



**Testimony of Steven Banks, Commissioner
Department of Social Services**

**Before the New York City Council, Committee on General Welfare
NYC Department of Social Services Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 17, 2021**

Good morning. I would like to thank the City Council’s General Welfare Committee and Chair Stephen Levin for giving us the opportunity to testify today about the Department of Social Services’ Fiscal Year 2022 Preliminary Budget and our ongoing benefits and services for low-income New Yorkers, particularly during these challenging times.

My name is Steven Banks and I am the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS). In this capacity, I oversee the Human Resources Administration (HRA) and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS). Joining me today are DSS First Deputy Commissioner Molly Murphy, HRA Administrator Gary Jenkins, DHS Administrator Joslyn Carter, DSS Chief Program Planning and Financial Management Officer Ellen Levine, and DSS Chief of Staff Scott French.

At the outset, we must acknowledge that COVID-19 has profoundly impacted all of us — including our staff, our clients, and our not-for-profit service providers. And over this last year, we have lost family members, colleagues, clients, friends, and neighbors. Let’s take a moment to remember all those who we have lost.

Now turning to the January Plan, even in these hard financial times, the FY22 Preliminary Budget reflects our commitment to continuing to remove barriers, increasing access to benefits and services, eliminating punitive policies, and improving the services available to New Yorkers in need. As has been the case in years past, this budget aims to address the structural barriers facing our clients by improving access to our services and benefits. Moreover, as we will describe in this testimony today, our reforms and initiatives are taking hold, despite long-standing challenges such as decades-long underinvestment in affordable housing, deepening income inequality and persistent structural racism, all of which have been brought into stark relief during this past year as the COVID-19 pandemic changed our lives in countless ways. Many of our reforms and initiatives implemented over the past seven years provided a strong foundation for us to serve New Yorkers throughout the pandemic. Moreover, the federal and State waivers that we have obtained during the pandemic have allowed us to enhance the benefits access system that we’ve been building – one that decreases burdens placed on clients seeking assistance under federal and State law through onerous and unnecessary in-person application and interview appointments and documentation requirements, and paternalistic engagement obligations. With the waivers we

requested and received, this past year has afforded us an opportunity to administer benefits programs with much of the bureaucratic relief we've sought for years and clearly demonstrates the necessity for reforms at the federal and State levels to enable us to continue to make progress for our clients.

We understand that we are in a markedly different budget environment as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic, and in this testimony we will discuss the steps we have taken to address and overcome the challenges brought on by the pandemic. The FY22 Preliminary Budget supports our continued commitment to improve the lives of New Yorkers in need through quality programming and services.

The FY22 HRA/DSS Preliminary Budget is \$10.09 billion, consisting of \$7.84 billion in City funds. The FY22 DHS Preliminary Budget is \$2.05 billion, consisting of \$1.25 billion in City funds. The HRA headcount for FY22 includes 10,120 City-funded positions and another 3,472 non-City positions. The DHS headcount for FY22 includes 2,101 City-funded positions and another 40-grant-funded positions.

As you are aware, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on our citywide budget. All City agencies have been tasked with finding savings to address the budget gap resulting from COVID. This has involved making difficult decisions to achieve the necessary savings. Some of the DSS savings include:

- **One-time savings (January Plan)**
 - \$53.9M in prior year revenue and \$13M in unanticipated fringe benefit reimbursement in FY21 only provide City savings.
 - \$100M in federal pandemic related increased Medicaid reimbursement produces one-time City savings.
 - \$8M savings in FY21 only due to the COVID-19 eviction moratorium and a related lower level of case processing in the Access to Counsel program.
 - \$20.6M in savings in FY21 only in the Job Training Participant programs due to COVID-19 related program suspensions and reductions in activity.
 - \$11.7M re-estimate in FY22 of the phase-in schedule for Supportive Housing Units due to COVID-19.
 - \$1.2M in FY21 due to underspending in office supplies from remote work during COVID-19.
 - \$3.7M in vacancy savings and 723 positions in FY21 due to the citywide hiring freeze.

- **One-time and Baseline Savings (November Plan)**
 - \$2.3M in FY21 and \$3.1M in FY22 and the outyears (152 positions) in savings from vacancy reductions.

While the pandemic has presented a challenging fiscal environment, we believe the programs and reforms being supported in the Preliminary Budget build on the reforms and progress we have

made over the last seven years and continue the efforts we've made to make benefits more accessible and reduce bureaucratic barriers.

State and Federal Landscape

The FY22 Preliminary Budget has been proposed within the context of equally challenging State and national fiscal environments.

At the State level, we continue to track potential cuts impacting our programs, which we understand are subject to the allocation of the just appropriated federal aid to states and localities. That said, it is important to note that for many years, the State has cut resources for our programs.

To address this ongoing State disinvestment, we are advocating for several key initiatives in this year's State budget, including increasing the rent levels for State rental assistance to the HUD-set Fair Market Rent (FMR) level, which was included in the Senate and Assembly One-House budget proposals. For years, the State has refused to use this standard for setting rent subsidies for the State FHEPS program, and if the City did so on its own for our supplemental City FHEPS program, among other consequences, it would lead to landlords favoring City voucher holders over State voucher holders, resulting in a substantial cost shift to the City by incentivizing landlords to rent to only City FHEPS voucher holders. For these reasons, we are advocating for a State budget initiative to increase the rent levels for State FHEPS vouchers to the HUD-set FMR rent level through the proposed Home Stability Support program. If enacted, this State FHEPS initiative can help prevent and alleviate homelessness throughout New York State through the provision of State and federal reimbursement for rental assistance, even as we have reduced the DHS shelter census here in our City through significant local investments.

Additionally, we are working with the State Legislature to enact legislation (S.3223-A/A.5414) that would permanently allow interviews for Cash Assistance to be conducted over the telephone at the client's option. We currently have only a temporary COVID waiver permitting such telephone interviews — this legislation would provide Cash Assistance clients with the same option for access to benefits without having to go to an HRA office that Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP)/food stamps clients have had for several years through continuing pre-pandemic federal and State waivers. So far during the pandemic with our temporary Cash Assistance telephone interview waiver, over 162,000 interviews have been successfully conducted by telephone – highlighting the demand for benefits and our capacity to administer this program. Both the Senate and the Assembly have passed this legislation and we are asking that the legislation be incorporated in the enacted budget this month to expedite implementation.

In addition, we have called on the State to support shelter services and outreach by restoring the State's traditional 50/50 cost split for single adult shelters in New York City, outreach workers, safe havens, stabilization beds, and the cost of homeless services for the overnight MTA shutdown initiative. Despite the fact that a Consent Decree enforcing the State Constitution obligates both the State and the City to provide shelter to single adults experiencing homelessness, the State has steadily reduced its support for single adult shelters in New York City from 50/50 to a mere nine percent, and in the current Executive Budget there is further cut. Additionally, the State provides zero dollars to support the 600 homeless outreach workers and more than 3,000 safe haven and

stabilization beds that the City has funded that have enabled nearly 4,000 people to come off the streets and subways and remain off since 2016. Simply put, the State must return to paying its fair share for these life-saving services.

