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## Memorandum in Support

### **HOME STABILITY SUPPORT WILL BRING HOUSING SECURITY AND DRAMATIC REDUCTIONS IN THE SOARING COSTS OF EMERGENCY SHELTER A. 1620(HEVESI)/S.2375(KRUEGER)**

*Adds §131-bb, and amends §153 of the Social Services Law*

*The HSS bill would provide rent and heating supplements to enable low-income New Yorkers to remain in their homes. Empire Justice Center strongly supports this bill.*

New York State continues to break homelessness records on an annual basis. Across the State, more than 90,000 New Yorkers are homeless each night and more than 150,000 children experience homelessness over the course of a year.

We have learned much about the impact of homelessness and housing insecurity – children do less well in school, parents are less able to secure and retain employment, mental and physical health are in jeopardy and the general well-being of the family suffers.

Empire Justice supports proposals to build more affordable housing, supportive housing and emergency shelters. But these proposals are costly, and will take years to complete. The problem of lower-income New Yorkers unable to meet their housing costs represents a crisis that must be addressed now. The appalling disconnect between welfare rent allowances and the actual cost of housing must be addressed immediately.

Most public assistance recipients live in private housing with rent costs that are greater, often 150 to 200 percent greater, than the amount they receive for rent. Without a swift change in policy, these New Yorkers face chronic housing instability and the hardship that comes with it. At the same time, the cost of emergency shelter, of emergency medical needs, of diminished educational attainment and employment outcomes must be borne in large measure by the State and localities. The costs are prohibitive.

Empire Justice strives to make legislators aware that the need, while certainly acute in New York City and the suburbs, is extreme throughout the state. In Albany County, the rental amount provided by public assistance equals less than a third of the cost for a modest but decent two-bedroom unit; in Suffolk County the welfare rent would meet only slightly more than one-fifth of that cost and in Erie County, the public assistance rent amounts to just over one-third of the cost of a reasonable rental unit. This is clearly a statewide crisis that needs a statewide solution.

In addition, many upstate households must pay for heat on top of their rent cost. The existing welfare fuel-for-heating allowance has not been increased since its creation more than 30 years ago. The inability to meet heating costs may mean that the family must relocate or must endure hazardous living conditions – another manifestation of housing instability.

We urge the Legislature to adopt and fund the Home Stability Support initiative (HSS). HSS will create a new statewide rent supplement program for families and individuals facing eviction, homelessness, or loss of housing due to domestic violence or hazardous conditions. The HSS rent supplement would enable a household to pay up to 85% of the HUD Fair Market Rent. To account for the inadequacy of the current fuel allowance, HSS will also include a fuel supplement for those households that pay for heat separately from their rent.

HSS will reverse the growing trend of homelessness in New York State, keep low-income families and individuals in their homes, save millions of taxpayer dollars for emergency shelter and associated costs and will bring housing stability to thousands of struggling households.

Empire Justice Center urges you to support the Home Stability Support initiative.

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