



coalition
for the
homeless

April 2019

STATE OF THE HOMELESS 2019

House Our Future Now!



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Photo by Coalition for the Homeless



Photo by Cindy Trinh

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STATE OF THE HOMELESS 2019
HOUSE OUR FUTURE NOW!

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Coalition for the Homeless

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2019, New York City reached yet another dismal milestone in the history of modern mass homelessness: An all-time record 63,839 men, women, and children slept in shelters each night. The new peak was fueled by a dramatic increase in the number of homeless single adults – a figure that has been growing by an average of *10 percent per year* since Mayor de Blasio took office. The number of single adults in shelters has more than doubled in the past decade, and exceeded 18,000 individuals for the first time in January 2019, while the number of homeless families has soared from 9,600 to more than 15,000 during the same period.

As tens of thousands of men, women, and children continue to struggle to find a way out of homelessness, Mayor de Blasio's hollow plan to address the crisis, *Turning the Tide on Homelessness*, has floundered, failing entirely to live up to its title. This setback is not at all surprising: The plan aimed to reduce the shelter census by a mere 2,500 people between 2017 and 2022, an embarrassingly unambitious objective given the enormity of the crisis. Further, based on the current trajectory of the shelter census and the Mayor's inexplicable resistance to building more permanent housing for homeless New Yorkers, the census will more likely have *increased* by roughly 5,000 people by 2022.

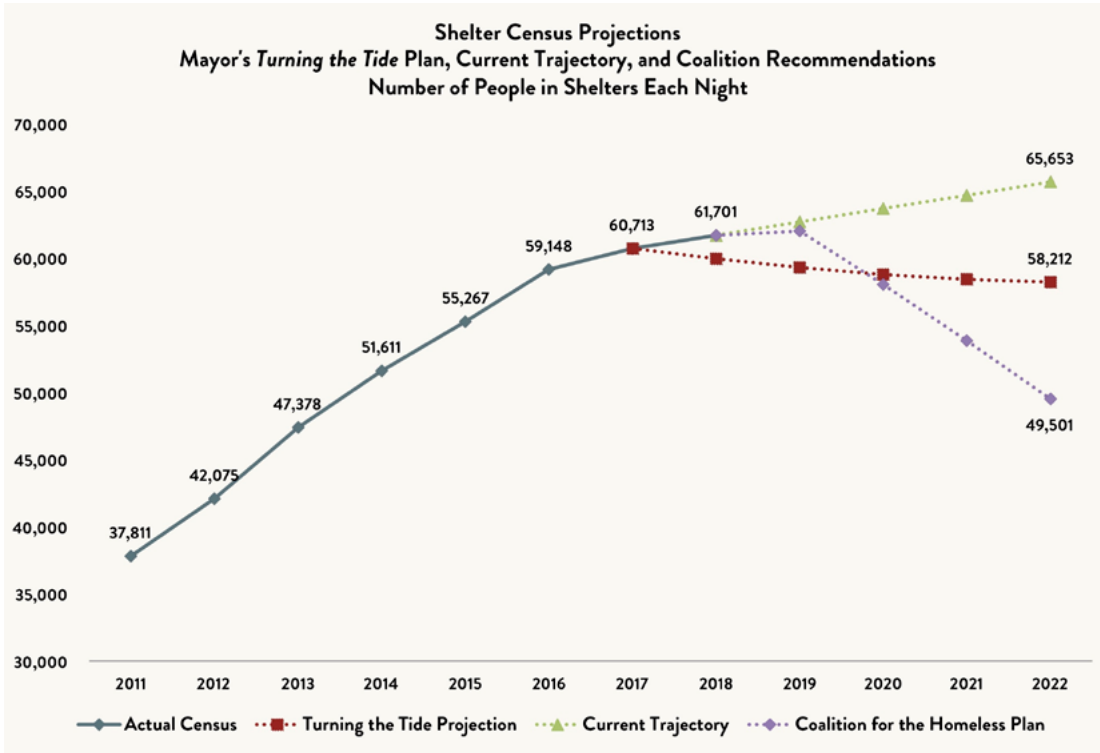
This is an utterly unacceptable outcome given the human and financial impact of mass homelessness in our city: The number of people in shelters each night is big enough to be New York's ninth-largest city, at a cost of more than \$2.3 billion *per year*.

It is, however, an avoidable outcome. Both the City and State governments bear responsibility for the growing crisis, and both have the tools at their disposal to address it if only they had the political will.

The City's construction of new affordable apartments for homeless households and the State's adoption of legislation enacting the Home Stability Support rent supplement program for individuals and families who are homeless or at risk of homelessness are the most direct and promising remedies. To that end, Mayor de Blasio must immediately direct his housing agencies to build 24,000 new units of deeply subsidized, affordable housing and preserve at least another 6,000 existing City-subsidized apartments for homeless New Yorkers. Governor Cuomo must ensure that the Home Stability Support legislation is passed and implemented.

State of the Homeless 2019 examines the recent causes and consequences of mass homelessness in New York City, analyzes City and State policy developments, and offers practical recommendations to effectively address the crisis and meet the needs of homeless families and individuals. If the Mayor and the Governor implement the recommendations outlined in this report, the number of people sleeping in shelters each night would decrease by 20 percent over the next four years (more than 11,000), rather than continuing to rise year after year.

Chart 1



SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

HOUSING

Mayor de Blasio must:

- Follow the [House Our Future NY Campaign](#) recommendation to build at least 24,000 new units of deeply subsidized, affordable housing for homeless households through the *Housing New York 2.0* plan, and set aside at least 6,000 more units for homeless households through the preservation of already-occupied housing, for a total of 30,000 apartments. This goal will require that the Mayor build roughly 2,700 new apartments for homeless New Yorkers each year between 2019 and 2026, which constitutes 20 percent of the newly constructed apartments in the *Housing New York 2.0* plan.
- Continue to provide at least 8,000 City-initiated rent subsidies per year to households in shelters and those at risk of eviction and homelessness.
- Establish a protocol to guarantee that all housing placements made with the use of City rent subsidies are free from conditions that could harm the health and safety of formerly homeless people or force them to return to the shelter system, and ensure that recipients are never coerced to accept inappropriate placements.
- Increase the number of Section 8 vouchers provided to homeless families from 500 per year to 2,000.
- Increase the number of public housing placements for homeless families from 2,000 per year to 3,000.
- Accelerate the timeline for the creation of 15,000 City-funded supportive housing units by scheduling their completion by 2025 rather than 2030.

Governor Cuomo must:

- Implement the [Home Stability Support](#) program through legislation introduced by Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi and Senator Liz Krueger to create a State-funded, long-term rent subsidy for households on public assistance who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing due to eviction, domestic violence, or hazardous housing conditions.

- Accelerate the pace of production of the 20,000 units of supportive housing pledged by the Governor in 2016 by scheduling their completion within 10 rather than 15 years, and fully fund the construction and operation of the remaining 14,000 units for which funds have yet to be appropriated.
- Follow the recommendations of the [Bring it Home Campaign](#) and adequately fund existing community-based housing programs for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, as many of those programs have lost 40 to 70 percent of the value of their initial funding agreements due to inflation and inadequate State investment.
- Eliminate rent law loopholes and provide sufficient enforcement of rent regulation by eliminating vacancy bonuses, ending high-rent vacancy decontrol, and restoring preferential rent protections.
- Ensure effective reentry planning for individuals being released from State prisons in order to identify viable housing options prior to each individual's scheduled release date.
- Expand the Disability Rent Increase Exemption program (DRIE) to include households with a family member with a disability who is a child or an adult who is not the eligible head of household. This would help families retain their rent-stabilized housing, prevent their displacement to a system ill-equipped to meet their needs, and, simultaneously, prevent possible deregulation of their apartments.

The Mayor and Governor together should:

- Expand access to supportive housing for adult families – a population with disproportionately high levels of disabilities and long shelter stays.
- Ensure that individuals who have served their prison sentences receive adequate support services and are not incarcerated past their release dates because of a lack of housing or shelter options.

SHELTER PROCESSES AND CONDITIONS

Mayor de Blasio must:

- Increase capacity in the shelter system to maintain a vacancy rate of no less than 3 percent for each shelter population at all times so that homeless New Yorkers are no longer effectively denied access to decent shelters that meet their needs.
- Develop a medical respite program and longer-term residential supports to address the needs of individuals with medical conditions released from hospitals and other institutions who cannot be accommodated within the shelter system.
- Ensure that all shelters serve homeless individuals and families with dignity, provide a safe environment, and are adequately staffed at all times to provide meaningful social services, housing search assistance, and physical and mental health care and/or referrals.
- Direct the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to institute twice-monthly compliance monitoring of all single adult shelters to better assess and address problem conditions.
- Provide adequate capital funds to ensure that shelter facilities are properly maintained and repaired expeditiously.
- Place homeless families with children in shelters near the children's schools.
- Eliminate the requirement that families applying for shelter bring their children to their first intake appointment, which results in children needlessly missing school.
- Ensure that homeless parents are made aware of all educational rights and resources.
- Enroll all homeless preschool children in early care or Pre-K.
- Guarantee annual [Bridging the Gap](#) funds for at least 100 school-based social workers to support homeless students.
- Ensure that all staff working with homeless children are fully trained to provide trauma-informed care.

Governor Cuomo must:

- Reverse harmful cuts to New York City's emergency shelter system that have resulted in the State short-changing the City hundreds of millions of dollars over the past six years, and share equally with the City in the non-Federal cost of sheltering families and individuals.
- Establish a structure to regulate and finance medical respite programs.
- Conduct oversight of all hospitals and nursing homes to prevent inappropriate discharges to shelters.
- Raise the personal needs allowance for those living in shelters to at least \$144 per person per month, up from the current grossly inadequate amount of \$45 per month.
- Permanently eliminate the statewide requirement to pay "shelter rent" or equivalent program fees as a condition for receiving shelter.

The Mayor and Governor together should:

- Implement a less onerous shelter intake process for homeless families in which 1) applicants are assisted in obtaining necessary documents, 2) housing history documentation is limited to the prior six months, and 3) DHS-identified housing alternatives are investigated to confirm their availability, safety, and lack of risk to the potential host household's tenancy.
- Fund additional services for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illnesses, such as expanding access to inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care, providing mental health services in more single adult shelters, and adding more Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams.

UNRELENTING RECORD HOMELESSNESS

MODERN HOMELESSNESS IN THE WAKE OF THE GREAT RECESSION

- The last appreciable reduction in homelessness in New York City took place immediately prior to the Great Recession, and since then the shelter census has doubled.
- In February 2019, an average of 63,615 men, women, and children slept in New York City shelters each night, just shy of the all-time record set in January.
- However, the census trends by household composition diverged significantly in the past year: The number of homeless families decreased slightly, while the number of single adults increased by 9 percent.
- An all-time record 18,212 single adults slept in shelters each night in February 2019, up 150 percent from 2009. Between September 2018 and April 2019, the number of single adults in DHS shelters reached a new nightly record high 32 times.
- In fiscal year 2018, an all-time record 133,284 unique individuals spent at least one night in a DHS shelter – an increase of 61 percent since fiscal year 2002 when the figure was 82,808 – fueled in large part by the increase in the number of homeless single adults.

