

MONTHLY
ADVOCACY NEWSLETTER

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**End
Homelessness
VOTE!**

City Budget Cuts

When Mayor Bloomberg announced his \$46.9 Billion annual budget for New York City in April, he failed to mention that many social programs would be cut in order to fund that budget. In addition to the DHS cuts, there are proposed cuts to child care vouchers, health services, mental health and substance abuse services. All of these services directly affect communities that are at-risk for homelessness. Adequate financing is necessary to provide the much needed services to those living at or below the poverty level in New York City.

These proposed cuts come at the most ironic time, as the Department of Homeless Services is putting together a 10 Year Plan to End Chronic Homelessness. This plan's focus is primarily on the prevention of homelessness in New York City. According to the plan, "The City's historic response to homelessness has focused on shelter as a first line of response to housing related needs. This has come at the expense of focusing on preventive interventions that help individuals and families avoid shelter in the first place. Spending on shelter services has reached an all time high. Opportunities exist to shift these resources to prevention, rental assistance, and permanent housing programs". This plan is also in accordance with the New York City Family Special Masters Panel's first report which recommended that "Increased Legal Representation" and "Affordable Housing and Rental Assistance" be the two main methods in which New York City attempt to combat family homelessness.

State Budget Cuts

The State is currently proposing to cut SHIP funding by 4 Million. SHIP provides aftercare services that assist and support families through their successful transition into stable housing. Aftercare for homeless families to costs \$2,000 dollars. When a formerly homeless family loses their housing a second time, the city and state's initial investment of \$36,000 is lost. The city will spend another \$36,000 for a second journey through the shelter system for that family. This second round of homelessness will further harm the children involved. Every disruption in a child's education sets them back academically and will likely result in repeating a grade at an additional cost of \$11,500 for taxpayers. The emotional problems and stresses on children caused by homelessness will necessitate additional spending on health care, mental health services, and special education or remedial services.

Pataki is also proposing full family sanctions to TANF recipients. This means that families who are deemed "non-compliant" with TANF regulations (for example - a client could miss a meeting with his/her PA worker) would be left without any cash income and may not be able to pay rent, increasing the likelihood that some families will either be forced to "double-up" with friends and relatives in overcrowded quarters or become homeless. Children whose families are unable to maintain stable housing and afford food and other necessities are unlikely to arrive at school each morning prepared to learn and participate effectively in school. Over time, families left without any cash income due to sanctions may be unable to care for their children adequately, leading to larger numbers of children placed in foster care. An increase in foster care placements is surely not in the best interest of children, their families, or the state. The Governor is also proposing a reduction of TANF benefits for families that have one household member on SSI, and to reduce by 10 percent the non-shelter component of the grant for families on welfare for more than five years, and for single adults and childless couples on welfare for more than one year.

NY/NY III Agreement

The Campaign for a New York/New York III Agreement is calling on Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg to negotiate a third State-City agreement to provide 9,000 units of supportive housing for homeless New Yorkers – 7,500 units for homeless individuals living with mental illness, and 1,500 units for homeless families with special needs. The Campaign has been endorsed by more than 60 organizations statewide, including supportive housing providers, mental health organizations, homeless service providers, and advocacy groups. New York/New York housing is a proven, cost-effective solution to the problem of homelessness, and contributed to substantial reductions in New York City homelessness in the early 1990s. However, in the absence of a renewed agreement, homelessness in New York City has grown to all-time record levels.

To show your support for the campaign for a New York/New York III Agreement please join us at the Summer March & Rally to urge Governor Pataki and Mayor Bloomberg to renew New York/New York housing. We will meet outside of the 305 7th Avenue building at 10AM. We will then take the 1/9 Subway at 23rd Street up to 42nd Street and walk over to Bryant Park (corner of 6th Avenue and 42nd Street) and march to Gov. Pataki's office (3rd Ave. at 40th Street). There will be guest speakers and food – so far Mayor Dinkins, State Senator Liz Krueger and Councilmember Lopez have accepted.

Section 8 Cuts

For many New Yorker's who are just barely making ends meet with the help of Section 8, the recent cuts to the Section 8 voucher program will almost certainly force them into the shelter system. Public Housing Authorities will be forced to cut rental support for low-income families and evict current Section 8 tenants due to insufficient funding. In addition, it will be very expensive for the city to provide shelter to the families that lose Section 8 support. Providing shelter for a family in New York City costs \$36,000, and \$22,000 for single adult. There will no doubt be a substantial increase in the number of people in the shelter system as a result of these cuts, and the cost will be a very difficult burden for the city to bear.

In response to the recent cutbacks to Section 8, which has all but crippled many housing agencies nationwide, HUD has announced they would be allocating \$150 million to assuage the strain that many of these agencies have been experiencing. The money itself would be divided among the 525 agencies, or one fifth of those that participate in the Section 8 voucher program. However, considering that \$55 million has been cut from New York City's budget, many feel that the money is simply too little, too late.

Homeless Activists for Affordable Housing

Due to the effectiveness of the Voter Registration Press coverage back in February and March at Peter's Place, clients began to get increasingly interested and excited about advocacy. A social action group formed called the Homeless Activists for Affordable Housing, and so far they have been successfully involved in multiple advocacy opportunities. They have written letters to elected officials regarding the "Bring America Home Act", they have given testimony at State Assembly hearings in an attempt to persuade elected officials to build more affordable and supportive housing for people with disabilities, they have attended town hall meetings on building affordable housing in Chelsea, assisted in voter registration drives, and more. The group has meetings every week at Peter's Place in which updates are given on upcoming advocacy opportunities, as well as information sharing on policies and legislation that are crucial to the homeless population.

Homeless Voter Registration Campaign

In the past two months – the Homeless Voter Registration Drive has exploded! There have been two volunteer training workshops so far, in which close to 50 volunteers were trained to go out to homeless provider sites and conduct the education and registration component of the drive. Multiple organizations have offered to provide support and collaboration; NYPIRG, The Supportive Housing Network on New York, Help USA, the New York City Coalition Against Hunger, the Human Service Council, and more. These groups have reached out to provide volunteers, resources, and assistance in conducting homeless drives throughout the city. The Supportive Housing Network of New York has asked us to set up a voter registration booth at their annual conference on June 17, and we will also begin to do a series of "training the trainer" workshops for organizations that would like to have their own staff do the drives at their specific locations. So far – we have registered close to 600 homeless voters. If you or any of your friends would be interested in participating in this very exciting effort, please contact Cynthia Bydlinski at 212-645-3444 x508.