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Mayor de Blasio Launches Shelter Repair Squad to Address Urgent Health and Safety Conditions in City Shelters

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Department of Homeless Services, Fire Department, Department of Buildings, Housing Preservation and Development, and Department of Health, Department of Investigation to join forces to expedite violation corrections at over 500 city shelters following a report by the Department of Investigation

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio today announced that the City will be deploying over a hundred workers from multiple City agencies to over 500 buildings that operate as homeless shelters to begin immediately addressing building, fire and other code violations that may impact the health and safety of residents.

After decades of neglect and underfunding from Federal, State, and City government, the City's shelters have seen deteriorating conditions, and Mayor de Blasio is ordering a top to bottom inspection and repair process from the newly launched Shelter Repair Squad – an interagency team spearheaded by Deputy Mayors Anthony Shorris and Lilliam Barrios-Paoli and comprised of the Department of Homeless Services (DHS), Fire Department (FDNY), Department of Buildings (DOB), Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), and Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH). Each agency has assigned teams to the Shelter Repair Squad for both inspection and repair.

This effort will be funded by \$12.5 million through Fiscal Year 2016. The Administration will also commit further funding for ongoing costs as needed.

Agency Roles and Responsibilities:

DHS: Remediate issues found by other agencies

DOB: Inspect and dismiss violations

HPD: Inspect and help remediate violations (example: repairing plumbing, fixing walls, replacing wiring)

FDNY: Inspect and ensure safety fire panels, smoke detectors fire plans, and fire exits

DOHMH: Inspect inside and outside shelters for rodents and cockroaches, and provide guidance on pest control

The announcement comes two months after the City's Department of Investigation released a report, commissioned by the Mayor, about conditions at 25 City-run homeless shelters. The DOI Report called for the creation of an inter-agency task force. The Department of Homeless Services worked closely with DOI in identifying and addressing issues, and started a series of reforms to improve shelter inspections and hasten the timeline for making corrections, and DOI will continue to monitor and oversee where City government can be more effective. DOI found a total of 621 violations in their report, and 273 of those violations were outstanding when the report was published. All but a handful of the outstanding violations are now repaired or in process of being repaired. The Shelter Repair Squad will now extend this work to include all City shelters, including family and adult shelters and clusters run by external providers.

“Being homeless is tough enough – no one in shelters, particularly children, should have to endure poor or unsafe living conditions,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “Our shelter system is old, and has endured decades of neglect and bad policies from every level of government, but we are working aggressively to correct dangerous conditions, and to make sure that people have a decent place to stay while they need it.”

“DHS has stepped up inspections and streamlined repairs – this concerted approach brings the urgency of our work to other city agencies with a role in correcting physical problems at shelters,” said **DHS Commissioner Gilbert Taylor**. “I feel confident that this effort will help us dramatically reduce the number of outstanding safety and health violations at our shelters and allow us to address those we do find within days.”

“This task force is an important step forward in the effort to improve housing for the homeless. Continued and consistent vigilance by all the agencies involved in providing and inspecting homeless shelters is the only path to lasting change,” said **DOI Commissioner Mark G. Peters**. “DOI's investigation played a key role in establishing this task force and we will continue to work with our partners to expose deficiencies and inefficiencies in City government.”

DHS will begin tracking each and every violation, and the agencies are working together to assign tasks and actions teams to remediate issues as they are discovered by teams of inspectors. All outstanding violations will be addressed by special teams of City workers and contractors within 7 days of identification. All major capital repairs will begin within 30 days and completed by the end of the year. Shelters that need additional assistance complying with health and safety requirements will be placed in a streamlined corrective action process, and will have their progress closely monitored. Once the backlog of work is cleared, the City will continue to ensure the safety of all facilities through regular inspection and prompt repair. DHS will publicly post a

scorecard for all facility operators within two weeks to insure on-going accountability for conditions in the shelters.

“Every New Yorker has the fundamental right to a safe and clean roof over their head. But we know that thousands of families and children, who rely on homeless shelters as safety nets each night, are forced to live in dangerous conditions,” said **Public Advocate Letitia James**. “This interagency effort will help address critical shortcomings in our City shelter system and protect vulnerable families who are in need of a permanent home.”

“As we combat homelessness in our city, we cannot ever lose sight of the most fundamental priority, the health and safety of our families. The Shelter Repair Squad is a crucial interagency effort by Mayor de Blasio and his administration to draw all necessary resources, in a collaborative fashion, toward improving conditions that put at-risk New Yorkers, especially children, in harm's way,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams**.