Chart 2

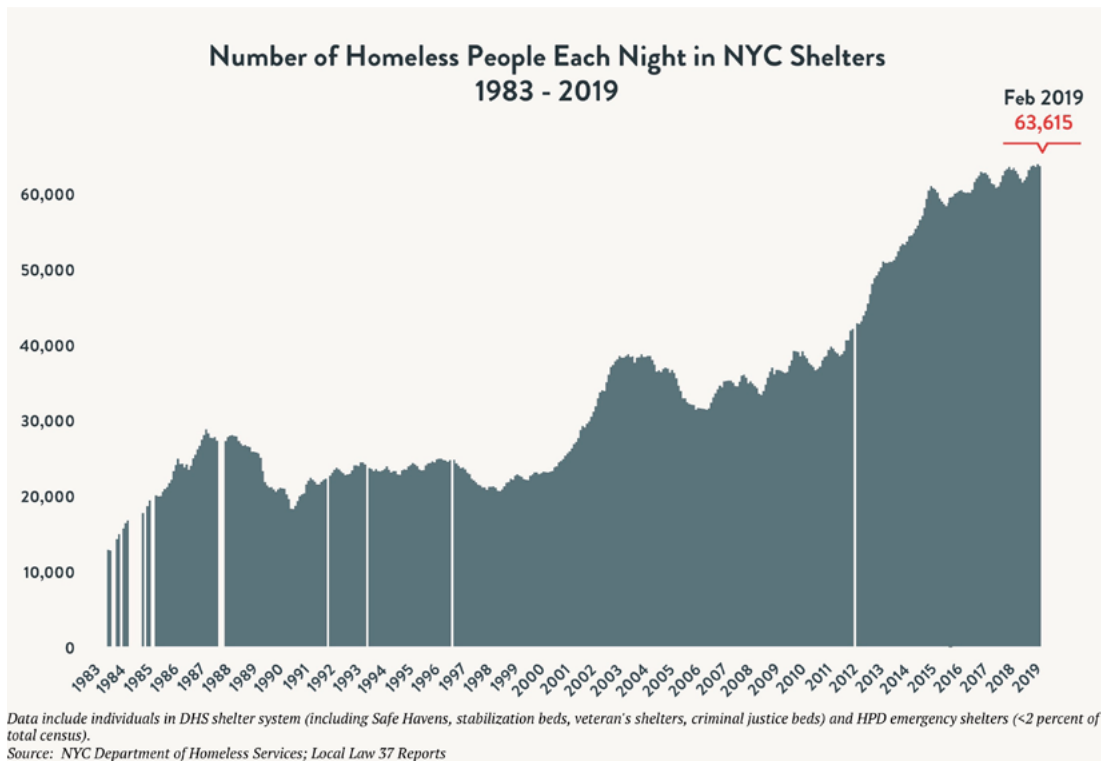


Chart 3

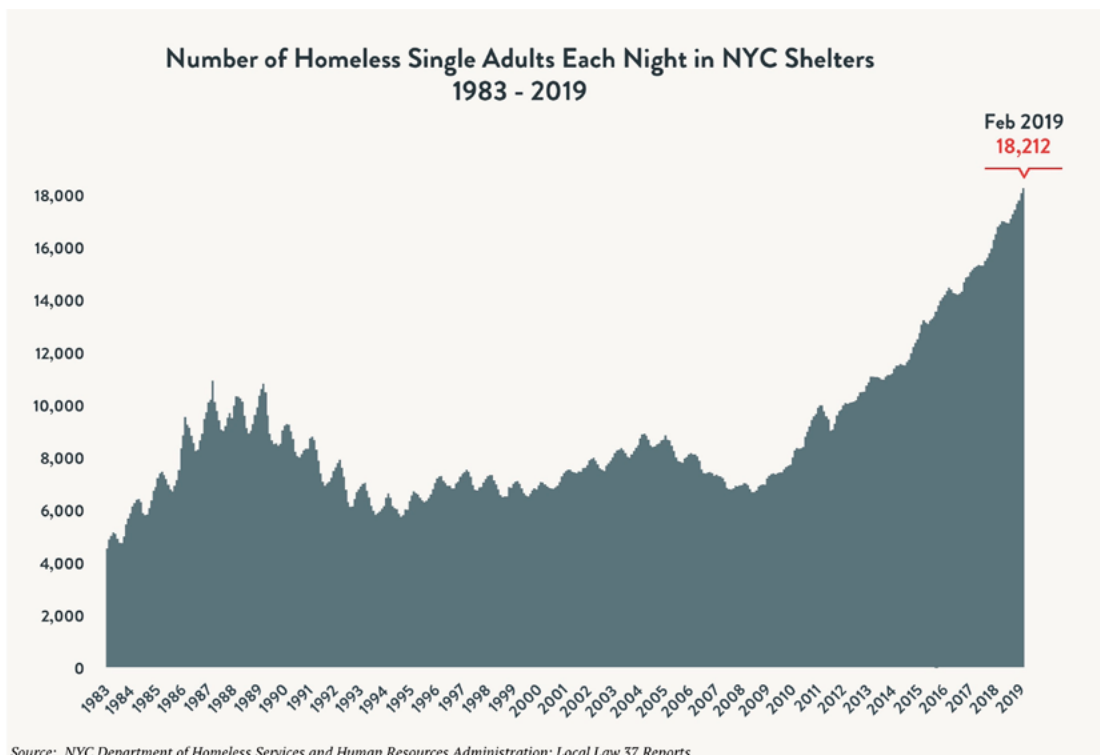


Chart 4

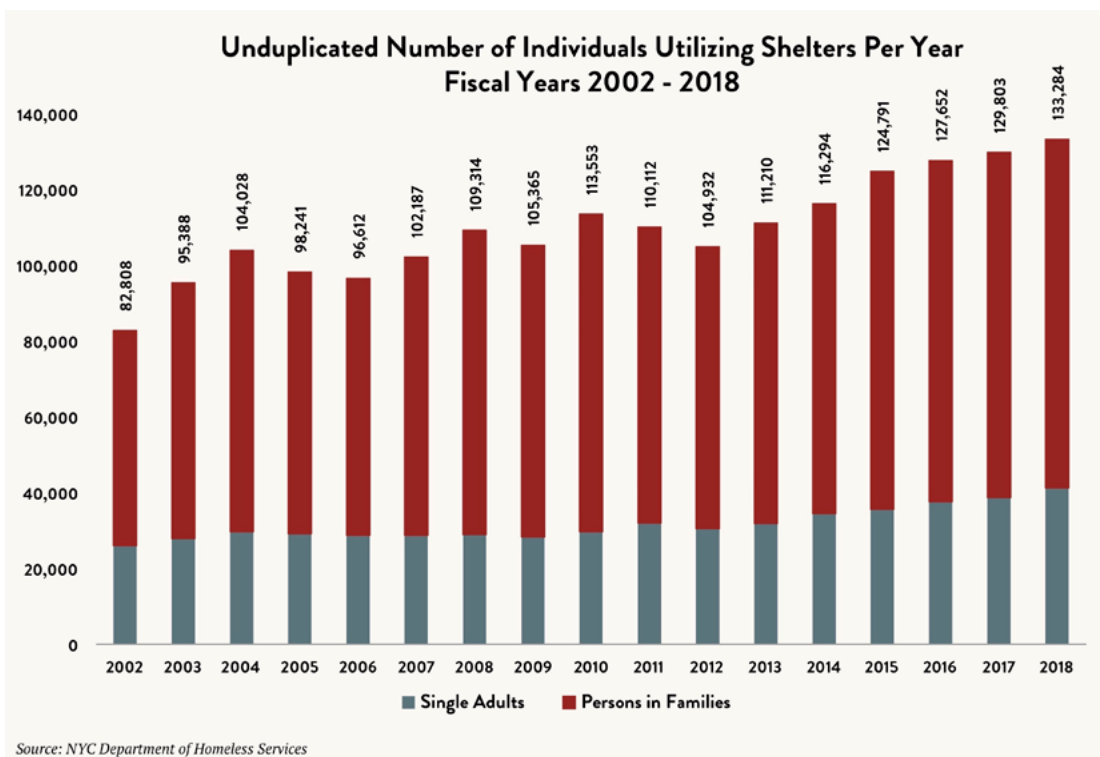




Photo by Coalition for the Homeless



Photo by Alexis Fuchs



Photo by Coalition for the Homeless

HOMELESSNESS POLICY REPORT CARD

NEW YORK CITY

Housing and Prevention	Grade
Housing Production and Supply	F
Housing Vouchers and Stability	B-
Supportive Housing	C
Homelessness Prevention	A-
Shelter Processes and Conditions	
Meeting the Unprecedented Need for Shelters	C+
Family Intake and Eligibility	D
Shelter Conditions	C+
Homeless Children and Students	C-

NEW YORK STATE

Housing and Prevention	Grade
Housing Vouchers and Stability	F
Supportive Housing	C
Homelessness Prevention	F
Shelter Processes and Conditions	
Meeting the Unprecedented Need for Shelters	F
Family Intake and Eligibility	D
Shelter Conditions	C+

HOUSING PRODUCTION AND SUPPLY

CITY: F

The staggering scale of mass homelessness in New York City, which has repeatedly reached new all-time records on Mayor de Blasio's watch, is a direct result of an extreme shortage of housing affordable to low-income New Yorkers. Between 1996 and 2017, New York City lost more than 1.1 million apartments renting for less than \$800 per month,¹ and the city is currently facing a deficit of more than 500,000 apartments needed in that price range, given the number of low-income households.²

Mayor de Blasio has made one of his signature policy goals the creation and preservation of 300,000 units of affordable housing by 2026, as outlined in his *Housing New York 2.0* plan. However, he has designated only 15,000 of these apartments for homeless households – a paltry 5 percent of his plan. Moreover, just 6,000 of those 15,000 units would be created through new construction and available for homeless households to move into in the near future. Furthermore, many of the 6,000 new apartments are already counted toward the Mayor's separate goal of creating 15,000 units of supportive housing for homeless New Yorkers needing onsite support services, meaning that the housing supply for the majority of homeless New Yorkers who are not in need of supportive housing will barely expand. The remaining 9,000 apartments the Mayor has committed to set aside for homeless New Yorkers under *Housing New York 2.0* are existing apartments slated to be preserved as affordable for tenants already in place. Preserved housing does not enable a homeless person to leave a shelter and move into an apartment until the current tenant moves out, and has a vacancy rate of only about 3 percent per year.³

The Mayor's meager efforts to provide housing to reduce homelessness in New York City are evident in the embarrassingly trivial role the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD), the City's main housing production agency, has played in moving New Yorkers out of shelters – especially when compared with other City agencies. Between fiscal years 2015 and 2018, the City's Department of Social Services (DSS) – an agency tasked primarily with providing public assistance benefits, City-initiated rent subsidies, homelessness prevention, and access to shelters – helped far more New Yorkers move into permanent housing than HPD did, by using City-initiated rent subsidies. In fiscal year 2018, DSS helped more than 8,000 households move out of or avoid using shelters,⁴ while HPD – which is responsible for producing and regulating the city's affordable housing stock – helped only 827 households move out of shelters and into apartments HPD financed or created.

¹ NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey (2017): <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CFHStateoftheHomeless2018.pdf> (see Chart 9).

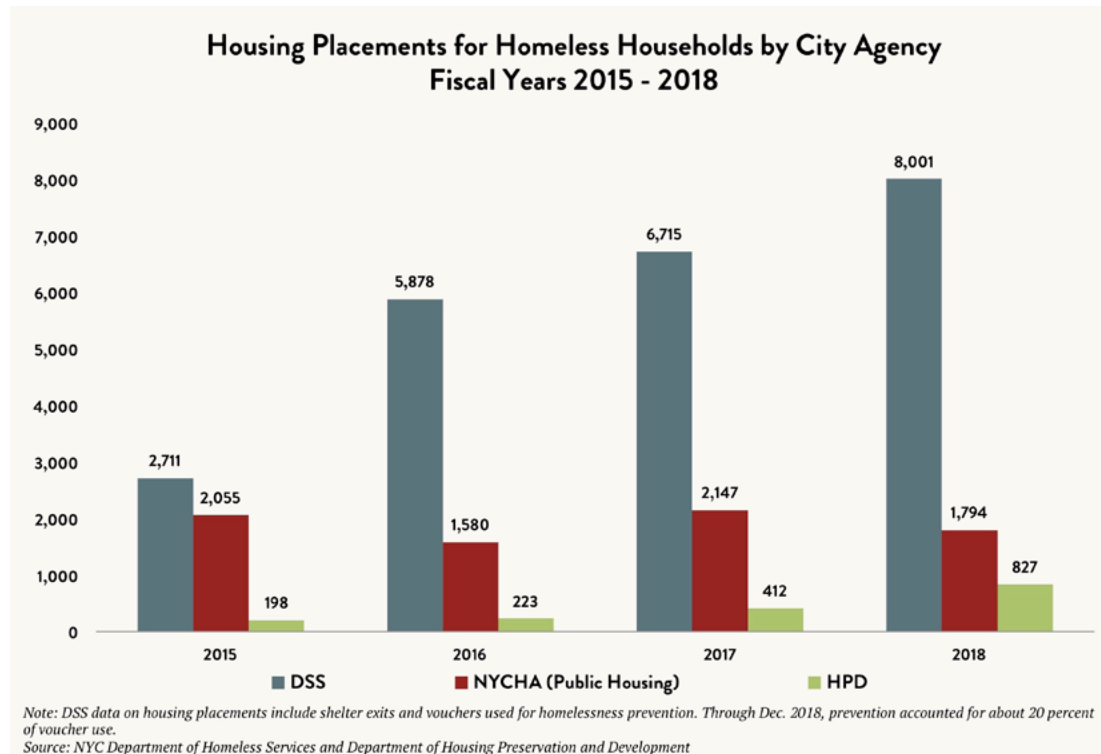
² NYC Housing and Vacancy Survey (2017): <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/CFHStateoftheHomeless2018.pdf> (see Chart 10).

³ Pursuant to HPD verbal reports.

⁴ DHS only provides the combined total number of vouchers used for homelessness prevention and shelter exits. Previous data indicate less than 20 percent of vouchers are used for prevention.

Fewer than 1,700 homeless households moved out of shelters and into HPD-financed apartments between the launch of Mayor de Blasio's *Housing New York* plan in 2014 and June 2018, even as the City has touted record levels of affordable housing production.⁵ Furthermore, the City has refused since 2015 to increase the number of public housing units made available to homeless families, which hovers between 1,500 and 2,000 placements per year.⁶ The City's two principal housing agencies, HPD and the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA), placed *only* 62 more homeless households into permanent housing in 2018 than they did in 2017, despite the enormous and growing scale of the crisis.

