

CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND CITYFHEPS

Recommendation #1: Streamline and Expand CityFHEPS Eligibility

THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS IN NEW YORK CITY

Homelessness should only ever be brief and rare. In New York City, however, it is neither. With average shelter stays at over a year for single adults (483 days) and over two years for adult families (773 days), we can't say homelessness is brief.¹ And with roughly 65,000 people in the shelter system as of November 2022, and thousands more living on the streets, we cannot say it's rare.²

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WHAT IS CITYFHEPS?

CityFHEPS (“City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement”) is a voucher that helps tenants pay rent each month. There are different types of CityFHEPS vouchers, but the main version helps households leave homeless shelters and move into apartments. An additional smaller number of vouchers are meant to help people remain housed so they avoid entering shelter. While the City has recently made important changes to improve the program, there is more work to be done to ensure that more people can access CityFHEPS vouchers, and fast.

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HOW CAN WE IMPROVE CITYFHEPS?

In a series of short briefs, we are exploring the various ways that the CityFHEPS program can be improved. This piece, the first in the series of recommendations, enumerates ways for the City to make the application process easier while expanding eligibility.

THE CITY MUST:

1. **Eliminate the requirement that households live in shelter or receive services for three months prior to receiving a voucher.**

CityFHEPS vouchers are only available to people experiencing homelessness after they've spent 90 days in the shelter system. (The one major exception to this rule domestic violence shelters.) This requirement automatically ensures that homelessness is rarely brief, prolonging the physical, economic, and psychological toll of homelessness on individuals and families. It also exacerbates overcrowding in shelters and drives up the system's cost for the city, state, and federal government. There is no justifiable rationale for this 90-day shelter stay requirement. City officials have already committed to ending this arbitrary waiting period.³ They should act now to do away with it once and for all and should do everything possible to reduce – rather than mandate – wait times for receiving CityFHEPS and accessing other means of permanent housing.

2. **Expand voucher eligibility to more families that are currently housed and facing eviction.**

Today, a family that's evicted for nonpayment is likely to end up in the shelter system, where – after waiting 90 days to satisfy arbitrary bureaucratic requirements – they may get access to a voucher, which will help them pay the rent in a different apartment. Instead of forcing this household to face the hardships of eviction, homelessness and rehousing, why don't we just apply the same tool we use to help them find new housing (a CityFHEPS voucher) to help them avoid eviction in the first place?

Section 8 and State FHEPS vouchers are already used as homelessness prevention tools and can be highly effective in maintaining household and neighborhood stability. Let's use CityFHEPS to keep people housed, not just to rehouse them after they've been forced out of their homes.

3. **Expand voucher eligibility to households without immigration status.**

Undocumented immigrants make up a significant portion of our city's population – roughly 1 in 17 residents – as well as our city's workforce and our cultural life.⁴ But when undocumented New Yorkers experience homelessness, they are unfairly and unnecessarily discriminated against by the City's rehousing systems. As a result, undocumented people often face the longest shelter stays and are offered the fewest resources.⁵ Unlike Section 8 – which is a federal program, and subject to federal rules – CityFHEPS is a local program. The City should immediately extend CityFHEPS vouchers to undocumented people in the shelter system, who otherwise have few – if any – resources to exit into permanent housing.⁶ for at least 90 days. Those who are street homeless, staying in drop-in centers, or living in transitional housing must be receiving services from a DHS contracted provider for at least 90 days.



WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT CITYFHEPS?

More information about CityFHEPS is here:

www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps.page

Or here:

www.cssny.org/CityFHEPS

If you are in shelter and want to learn whether you qualify for CityFHEPS, you can speak with a representative from your shelter.

Endnotes

1 https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/operations/downloads/pdf/mmr2022/2022_mmr.pdf

2 <https://citylimits.org/nyc-shelter-count-2022/>

3 <https://citylimits.org/2022/09/26/fewer-nyc-families-left-shelters-for-permanent-homes-last-year-new-report-shows-how-to-ease-more-moves/>

4 https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/immigrants/downloads/pdf/moia_annual_report_2018_final.pdf

5 <https://citylimits.org/2022/07/20/who-are-the-families-entering-nyc-shelters-from-the-southern-border/>

6 <https://beta.gothamist.com/news/nyc-should-expand-rental-assistance-program-to-include-undocumented-immigrants-advocates-urge-city-hall?betaRedirect=true>