"Our city has made a commitment to provide safe, clean shelter to those who need it, and we must make good on it," said **Manhattan Borough President Gale A. Brewer**. "I commend Mayor de Blasio for acting to address deficiencies and neglect in our shelter system."

“I applaud Mayor de Blasio’s commitment to ensuring proper care for those who are in need of adequate housing. Whether at one’s home or in a shelter, no one should fear for safety. The new shelter repair squad will improve the lives of many New Yorkers who deserve a safe roof over their heads,” said **Congressman Charles Rangel**.

“I am pleased that the de Blasio administration is taking steps to improve the daily lives of our City’s homeless population. No one should be forced to endure abhorrent and unsafe conditions because of their inability to afford housing. Everything should be done to ensure that living conditions meet all codes and standards, as well as to ensure the highest level of safety for the residents and the surrounding community,” said **Congressman Eliot Engel**.

“As the recently-released report by the City’s Department of Investigation outlines, our homeless shelters are old and in deteriorating condition. Homeless individuals and families in New York City need and deserve access to clean and safe shelters while going through the difficult process of homelessness. The Mayor’s plan is an important investment in the health and safety of an often-neglected population that is part of our community,” said **Congressman José E. Serrano**.

“City shelters provide a basic human need to some of our neighbors when they are most vulnerable. It is unacceptable that they have deteriorated to the current level and I applaud this effort to inspect, repair and improve them for the benefit of our fellow New Yorkers,” said **Congresswoman Nydia M. Velázquez**.

“It's horrible enough that adults and kids have to live in homeless shelter. But it is even worse that they have to live in very unsafe and unhealthy conditions,” said **State Senator Jose Peralta**. “I want to thank Mayor de Blasio and all City agencies involved for taking this very crucial step in fixing shelters to provide safer conditions for those who have no other option but to live there.”

“Today’s announcement is a step in the right direction for the individuals and children living in the City’s shelter system. As Chair of the Task Force on the Delivery of Social Services in New

York City, I have worked hard to shed light on these upsetting conditions. I commend Mayor de Blasio for actively addressing this issue,” said **State Senator Tony Avella**.

State Senator Brad Hoylman said, “Today’s announcement by Mayor de Blasio is good news for some of our city’s most vulnerable residents. By creating the Shelter Repair Squad, the mayor will be able to harness the power of multiple city agencies to address longstanding and safety and health conditions in the shelter system and quickly correct these violations.”

“Homelessness is on the rise and the number of individuals and children living in the New York City Shelter System are the highest they have been since the Great Depression. I applaud Mayor de Blasio and the Department of Homeless Services for taking the necessary steps to fix these shelters, which have suffered years of neglect,” said **Assembly Member Andrew Hevesi, Chair of the Assembly Social Services Committee**.

“New York provides thousands of homeless people with shelters in New York City and other communities, but conditions are not good for everyone, as many facilities are in disrepair and simply do not meet the standards of the city's fire and building codes. With the Mayor, Fire Department, and other City officials and agencies renewing their commitment to fixing longstanding problems in homeless shelters, our community has the opportunity to address the need for repairs and generate solutions which will fulfill our obligations to provide shelter for those in need of shelter and other supports. Only by working together with all parties can we take this opportunity now to correct deficiencies in our shelters and strengthen the guarantee of a decent place to live for all New Yorkers,” said **Assembly Member Alec Brook-Krasny**.

Assembly Member Maritza Davila said, “I am grateful that Mayor de Blasio has recognized the need for closer monitoring and expedited repair of conditions within our City shelter system. Each one of us is just a few steps away from homelessness. It is important that families that may temporarily be forced to enter shelter can be assured that they can live there with dignity, respect, and safety while they get back on their feet.”

“Recognizing the needs of thousands of families who rely on the shelter system to meet their housing needs, Mayor de Blasio’s ‘Repair Squad’ is an important initiative that shows New York’s commitment to assisting those who are struggling to survive in a difficult housing market,” **Assembly Member Latoya Joyner** said. “As a partner in government, I look forward to working with the administration to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to quality affordable housing by strengthening the state rent regulation law and investing in the housing our families need.”

“The launch of the Shelter Repair Squad is an important step toward improving the support and services we provide to those in need through our shelter system. I am encouraged that the administration is committed to aggressively identifying and correcting serious violations in all types of shelter facilities. New Yorkers depend on these facilities to get them through the most difficult of circumstances and those who use them deserve to know that they will be safe and secure,” said **Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of General Welfare Committee**.