Chart 5



Coalition for the Homeless spearheads the [House Our Future NY Campaign](#), which calls on Mayor de Blasio to effectively address the city's homelessness crisis by creating 30,000 apartments for homeless New Yorkers as part of his 300,000-unit *Housing New York 2.0* plan. The campaign urges the Mayor to build 24,000 new apartments specifically for homeless households: about 20 percent of all new construction in the plan from 2019 through 2026, or 2,700 new apartments for homeless households per year. House Our Future NY also urges the Mayor to preserve the affordability of at least 6,000 existing apartments so that homeless New Yorkers can move in after the current tenant leaves. To date, only 5 percent of new units under *Housing New York 2.0* have been built specifically for homeless individuals and families.⁷ By obstinately ignoring the recommendations of the House Our Future NY Campaign – which have been endorsed by almost every major elected official in the city as well as by 64 other

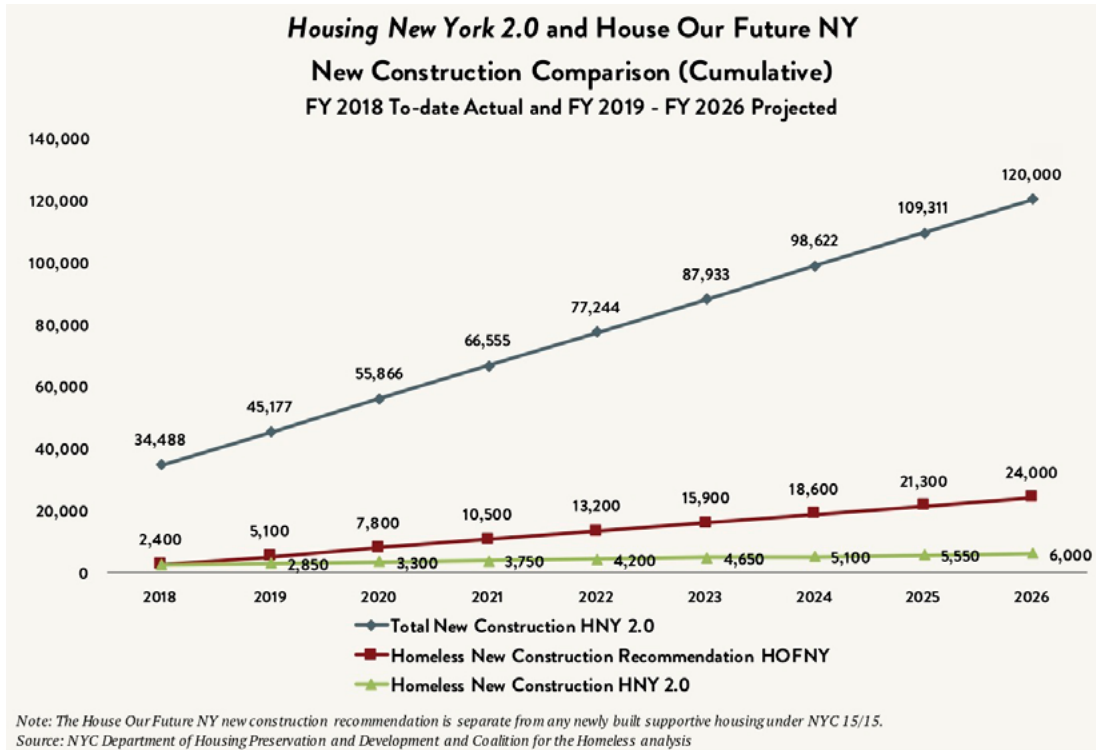
⁵ "De Blasio Administration Financed More Than 34,000 Affordable Homes in 2018 – A New Record." Jan. 16, 2019. From: <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/news/035-19/de-blasio-administration-financed-more-34-000-affordable-homes-2018--new-record#/0>. Move-out numbers from HPD, via FOIL request.

⁶ From NYC Department of Homeless Services, via FOIL request.

⁷ Report of the NYC Council Finance Division on the Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Plan for the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, p. 12. This does not include supportive housing construction.

organizations and thousands of individual New Yorkers – the Mayor is squandering a historic opportunity to reverse the decades-long increase in homelessness that has devastated the lives of countless men, women, and children.

Chart 6



HOUSING VOUCHERS AND STABILITY

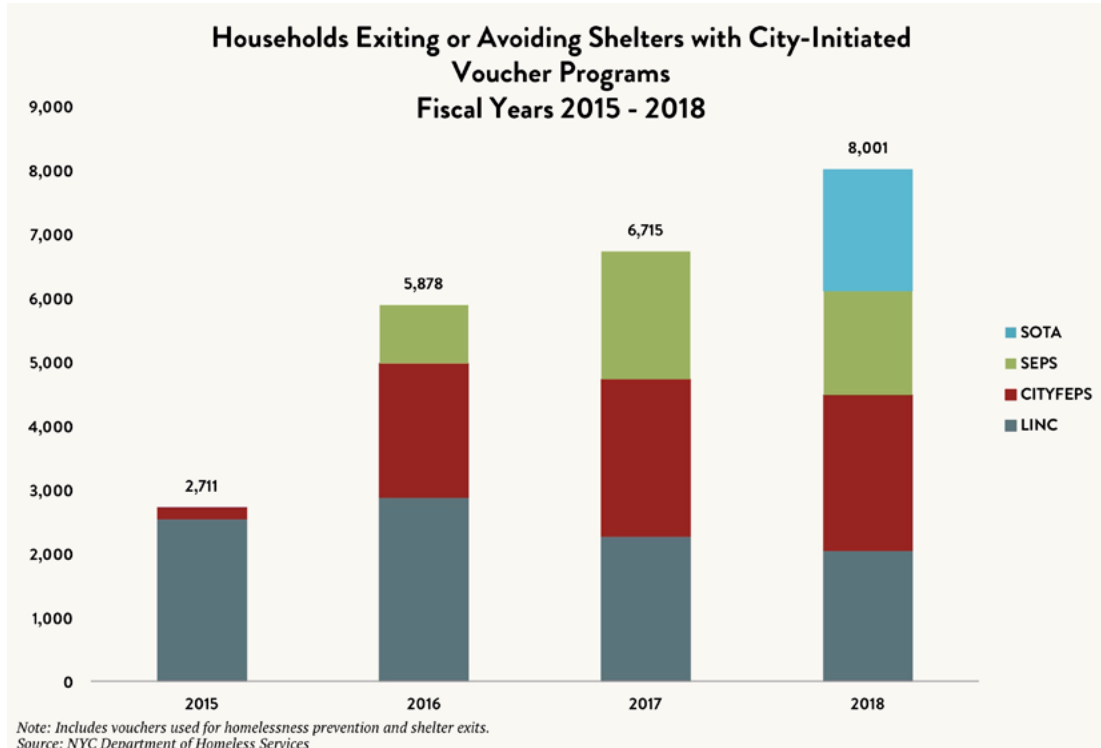
CITY: B- STATE: F

In October 2018, the City consolidated into a single program the multiple rent subsidies introduced since 2014. The new program, called CityFHEPS, has largely the same eligibility criteria as the programs it replaced (LINC, CityFEPS, and SEPS). Placement and stability data are not yet available for CityFHEPS. However, through the end of fiscal year 2018, the previous array of City-initiated rent subsidies continued to help individuals and families move out of shelters or avoid homelessness altogether.

In fiscal year 2018, more than 8,000 households exited or avoided shelters with the help of a City-initiated rent subsidy – nearly three times the number in fiscal year 2015 and up 21 percent compared with 2017. However, the increase in fiscal year 2018 was fueled entirely by the City’s increasing reliance on the Special One Time Assistance (SOTA) program. This program advances one year’s worth of rent for homeless New Yorkers to move either within New York City, to other counties in New York State, or to another state. The program does not provide any ongoing rent subsidy after the initial 12-month rent advance is exhausted.

Because the majority of SOTA recipients have moved out of state and will not receive continued financial support, there are serious concerns about their ability to achieve housing stability. This concern is fueled by numerous reports of poor housing conditions, which have caused some families to return to shelters.⁸ To date, nearly 2,000 households have moved out of shelters using SOTA grants, and so the program’s deficiencies could precipitate significant housing stability problems as more families and individuals start to pass the 12-month mark.

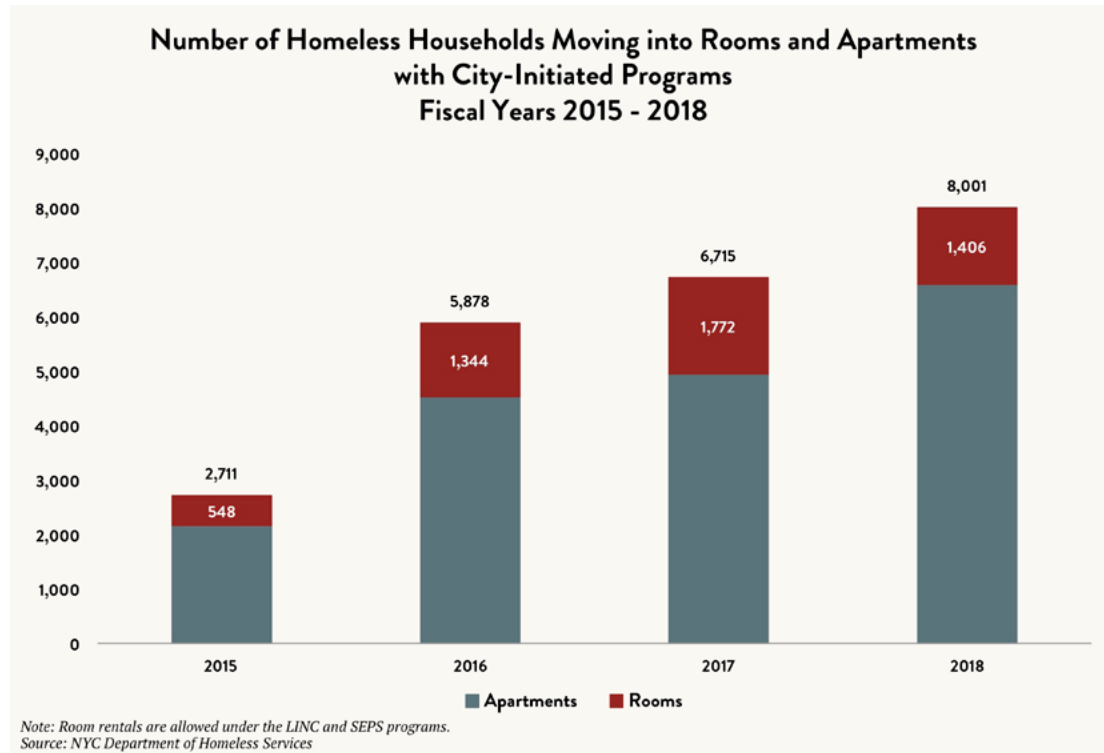
Chart 7



⁸ See CBS New York reports: <https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2019/02/08/legal-aid-notified-dhs-about-sota-problems/>; <https://newyork.cbslocal.com/2019/02/01/east-orange-new-york-homeless-family/>; and <https://newyork.cbslocal.com/category/forgotten-families/>

As the number of housing placements using rent subsidies has risen, the City has also continued to rely on room rentals to help single adults move out of shelters. More than 1,400 single adults moved into rooms instead of their own apartments in fiscal year 2018: roughly half of all subsidized placements for single adults, and about 18 percent of all placements. Some individuals report feeling pressured by the City or shelter employees to accept room rentals, often in apartments with complete strangers as roommates. Not surprisingly, too often this can lead to conflict, housing instability, and ultimately a return to homelessness.

