

MEMORANDUM IN SUPPORT

“Home Stability Support”

A.1620 (Hevesi et al.) and S.2375 (Krueger et al.)

March 13, 2019

The Community Service Society of New York strongly supports this legislation, which would provide state-funded rent supplements to many of the state’s poorest households facing eviction, homelessness, or loss of housing. It would replace existing optional rent supplements with a new subsidy bridging the gap between the current shelter allowance and 85 percent of the federally determined fair market rent. This proposal has been incorporated into the Assembly and Senate’s one-house budgets.

The Community Service Society is a 175-year-old independent nonprofit organization that addresses some of the most urgent problems facing low-wage workers and their communities in New York City, including the effects of the city’s chronic shortage of affordable housing and the high rate of homelessness that results from it.

Home Stability Support would authorize the provision of rent supplements to public assistance households who are homeless, as well as those at risk of becoming homeless due to eviction, domestic violence, or hazardous conditions in the home. These supplements would enable households to afford market rents.

This would help fill a major gap in the state’s housing programs. New York State and New York City have undertaken admirable efforts to increase the stock of affordable housing, but these efforts have done little to reduce or prevent homelessness because they are not well targeted to the people most at risk of homelessness – those with the lowest incomes. State and city housing production programs are based on federal subsidy streams that help pay for the construction of new housing but rely on tenants’ rents to pay the costs of operating housing. As a result, they provide only limited benefit to households with incomes too low to enable them to afford rents that would fully cover these operating costs.

New York State does also provide rent assistance – subsidies that tenants can use to help pay their rent, including operating costs – but it does so through a patchwork of inadequate programs. Home Stability Support would respond to this problem by rationalizing the

state's rent assistance programs, increasing the amount of rent covered, and increasing the number of tenants receiving rent assistance. This would help thousands of individuals and families remain in their communities and help thousands of New Yorkers escape homelessness, while also relieving local governments of the strain of providing shelter.

Home Stability Support is well designed to accommodate the needs of local governments. It would provide state funds to cover the gap between local shelter allowances and 85 percent of the federal fair market rent, while allowing local governments to opt to provide funding to enable the program to reach 100 percent of fair market rent. This would allow New York City to respond to its extreme housing scarcity while also maximizing relief to local government in other parts of the state.

It would also target relief for public assistance households. The Community Service Society's 2018 Unheard Third survey has found that in the past year 48 percent of low-income households receiving public assistance have faced a housing hardship such as falling behind on rent, being threatened with eviction, or doubling up with another family, compared with 31 percent of all low-income households in New York City.

This much needed program will keep families and individuals on public assistance in their homes and out of homeless shelters, significantly reducing costs to local governments by preventing evictions as well.

For further information, please contact:

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