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HUNGERFREENYC.ORG



Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York
New York State Capitol
Albany, New York, 12224

March 10th, 2020

Dear Governor Cuomo:

On behalf of Hunger Free NYC (a division of Hunger Free America), an advocacy and direct service anti-hunger organization, we write this memo in support of the Home stability Support (HSS) legislation (S.2375/A.1620) which would drastically reduce the homeless population across the city and state and would help thousands of New Yorkers stay in their homes. We have done extensive research on the most cost-effective methods of solving hunger and poverty and this legislation strongly aligns with our conclusions.

In all of New York State, there are 2.1 million food insecure individuals, essentially one in nine State residents. Many are children living in the 253,000 homeless individuals pending their days and nights in shelters and government offices, navigating the complicated and inadequate social safety programs that are available to them. Parents seeking assistance will spend over 16 hours total traveling to and waiting at government offices applying for the most common public benefits, which is time away from gainful employment and parental duties. New York rents have been skyrocketing for decades, far faster than the overall rate of inflation, and the median monthly rent is now \$3,355 in Manhattan, \$2,841 in Brooklyn, and \$2,819 in Queens. Even in the lowest-rent neighborhoods of the city – all in the Bronx – rents are often \$1,500 – \$1,600 per month. The “rent is too damn high” is not just a cathartic rallying cry. It is a reality that fuels the twin crises of homelessness and food insecurity in our city.

Landlords often require that tenants have gross incomes at least 40 times the monthly rent, but that target is far easier to reach for the wealthy rather than the working class. While there is a vacancy rate of nearly 9 percent for apartments affordable to households earning \$200,000 yearly, for those earning the median income of \$55,322, the rental vacancy rate for housing they can afford is less than 3 percent. For those who earn even less – the 670,000 extremely low-income households in our city who need a place renting for less than \$800 per month based on their public assistance shelter allowance – the vacancy rate has plummeted to just 1.2 percent.

The most effective step that the State can take to reduce hunger and homelessness is to make more deeply subsidized affordable housing available, especially for those currently without homes. HSS could reduce the homeless population by 60 percent by bringing the value of housing vouchers closer to market value. In fact, rent subsidies like HSS are considerably less expensive than the \$71,624 annual cost of emergency shelters for each family in New York City. Additionally, HSS will provide tremendous cost-savings to local and state governments over time from reduced shelter use, shorter shelter stays, prevented evictions, and reduced social service and healthcare costs associated with homelessness.

A division of HUNGER FREE AMERICA



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For these reasons Hunger Free NYC strongly supports this legislation and urges its adoption. We'd be happy to continue the discussion on these issues with you and your staff.

Thank you for your kind attention and public service.

Sincerely,

Joel Berg
CEO
Hunger Free New York City

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