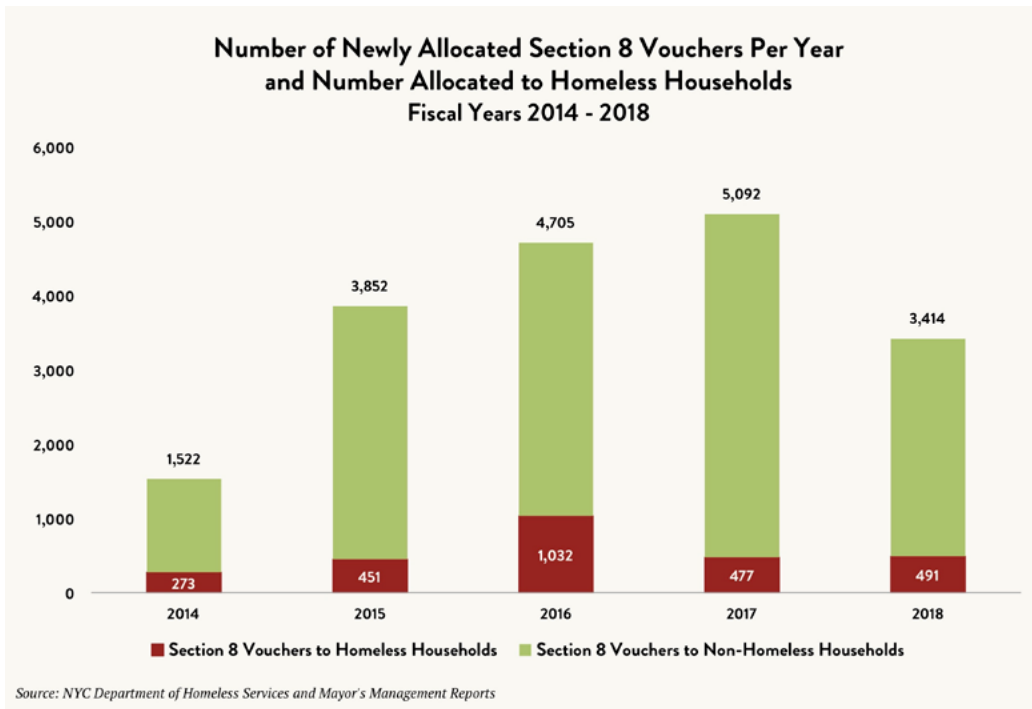
Chart 8



Exacerbating the paucity of affordable apartments for homeless New Yorkers is the inadequate access homeless families and individuals have to the most stable, long-term rent subsidy program: the Section 8 housing choice voucher program. In fiscal year 2018, homeless households received just 14 percent of all newly issued Section 8 vouchers through HPD and NYCHA: a paltry 491 out of 3,414 vouchers.⁹

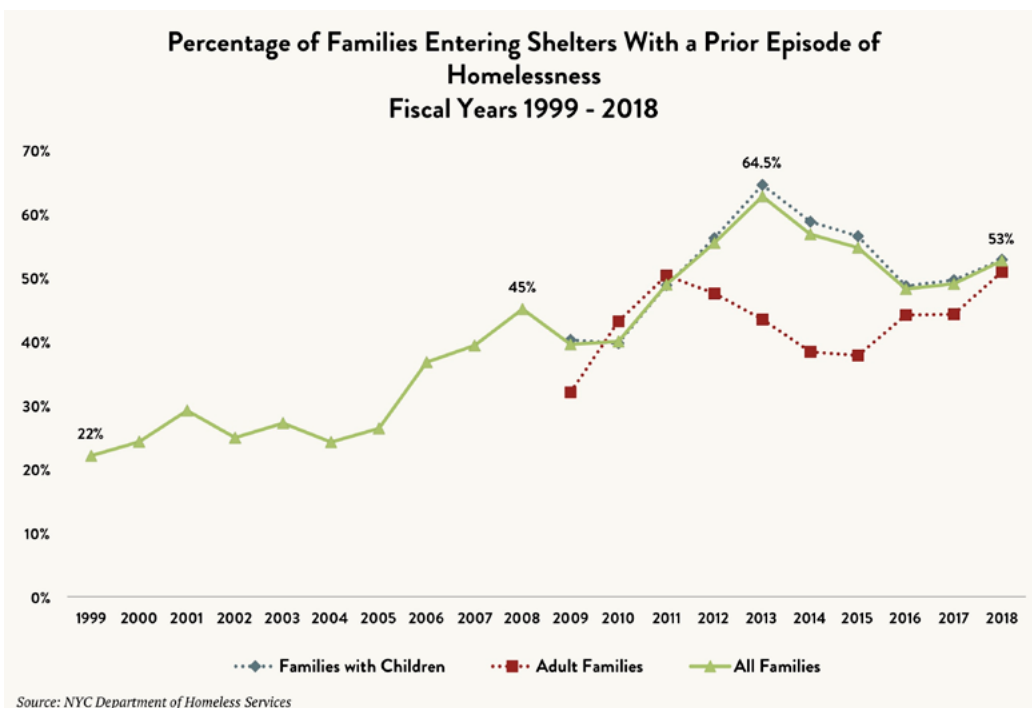
⁹ From DHS exit data compared with the Mayor's Management Reports for HPD and NYCHA.

Chart 9



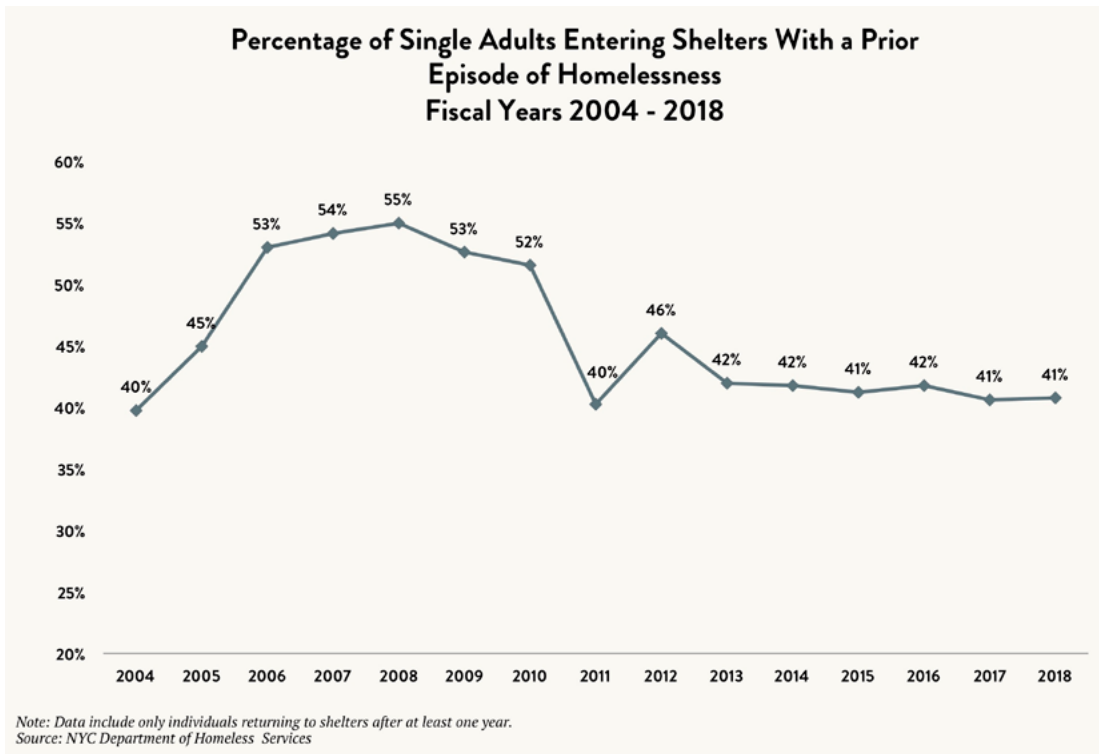
These factors together decrease the likelihood that a family or individual leaving a shelter will achieve housing stability. In fiscal year 2018, 53 percent of all families with children who entered the shelter system had previously been homeless – up from 50 percent in fiscal year 2017, but down from an all-time high of 65 percent in 2013. The return rate for adult families (families without minor children) was a record 51 percent. The fiscal year 2018 shelter return rates reflect a troubling reversal of a trend that had been improving a few years ago, and again indicate the tremendous need for more permanent housing for homeless New Yorkers.

Chart 10



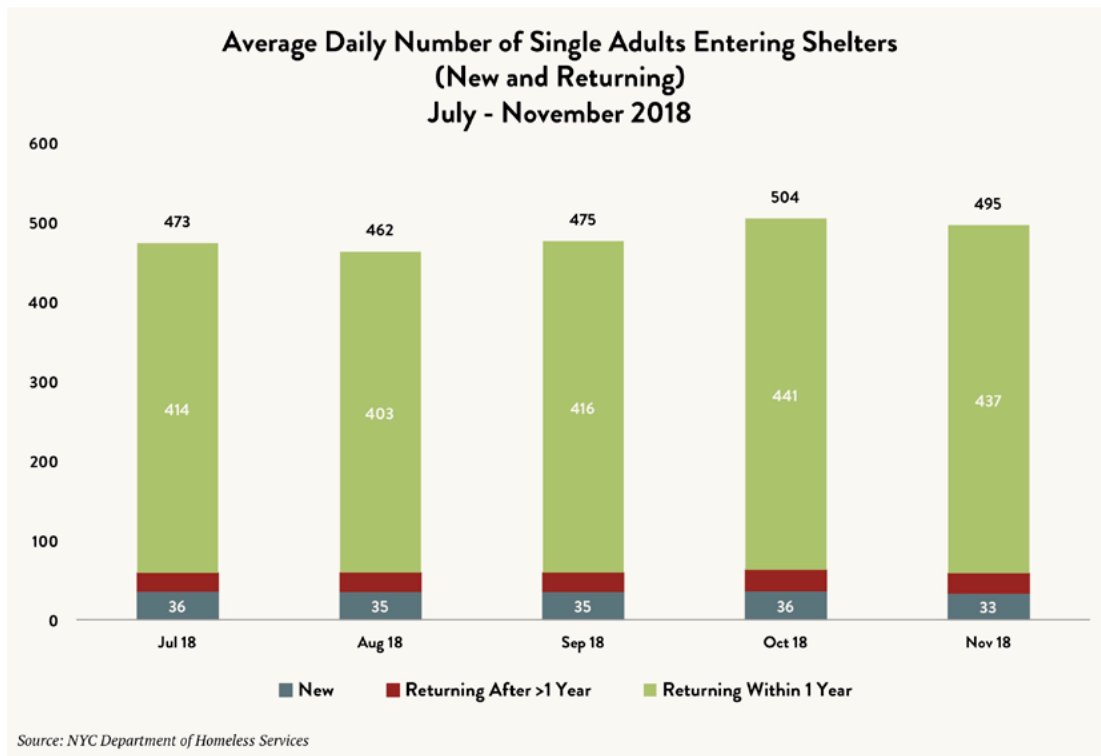
The high return rate of single adults to shelters also remains an urgent problem. Record levels of homelessness and housing instability among single adults can be reduced by placing them in appropriate housing with adequate rent subsidies, as well as support services when needed. In the past six years, the proportion of homeless single adults returning to shelters after having been out of the system for at least one year remained steady at 41 percent. Although this remains well below the high of 55 percent in 2008, it nevertheless represents a substantial portion of single adults entering shelters: 8,628 of the 21,177 single adult men and women who entered shelters in fiscal year 2018 had previously been homeless and exited the shelter system at least one year prior.

Chart 11



Moreover, the number of single adults returning to shelters within one year of leaving remains staggeringly high. Between July and November 2018, 88 percent of adults entering the shelter system on a nightly basis had been homeless within the prior year. These data do not distinguish between individuals who left shelters for only a few days and those who exited for a longer period but whose housing placement ultimately failed. In any case, prioritizing the stability of housing placements for single adults remains paramount: The provision of an adequate supply of deeply subsidized apartments and supportive housing for individuals living with a serious mental illness or disability remains the most effective solution.

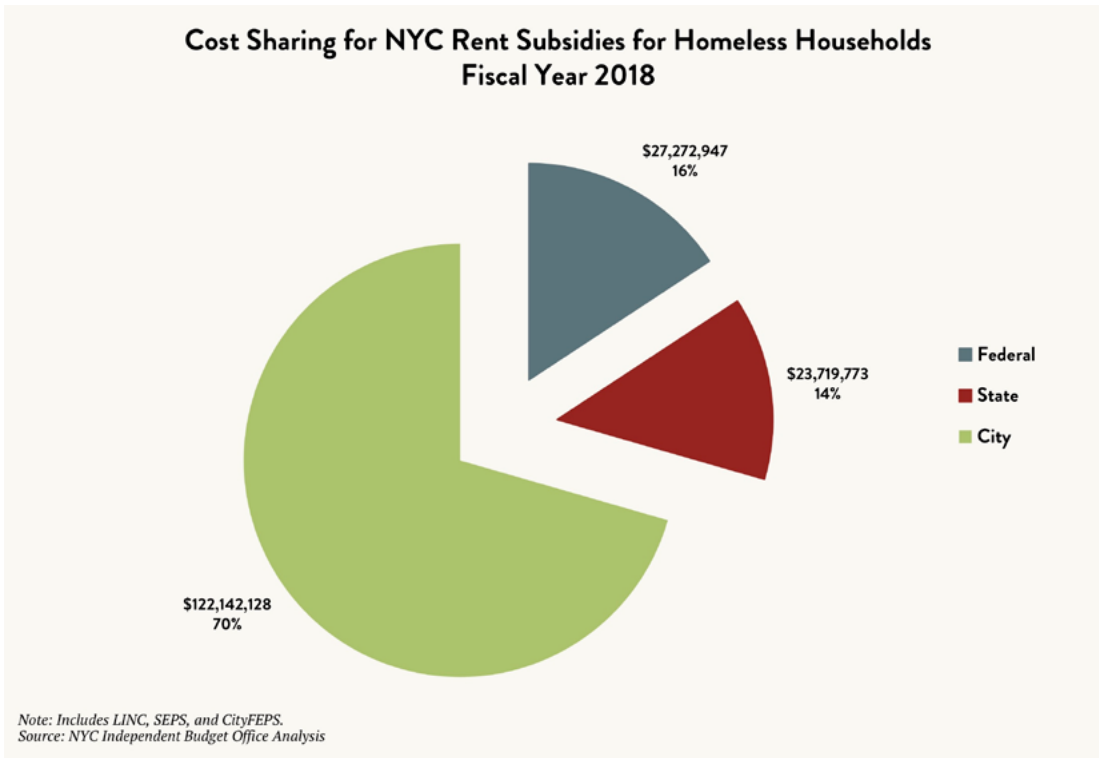
Chart 12



Even as the City struggles to provide stable housing for families and single adults, New York State has consistently shirked its responsibilities to provide any meaningful access to rent subsidies for homeless New Yorkers. In fiscal year 2018, the State contributed just 14 percent toward the cost of local rent subsidies, including LINC, SEPS, and CityFEPS.¹⁰ Moreover, Governor Cuomo refuses to back the widely supported Home Stability Support (HSS) program, which proposes a statewide rent supplement for families and individuals eligible for public assistance and who are facing eviction, homelessness, or loss of housing due to domestic violence or hazardous living conditions. Thousands of New Yorkers would have been saved from the trauma and indignity of homelessness had HSS been implemented when Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi first introduced it in 2016.

