
Family Homelessness Coalition Platform

THE ASK:

The Family Homelessness Coalition, a coalition representing service providers, housing providers, children's organizations, and advocacy organizations, urges the City of New York to launch a coordinated, multi-agency, collaborative effort focused on the needs of homeless children and their families to prevent homelessness where possible, improve the well-being of children and families in shelter, and support the long-term stability of children and families who leave shelter.

INTRODUCTION: Accomplishing bold, ambitious, large-scale efforts to address income inequality has been the hallmark of the first term of the de Blasio administration. The Mayor, in just four years, has implemented a number of complex, comprehensive initiatives including a full-day universal Pre-K program, a multi-agency Thrive initiative helping New Yorkers access mental health services, and the Vision Zero traffic safety plan that has saved countless pedestrian lives.

The de Blasio administration has also achieved important successes in the critical areas of housing and homelessness, problems that have challenged a number of previous administrations. Under Mayor de Blasio, the city administration has:

- Met or exceeded the annual goals to create or preserve 200,000 units of affordable housing;
- Developed NYC 15/15 to create 15,000 units of supportive housing over 15 years;
- Created city-funded rental assistance programs, which have helped over 15,000 families with children leave the shelter system;
- Significantly decreased homelessness caused by evictions by an unprecedented investment in legal services for low-income tenants; and
- Developed a plan to eliminate the use of cluster sites and hotels for homeless individuals and families and to create or expand 90 new purpose-built shelters.

The Mayor's second term offers the opportunity to build on past successes by launching a coordinated, multi-agency effort to combat family homelessness designed to increase affordable housing options for homeless families while promoting the well-being of children and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

WHY NOW:

- **Almost 70% of homeless New Yorkers are children and their families.**
- There are over 23,000 children from nearly 13,000 families in the DHS shelter system alone with at least another 4,000 children in homeless shelters operated by HRA, HPD and DYCD.
- Homelessness is traumatic for children and their families and can have long-term negative impacts on children's health, mental health, education and ultimately their likelihood of being a homeless adult.
- The average length of shelter stay for homeless families is well over a year.
- 1 in 10 NYC school children were homeless last year and 62% of homeless children are chronically absent from school.
- Nearly 25% of the families in shelter have current or previous history with the City's child welfare agency.
- Only half of homeless families with children are in Tier II shelters built to house homeless families—many are in commercial hotels where they do not have access to kitchens, laundry, or recreational space.

**The Family Homelessness Coalition Wants to Partner with the Mayor, the de Blasio Administration
and the City Council to Make Reducing Family Homelessness,
While Fostering the Well-being of Homeless Children and their Families,
a TOP PRIORITY for the Next 4 Years**

THE GOAL: The goal of a coordinated, multi-agency effort is: 1) to strengthen prevention and post-shelter services for families with children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; 2) to provide safe and appropriate purpose-built shelter that promotes child and family well-being when shelter is unavoidable; and 3) to create more permanent housing for homeless families.

THE STRATEGY:

1) Strengthen prevention & post-shelter services for at-risk families:

- a) Pilot an alternative to shelter program model for domestic violence survivors that permits survivors to remain in their current housing, if they can do so safely, or move quickly to other permanent housing.
- b) Improve and expand aftercare services for homeless families leaving shelter for permanent housing by using family advocates and formerly homeless parents to help homeless families adjust to their new communities and housing.
- c) Strengthen the assessment process for identifying the needs of homeless families with children to better match shelter, housing, subsidies and services to the families' needs.
- d) Improve public awareness of and access to existing prevention programs and other services critical to housing stability.

2) Promote child and family well-being when shelter is unavoidable:

- a) Ensure educational stability, improved attendance, and success for homeless children by 1) increasing the number school-based DOE social workers staff working with students and families, 2) providing high-level leadership within the DOE to strengthen the education of students who are homeless and design and implement accountability measures, and 3) improving coordination between DOE and DSS to more quickly arrange transportation to school, and inform families of their options and the kinds of assistance available when they enter shelter.
- b) Ensure that all family shelters connect children to early intervention, early education, after-school and summer programming, and connect parents to needed supports. Ensure homeless children have opportunities for play and socialization through communal spaces and opportunities to participate in activities outside of the shelter.
- c) Train shelter staff in trauma-informed care and require that all policies and procedures are executed and implemented with a trauma lens.
- d) Improve the physical environment and access to services and basic needs for families in hotels.

3) Create more permanent housing resources for homeless children and their families:

- a) Develop a 15-year rental subsidy that is project and tenant based.
- b) Increase significantly the number of units for homeless families with children in HPD/HDC preservation and new construction projects, NYCHA public housing, and in projects using Affordable New York tax incentives.
- c) Develop a service-enriched permanent housing model for vulnerable homeless families who are ineligible for NYC 15/15 supportive housing.
- d) Provide incentives for private developers to include housing for homeless families in projects developed under Mandatory Inclusionary Housing.