On the federal level, we thank President Biden, Vice-President Harris, Majority Leader Schumer and the entire New York Congressional delegation for the enactment of the rescue stimulus package, which, unlike prior pandemic rescue efforts, includes critical one-time funding for states and localities and prioritizes resources for vulnerable populations.

And at the federal and State levels, we are continuing to work with State OTDA on the implementation of the federal stimulus rent relief program to address the significant amount of rent arrears that has built up during the pandemic. The implementation of the rent relief program is particularly critical given that the State's current eviction moratorium is set to expire on May 1st of this year. We also appreciate OTDA's recent approval of our June 2020 waiver request to allow DSS to provide State FHEPS rent supplements to applicants who have received rent demands, rather than require them to be sued in eviction proceedings.

Responding to COVID-19

One year into this unprecedented crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic continues to impact all facets of our work, but we remain committed to delivering high-quality services to our clients and their families. And I would like to take this moment to acknowledge all of our staff who have worked through the pandemic especially all of our client-facing staff — as well as our not-for-profit partners. Our aggressive and multipronged response to the pandemic was made possible due to the strong programmatic foundation DSS has built over these last seven years, and which we believe will continue to support our clients in the coming months and years as we recover together.

Changing How Clients Access HRA Benefits

As we have previously reported and testified to, it is our longstanding vision to transition from using only Face-to-Face interviews as part of the Cash Assistance application requirement, to allow for such interviews to take place by telephone at the client's choice — just as we are permitted to offer SNAP/Food Stamps clients pursuant to federal and State waivers that we received several years ago. Prior to COVID, New Yorkers could only apply for Cash Assistance (CA) in-person at one of HRA's Job Centers. Giving Cash Assistance clients the same option to apply by telephone without having to come to an office as SNAP/Food Stamps clients have had for several years is subject to State approval. In an effort to improve the client experience for Cash Assistance clients, pre-pandemic we had taken initial steps for this transformation in the hope that we would eventually receive approval from our State oversight agency, OTDA. These initial steps towards implementation proved invaluable in order to protect the health and safety of clients and staff and expand access to benefits for clients in need of assistance during this public health emergency.

At the outset of the pandemic, DSS-HRA was finally granted a State waiver that we had been seeking for many years, and in less than one week's time in March we immediately stood up a system for New Yorkers to apply for Cash Assistance online and conduct their interview by phone,

following the successful and effective blueprint we developed in pioneering remote/mobile access to SNAP/Food Stamps via ACCESS HRA. This waiver permitted clients to conduct all business online and by telephone in order to reduce foot traffic in our centers to protect the health and safety of clients and staff. **Since receiving the waiver during the pandemic, 85% of Cash Assistance applications have been submitted online with about 162,000 interviews conducted by telephone.** In that time, we have seen the number of Cash Assistance applications nearly double.

After the stay-at-home order took effect in mid-March, during the height of the pandemic last spring, and as the economic impact of the pandemic became evident, HRA saw record increases in applications for benefits, including Cash Assistance and SNAP/Food Stamps. For example, during the beginning of the pandemic in NYC when uncertainty was most prevalent, COVID cases were on the rise, and stay-at-home orders were implemented—and with Cash Assistance now made available via online ACCESS HRA for the first time—HRA saw record applications for Cash Assistance in March and April 2020. In May through September, applications returned to lower-than-average levels before climbing back up beginning in October. 2020 saw the highest number of December applications in over a decade.

- In March 2020, the Agency received approximately 12,740 more CA applications than March 2019, a nearly 53% increase.
- In April 2020, the Agency received approximately 7,980 more CA applications than April 2019, a more than 31% increase.
- **Overall, between February 2020 and November 2020, there was an approximately 53,000-person (+20%) increase and a more than 30,000-case (+16.8%) increase in the CA caseload.**

In addition to the telephone interview waiver, DSS-HRA advocated for and was granted waivers by the State to temporarily suspend many of the ongoing engagement requirements that are mandated under federal and State law in order to remain enrolled and to demonstrate continued eligibility for federal and State benefits; the waivers included suspending requirements like employment program engagement and/or eligibility rules such as substance use services procedures, which, in the past, and under previous Administrations, would have led to case closings in the normal course.

We have also seen historic increases in the demand for SNAP/Food Stamps. **From the start of COVID (March 2020) through June, the period in which DSS-HRA experienced the greatest surge in SNAP applications, the Agency received 121,364 more SNAP applications than in the same period in 2019, a 113% increase.** From July through December, SNAP application volume returned to just higher than normal levels, with the Agency receiving 30,880 more SNAP applications than in the same period last year, an 18% increase. **Taken together, from March through December, the Agency received 152,244 more SNAP applications overall than in the same period during the prior year, a 55% increase.** Between February 2020 and December 2020, there was a 164,699-person increase (11.1%) in the SNAP caseload. Pre-pandemic, in February 2020, 76% of SNAP applications were submitted electronically outside of DSS-HRA centers; with the onset of the pandemic, this percentage increased significantly to approximately 98% in May and June and remained in the 90s (94.2%) since then through December 2020.

In addition to telephone and online access to benefits, we obtained federal and State waivers to permit HRA staff to take applications over the telephone for clients with challenges using technology. We also kept a limited number of Centers open across the city for clients who prefer in-person assistance, even though it is not necessary to go to one of our offices to get help as a result of the waivers. At the same time, we built a completely new system so that substantial numbers of our staff can serve clients from their own homes to help prevent the spread of the virus. And at the height of the pandemic, we redeployed 1,300 staff from back office functions to help manage the historic increase in need for Cash Assistance and SNAP/food stamps.

DSS is continuing to seek to renew and extend the waivers that we have obtained during the pandemic as the public health emergency continues. For your awareness, a status report on the various waivers we have requested from the State are included as an appendix to this testimony.

In FY20, HRA's Emergency Food Assistance Program (EFAP) distributed 14,972,681 pounds of food. And from March 2020 through December 2020, EFAP distributed 15,484,656 pounds. Since the pandemic began in March 2020, EFAP has funded 55 new programs, and since July 2020, EFAP has focused on funding programs in the Racial Inclusion and Equity Taskforce neighborhoods. To that end, EFAP has funded 10 new programs in those zip codes, additionally EFAP is actively funding 7 CUNY food pantries and exploring additional partnerships with non-traditional emergency food providers.