¹⁰ This percentage does not include State financial contributions to certain court-ordered State-created rent subsidies, such as FHEPS.

Chart 13



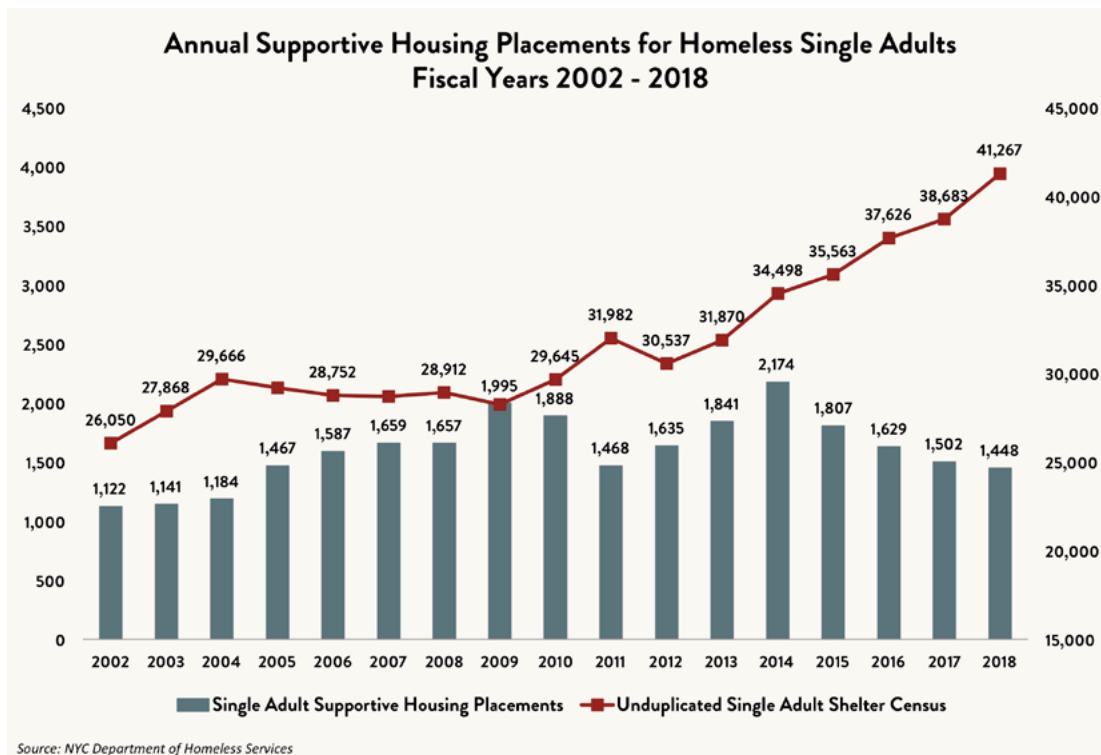
SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

CITY: C STATE: C

The number of homeless single adults who moved into supportive housing units in fiscal year 2018 reached a 14-year low, even as the number of single adults in shelters reached an all-time high. Fewer than 1,450 adults were placed in supportive housing in 2018, or just 3.5 percent of all individuals who spent time in shelters that year. The campaign for a fourth “New York/New York Agreement” began in 2014 as the development pipeline was winding down for the third agreement. Advocates recognized that a new infusion of funds was necessary to ensure adequate access to supportive housing in the years ahead.

Five years later, after numerous false starts in Albany and separate City and State plans that spread the construction of new supportive housing units over a 15-year period, there are more people in need of supportive housing and languishing in shelters than at any point in the past three decades. Despite individual commitments made by Mayor de Blasio in 2015 and Governor Cuomo in 2016, the production of new supportive housing has been far too slow, and the availability of placements far too scarce. The City’s initial goal to open 500 supportive housing units before the end of 2017 and expand openings each year thereafter has proved elusive. By the end of 2018, the City had opened only about 850 supportive housing units. The State likewise had opened only about 550 supportive housing units. The need to bring these units online quickly is dire: Ten years ago, twice as many single adults living in shelters (7 percent) were placed into supportive housing as compared with today. The sharp decline in the number of supportive housing placements is definitive proof that the Governor’s and Mayor’s delays in building supportive housing units have had tragic consequences for the most vulnerable homeless New Yorkers.

Chart 14



Further compounding the incommensurate production of supportive housing is the tenuous status of older supportive housing programs. The woefully inadequate service and operating rates paid to supportive housing providers, which have not been increased in years, place far too much of this desperately needed housing at risk of being lost.

Both the City and State must accelerate the production of supportive housing and bring funding rates in legacy programs up to viable levels, as the number of homeless single adults continues to skyrocket.



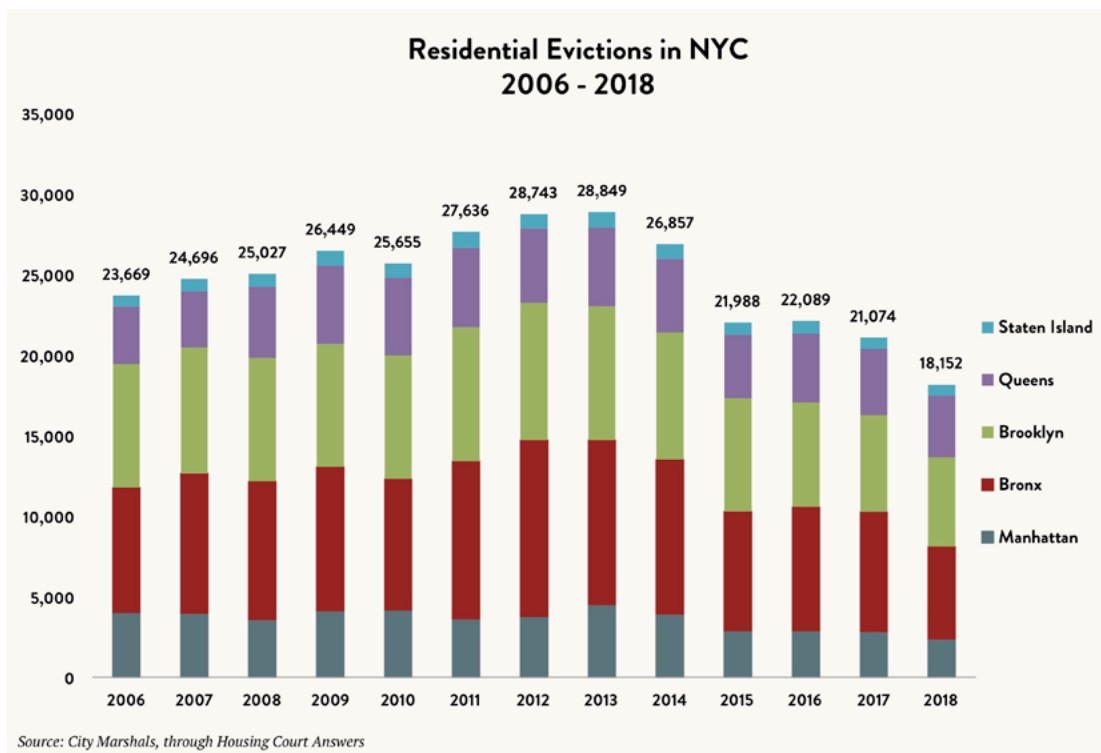
Photo by Coalition for the Homeless

HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION

CITY: A- **STATE: F**

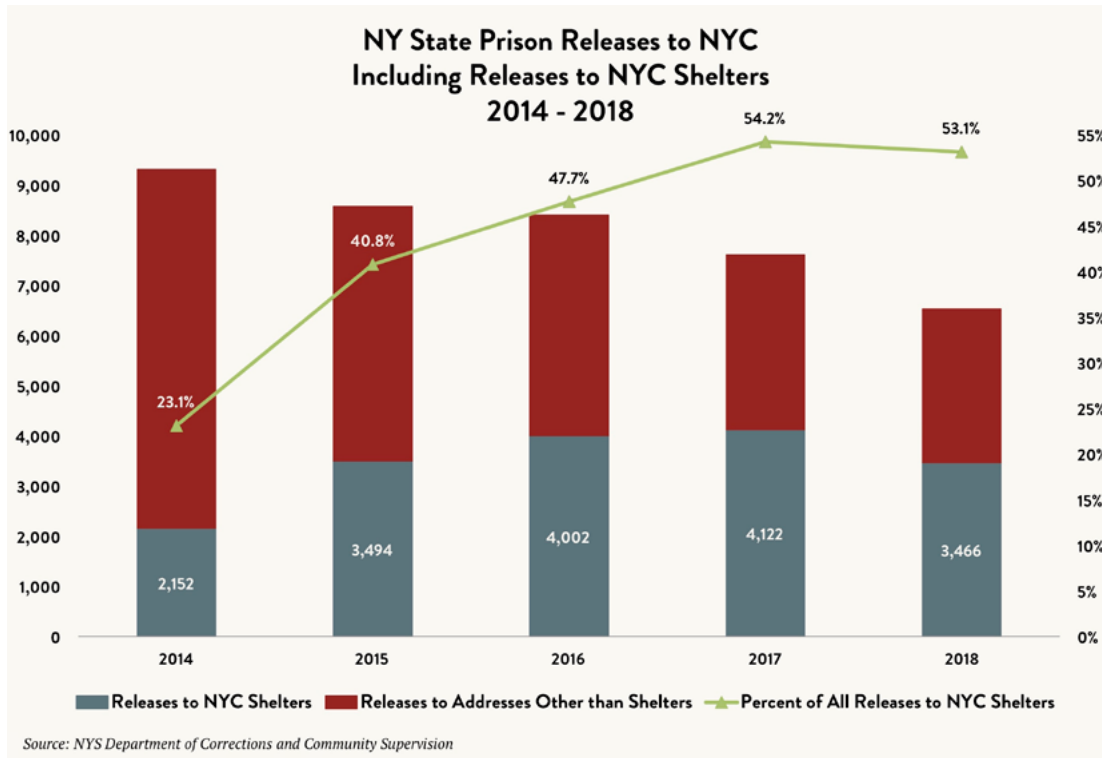
Since 2014, the City has made substantial investments in homelessness prevention by expanding access to rent arrears grants and free legal services for tenants in housing court. In August 2017, the City enacted legislation that guarantees a right to legal counsel for low-income tenants in housing court. The five-year implementation schedule for the right to counsel has begun, and an increasing number of low-income tenants can now access free legal representation when fighting eviction. These investments have contributed to a substantial decrease in evictions since 2014. In fiscal year 2018, about 18,000 evictions occurred in New York City, down 14 percent from the prior year and 37 percent below the 2013 record of more than 28,800 evictions. In fact, 2018 marked the first time in 13 years that the number of evictions in the city fell below 20,000 per year.

Chart 15



In contrast to the City's homelessness prevention efforts, the State continues to significantly exacerbate the problem of record homelessness among single adults through the actions of its Department of Corrections and Community Supervision (DOCCS). The State has allowed its correctional facilities to release parolees directly to New York City shelters rather than assist them with adequate reentry planning and housing placements. In 2018, 16 percent of single adult shelter entrants (or 3,466 individuals) arrived directly from State correctional facilities. Both the percentage and number of formerly incarcerated individuals released directly to New York City shelters rose dramatically between 2014 and 2018. During 2017 and 2018, more than half of all individuals released under community supervision by New York State DOCCS were sent directly to New York City shelters. The lack of appropriate reentry planning also results in some individuals being incarcerated past their release dates because of the lack of appropriate housing and/or shelter options for them.

