



Testimony of Juan Diaz
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Submitted to The New York City Council Subcommittee on Zoning and Franchises
Oversight – City of Yes for Housing Opportunity Proposal
October 22, 2024

Thank you, Chair Riley and members of the Committee on Zoning and Franchises, for the opportunity to submit testimony at this hearing regarding the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity zoning text amendments.

Since 1944, Citizens' Committee for Children of New York has served as an independent, multi-issue child advocacy organization. CCC does not accept or receive public resources, provide direct services, or represent a sector or workforce; our priority is improving outcomes for children and families through civic engagement, research, and advocacy. We document the facts, engage, and mobilize New Yorkers, and advocate for solutions to ensure that every New York child is healthy, housed, educated, and safe.

CCC is a steering committee member of the Family Homeless Coalition (FHC), a coalition comprised of 20 organizations representing service and housing providers, children's advocacy organizations, and people with lived experience with family homelessness. We are united by the goal of preventing family homelessness, improving the well-being of children and families in shelter, and supporting the long-term stability of families with children who leave shelter.

The City's 1.4 percent vacancy rate and serious lack of affordable housing units make it extremely difficult for families with children to find stable housing. Furthermore, [CCC's Keeping Track of New York City's Children](#) data book revealed that in FY23, over 46,000 children resided in City shelters and the average length of stay was 437 days for families with children in shelters. Long shelter stays can permanently impact a child's educational and overall well-being.

We applaud the City Council's effort to expand the conversation and call for additional solutions to alleviate the current shelter and housing access crisis and pair them with necessary increases in supply and zoning flexibility. **We urge the City Administration to take the following steps to expedite housing placement and prevent homelessness.**

Fully Implement the CityFHEPS Reform Package:

- **We urge the City Administration to fully implement and fund the CityFHEPS expansion** which would reduce unnecessary shelter costs and significantly reduce homelessness for families with children. CityFHEPS package, would remove the shelter stay and housing eviction court histories to qualify, among other reforms.

Invest in Prevention and Aftercare Services:

- **Increase the Budget for Homebase Providers by \$37.9 million to a total of \$100 million.** Since the pandemic, Homebase providers have taken on tremendous increases in caseload as well as an ever-expanding set of responsibilities. This has not been accompanied by funding levels to match the new post-Covid reality. As a result, wait times have increased for critical Homebase services like help with eviction prevention, emergency rental assistance and obtaining benefits.
- **Establish a Dedicated Funding Stream Strictly for Aftercare Services.** Establishing a strict separate funding stream for this essential work will ensure organizations can properly dedicate staff and tailor programming to increase housing stability. Families who are placed in permanent housing from shelter require time limited support to avoid recidivism in homelessness.
- **Release an RFP and Dedicate Funding for Organizations Beyond Homebase Providers to Process CityFHEPS.** Legal services organizations who have taken on this role on a temporary basis have been successful in speeding up processing times and reducing the overall burden on the system of processing CityFHEPS applications. By opening this opportunity for other organizations, further will reduce strain on Homebase providers and expedite CityFHEPS application processing.

Reduce Barriers in Voucher Administration

We applaud the recent streamlining measures and reforms that have been implemented in homeless placements, voucher administration, and NYC Housing Connect lease-up. However, further steps are needed to expedite placement and meaningfully reduce family homelessness.

- **Improve apartment inspections by:**
 - Adopting NYCHA's approach to inspections, which prioritizes significant health and safety issues but allows for smaller issues to be rectified after tenant move-in.
 - Reforming the Double Inspection Rule, which requires a DHS inspection (cellars and ground floor units), DSS requires both a DHS and a separate HRA inspection. We call for the secondary inspection to be limited to a fraction of the units as a secondary review/audit procedure but not policy for every unit.
- **Adopt the \$100 Rule:** The income presented in a voucher package must be within \$100 of the original shopping letter amount. With low-income tenant incomes often varying greatly week by week, this discrepancy often triggers a rebudgeting letter, which is a source of delay. If the income qualifies at the time of the voucher package, it should be approved without rebudgeting.

- **Modify the Public Assistance Single Issue Timeframe:** The single issue, which is granted by HRA staff that is assigned to public benefits assistance, provides a window of time for the optimal processing of CityFHEPS application approval. The current time frame is 30 days but often the process for applying and getting the voucher is longer and requires a single issuance to be resubmitted. We recommend a 90-day time frame.

Additionally, we encourage the City Administration to continue to improve housing placement and invest in agency staffing within benefit access and housing assistance units at HPD, DHS and HRA.

Thank you for your time and consideration.