Eviction Prevention and Tenant Support

HRA's Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) has implemented the right-to-counsel law citywide, in partnership with legal service providers who have stepped up to represent New Yorkers in all Zip codes – free of charge – facing an eviction in Housing Court during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Since the pandemic's outset, OCJ and legal service providers have worked with the New York Housing Court to modify approaches to the universal right-to-counsel program, and through these efforts ensured that all tenants facing eviction in court had access to free legal representation during the pandemic.

Due to the work of our staff, legal service partners, the Right to Counsel Coalition and the City Council, New York City has become the national leader in providing legal protections to tenants experiencing housing instability. Our leadership in this field was cemented by the implementation of New York City's landmark right-to-counsel law. With this law of 2017, New York City became the first city in the nation to enact a law ensuring that all tenants facing eviction in housing court, or in NYCHA administrative termination of tenancy proceedings, have access to free legal services.

The investments we have made since OCJ's inception are already showing a positive impact: since the Office's founding in 2014 and through today, nearly 450,000 New Yorkers facing eviction and other housing-related legal challenges have received City-funded free legal assistance. The positive impacts of these efforts have been clear: residential evictions by city marshals fell by 41% between 2013 and 2019, while evictions across the nation were on the rise, and the percentage of tenants facing eviction in court with the protection of legal representation was 38% in 2019, up from just 1% in 2013. It is worth noting that in the vast majority of cases, when tenants are

supported by lawyers in eviction proceedings, we see positive outcomes: in resolved cases in FY20, 86% of households represented in Housing Court and NYCHA tenancy proceedings by OCJ-funded tenant lawyers were able to stay in their homes.

When the pandemic began, the work of OCJ and its partners changed overnight, and, fortunately, given the solid foundation created since the program start, we were able to quickly and aggressively shift direction to support tenants at risk of displacement. OCJ coordinated among legal service providers, the courts and other government partners to ensure legal providers and their clients had access to timely and accurate information on legal developments and court operations amidst a fast-changing landscape for tenants facing eviction.

To respond to the crisis, we transformed the approach through which tenants in need could seek legal assistance. By working with our partners, we quickly established a housing legal hotline to provide access to live phone-based legal advice to tenants. To this day, these services are available via 311 and the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit through the City's Tenant Helpline, and through the Housing Court Answers' hotline. Legal advice services are free and are available to all New York City residential renters, regardless of ZIP code or immigration status or income with an OCJ waiver.

At the start of the pandemic, the New York City Housing Court was closed for all new and pending matters, including eviction proceedings, except for "essential" proceedings such as actions to restore legal possession for tenants who were illegally evicted, and proceedings to compel landlords to make emergency repairs. To support tenants with their legal needs, OCJ and the Housing Court quickly set up a case referral process to connect all unrepresented tenants who file emergency cases in court with free legal representation. Since then, unrepresented tenants who file an action to be restored to possession after being illegally locked out by their landlord, or who file an HP action for emergency repairs, are referred to OCJ by the Court for free legal representation.

As the Housing Court expanded operations, OCJ's legal providers were ready and available to protect tenants in need. In particular, the Court scheduled thousands of eviction proceedings that were pending resolution prior to the pandemic for status and settlement conferences, and only allowed cases where all parties had legal counsel to be scheduled for a court conference. As a result, OCJ's legal services providers have participated in thousands of court conferences representing tenants in pre-pandemic eviction cases. Our initiative has been citywide and universal, as all tenants facing eviction have been eligible, regardless of ZIP code, immigration status or whether the tenant may have previously declined or been found ineligible for legal representation under the right-to-counsel program, and regardless of household income with a waiver by OCJ.

Help for New Yorkers Experiencing Homelessness During the Pandemic

For the last year since the public health emergency began, DHS responded to this unprecedented crisis with unprecedented action. Since the pandemic's outset, we have closely followed the science and advice from health experts to protect the lives of our staff and clients, both sheltered and unsheltered. The data shows that these decisive strategies worked, saving countless lives and stopping the spread of the virus. We continue to navigate this unprecedented public health crisis

together, and the DHS use of emergency commercial hotels has helped us protect the lives of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, ensuring that clients have the same protections from the pandemic as New Yorkers fortunate enough to socially distance at home.

As the crisis began, DHS quickly launched a multi-agency response to protect the lives and safety of New Yorkers experiencing homelessness. Among several actions, these efforts included: developing and circulating guidance and protocols in close coordination with the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene and Health + Hospitals to ensure access to health care; opening hundreds of isolation units at hotels; and strategically transferring single adults out of congregate shelters.

DHS implemented a comprehensive program to relocate clients in congregate shelters who tested positive or experienced symptoms to isolation beds in commercial hotels. These efforts began in mid-March 2020, and at the height of need there were more than 700 isolation beds across several locations to protect clients' health. Next, in an eight-week period, we reduced the density of the congregate shelters by relocating 10,000 people to commercial hotels.

Beginning in early March 2020, the agency also rolled out a street homeless screening process to hundreds of street outreach workers to engage New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness who may have possible COVID-19 symptoms and connect them to testing and assessment at Health + Hospitals sites. Using a system similar to our extreme weather outreach, DHS HOME-STAT teams continue their 24/7/365 outreach, and as of March 9 have had over 109,000 interactions with unsheltered clients regarding COVID-19 and their health needs. And when the MTA implemented the overnight systemwide shutdown, we implemented a new end-of-the-line program, including direct shelter placements from subway stations and platforms, that has enabled more than 750 people to come inside from the subways and remain in our shelter programs. We opened more than 1,200 specialized new beds in 2020 alone dedicated to serving New Yorkers who have lived unsheltered, including Safe Haven beds and stabilization beds, which we have established in commercial hotel settings, with hundreds more opening in the coming months and years.

Among the many steps DHS has taken to protect the safety of our staff and clients, we put in place systemwide testing, tracing, and treating to reduce exposure to the virus. We are proactively and systematically offering testing to all our adult system clients, shelter by shelter, to continue our progress and drive down exposure. These resources are free and accessible directly at our shelters. The positivity rate is now lower than the city overall.

With the expansion of State eligibility criteria and subject to vaccine supply availability, we opened a DHS vaccination site for eligible clients and shelter staff to supplement the overall City and State vaccination sites that are available to them. With the availability of the Johnson & Johnson shot, we have now added a mobile component to our testing initiative to bring the vaccine to where are eligible clients are. So far, we have administered nearly 8,000 vaccine doses to clients and staff.

Reforming Homeless Policies and Services

As we have reported before, as a result of our multi-pronged approach to addressing homelessness, after nearly four decades of an ever-increasing DHS shelter census, we broke the trajectory of growth in the shelter census. The programs, reforms, and investments we are implementing are headed in the right direction, holding the DHS census essentially flat year-over-year in 2017, 2018, 2019, and now reducing the census on a sustained basis. Today, the DHS census stands at less than 52,000, down for a high of 61,415. Without the agency’s initiatives, projections indicate there would be 71,000 people in shelter today instead of the current number of less than the 52,000.

