, particularly DOHMH and HPD, as well as service providers to establish new housing programs and to serve as the centralized source for the referral of applicants to supportive housing. OSAHS' coordination and collaboration with our sister agencies and non-profit partners are geared to ensure that the people we serve are able to achieve their maximum functional capacity in a safe supportive environment.

Reforms to Date

In early 2016, a Supportive Housing Task Force, including City agencies, supportive housing providers and advocates, was convened and in December of that year issued a report which included 23 recommendations for NYC 15/15 to expand and improve upon the previous NY/NY agreements. The recommendations were grouped into 4 categories: data and evaluation; referral process; services models; and streamlining development. Today we are well underway in the implementation of those recommendations; more than 90% of the recommendations are either completed or ongoing, and the remaining recommendations are in the process of being implemented.

I want to highlight a few important reforms today including updates to the NYC Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS), the Standardized Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) and COVID-19 related reforms.

NYC Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS)

On October 26, 2020, pursuant to the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development's requirements, HRA implemented a Coordinated Assessment & Placement System (CAPS). CAPS is the comprehensive re-design of the Placement Assessment and Client Tracking (PACT) system to better incorporate the HUD requirements for coordinated entry in NYC and now integrates all application, eligibility determination, referral and placement activities into one system. The CAPS system also interfaces with DHS, HASA, DYCD, and Medicaid systems for data, additional interfaces with DOC and other entities is planned throughout 2021. These interfaces provide demographic, homeless status, and other data to support and facilitate application and eligibility determination completion. We anticipate this will increase efficiencies in placing individuals and families experiencing homeless as they transition to permanent housing. Other enhancements include:

- An easy to complete Coordinated Assessment Survey for users and clients of the types of housing and housing subsidies and supports clients may be eligible for.
- Retrieval of prior applications and copies of documents HRA is in receipt of that are required for placement.
- Prepopulating application fields from system integrations with DHS, HASA, DYCD and HRA's systems.
- Electronic 2010e Supportive and General Population Housing Applications.
- A Standardized Vulnerability Index that assists DHS/HRA to focus on those clients with the highest vulnerability and likelihood for continued homelessness.
- A Vacancy Control system which, upon release, had over 30,000 units of supportive and other housing units captured within it and allows HRA/DHS the ability to monitor vacancies and increase the speed at which we are able to make placements.
- Electronic referrals, appointments, and documentation transmission for clients to be referred to for interviews with housing providers.
- The ability for housing providers to act on referrals in the system and relay the outcome of the client interview and acceptance of placement.

In addition to coordinating the NYC 15/15 supportive housing efforts, HRA is working with our New York State partners to make referrals of households experiencing homelessness into units that NY State has developed as part of their Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI). Our collaborative work includes developing requirements and assessing eligibility for some distinct State ESSHI categories and working with our DHS shelter providers and Street Homeless programs to refer eligible candidates to these units. Working with our State partners and their non-profit providers has expanded supportive housing opportunities for DHS clients in many areas (i.e. frail and elderly populations, individuals with mental health diagnoses, and survivors of domestic violence). This is a meaningful complement to the existing supportive housing portfolio.

We recently partnered with the NYS Office of Mental Health on an initiative to house clients experiencing street homelessness. NYS identified more than 200 units in their ESSHI portfolio specifically for this population. To date, we have linked almost 90% of the units to clients experiencing street homelessness

and in need of permanent supportive housing, and the remaining clients are waiting for the State's providers to locate scattered site units.

Last year HRA, DHS, HPD, and DOHMH worked in collaboration with community stakeholders to create several key recommendations to increase access to supportive housing. Recommendations include streamlining the housing application process, expanding the pool of professionals who can submit psychiatric evaluations, and expediting the housing application process. The goals of these recommendations are to reduce client barriers and enhance the client experience throughout the application, interview, and move-in process for supportive housing.

Finally, in our continued effort to better serve New Yorkers in need of supportive housing, we are assessing and updating the online supportive housing application, completed by a referral agency, known as the 2010(e) application. For example, we are ensuring that questions regarding preferred spoken language and ethnicity include the top 30 languages in New York City and a comprehensive listing of ethnicity choices, respectively. We are also ensuring that more responses, such as nonbinary and gender nonconforming, are included under gender identity so that clients can properly express how they identify.

Standardized Vulnerability Assessment (SVA)

Developed through the work of the Supportive Housing Task force during 2016, the NYC Standardized Vulnerability Assessment (SVA) is conducted on all approved HRA Supportive Housing Application Referrals. This assessment takes into consideration the applicant's living situation (current and history), Medicaid utilization, challenges impacting their independence, and functional limitations, and from those metrics determines the level of continued vulnerability of homelessness. The SVA uses a categorical system of High, Medium, and Low Vulnerability.

HRA continues to work with our government, community, provider and advocacy group partners — and from these collaborative efforts in 2019 further refined the SVA to better assess uniquely vulnerable groups including unsheltered individuals, survivors of Domestic Violence/Intimate Partner Violence, families with children, and young adults.