“New Yorkers who enter our shelter system deserve to be housed in a safe, secure building, but we know that our city's aging infrastructure has taken a toll on many of these buildings. As Chair of the Council's Housing and Buildings committee, I know that deteriorating buildings in this city is a real concern that I am glad our Administration plans to resolve. I look forward to

working with Mayor de Blasio to address this and other infrastructure issues throughout the city,” said **Council Member Jumaane D. Williams, Chair of the Committee on Housing and Buildings.**

“I applaud Mayor de Blasio for taking steps to correct decades of longstanding health and safety violations in our City shelter system,” said **Council Member Julissa Ferreras.** “For far too long, homeless New Yorkers living in the shelter system have not gotten their fair share of assistance from the Federal, State and City government. If we plan to make a better, more equitable City a reality then we must provide all New Yorkers, regardless of where you live the ability to have a safe and healthy place to call home.”

“I applaud Mayor de Blasio for creating an interagency shelter repair squad to deal with the serious issues that plague our City’s aging shelter system,” said **Council Majority Leader Jimmy Van Bramer.** “Growing up, my family spent a brief period of time in a homeless shelter. The vast majority of those in our City’s shelters are simply down on their luck and need a helping hand to get back on their feet. This interagency team shows that Mayor de Blasio takes the City’s responsibility to our City’s homeless seriously.”

“Whether they’re in a condo, a rent-regulated apartment or a DHS shelter, all New Yorkers deserve safe living conditions,” said **Council Member Margaret Chin.** “I applaud Mayor de Blasio for taking action to protect the health and safety of shelter residents by improving coordination among our city agencies and providing the resources to address building and fire code violations.”

“As I recently stated, safety in DHS facilities should be a priority. This is the first of many necessary improvements that can go into making shelters safe for all of the residents that call them home. Thank you Mayor de Blasio, the FDNY, DOB, HPD and DOHMH for giving the attention that is needed to our outdated shelter system and working together to ensure the safety of our City’s homeless residents,” said **Council Member Andrew Cohen.**

“Imagine a safety net filled with nails. That’s what a dangerous shelter represents to homeless individuals and families, who are already facing one of the most stressful situations in life. This coordinated plan to direct resources to inspecting and repairing shelters quickly will ensure that New Yorkers going through hard times find the safe refuges they need,” said **Council Member Robert Cornegy.**

“Today’s announcement by Mayor de Blasio on the launching of a Shelter Repair Squad is welcome news to the residents in my district. As the representative of an area that has many shelters within its boundaries, for years I have heard from constituents about the deplorable and unsafe conditions that exist in the city’s shelter system. I’m looking forward to seeing the improvements that the Shelter Repair Squad will perform to these facilities and the positive impact that it will have on our most vulnerable populations who rely on shelters for emergency housing,” said **Council Member Rafael L. Espinal, Jr.**

“When shelters are unlivable or unsafe, homeless individuals and families find themselves forced onto the street. This is not acceptable and I am thankful that our long neglected homeless shelters are being addressed by the Administration, in collaboration with DHS and DOI. With these changes and new systems in place, shelters will be assured timely inspections and a reasonable time frame for repairs. Homeless New Yorkers are among our most vulnerable residents and I

applaud Mayor de Blasio and DHS Commissioner Taylor for their commitment to their health, safety, and wellbeing,” said **Council Member Vanessa L. Gibson**.

“The Shelter Repair Squad is urgently needed, and I applaud Mayor de Blasio for acting boldly against the decay and disrepair that has plagued our city's homeless shelter system for too long. Reducing homelessness and ensuring conditions are livable must be top priorities for our city. Every New Yorker should have a decent, safe place to sleep at night,” said **Council Member Ben Kallos**.

“I have received numerous complaints from families enduring horrible and sad conditions of shelter living and this has to stop. Homelessness is not a crime and New Yorkers who are forced into a shelter because they need a roof over their head should be treated with respect and given a clean, safe environment that respects their dignity. I applaud Mayor de Blasio for putting this program in place, along with DHS Commissioner Taylor and the interagency team comprising the Shelter Repair Squad. In the upcoming months, I will eagerly await the Shelter Repair Squad's report so we can gauge the successfulness of this initiative,” said **Council Member Andy King**.

“The safety and security of the millions of people who rely on our homeless shelter network is central to maintaining a safe City. A person or family's inability to secure permanent living arrangements should not be cause for punishment through unlivable conditions – it should compel our city to deploy the very best of its resources. Our homeless and home-insecure population is one of our most vulnerable and we must meet our obligation to provide proper infrastructural support for them. I applaud the de Blasio administration for their continued commitment to this,” said **Council Member Carlos Menchaca**.