While we know we have much work to do, a recent report¹ by the NYC Independent Budget Office (IBO) credited our efforts in reducing the DHS census:

“Over the past 12 months, the city has seen a decrease in families residing in shelters, largely attributed by the de Blasio Administration to the ramp up in spending on rental assistance, which allows families to move out of shelter and into their own apartments.”

This report also notes that “over the past 12 months, the number of families with children in shelter has decreased by 17 percent while adult families have decreased by 18 percent, continuing a downward trend in the family census that was underway before the pandemic.”²

Likewise, a March 4 report by City Limits concludes that over the last seven years “the number of children in the New York City homeless shelter system has fallen by 25 percent.”³ The funding in this Preliminary Budget will help us sustain and expand on these achievements by supporting the four pillars of the 2017 Turning the Tide plan. So far, the results of this plan include:

- **Prevention first — driving evictions down** by 41% pre-pandemic through our first-in-the-nation right-to-counsel program and payment of rent arrears, while evictions were up all across the country;
- **Provide Permanent housing — helping more than 160,000 New Yorkers secure permanent housing** through the DSS rental assistance and rehousing programs we rebuilt from scratch that enable families and individuals to move out of shelter or avoid homelessness altogether by remaining in their homes;
- **Provide decent shelter — transforming a haphazard shelter system decades in the making** by shrinking the NYC DHS shelter footprint/reducing the total number of shelter locations citywide, and already phasing out more than 200 substandard shelter sites, including 75% of the sites in the 21-year-old Giuliani-era cluster program, and siting 88 borough-based shelters as close as possible to the anchors of life like schools, jobs, health care, houses of worship, and family support networks – with 44 already operating; and

¹ <https://ibo.nyc.ny.us/iboreports/homeless-services-sees-shift-in-shelter-populations-and-influx-of-fema-funding-fopb-february-2021.pdf>

² Ibid

³ <https://citylimits.org/2021/03/04/in-confronting-family-homelessness-candidates-asked-to-think-beyond-housing/>

- **Address street homelessness — assisting more than 4,000 of our unsheltered neighbors to transition off the streets** and subways in transitional programs and housing since HOME-STAT began in 2016.

For your information, we have included in an appendix a full list of our DHS and HRA reforms.

In closing, while much work remains, the programs, policies and reforms that our agency has advanced over the last seven years have increased access to and enhanced our provision of benefits and services for clients. COVID-19 has presented critical challenges for our city, but our foundation of reforms has helped us respond to the unprecedented needs that our clients continue to face. We have appreciated the Council's support in meeting these challenges.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on our essential work, and we look forward to our continuing partnership with the Council. We welcome any questions you may have.

NYC HRA COVID-19 Waiver Requests And Statuses

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
1	OTDA	CA	Allow CA telephone application interviews	Approved
2	OTDA	CA	Allow CA telephone recertification interviews	Approved
3	OTDA	CA	Remove or defer the requirement for employment and eligibility in person appointments and assignments	Approved
4	OTDA	CA	Extend CA recertification periods	Approved
5	OTDA	CA	Provide flexibility to not take negative action for clients who fail to return the six-month mailer	Approved
6	OTDA	CA	Suspend State requirement for local district to provide clients with a photo on their CBIC Card if vendor not operational or clients cannot travel to site	Approved
7	OTDA	CA	Waive the signature requirement for applications in situations on which a client is receiving assistance on the phone from DSS or CBOs	Partial Approval: Did not receive approval for CBOs
8	OTDA	CA	Reconsider request to suspend the requirements of ISP, including distribution of invoices	Approved
9	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Suspend the SNAP ABAWD work rules and delay implementation of new ABAWD rule	Approved
10	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Emergency Supplement of SNAP Benefits for Current Recipients up to the maximum allotment for the household size	Approved
11	OTDA	SNAP	Waive the signature requirement for applications in situations on which a client is receiving assistance on the phone from DSS or CBOs	Partial Approval: Did not receive approval for CBOs

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
12	OTDA	SNAP	Adjustment to certain SNAP Interview Requirements	Approved
13	OTDA	SNAP	Extend SNAP recertification periods	Approved
14	OTDA	SNAP	Remove or defer the requirement for employment and eligibility in person appointments and assignments	Approved
15	OTDA	SNAP	Provide flexibility to not take negative action for clients who fail to return the periodic report	Approved
16	OTDA	SNAP	Suspend the SNAP ABAWD work rules and delay implementation of new ABAWD rule	Approved
17	OTDA	SNAP	Emergency Supplement of SNAP Benefits for Current Recipients up to the maximum allotment for the household size	Approved
18	OTDA	OPA	Suspend mandatory CA/SNAP and Medicaid data matches	Partial Approval: Some matches have resumed
19	OTDA	OPA	Extend SNAP claim establishment period	Partial Approval
20	OTDA	OPA	Suspend FEES and EVR investigations	Approved
21	OTDA	Fair Hearings	Suspend fair hearings where ATC has been granted	Partially Approved: Non-aid cases are being prioritized

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
22	OTDA	Fair Hearings	Agency fair hearing reps and clients to participate remotely by telephone	Approved
23	OTDA	Child Support	Suspend all credit reporting after P.A.U.S.E. was put into effect and for the duration of the COVID-19 crisis pursuant to SSL § 111-c(2)(h).	Partially Approved
24	OCFS	APS	Extend timeframes for initial eligibility, visits, ongoing assessments.	Approved
25	OCFS	APS	Extension of eligibility determination from 60 days to 90 days- 18 NYCRR § 457.2(b)(4)(i)	Approved
26	OCFS	APS	Waiving Face to Face contact required under 18 NYCRR § 457.5(b)	Approved
27	OCFS	APS	Permit client contact by telephone rather than in person, but continue to make home visits when necessary to ensure safety of client	Approved
28	OCFS	ODV	Allow DV survivors to remain in DV shelters for up to 180 days rather than the current 90 days without a request for an extension	Approved
29	OCFS	ODV	Permit reimbursement beyond 180 days for DV survivors who are self-isolating or quarantined in a DV shelter until such clients are no longer a public health risk	Approved on a Case by Case basis
30	OCFS	ODV	Allow placement and reimbursement for single adults placed in larger than what a single would normally be eligible for	Approved on a Case by Case basis
31	OCFS	ODV	A waiver of the reimbursement for a sponsoring agency staff person to visit the safe dwelling on a weekly basis and to permit telephone contact	Approved
32	OCFS	ODV	Allow expedited approval of new DV shelter capacity, including hotel space	Approved on a Case by Case basis

