



Testimony of FPWA

**Presented to:
Oversight Committee
Hearing on Mayor's Management Report:
Agency Performance in the Delivering Housing & Services
Chair Gale A. Brewer
November 1, 2023**

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Good morning, Chair Brewer and Oversight Committee members. Thank you for scheduling this hearing concerning the Mayor's Management Report and putting a spotlight on the delivery of housing and services.

FPWA is an anti-poverty policy and advocacy organization committed to advancing economic opportunity, justice, and upward mobility for New Yorkers with low incomes. Since 1922, FPWA has driven groundbreaking policy reforms to better serve those in need. We work to dismantle the systemic barriers that impede economic security and well-being and strengthen the capacity of human services agencies and faith organizations so New Yorkers with lower incomes can thrive and live with dignity.

Advocating for access to quality, affordable housing is essential to anti-poverty and racial justice work, and to the assurance of dignity for all New Yorkers. The absence of quality, affordable housing in the marketplace impacts the health, educational opportunities, and economic outcomes of individuals and families.¹ At FPWA we are committed to advocacy and research that allows New Yorkers to thrive by ensuring that policy at every level of government is cognizant of the true cost of living.

The nonprofit and community-based organizations (CBOs), that comprise our human services sector, have been critical to our city historically, and now. They often step in to provide housing, services, critical income supports, and programs designed to offset the negative impacts of housing insecurity, frequently at the expense of the direct service providers, when the city falls short of its obligations. In recognition of the findings in the Mayor's Management Report, we urge the city to improve its existing essential housing programs, while also protecting funding for programs and services that provide income supports. The city should look to the human services sector as both thought partners and direct service providers to be funded and engaged in addressing these issues.

The Adams Administration is poised to enter a period of austerity that will be detrimental both to the human services sector, which is overwhelmed and under-resourced, and to the constituencies across the city that they serve. The mayor's proposed 15% budget cuts for the next fiscal year will remove \$16.5 billion from the city budget, undermining the health of many programs. This comes at a time when administrative agencies have vacancies in critical positions. The city was only able to process just under 40% of cash assistance applications and just under 30% of SNAP applications during the last fiscal year, leaving many applicants, seeking vital income supports, to languish without proper consideration.²

These budget cuts and vacancies are particularly untimely because New York City residents are currently suffering through a series of intersecting housing crises, including housing affordability, disinvestment and habitability issues in public housing, the undermining of the right to shelter, and the lack of sufficient funding for housing legal representation in eviction proceedings. Housing instability has a cascading effect on food security, health, education, and other outcomes. Consequently, the city must act with urgency to resolve these issues.

New York City must address housing affordability by not only investing in NYCHA, but also maintaining funding for essential programs and services. Approximately 50% of working-age New York City households cannot cover their basic needs including housing. This forces individuals and families to

¹ <https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/103472/why-housing-matters-for-upward-mobility-evidence-and-indicators-for-practitioners-and-policymakers.pdf>

² <https://citylimits.org/2023/09/18/nyc-failing-to-process-most-food-stamp-cash-benefit-applications-on-time/>

make tough decisions related to their food, access to healthcare, and transportation, to keep a roof over their heads.³

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is the largest public housing system in North America, and houses about 6% of the city's population. We commend the Adams administration for engaging in new projects to address housing affordability, serving seniors, formerly unhoused New Yorkers, and low-income families.⁴ Unfortunately, these measures, while both vital and a step towards addressing housing affordability, are insufficient due to the breadth of the problem. We recognize that New York City will need the support of the state and federal governments to address these issues holistically, and time to implement additional planned housing projects.⁵ We urge the city to recognize the vitality of the administrative programs and services that support the needs of low income and middle-income New Yorkers, because budget cuts and administrative vacancies impact those already struggling with housing unaffordability.

New York City must address the habitability of NYCHA housing and the long processing times associated with tenant requests. NYCHA housing has fallen into disrepair, leaving some residents in dangerous living conditions. The Mayor's Management Report noted the need for an investment of \$78.3 billion to repair NYCHA housing. There are also well-documented implementation problems concerning tenant requests. We support the recently passed New York City Council Resolution seeking the New York State Legislature and the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development to audit the responsiveness of NYCHA managers to tenant requests,⁶ and are disturbed by the reports that as of September of this year, the average response time for completing repairs was approximately one year.⁷

We are thankful to see the city acknowledge the need for investment and reforms to NYCHA in the Mayor's Management Report but want to emphasize that this recognition is in tension with the mayor's proposed 15% budget cuts from every city agency. While budget cuts can allow the city to invest the savings in other projects, this seems inappropriate when the administration is struggling to provide adequate services within existing programs.

The Adams Administration should cease its efforts to undermine the right to shelter in New York City. We are dismayed by the Adams administrations challenges to the right to shelter including issuing 30-day and 60-day eviction notices for adult migrants and migrant families respectively, as well as requesting that the right to shelter be suspended if either the mayor or governor declares a state of emergency.⁸

³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/04/25/nyregion/affordable-housing-nyc.html>

⁴ https://donbuqm3ub5fw.cloudfront.net/files/2023_mmr_ce1a8eaa8b.pdf

⁵ https://www.fpwa.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Human-Services-Funding-Tracker-Annual-Update-FY22_5.24.23-3.pdf

⁶ <https://legistar.council.nyc.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5521095&GUID=9A0EFE8A-EF8B-4858-8C20-EE8B3634E193&Options=&Search=#:~:text=The%20New%20York%20City%20Council%20%2D%20File%20%23%3A%20Res%200068%2D2022&text=Name%3A,of%20NYCHA%20managers%20to%20tenants>

⁷ <https://citylimits.org/2023/10/24/city-lawmakers-call-for-probe-of-how-nycha-handles-tenant-complaints/>

⁸ <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/04/nyregion/eric-adams-right-to-shelter-migrant-crisis.html>;
<https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/10/23/migrants-families-row-shelters-eviction-schools-eric-adams/#:~:text=The%20city's%20announcement%20that%20some,the%20mayor%20said%20last%20Tuesday>.