COVID-19 Related Reforms

COVID-19 required us as an agency to take look at our processes so that we could continue to serve clients in a means that prioritized their health and safety as well as that of our staff. As such, in the early stage of the pandemic we set up processes with housing providers and DHS staff -to conduct clinical interviews remotely. We also set up a system and process for property management interviews to be conducted virtually wherever possible. Our partners at HPD also transformed their manual processes to include e-signatures on documents in lieu of original signatures as well as remote briefings. We see a great benefit to our clients in conducting interviews in this manner, including “no-shows” to interviews. We have worked with our partners at DOHMH to support increased capacity for congregate programs to isolate tenants onsite or to utilize the City's hoteling program. DOHMH has supported providers use of virtual services to ensure service provision that supports the health and wellness of all tenants and staff. This includes virtual meetings, increasing access to Wi-Fi for tenants and support with PPE supplies for

providers. Additionally, there are added efficiencies for DHS-funded programs and supportive housing providers alike. We intend to continue these changes post-COVID when we are no longer required to social distance and limit in-person interactions.

Progress to Date

Overall, there have been 11,883 total supportive housing placements from DHS shelter from the beginning of this Administration in January 2014 through September 2020. Included in these numbers are recent supportive housing placements from DHS shelter across various programs. In the CY20 through September 2020, DSS-DHS-HRA placed 1,035 households into permanent supportive housing from DHS shelters. This includes ongoing placements into the various congregate and scatter-site supportive housing programs (including NY/NY I – III, General Population Supportive Housing, NY State licensed programs, and ESSHI (Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative)) and placements into the new NYC 15/15 program.

Progress on this Administration's ambitious NYC15/15 plan is also on target. Construction awards through September 2020 are as follows. We have awarded 5,306 15/15 units to providers, including 1,255 scattered site and 4,051 congregate units.

Across all City agencies, through September 2020, nearly 1,800 households comprised of more than 2,300 New Yorkers have been connected to 15/15 supportive housing units, including more than 1,700 households, comprised of more than 2,200 people who'd already moved into homes and another 109 households who were linked to homes and in the process of moving (as of September 28, 2020).

As of September 2020, HRA's HASA program has:

- A contracted supportive housing portfolio of 5,362 units of which 4,924 units are already occupied. HASA spends about \$141.5 million annually for these units.
- 2,672 scattered-site units, including NY/NY III and non-NY/NY III, of which 93.4% (2,496) are occupied, and the remaining units are in the process of development or rent-up.
- 2,690 permanent congregate units, including both NY/NY III and non-NY/NY III, of which 90% (2,428) are occupied.

Legislation

I would now like to turn to the legislation being heard as part of today's hearing. Int. No. 2177, sponsored by Chair Levin would amend the administrative code of the City of New York, in relation to outreach to unsheltered individuals. This bill if enacted would limit outreach to unsheltered individuals to Department of Homeless Services staff or staff contracted by the department to contact and offer services to unsheltered individuals experiencing homelessness. The Administration is reviewing the impact of this legislation that has just been introduced; upon initial review and preliminary discussions with providers and sister agencies, we have concerns. Based on these conversations, we believe as drafted, this bill impacts the work of agencies other than DHS, including the FDNY/EMS, DOHMH, and the Parks Department. While our teams of experienced outreach providers are generally able to build relationships

with street homeless individuals, that is not always the case. For example, where a Client has previously been violent, or credibly threatened violence against outreach workers, but needs to be checked on for his or her own safety. Our outreach workers are trained to deescalate dangerous situations and work with individuals who have a history of violence. However, even the most rigorous training will not always enable an outreach worker to safely interact with a client. Our work includes balancing the interests of our staff, our clients and the general public. We have strong concerns that this bill will impede us from achieving that responsibility and servicing some of our most in need individuals. We look forward to further discussions with the Chair and the Council.

Int. 2176, also sponsored by Chair Levin would amend the administrative code of the City of New York, in relation to requiring the Department of Social Services to create a written notice for supportive housing residents of their rights pursuant to various state and local laws, as well as certain information about the building's regulatory scheme. The bill would require every provider of supportive housing to provide every resident this notice at the time of initial occupancy, at each lease renewal, and upon request. Additionally, the bill would subject any provider who violates the notice requirement to a civil penalty of \$250. The Administration is reviewing the impact of this legislation that has just been introduced and we look forward to further discussions with the Chair and the Council. Upon initial review, it appears this bill would set a different standard for City-contracted projects compared to those administered by the State. While we are supportive of the general intent of the bill, to increase transparency and provide tenants with useful information, we hope to work with the sponsor and stakeholders to address concerns.

Conclusion

Supportive Housing is a proven resource for individuals and families experiencing homelessness; voluntary services coupled with quality permanent housing results in positive impacts for tenants' quality of life. This housing first model benefits individuals and families as well as neighborhoods and communities at large. The biggest failure of supportive housing is that there is simply not enough of it to address the need. This is why this Administration made the single largest municipal commitment to develop 15,000 units over 15 years and continue to work with our State partners to ensure an equal commitment. We look forward with our continued work with the Council to ensure that each community is playing their part to welcome this permanent affordable housing model to their neighborhoods. And additionally, we look forward to our work together to ensure the State renews its commitment and funds the ESSHI program in the FY22 budget.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and I welcome your questions.