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
33	SDOH	Home Care	Waive required nurse visit, social work assessment visit for all service assessments, including immediate needs applications, regular applications and renewals	Approved
34	SDOH	Home Care	Allow case workers and nurses to conduct telephone interview assessments in lieu of home visits for renewals	Approved
35	SDOH	Home Care	Extend required time frames for Licensed Home Care Services nurse Home Visits, Homecare Worker Annual Medical Exams and all trainings	Approved
36	SDOH	Home Care	Extend required time frames for all Personal Care and Managed Long Term Care service authorizations and required CDPAP six-month nurse visits	Partial Approval
37	SDOH	Medicaid	Extend coverage of all Medicaid authorization periods, including for Stenson and Rosenberg clients	Approved
38	SDOH	Medicaid	Waive eligibility documentation requirements and allow attestation. Applicants who receive Medicaid without all required documents would only receive coverage for 6 months	Partial Approval (except non-citizens will be placed on an advanced renewal schedule after PHE)
39	SDOH	Medicaid	Allow approval of full Medicaid coverage for community surplus cases by not requiring clients to pay-in or incur/submit bills	Approved
40	SDOH	Medicaid	Suspend or delay mandatory Medicaid data matches	Approved
41	SDOH	CA	Suspend Child/Teen Health Program (C/THP) oral script that workers are required to read to our clients when processing an application/recertification.	Approved

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
42	OTDA	Child Support	Consider noncustodial parents for services supported by federal funds appropriated for employment and training under Title VIII of the CARES Act (H.R. 748), the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 170(a)(1)(B), or any subsequent appropriation to assist them in re-connecting to work and paying their court-ordered child support obligations to support their children.	Pending follow up with OTDA
43	OTDA	SNAP	Permit flexibility in establishing or disposing of new SNAP overpayment claims	Pending
44	OTDA	CA	Suspend special grant repayment time periods and recovery of overpayment	Pending
45	OTDA	CA	Request to allow the Agency to reduce recoupment to 5% for cases that meet certain criteria	Pending
46	OCFS	APS	Extension of timeframe to commence investigation for 24-hour cases (emergency cases) to 48 hours	Pending – Executive Order needed
47	SDOH	Medicaid	Waive recovery of overpayments for coverage that may have been incorrectly paid during the emergency	Pending
48	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the requirement to verify school attendance	Denied
49	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive income and resource requirements for CA and SNAP people who cannot work/ work reduced hours due to quarantine requirements	Denied
50	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Suspend time period required for repayment agreements associated with any special grants	Denied

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
51	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Suspend conducting Federal Quality Control reviews and remove the emergency time period from any future reviews	Denied
52	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waiver to extend the period that a household is given to sell real property from six months to twelve months	Denied
53	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the limits on the amount of money that can be exempt for a bona fide funeral agreement	Denied
54	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the requirement to verify the presence of all household members	Denied
55	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Waive the requirement to verify application for unemployment benefits at application for households that contain individuals who recently lost employment, and to provide for systemic check at recertification	Denied
56	OTDA	CA/SNAP	Allow DSS to grant good cause for individuals who are in sanction status for CA/SNAP for failure to comply with a work requirement, or are in sanction status for a voluntary quit situation, and would be deemed unable to reengage due to the COVID-19 pandemic, without the need for an individual determination to be made. Alternatively, DSS requests that OTDA temporarily waive the provisions in such regulations to permit the district to grant good cause without the need for an additional determination.	Denied
57	OTDA	SNAP	DSS asks that the State make a request to the Federal Government for waivers of federal law so that (a) New York City recipients of SNAP may purchase hot food with their benefits and (b) more SNAP vendors be allowed to participate as a "retail food store" so long as the COVID disaster declaration is in effect and (c) the SNAP student eligibility criteria be waived	Denied

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
58	OTDA	Child Support	Suspend administrative child support enforcement actions for non-custodial parents	Denied
59	OTDA	Child Support	Temporarily modify both the state and federal Tax Offset Program (TOP) defenses for the 2020 TOP certification under 18 NYCRR 346.9(b)(1) to include a defense that the arrears were due to job loss as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.	Denied
60	OTDA	Child Support	Halt the certification of all Department of Motor Vehicle license suspensions that would otherwise occur after P.A.U.S.E was placed into effect on March 22nd; and grant DSS greater authority to remove individuals currently in the license suspension process pursuant to the latitude in 18 NYCRR §346.12(a)(1)	Denied
61	OTDA	Child Support	Halt the Property Executions (PEX) of bank accounts that would otherwise occur after P.A.U.S.E was placed into effect; or in the alternative, grant DSS greater authority to remove the levy on individuals with frozen bank accounts pursuant to 18 NYCRR §346.11(b) by temporarily changing the threshold for past due support that triggers the PEX process from two months to six months. Alternatively, temporarily suspend CPLR 5205(d)(3) and CPLR 5222 (k) which allow DSS to seize a bank account of any size.	Denied
62	OTDA	Child Support	Request issuance of an Executive Order directing that once the Family Court begins to accept child support petitions for filing, for any modification petitions filed in the 2020 calendar year, support magistrates are required to review whether the NCP had the ability to pay during the COVID-19 crisis, and, if the support magistrate determines that they did not, to vacate any arrears that accrued during the crisis, pursuant to the authority in FCA §451(1)	Denied
63	OTDA	Child Support	Reverse the distribution order selected in the state plan and effectuated in 18 NYCRR 347.13(d) for any tax refund offset stemming from the CARES Act to allow the Custodial Parent of a former assistance case to be paid prior to DSS being reimbursed. This waiver would allow the CARES tax refund offset to be paid directly to the family, providing additional cash support to children during the crisis.	Denied

	State Agency	Program Area	Description of Request	Status
64	OTDA	Child Support	Allow, for current assistance cases, a one- time pass-through bonus to the custodial parent for any tax refund offset stemming from the CARES Act and waiver of the required reimbursement to the federal government for 100% pass through by granting a one-time reprieve from section 42 USC §657 (a)(6)(B)(ii). Because the bonus is temporarily exempt from being countable for PA benefits, the client and the family would get additional support when it is most needed.	Denied
65	OTDA	CA	Raise dollar amount of accrued rent arrears issued to FHEPS households	Denied
66	OTDA	Child Support	Lift and suspend child support sanctions	Denied
67	OCFS	APS	Extension of timeframes for the initial supervisory consultation from 24 hours to 48 hours for clients who have refused access during the home visit and may need an OGA -NY SSL § 473-c.	Denied
68	OCFS	ODV	Approve emergency DV shelter per diem adjustments on an emergency basis to account for the facility underutilization due to quarantine, isolation and other factors during the COVID emergency	Denied – Follow up required
69	SDOH	Medicaid	Waive timeframes for eligibility determinations on applications as well Immediate Needs Personal Care Services.	Denied
70	SDOH	Home Care	Allow approval of temporary increased services as needed for at risk clients that will be reimbursed by Medicaid without the required nurse assessment review and documents/ doctor's orders	Denied
71	SDOH	Home Care	Extend time frames for processing new Personal Care Service applications for Nursing Home patients seeking return to the Community	Denied
72	OTDA	CA	Waiver of the State FHEPS eligibility requirement that an eviction proceeding has been commenced in court	Denied
73	OTDA	CA	Waiver of the 45-day wait period for Safety Net Cash Assistance applications	Denied
74	OTDA	CA	Waiver of the Cash Assistance eligibility interview	Denied

