



**City Fiscal Year 2021 Budget Priorities:**  
**Responding to, and Recovering from, the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Family Homelessness Coalition, comprised of a diverse group of advocates, shelter and service providers, and affordable housing developers, has worked to combat family homelessness since before the current public health and economic crisis hit our city. Our priorities of preventing homelessness, improving conditions in shelters, and expanding access to affordable housing are even more relevant and critical today as we move towards a citywide recovery plan. Available data already point to the alarming and disproportionate impact that Covid-19 has on communities that were already grappling with high risks associated with housing instability: poverty, unemployment, overcrowded housing, severe rent-burden, and high numbers of families entering shelter. We stand ready to partner with and support the New York City Council and the City administration's efforts to harness existing city and state resources and additional resources at the federal level to tackle the Covid-19 related needs of vulnerable New Yorkers and to prevent a surge in homelessness as an aftermath of the pandemic.

**As the City Council prepares to negotiate the FY 21 budget, the Family Homelessness Coalition strongly encourages the City Council to prioritize the critical needs of New Yorkers to keep children and families stably housed. Our priorities include:**

- Investing in Upstream Homelessness Prevention
- Improving Family Shelter Conditions
- Expediting Exits to Permanent Housing
- Support for Nonprofits including Frontline Staff

**The above priorities are summarized and detailed as follows:**

**Investing in Upstream Prevention**

As the conditions leading to housing instability are being exacerbated by the economic fallout resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, attention must be paid, and resources committed to keep families housed after the eviction moratorium ends. The magnitude of need cannot be underestimated as 25% of all New Yorkers were severely rent burdened prior to the pandemic and the situation has been exacerbated now by job losses. Between March 24 and April 25, over 733,000 people in New York City filed unemployment claims, representing just a portion of the New Yorkers who have lost income and will likely have difficulty paying rent.

- **Rental Subsidies:** Short- and long-term rent assistance is needed to cover rent arrears and support ongoing rent payments, including coverage of undocumented immigrants, who are not able to receive assistance through many existing programs. Addressing the

housing insecurity of low-income families farther upstream is both less costly to the City at a time of strained resources as well as less disruptive to families and especially children.

- **Prevention Services:** Expanded preventive services are desperately needed to respond to families' needs before they reach a housing crisis. Preventive services should include case management, eviction prevention and rental assistance counseling, and service referrals for childcare, education, training and workforce development. This will require increased funding for community-based organizations that provide these services as demand will increase in the wake of this pandemic. Consideration should also be given to expanded awareness campaigns to connect people to resources, particularly those that are experiencing housing instability for the first time.
- **Rapid Rehousing:** Rapid rehousing, a HUD best practice, should be institutionalized by HPD and HDC. City-funded re-rental units can be used to provide safe, affordable housing for families at risk of homelessness, including those experiencing domestic violence, or already using shelter.

### **Improving Family Shelter Conditions**

Nearly 24,000 children and youth continue to reside in family shelter and the experience of homelessness is traumatic and can impact their health, behavioral health, educational progress, and their long-term economic stability. To address child and family needs and reduce trauma and poor outcomes experienced due to homelessness, the FHC continues to advocate for improvements in shelter conditions to protect and promote the well-being of children and their families.

- **Access to Education Supports:** Children and youth in shelter should be prioritized for any in-person and remote programming offered this summer. Students who experience homelessness must have uninterrupted access to technology and internet to participate in remote learning and because housing instability presents challenges to distance learning, students in temporary housing should be prioritized in DOE's Regional Enrichment Centers. Students in temporary housing fare worse than their permanently housed peers when examining attendance, proficiency, and graduation rates; learning loss and poor education outcomes are exacerbated now due to distance learning.
- **Improve Access to Services for families in Commercial Hotels:** Teleservices models should be leveraged to meet the needs of children and families living in hotels. Teleservices can facilitate access to social work services, recreation and tutoring, as well promote connectedness to family members and friends. Nearly 2,800 families reside in commercial hotels with minimal access to basic services and supports such as kitchens and laundry, social work services, or recreational activities for children. The isolation of these families is now exacerbated by social distancing.

## **Expediting Exits to Permanent Housing**

The process by which families in shelters are placed in permanent housing, either through a government-subsidized unit or by using a rental subsidy voucher, is far too complex and lengthy.

- **Rental Subsidies:** Long- and short-term rental assistance should be leveraged to facilitate more rapid exits from shelter.
- **Streamline Permanent Housing Process:** The process of placing homeless families in permanent housing must be streamlined so that they can move to safe, permanent homes quickly. Recent efforts by DHS, HPD and HDC to streamline voucher protocols and expand accessibility, such as online processing and the use of virtual inspections when appropriate, should be expanded and continued post-PAUSE.
- **Expand Supply of Housing for Families that are Homeless and Very and Extremely Low Income:**
  - The City should prioritize capital funding for development of new permanent affordable housing for homeless families and expand its efforts to facilitate the acquisition of distressed properties by nonprofits in order to take advantage of anticipated lower costs to expand affordable housing longer term.
  - An increased number of City-funded and mandatory inclusionary housing units should be made available to homeless families and to very and extremely low-income families and those households should have access to support services, either on-site or through a connection to community-based services, to ensure that they can retain their housing.
  - The City must continue and expand its commitment to housing the most vulnerable homeless families in supportive and service-enriched housing.

## **Supporting Nonprofits Including Frontline Staff**

Nonprofit organizations need additional support to expand their work – including operational support, incentive pay, access to testing, personal protective equipment, access to technology and equipment that enables virtual work, and cleaning supplies. Vital to the city's capacity to respond in this crisis is the continued viability of its social service sector, including the brave and critical frontline staff who support families in shelter, in permanent affordable housing, and at risk of homelessness every day, despite the risks to their health.

**FHC Steering Committee:**

Advocates for Children

Barrier Free Living

CAMBA

Citizens' Committee for Children

Coalition for the Homeless

Enterprise Community Partners

Gateway Housing

Henry Street Settlement

Homeless Services United

Monadnock Development

New Destiny Housing

Riseboro

Safe Horizon

Settlement Housing Fund

The Floating Hospital

Win