“I applaud the de Blasio administration for creating the Shelter Repair Squad and addressing the very serious issue of upkeep facing shelters throughout New York City,” said **Council Member Donovan Richards**. “This \$3.7 million infusion, as well as the continued support in subsequent budgets, will greatly improve the lives of those who need our support the most. As we tackle the homelessness crisis, we must provide housing that is not only safe and up to code, but also conducive to the growth and development our youngest citizens. Furthermore, I wish to thank all agencies involved for their continued effort to improve thousands of lives.”

“With record breaking reliance on our homeless shelters, it is incumbent on our city to ensure that our shelters are well maintained and safe. This multi-million dollar investment will ensure our shelters are brought up to good standards. I praise Mayor de Blasio for his investment in an all too often overlooked sector of our city and look forward to working with him on further improvements” said **Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**.

“Our City's shelters are dangerously underfunded, leading to unsafe and unhealthy living conditions for New Yorkers seeking refuge. I thank Mayor Bill de Blasio for taking a stand and creating the Shelter Repair Squad to quickly address building and fire code violations in New York City shelters,” said **Council Member Helen Rosenthal**.

Mary Brosnahan, President and CEO of the Coalition for the Homeless said, “Homeless New Yorkers deserve safe, compassionate shelter. But for far too long, entering New York City's homeless shelters has often meant experiencing deplorable conditions that no family should ever face. Mayor de Blasio's administration deserves praise for moving thousands of

homeless families into affordable homes and taking important steps to provide safe shelter for those who are still homeless.”

“These remedies are long overdue. Previous administrations permitted the shelter system to deteriorate to the point that conditions for many residents are not lawful. We share Mayor de Blasio's goal of moving shelter residents into permanent housing and ensuring that conditions are safe and decent for those who have to stay in shelter until they can return to the community,” said **Joshua Goldfein, Legal Aid Society**.

“Too many administrations have neglected New York's most vulnerable residents for too long. It's unacceptable that we have allowed homeless families and individuals to live in dangerous conditions that put their lives at risk. We thank Mayor de Blasio for taking action and putting a system in place that prioritizes the well-being of the city's lowest-income residents when so many of his predecessors have failed to do so in the past,” said **Peter Nagy, Deputy Director of New York Communities for Change**.

“By taking these steps Mayor de Blasio is ensuring residents will receive the safe and stable shelter they are entitled to. We stand behind all actions the Mayor takes towards ending our city's historic homeless crisis, and towards improving the lives of all of those who are struggling with homelessness. This initiative is a step in the right direction,” said **Jennifer Flynn, Executive Director of VOCAL New York**.

“We applaud Mayor de Blasio for his commitment to support the homeless community and create an aggressive plan to address living conditions in shelters throughout the City,” said **Javier H. Valdés, Make the Road New York**.

“We are the richest city in the richest country in the world, and it is unacceptable that the most vulnerable in our society are languishing in dangerous and unhealthy shelters. Many of our city's homeless are children, veterans, and people with physical and mental disabilities. Making sure all New Yorkers have the basic necessities for survival reflects our city's values and improves the quality of life for every resident. It is our collective moral responsibility to ensure the homeless have access to safe shelters, and the healthcare workers of 1199SEIU strongly support this initiative by Mayor de Blasio,” said **Kevin Finnegan, Political Director of 1199SEIU United Healthcare Workers East**.

“I'm deeply gratified to hear of the City's interagency coordination to fast track violation corrections for more than 500 shelters. Quickening the pace of repair for institutions that serve homeless individuals and families is a sacred work that cannot be completed too soon,” said **Reverend Andrew Wilkes, Associate Pastor of Social Justice and Young Adults, Greater Allen A.M.E. Cathedral of New York**.

“The Mayor is to be commended for this unprecedented effort to ease the pain of New Yorkers living in unacceptable conditions due in part to bureaucratic red tape,” said **Reverend Calvin Rice, Senior Pastor New Jerusalem Baptist Church**.

“The Interfaith Center of New York is enormously uplifted by the good news that City agencies have joined forces to expedite violation corrections at over 500 City shelters. The Mayor has taken action on an issue that religious leaders across the city have long been concerned: the

plight of homeless and vulnerable families,” said **Reverend Chloe Breyer, Executive Director of the Interfaith Center of New York.**

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