The Mayor's Management Report asserts that the "Housing Our Neighbors [blueprint] strives to break the cycle of housing instability and homelessness through strategies to prevent homelessness, increased support for New Yorkers in shelter, by accelerating the return to permanent housing, and ensuring that formerly homeless households remain stably housed."⁹ This assertion is hollow if the right to shelter can be suspended or curtailed during a state of emergency.

Since the end of the pandemic, the number of migrants entering the United States and thus migrating to New York City, both through typical means and the bussing of migrants by out-of-state government officials, has led to an increased number of people requesting space in New York City's shelter system. While we understand that accommodating asylum-seekers has been a challenge for city government, we implore the Adams administration to focus on advocacy and programs that will help migrants to gain work authorization and be able to leave the shelter system, instead of challenging the right to shelter and evicting migrants, especially as we approach the winter season.

Challenging the right to Shelter is a racial justice issue. While the shelter system has received migrants from all over the world, they are largely coming from the global south, particularly Venezuela, and large numbers of recent arrivals coming from African countries.¹⁰ Right now migrants are being targeted for exclusion from the right to shelter, but if this right can be suspended during any state of emergency declared by the City or State of New York, it can be denied to anyone.

We applaud efforts by the Adams administration, along with advocacy groups and other government officials, to push the federal government to redesignate Temporary Protected Status to Venezuela, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Cameroon, and Nepal, and initially designate Guatemala, Mali, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mauritania, and Nigeria. The redesignations were successful, the initial designations were not. We are heartened by the positive impact of TPS eligibility for thousands of migrants currently in New York City shelters who are now eligible for work authorization.¹¹ We urge continued advocacy for countries who were not granted initial designations, which are mostly African nations, and note that African migrants are often left out of this conversation despite representing a large share of migrants coming into the city.¹²

A report by the New York Immigration Coalition and Win argues that expanding housing subsidy programs, particularly housing vouchers, to immigrants could save the city almost \$3 billion by cycling folks out of shelters and into permanent housing.¹³ This is a long-term solution that the city should explore. It is important to note that Robert Callaghan, the plaintiff at the center of the court case establishing the right to shelter, died on the streets of New York while the case was being decided. Rolling back the right to shelter will lead to more deaths, worse health, education, and other issues associated with housing insecurity. We also wish to emphasize that the human services sector and faith groups have been stepping in to address the needs of migrants, including shelter, alongside the city. We

⁹ https://donbuqm3ub5fw.cloudfront.net/files/2023_mmr_ce1a8eaa8b.pdf

¹⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/article/nyc-migrant-crisis-explained.html>

¹¹ <https://apnews.com/article/biden-tps-border-asylum-venezuela-temporary-status-2fa052ceacb020b861bb82332912bc92>

¹² <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/13/nyregion/west-african-immigrants-nyc.html>;
<https://www.nytimes.com/article/nyc-migrant-crisis-explained.html>

¹³ <https://winnyc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Housing-Instead-of-Emergency-Shelter-for-Asylum-Seekersbriefv4.pdf>

urge you to support these organizations and partner with them to address both short-term and long-term housing issues.

New York City needs to fully fund its universal representation program in eviction proceedings to protect renters. Eviction is also a racial justice issue. Black households in New York City are three times more likely to face eviction than white households.¹⁴ In 2017 New York City became the first in the nation to create a Right to Counsel in eviction proceedings. Today, that right to counsel is undermined by a lack of funding to support existing cases. Since the end of the eviction moratorium in January 2022, there have been over 65,000 eviction proceedings in New York City, and the tenants have been unrepresented in more than half of them.¹⁵ Over 90% of landlords have legal representation in eviction proceedings, creating a dangerous power imbalance that the city's universal representation law was meant to solve.¹⁶ We urge the city to work with housing legal service providers to fully fund this program and to ensure that there are enough providers to guarantee representation to all eligible New Yorkers. In the coming year, FPWA aims to organize faith leaders, who have a long history of housing advocacy and direct services, in support of this issue.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. New Yorkers are struggling to find and maintain affordable housing. We at FPWA look forward to working closely with you to ensure that the city can implement equitable reforms that will meaningfully improve the lives of New Yorkers and will support the efforts of the faith groups and human services organizations that we represent.

¹⁴ [https://prattcenter.net/uploads/0222/1645804924258026/Racial Justice the Right to Remain Final.pdf](https://prattcenter.net/uploads/0222/1645804924258026/Racial_Justice_the_Right_to_Remain_Final.pdf)

¹⁵ <https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/nyccrisismonitor>

¹⁶ <https://citylimits.org/2023/01/03/nycs-floundering-right-to-counsel-fails-to-keep-pace-with-eviction-cases/>