2020 HRA Reform Highlights

Improve Access to Benefits and Services:

Short-Term Achievements:

- From its onset and throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, HRA has advocated for and received significant temporary waivers of State and federal requirements to provide clients greater access to benefits and services by:
 - permitting online submissions of Cash Assistance (CA) applications via Access HRA from anywhere
 - launching a CA telephone interview option for clients to conduct their CA application or recertification eligibility interview by phone without having to leave their home
 - eliminating the SNAP interview requirement for SNAP applicants and recipients who have verified all mandated eligibility criteria through documentation
 - permitting telephonic signatures on applications so that HRA staff can take CA and SNAP applications over the phone for clients who lack internet access or internet-ready devices or have challenges using technology
 - suspending CA work requirements and in-person appointments for the safety of staff and clients
 - eliminating negative case actions if clients do not submit their 6-month CA mailer and SNAP periodic reports
 - extending the certification periods of SNAP and CA cases coming due to temporarily eliminate the need for clients to submit recertifications and potentially lose benefits if not completed timely
 - allowing verbal authorization from clients to disclose confidential health information over the telephone
 - extending the 180-day limit on domestic violence emergency shelter stays
 - permitting certain Adult Protective Services (APS) client home visits to occur via alternative means of communication such as, facetime, skype, or video conferencing.
 - extending Medicaid renewals for one year without full eligibility review

Long-Term Achievements:

- Successfully advocated for the State to end the eligibility finger-imaging requirement for Cash Assistance (CA) applicants/recipients
- Worked with the State to remove the photo requirement on NYS Common Benefit Identification Cards (CBIC), and implemented a referral process from Job and SNAP Centers to IDNYC so that our clients can continue to have photo IDs if needed
- Implemented a citywide process to offer clients temporary “Vault” Electronic Benefit Transfer (EBT) cards which can be used to redeem SNAP and Cash

Assistance benefits until they receive their permanent CBIC from the State through the mail

- Revised the “You Must Submit Documents for Your SNAP Case!” (FIA-1146) notice to help clients better understand what documentation must be submitted to complete the SNAP application
- Obtained State approval for a revised New York State (NYS) Client Notification System (CNS) Expedited-SNAP Servicing notice, so clients are reminded that additional documentation is needed to establish eligibility for ongoing SNAP benefits
- Expanded the Internet Quorum (IQ) inquiry/complaint tracking system, which allows HRA to better handle client complaints and issues and offer faster turnaround
- Expanded the SNAP Interactive Voice Response System (IVRS) process to permit SNAP households with participants aged 55 and older or with disabilities without earned income to recertify through IVRS
- Implemented an easier security voucher redemption process for landlords of deceased CA clients whose tenancy was in effect on the date of death
- Implemented more self-service Kiosks at the Rider, Jamaica and Crotona Job Centers, which reduce initial waits to get into the center waiting area
- Conducting waiting room sweeps to find people that can utilize some of our self-service options (Scanners, PC Banks, etc.) and similarly deploying staff to canvass lines, if any, at centers to assist and educate clients on such tools
- Expanded the number of On-Demand agents to 350-400 daily and created a rotation for them to have one day out of every ten conducting other non-telephone business for better employee retention and morale
- Enhanced service delivery (clinical assessment, vocational services, wellness planning and federal disability advocacy) for WeCARE clients through full implementation of the new Self-Sufficiency, Employment, Assessment and Management System (SEAMS)
- Launched the electronic Fair Fares application process which expanded access to all NYC residents who believe they qualify to apply and submit documents for review by the Electronic Application processing unit.
- Integrated Access-A-Ride for eligible paratransit users into the Access HRA/Fair Fares system
- Through the Restaurant Revitalization Program, received 62,000 donated free meals for individuals facing food insecurity
- Simplified the Emergency Food Assistance Program’s (EFAP) eligibility criteria and application
- Expanded eligible items for funding through the EFAP Administrative Reimbursement Grant
- Increased the Burial Allowance from \$900 to \$1700 and increased the required cap on funeral cost to qualify for the program from \$1700 to \$3400

COVID-19 Reforms and Operational Changes:

- Implemented an agency-wide remote services model, allowing the vast majority of HRA staff to work and serve clients safely from home
- Mobilized, trained and implemented remote work for FIA and redeployed DSS staff to work from home handling Cash Assistance and SNAP-only applications
- Implemented a drop box for clients to submit their completed CA or SNAP-only applications at the 7 open HRA Centers citywide
- Incorporated over a thousand DSS/HRA staff from other program areas to assist Cash Assistance and SNAP Operations to handle the surge in additional applications due to the COVID-19 pandemic and local shutdown
- Began accepting Burial Services applications via email and fax
- Implemented voluntary & virtual appointment processes for all aspects of WeCARE
- Implemented a new outreach process to Home Visits Needed/Homebound (HVN/HB) clients to ensure well-being and food security during the pandemic
- Implemented virtual field visits for SROs/Master Leased and Senior program move-ins
- Developed strategies with contracted providers (Master Leased, SROs and Seniors) aimed at reducing COVID-19 cases in their buildings and collaborated with DOHMH and H+H on response plans and COVID testing for vulnerable tenants
- Waived all in-person engagements for survivors of domestic violence and set up call-in numbers for assessment and crisis counseling
- Distributed Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to staff working in open HRA centers and enforced social distancing measures to promote a safe environment for staff and clients
- Maintained 6 open HASA Centers (at least one in each borough) to continue providing emergency services (including emergency housing) to clients during the pandemic; safety initiatives included the installation of document drop boxes for use by clients and sneeze guards in the client service areas
- Developed a new model for delivery of HASA case management services which included a weekly wellness check protocol to monitor client well-being during the pandemic

Reduce Homelessness:

- Implemented a Streamlined Rent Arrears Process in which Job Centers handle all Emergency Assistance / One Shot Deal (EA/OSD) rent arrears requests for amounts less than \$7,200 and less than 6-months of arrears without the need for referral to the Rental Assistance Unit (RAU)
- Developed a Homelessness Prevention Administration (HPA) approval process for Congregate Care residents who have excessive rent arrears
- Established a case assignment system to provide right to counsel (RTC) legal services to all tenants at risk of eviction in Housing Court
- Created an auto-renewal process for CityFHEPS rental subsidy recipients

- Added 141 new units of HASA supportive housing for persons with a history of mental illness and/or substance use as well as homelessness

Modernizing Services and Processes:

- Added PC banks and Kiosks at the Rider, Jamaica and Crotona Centers.
- Successfully sought a State waiver for and implemented an online Cash Assistance application process using ACCESS HRA (AHRA) at 14 participating CBOs
- Implemented the ACCESS HRA online application for Single Issue (SI) grant applications to obtain various supplemental and Emergency Assistance subsidies
- Added the SNAP Case Change Reporting form to ACCESS HRA to allow online submission of case changes
- Permitted clients to submit the CA Periodic Mailer form electronically through Access HRA and the HRA Mobile Document Upload apps
- Continued system enhancements to better service clients, including ACCESS HRA and other system upgrades to better process applicant information and ensure accurate and timely processing
- Rolled out SNAP Telephone Interview Processing Services (TIPS) On-Demand satellite units to five in-person SNAP Centers to ensure that telephone interview services would be available at various locations in case a site goes down
- Implemented On-Demand “Processing Pods” in SNAP TIPS On-Demand Centers, allowing On-Demand staff to vary their work and understand the processing part by spending every fifth workday processing SNAP applications, increasing work satisfaction and decreasing processing errors
- Fully implemented the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System (CAPS) to increase efficiencies for referrals and placements into supportive housing
- Fully implemented the clinician portal, Electronic Medical Record (EMR), for Visiting Psychiatric Services (VPS) to prevent evictions and address urgent clinical needs
- Enhanced the Fair Fares Web application to allow for clients to report cards lost, stolen, or lost in the machine via web; upgrades also included opting-out options, auditing and administrative reviews, and enhanced reporting tools

Additional Accomplishments:

- Standardized training curricula for Office of Support Services (OSS) New Hires, and trained current OSS staff on unit procedures and Cash Assistance and SNAP program eligibility
- Revised Cash Assistance Periodic Mailer Form M-327H to simplify CA interim reporting requirements and remind participants to sign the form (pending OTDA sign-off)
- Completed specifications to migrate additional Office of Central Processing (OCP) tasks, including Landlord Security Voucher redemption, Utility Grant payments, and Child Support Payments into POS
- Implemented an Income Clearance Program (ICP) module in the POS to assist staff in processing actions and to better monitor unit workload

- Established a quarterly convening between HRA/DSS and the Columbia University Center for Justice to help streamline access to benefits and services for formerly incarcerated clients
- Published a new procedure outlining the actions to be taken by management, staff, HRA Police, and Contracted Security Guards in responding to Center incidents, while ensuring all clients are treated with courtesy, compassion, and respect
- Developed an anti-bias and trauma-informed training program
- Retrained and provided enhanced training for the HRA Office of Police Operations (HRA OPO)
- Completed the roll-out the Body Worn Camera (BWC) initiative for HRA PD staff
- Launched the Restaurant Revitalization Program (RRP) to support restaurants across the city by offering \$2.01m million worth of wage-reimbursement funding to cover up to \$30,000 of labor costs per business; a total of 68 restaurants were funded, selected based on their location in the hardest hit communities and whether they were a women or minority-owned business
- Launched the Work Progress Program's (WPP) Workplace, an online service that serves as a platform for WPP providers to share resources and employment/training/educational opportunities and discuss best practices
- Launched a new child support debt reduction program which allows noncustodial parents (NCPs) to reduce up to \$10,000 in child support arrears assigned to the New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) by completing a state-certified substance use treatment program
- Launched the lift sanctions initiative for custodial parents on Cash Assistance, which allows custodial parents to inform the Office of Child Support Services (OCSS) of their intent to comply with child support requirements in the future; once sanctions have been lifted, the client's full cash and medical benefits are restored
- Revised the child support summons package by adding information to the package aimed at clarifying expectations and softening the tone of the court summons
- Expanded ACCESS HRA to allow HASA clients to report address and income changes.

Client-Centered Reform

As we reorganize services to improve and streamline how we connect our clients to benefits/resources, it is important to note the channel shifts we are seeing in how New Yorkers are now accessing their benefits via the ACCESS HRA platform:

- Pre-pandemic, citywide SNAP in-center foot traffic had declined by more than 50% since 2014, largely driven by the increased use of ACCESS HRA.
- The percentage of SNAP applications submitted online increased from 23% in 2013 to 88% in 2019.

- 80% of those applications are submitted out-of-center, with the remainder submitted online at DSS-HRA kiosks and PC banks within HRA centers.
 - Meaning approximately 70% of all SNAP applications are submitted online and out-of-center.
- The percentage of SNAP applications submitted online increased in 2020/ In February 2020, 76% of SNAP applications were submitted electronically outside of DSS-HRA centers, with this figure increasing significantly to approximately 98% in May and June, remaining in the 90s (94.2%) since then/through December 2020.

Taken together, these client-centered reforms have helped reduce wait times and eliminated or reduced the need to come into a Center. Digital service delivery and modernization of the Agency's processes improves the experience for our clients as it is more efficient and frees staff to focus on cases that require more in-person contact.

DSS is seeking to make permanent a COVID-related waiver allowing telephone interviews for the application for and recertification of Cash Assistance as well as for DV and substance use screenings and assessments. The current waiver expires on March 31, 2021. Making the current waiver permanent through language in the State budget will prevent a gap in coverage if the waiver is not extended while legislation is being considered. We are grateful for the partnership of Senators Persaud and Krueger and Assemblymember Rosenthal for introducing S3223-A/A5414 which allows persons applying for or receiving public assistance the option to be interviewed by phone.

Prior to COVID, New Yorkers could only apply for Cash Assistance (CA) in-person at one of HRA's Job Centers unlike SNAP clients who since 2015 have been able to apply by telephone without having to come to an office. The change we are seeking is subject to State approval and absent that approval we are seeking legislative solutions in order to align our service delivery model.

To reiterate what we outlined at the beginning of this report, at the outset of the pandemic, DSS-HRA was granted a State waiver so that New Yorkers could apply for CA online and conduct their interview by phone. Throughout the pandemic, we've had to request waiver extensions multiple times in order to protect the health and safety of staff and clients and align the CA program with the client- and dignity-centered remote/mobile service delivery that we've had for SNAP clients since 2015. **Since receiving the waiver, 85% of Cash Assistance applications have been submitted online with about 162,000 interviews conducted by telephone.** And as we've noted, in that time, we have seen the number of Cash Assistance applications nearly double.