Chart 16



MEETING THE UNPRECEDENTED NEED FOR SHELTERS

CITY: C+ STATE: F

Both the cost of shelters and the average lengths of stay in them have continued to rise, pushing the price tag of homelessness to new heights. In fiscal year 2018, it cost an average of \$81,700 to provide emergency shelter to a family and \$47,000 to provide emergency shelter to a single adult, given the average lengths of stay for each population. The financial burden of these increased costs is borne almost exclusively by the City, as Governor Cuomo's budgeting practices have resulted in a massive withdrawal of State resources to address poverty and homelessness in New York City. Between 2011 and 2018, the City's share of the cost to shelter homeless adults and families grew by almost \$800 million, while the State's share grew by just \$71 million. Between fiscal years 2011 and 2018, the City shouldered 92 percent of the increased shelter costs not covered by the Federal government.

The State's 2019-20 enacted budget further reduces the State's already inadequate contribution toward shelter costs. Pursuant to State budget language, the City's Human Resources Administration (HRA) now must cover 10 percent of the cost of Family Assistance benefits, which had been reimbursed with Federal funds. The foregone Federal reimbursement will be used prospectively to defray other State costs. The City estimates this shift will cost \$125 million annually beginning in 2020.

Chart 17

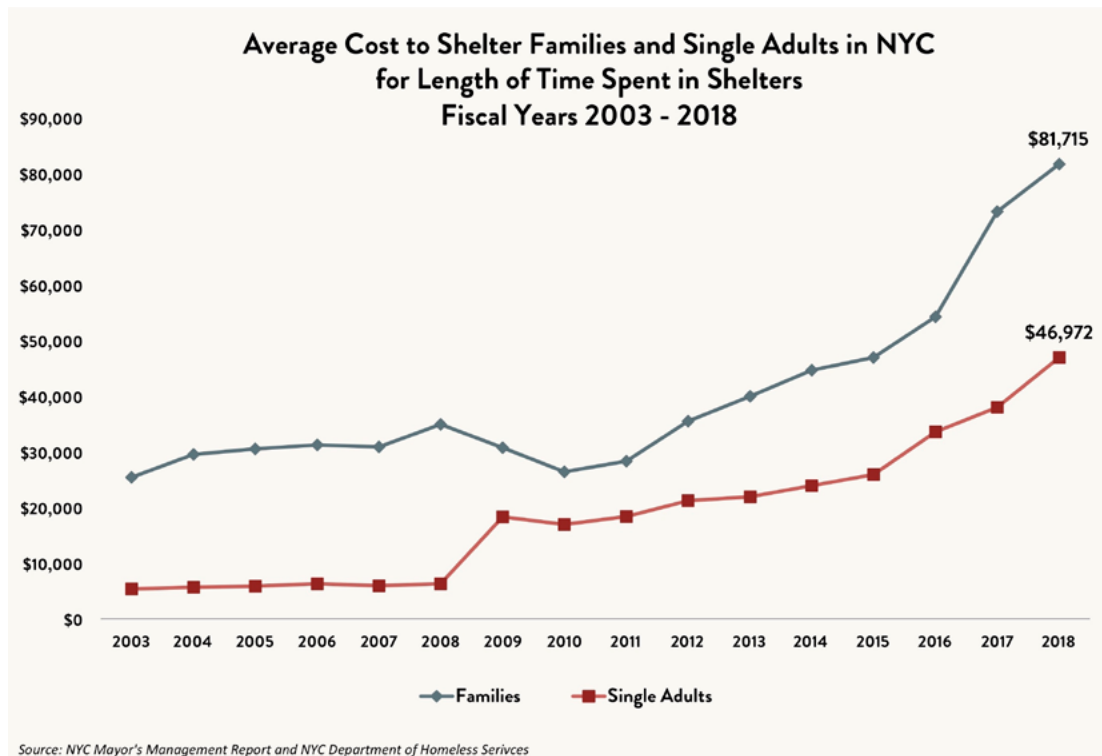
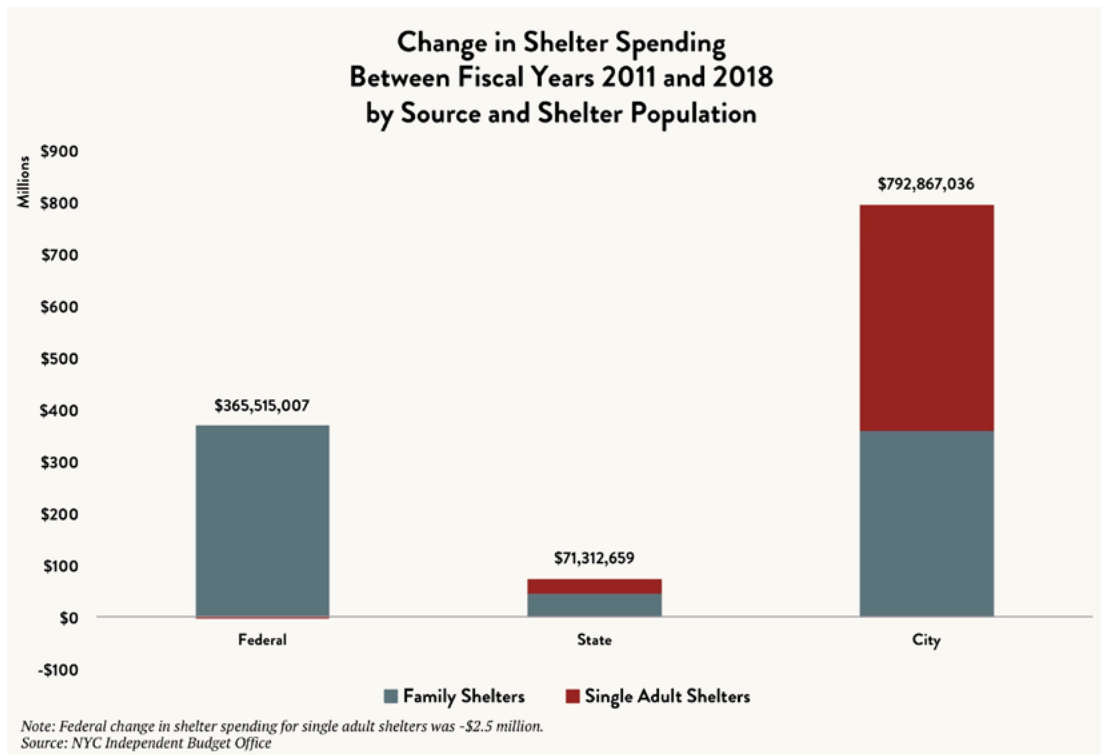


Chart 18



In order to meet the growing need to provide shelter for homeless adults and families, the City has increased capacity and provided a greater vacancy cushion for both single adults and families in recent months. The vacancy rate for single adult shelters during the month of January increased from 1.8 percent in 2018 to 3.4 percent in 2019. For families, the vacancy rate increased from 0.6 percent to 1.7 percent during the same period. When shelter vacancy rates are too low, the City has difficulty making timely shelter placements, providing reasonable accommodation transfers for people with disabilities, and offering placements near children’s schools. For single adults, low vacancy rates increase the City’s reliance on late-night transfers and the use of so-called “pass beds” – the practice of assigning someone to sleep in the bed of another shelter resident who is working overnight. This practice is a clear violation of the City’s legal obligation to provide a shelter bed for each person without doubling-up bed assignments.¹¹ The vacancy rate in the shelter system remained below 3 percent between September and November 2018 as the weather grew colder – driving more single adults into shelters – and the City steadily increased the use of pass beds, violating the law and creating further stress for vulnerable homeless adults.

¹¹ Further problems arising with the use of “pass beds” include the inability of newly assigned residents to access proper storage for their belongings, as well as insufficient time to rest. Frequently, the person who is officially assigned to the bed returns while the “pass bed” recipient is asleep in it, which leads to unnecessary conflict in addition to potential health and safety hazards.

Chart 19

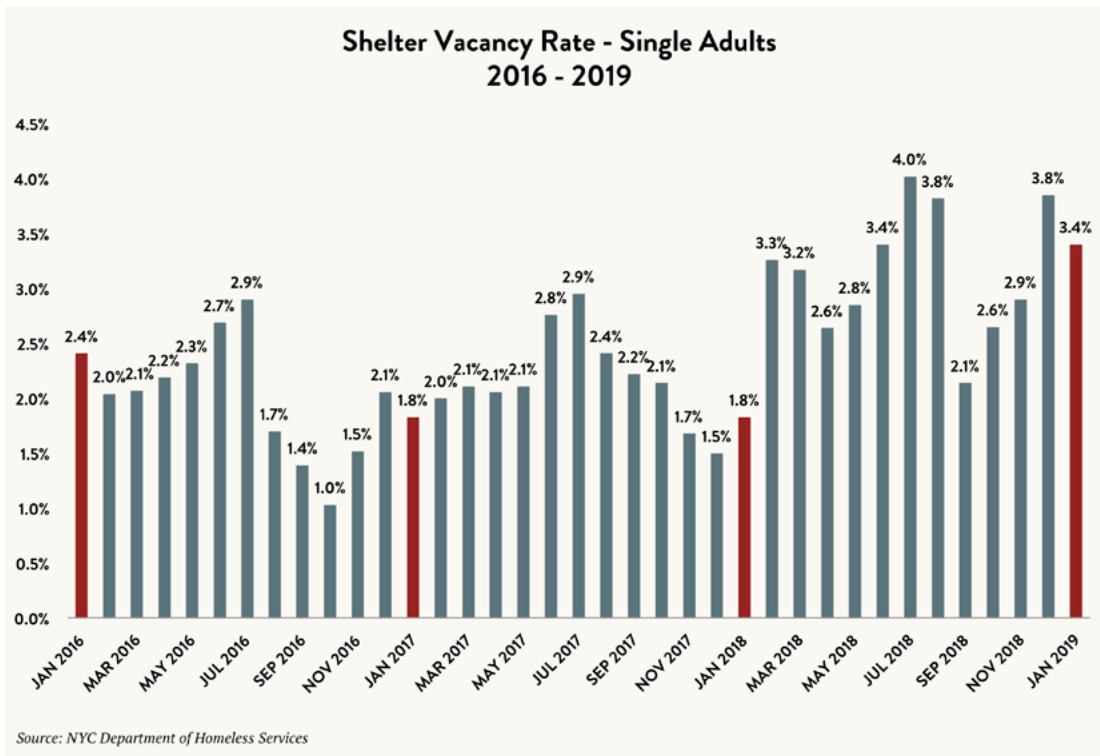


Chart 20

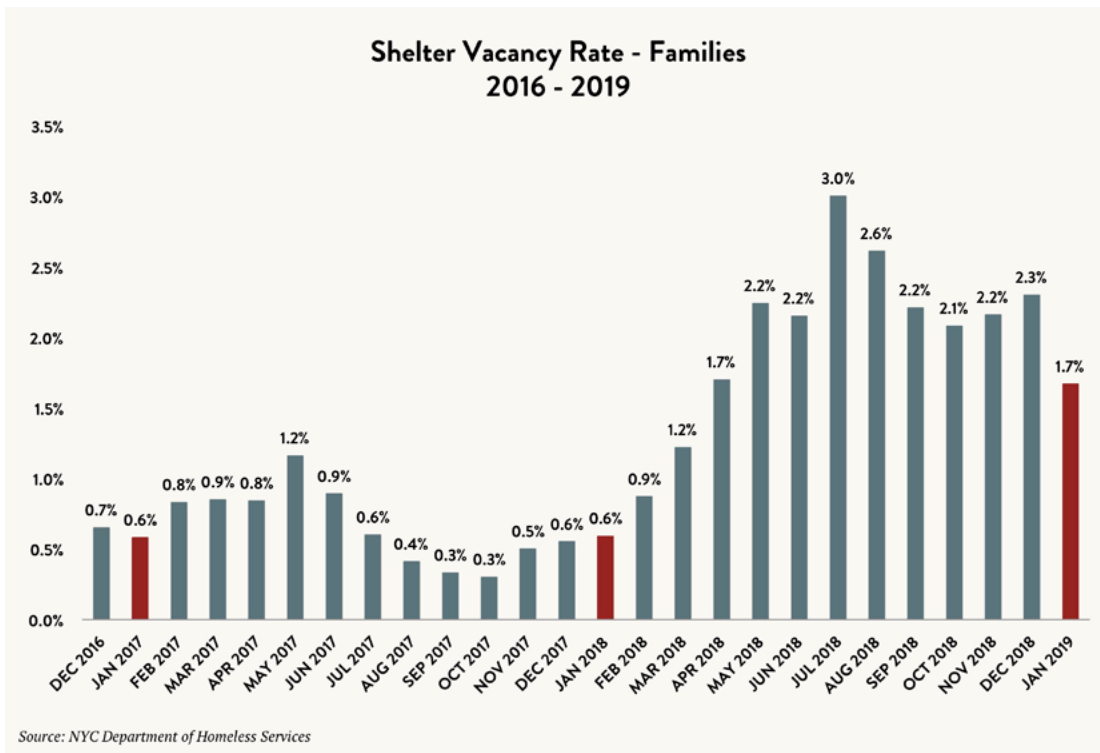
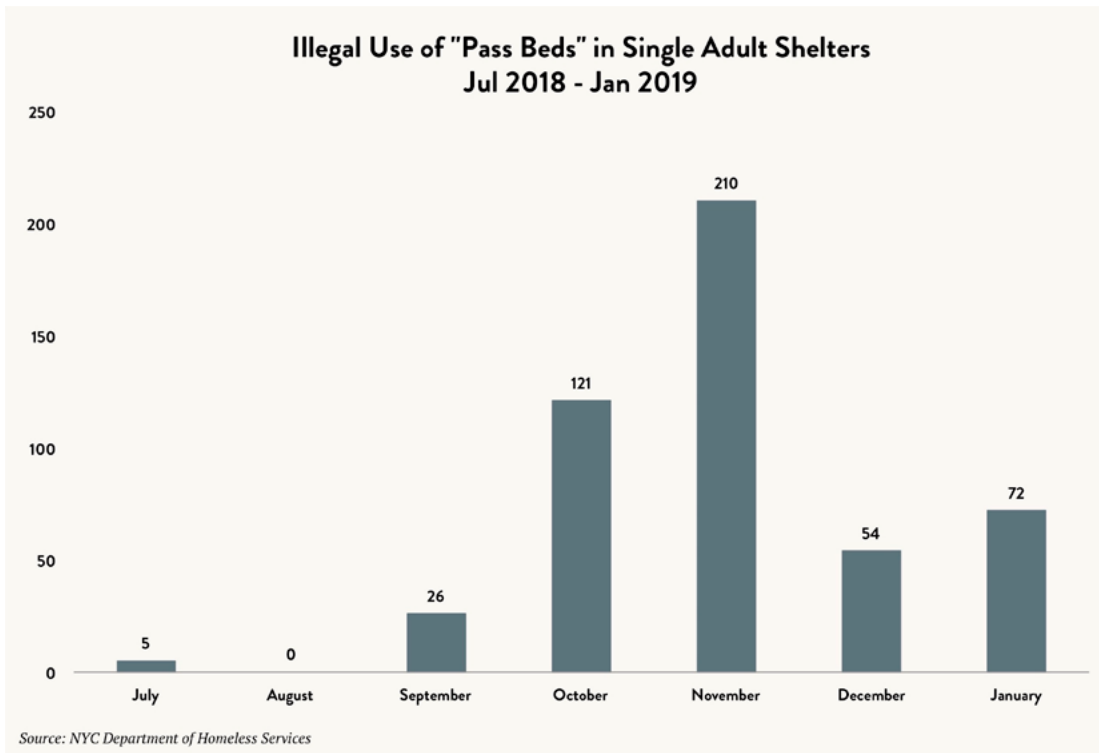
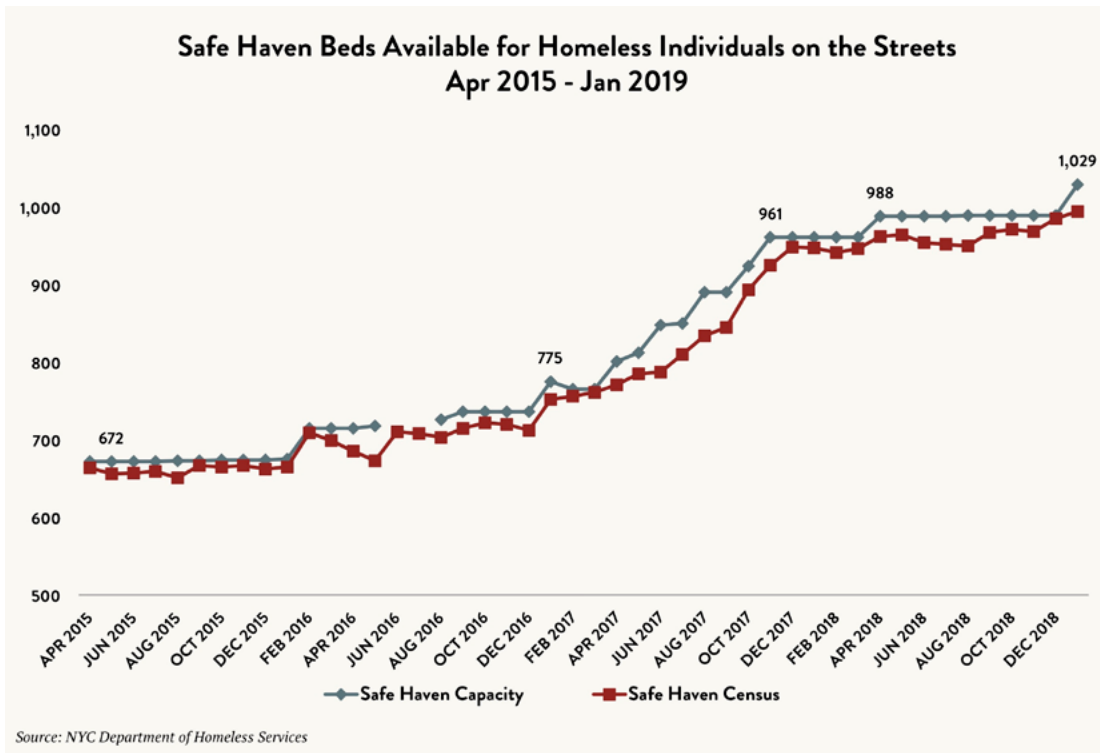


Chart 21



In part because of personal safety concerns, poor conditions, and a sometimes chaotic shelter admissions process, thousands of individuals continue to sleep each night on the city's streets or in transportation terminals and other public spaces. In order to meet the immediate needs of the most vulnerable individuals sleeping on the streets, the City must maintain an adequate supply of small shelters with low barriers to entry, called Safe Havens. In 2018, the City continued to open new Safe Haven beds, adding 68 beds between January 2018 and January 2019. The number of Safe Haven beds is now 53 percent greater than in early 2015. However, far more Safe Haven beds – and permanent supportive housing units – are needed to provide a viable alternative to the streets for the thousands of unsheltered homeless New Yorkers who reject the municipal shelter system.

Chart 22



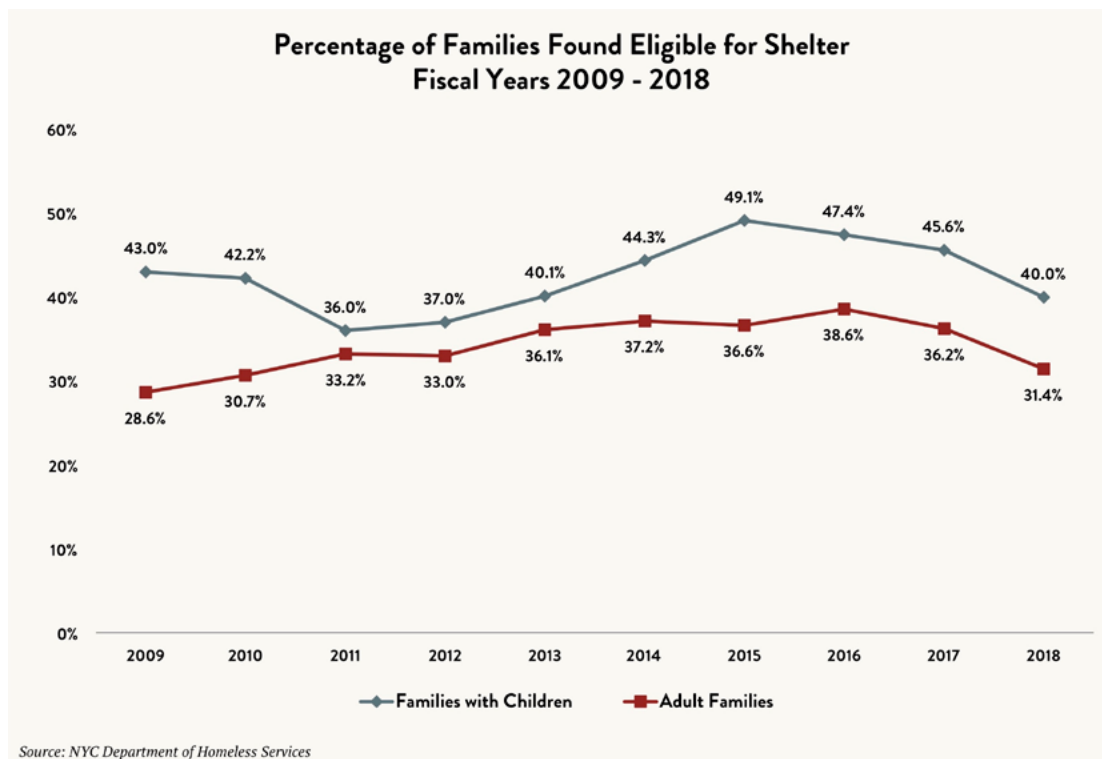
FAMILY INTAKE AND ELIGIBILITY

CITY: D STATE: D

The process that homeless families must undergo to access shelters in New York City is onerous, stressful, and error-prone. The application process requires a homeless family to provide a daunting amount of documentation as well as undergo extensive interviews and investigation, often necessitating hours of waiting through each step in the process. Families not diverted from entering the shelter system are given a 10-day conditional shelter placement while their family composition and housing history are investigated. A family is either found eligible and given a more stable shelter placement or, more often, found ineligible. The City often denies shelter placements to homeless families for trivial reasons, such as a family's inability to prove where they slept for a few nights at some point in the past two years.

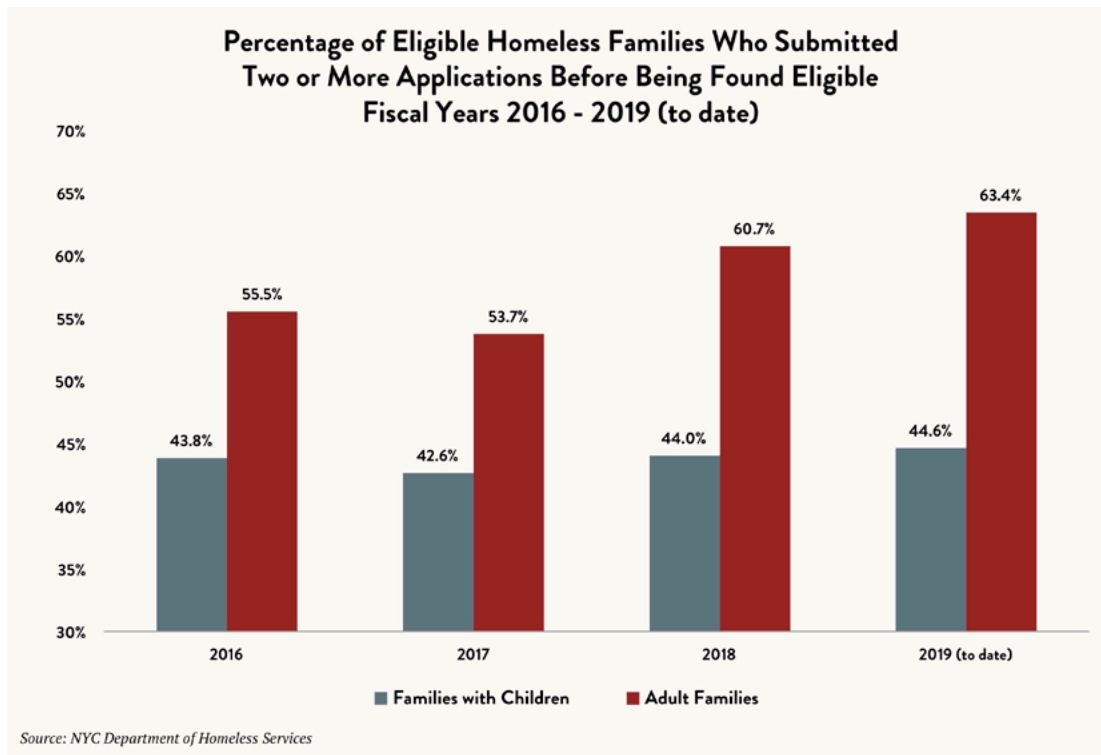
The percentage of homeless families found eligible for shelter has continued to decline since November 2016 when the State, at the request of the City, modified a directive that governs shelter eligibility determinations. The eligibility rate for families with children is now just 40 percent – the lowest rate in six years. The eligibility rate for adult families is even worse at 31 percent – the lowest rate in eight years.

Chart 23



The burdensome shelter application process needlessly creates even more stress on homeless families at a time of great vulnerability. The extremely low eligibility rate for adult families suggests both a high level of error by shelter intake workers and a de facto policy of front-end deterrence to suppress the growing shelter census. In 2018, 63 percent of adult families who were ultimately found eligible for shelter had to submit two or more applications – up from 56 percent four years ago. The situation for homeless families with children was not much better in 2018. More than 44 percent of homeless families with children were found eligible only after submitting multiple difficult and draining applications – an inexcusably cruel hurdle for families who are already grappling with the trauma of losing their homes.