During the initial weeks of the pandemic with increased uncertainty, COVID cases on the rise, and stay-at-home orders newly implemented, we made Cash Assistance available via online ACCESS HRA for the first time. We saw record applications for Cash Assistance in March and April 2020 and during the time period of May through September, applications returned to lower-than-average levels before climbing back up beginning in October.

2020 saw the highest December applications in over a decade.

- In March 2020, the Agency received approximately 12,740 more CA applications than March 2019, a nearly 53% increase.
- In April 2020, the Agency received approximately 7,980 more CA applications than April 2019, a more than 31% increase.

Between February 2020 and December 2020, there was an approximately 48,500-person (+14.8%) increase and a more than 27,000-case (+15.1%) increase in the CA caseload.

In addition to the telephone interview waiver, which made benefits more accessible, DSS-HRA requested and received waivers from the State to temporarily suspend many of the ongoing engagement requirements, required for continued eligibility for federal and State benefits. Waivers allowed us to suspend requirements such as employment program engagement and/or substance use services rules. Under prior Administrations, failure to engage in such requirements would have led to case closings in the normal course. With these factors taken into consideration, as CA cases have been closed at historically low rates due to the waivers, and the historic application increases, there has been a steady increase in the CA caseload since the beginning of the pandemic.

No Wrong Door – Modernizing HRA's Offices and Locations

The agency's long-term goals include ensuring HRA is in the communities of the greatest need by right-sizing our current client-facing locations and relocating into areas of highest need. In executing this strategy, we are implementing new service delivery models to better meet client needs. Further, as we move away from a specific program-focused (each program operates separately) service-delivery approach to a more client-centric, "no wrong door" approach we are increasing opportunities to co-locate with other agencies and community-based organizations (CBOs) to leverage community-based outreach and resources. And finally, we are continuing to maximize use of technology wherever possible.

2020 DHS Reform Highlights

Procedure Development

- Interim Reasonable Accommodations (RA) Process (Butler): DHS provides RAs to clients consistent with applicable laws except where doing so would fundamentally alter the nature of DHS services. DHS will not discriminate or retaliate against any client for requesting an RA, nor will DHS make an adverse determination regarding shelter eligibility or benefits as a result of a disability when the failure to comply relates to a disability requiring an accommodation that has not been provided.
- Selected Infectious Diseases Investigation and Outbreak Prevention: this policy outlines the roles and interactions between DHS facilities, Outreach teams, DHS Office of the Medical Director, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in the event of an individual case or potential outbreak.
- Service Coordination with No Violence Again (NoVA) staff for PATH and AFIC: the purpose of this procedure is to delineate the requisite actions that DHS staff at Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) and Adult Family Intake Center (AFIC) sites must take when individuals possibly experiencing domestic violence present at these locations.
- Medication Storage and Self-Administration: this procedure establishes a uniform practice for offering optional medication storage and monitoring to clients as they self-administer their medication. This procedure does not apply to medical clinics that may operate within a DHS facility.
- Single Adult Bed Management: the purpose of this procedure is to clarify and establish consistency regarding the management of bed assignments and vacancies in the Single Adult shelter system.
- DHS' Guide to Improving Services for LGBTQI Clients - Frequently Asked Questions: DHS created this guide to share information about homelessness in the LGBTQI community and to highlight resources that staff should use to better support LGBTQI clients.
- DHS released a Transgender, Non-binary, and Intersex Clients policy applying to all providers and staff that includes: guidance for appropriate service delivery; background on terminology and purpose; an introduction of gender pronouns and chosen name to Agency procedures; and a script for modeling respectful introductions to clients.
- DHS added a field in CARES for preferred/chosen name, a name that clients may use that is different than their legal name. CARES nightly rosters print preferred name over legal name, which prevents clients from being "outed" as transgender during roster checks.
- To ensure clear and consistent standards of social service delivery across the agency, the divisions of adult services, family services and street homeless solutions are developing models of practice, which include:
 - What must be done: All service delivery actions from entry to exit, including case management efforts, operational actions with client interaction and adherence to regulations, policies and procedures.

- How to do it well: Descriptions of how to complete each action with quality, a person-centered approach, a trauma-informed lens, transparency and accountability.
- What is to be measured: Standardizing how and what we measure by ensuring anything currently measured is noted in the model and all standards in the model are measured, and updating the twice annual Monitoring Instruments to reflect these measures.
- Developed the HOME system, which functions as a rehousing wrap-around to CARES, providing the following functionality:
 - Subsidy eligibility and letter generation.
 - Apartment stock and viewings through the Public Engagement Unit.
 - Transportation requests for viewings and shelter move outs.
 - Veteran rehousing (including non-DHS clients).
 - As of August 2020, DHS program staff use HOME to submit CityFHEPS packages and HPD's Homeless Housing Applications.

Training & Development

- Transgender, Gender Non-Binary, Intersex (TGNBI) Procedure Training: this provides a learning experience designed to help staff understand the experiences, needs, and concerns of TGNBI clients seeking or receiving services at a DHS facility.
- DHS Language Access: this provides information to staff and providers about language access requirements and policies for serving clients who speak languages other than English. Staff learn tools for providing services to our diverse client base. Training covers interpretation services, CARES and manual forms, and translation services.
- DHS has partnered with CUNY's School of Professional Studies to develop a series of trainings that provide a system-wide framework for engaging and supporting our clients. The 10 introductory-level trainings provide guidance on skills such as using a trauma-informed approach, understanding mental illness, and being culturally sensitive. The courses are: Using a Trauma-Informed Approach; Motivational Interviewing; Cultural Sensitivity; Mental Illness and Substance Use; Understanding Violence; Crisis Intervention; Suicide Assessment and Prevention; Self-Care; Key Activities; 5 Steps to Home.

Initiatives

- Influenza vaccination: DHS made the flu vaccine available to all congregate shelters last fall/winter, including all single adult and adult family shelters, all Safe Havens and Drop-in-Centers, Stabilization Beds facilities and selected Families with Children shelters with shared bathrooms. The medical providers who offered COVID testing administered the flu vaccines.
- Overdose Prevention: DHS continues to focus on opioid overdose prevention and in particular, reduction of deaths due to overdoses, by making naloxone available at all its facilities at all times. In CY2020, DHS trained over 2,100 clients and 3,000 staff to administer naloxone, distributed 14,352 naloxone kits, and administered naloxone 730 times, reversing over 90% of overdoses.

COVID-19 Response Reforms

- Conducted shelter de-densification at all our Single Adult Shelters.
- Hold monthly COVID testing at all our Single Adults and Adult Family Sites.
- Conduct daily COVID testing at all our Single Adult Intake locations.
- Opened our own DHS Vaccination POD to service all our congregate shelters, clients and staff.