Chart 24



SHELTER CONDITIONS

CITY: C+ STATE: C+

As the court-appointed independent monitor of the single adult shelter system and the City-appointed independent monitor of the family shelter system, Coalition for the Homeless continually gathers detailed information about shelter conditions through formal joint inspections, daily and nightly unannounced visits, and constant communications with people living in shelters. In 2018, our monitors made more than 150 unscheduled visits to shelters, conducted 230 joint inspections with DHS of single adult shelters (known as *Callahan* inspections, referring to the name of the lawsuit that established the legal right to shelter¹²), conducted 18 joint inspections of family shelters, and filed more than 100 written complaints to DHS about poor conditions. Although the City has made progress in reducing formal violations issued by City agencies such as the Department of Buildings and FDNY through the Shelter Repair Squad initiative,¹³ pervasive problems that impact the daily experiences of residents remain. These issues typically fall into three categories: large-scale capital needs, routine cleaning and maintenance, and dehumanizing treatment by shelter staff.

Significant capital repairs are most needed at older, larger, City-owned shelters. Monitors frequently document issues related to plumbing systems; bathroom fixtures; electrical capacity; elevators; and heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC). The City's Fiscal Year 2019 Capital Commitment Plan includes capital projects that were planned years ago but have been slow to materialize, including a much-needed roof replacement at a City-owned shelter on Ward's Island that has leaked for the better part of a decade.

In addition to the needed capital repairs, the failure to provide routine cleaning and maintenance of facilities is degrading to shelter residents and creates unhygienic conditions. Coalition monitors frequently observe filthy bathrooms, most often at night and on weekends. Shelter residents sometimes have no choice but to try to clean the bathrooms themselves despite lacking proper equipment and supplies. Problems with vermin, including rodent and insect infestations, also abound in many shelters.

Certain practices and conditions in many shelters further traumatize and dehumanize homeless individuals. These practices include requiring residents to request toilet paper whenever they need to use the restroom; providing poor-quality, unappetizing food and insufficient portions (while forbidding residents from bringing outside food into shelters); failing to offer frequent laundry services; providing inadequate case management and housing assistance; and erecting bureaucratic barriers that deter those seeking shelter.

¹² *Callahan v. Carey* and other legal victories: <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/our-programs/advocacy/legal-victories/>

¹³ NYC Department of Homeless Services Shelter Repair Scorecard: <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/dhs/about/shelter-repair-scorecard.page>

Examples of the Coalition's communications to DHS regarding shelter conditions illustrate some of the problems described above:

Coalition for the Homeless email to DHS regarding a Manhattan shelter on August 19, 2018:

“

The bathrooms on both floors were filthy. We saw evidence of mold, flies, and roaches and multiple toilets that were inoperable, due to clogging. Additionally, the first bathroom on the first floor has been closed for several days, leaving more than 100 men with only 4 working toilets (exacerbating the toilet clogging problems) and no working showers. There are also many men on the first floor with mobility issues who cannot take the stairs to the 2nd floor to use those bathrooms and showers. Several bed frames are extremely old and curved inwards, which in combination with very thin and old mattresses, makes the beds very uncomfortable.

Coalition for the Homeless email to DHS regarding a Brooklyn shelter on April 3, 2018:

“

The monitor noted that the bathrooms were in poor physical condition. At least two toilet stall doors were missing on 2nd and 4th floor bathrooms, and one stall door on the 4th floor had been replaced by a shower curtain, which clients reported has been the case for more than a month. There is a large hole in the wall tiles in one toilet stall on 2nd floor. Coalition monitors had noted this hole during the 2/2/18 *Callahan* inspection following client complaints about inadequate patching of holes. Rather than repairing the wall, staff has apparently locked that stall for two months and kept it in disrepair.

Coalition for the Homeless email to DHS regarding a Brooklyn shelter on March 21, 2018:

“

Monitors observed signs of extensive water damage and leaks in building A. Buildings B and C also had visible evidence of previous water damage that had been recently fixed. The water damage was most evident in the common areas, but some clients reported water damage in their units. Please provide a plan detailing when and how the leaks and water damage will be fixed. Residents also conveyed concerns about vermin, particularly mice. Some residents reported that the facility had brought in exterminators to abate the vermin situation in their units, but other residents reported that they have not yet received extermination services despite repeated requests to staff.

Coalition for the Homeless email to DHS regarding a Manhattan shelter on December 13, 2018:

“

Clients said there are insufficient case managers and there appears to be no housing specialist, which has resulted in significant delays in accessing permanent housing. The shortages are reportedly so dire that the director is picking up case management work.

Coalition for the Homeless email to DHS regarding a Brooklyn shelter on January 31, 2019 at 10:45am:

“

A new intake arrived at about 1am and as far as we know is still awaiting a placement. She uses a cane, so staff told her they could not let her use the stairs and categorized her as a ‘can’t navigate.’ No transfer or transportation to another site was made available to her. Five clients were overnighted¹⁴ to [the shelter]. The bus arrived at 3:15am and bed assignments were not finalized until about 5am.

The Coalition’s ongoing monitoring visits to the City’s shelters have elicited ample evidence that a significant number of individuals with disabling conditions – medical, psychiatric, and cognitive – currently reside in shelters. Many of these adults have not been properly accommodated in the shelter system for years, and some of DHS’s current policies and practices actually exacerbate the problems experienced by these vulnerable men and women. While the Coalition and other advocates have worked for years to ensure that individual clients are accommodated on a case-by-case basis, the need for systemic change has become acute. The City must establish a medical respite model, expedite supportive housing production, and fully fund existing supportive housing programs, as well as create other options for longer-term residential care so that shelters do not become de facto unlicensed nursing homes.

Fortunately, long-overdue changes to the shelter system are now underway. A major breakthrough for homeless New Yorkers with disabilities was the 2017 settlement in *Butler v. City of New York*, a lawsuit brought on behalf of clients of The Legal Aid Society, Coalition for the Homeless, and the Center for Independence of the Disabled in New York. The *Butler* settlement mandates that the City retrofit existing facilities, include accessible accommodations in all new shelters, and ensure that accessible shelters are not segregated in any one part of the city. In order to comply with the settlement agreement, the City will likely have to upgrade or replace many older, noncompliant shelters and offices. The *Butler* settlement compels the City to undertake a complex, large-scale, systemic overhaul of New York City’s shelter system, and includes specific milestones as well as deadlines that dictate how and when the changes are to be made over a five-year implementation period.

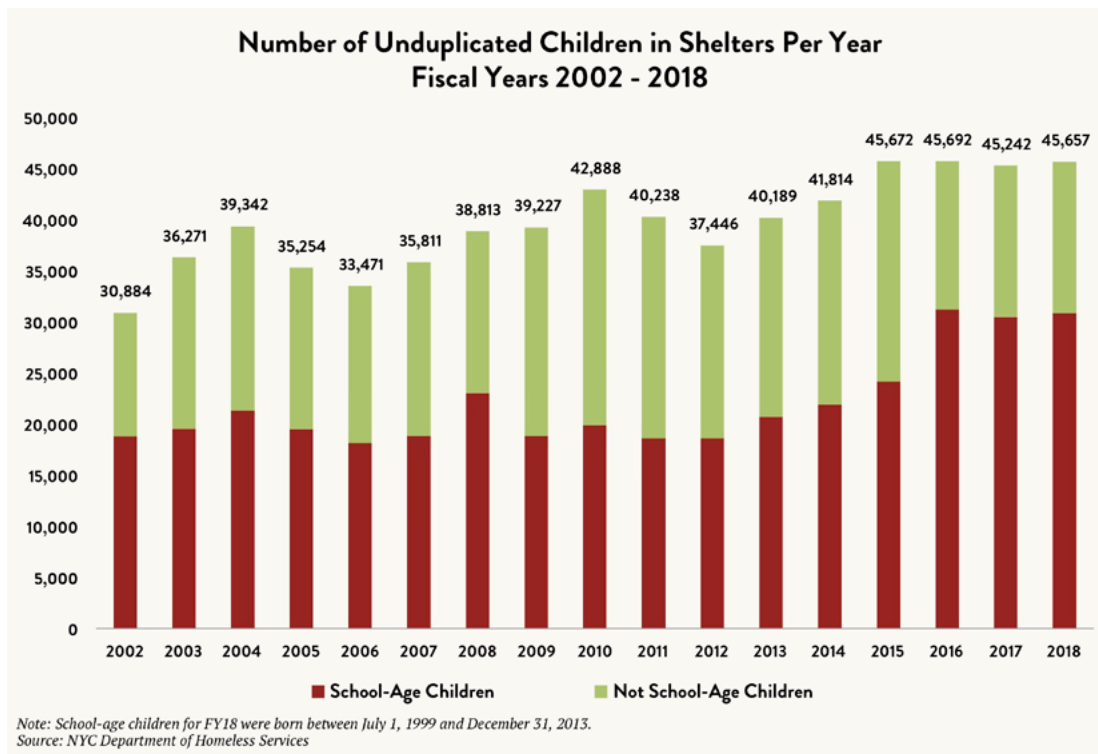
¹⁴ “Overnighted” means transported to a shelter for a one-night bed assignment. Individuals have to return to their assigned shelter or intake shelter again the following day to receive their actual consistent bed assignment.

HOMELESS CHILDREN AND STUDENTS

CITY: C-

Homelessness creates myriad challenges for children of every age. Long commutes to school, shelter conditions that are not conducive to quiet study, and the unrelenting stress that accompanies not having a home result in a greater incidence of behavioral and academic difficulties for homeless children. In fiscal year 2018, 45,657 children spent at least one night in a New York City shelter – a figure that continues to hover near record levels. More than two-thirds of those children, or 67.6 percent, were school-age, the second-highest percentage since the City began publicly reporting that measure in 2002.

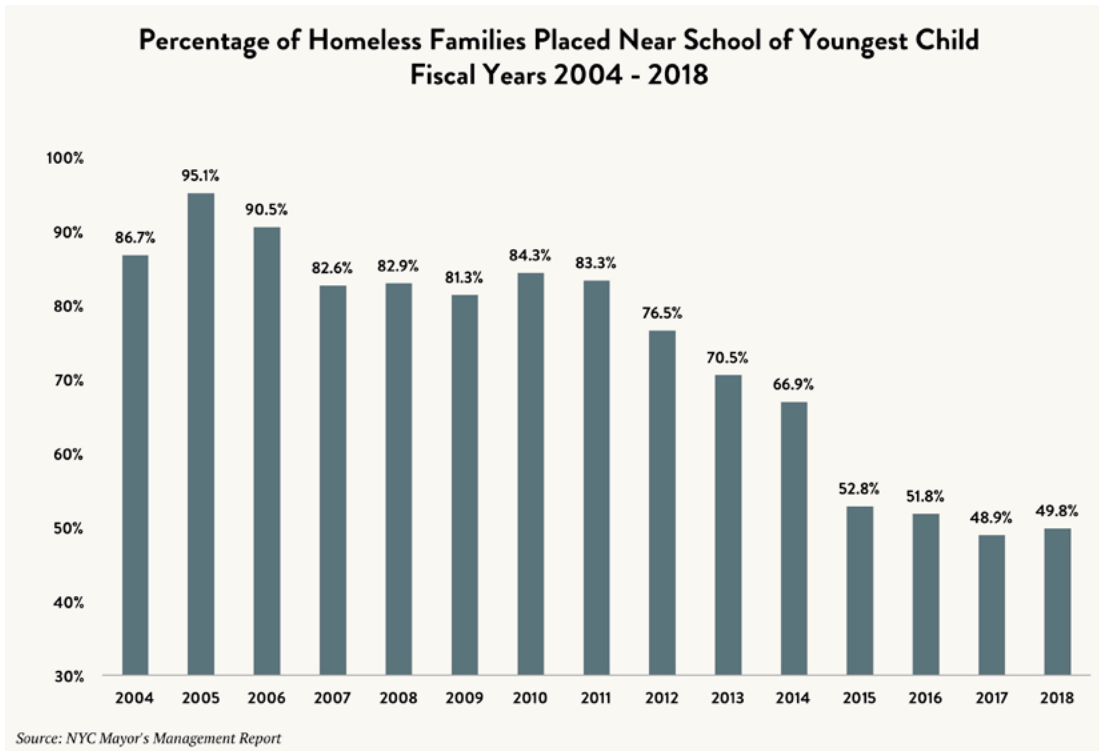
Chart 25



The homelessness crisis is felt in classrooms across the city, as children struggle to keep up with their stably housed peers. Even getting to school can be an ordeal for these students: The average school attendance rate for children living in DHS shelters was 82.3 percent. Homeless children miss about 32 school days each year – a number that has not significantly improved in the past four years. New York State defines chronic absenteeism as missing 18 or more school days per year. The period during which a family is applying for shelter at PATH and given a “conditional” shelter placement is notoriously chaotic, and many students miss school during the daunting eligibility process. Although children are no longer required to be present at follow-up PATH appointments, the requirement that they be present at the initial application appointment is unnecessary and contributes to the high number of school absences for homeless children. When a family is found ineligible for shelter and reapplies, the family is moved to another conditional shelter placement, which contributes to further interruptions in academic continuity.

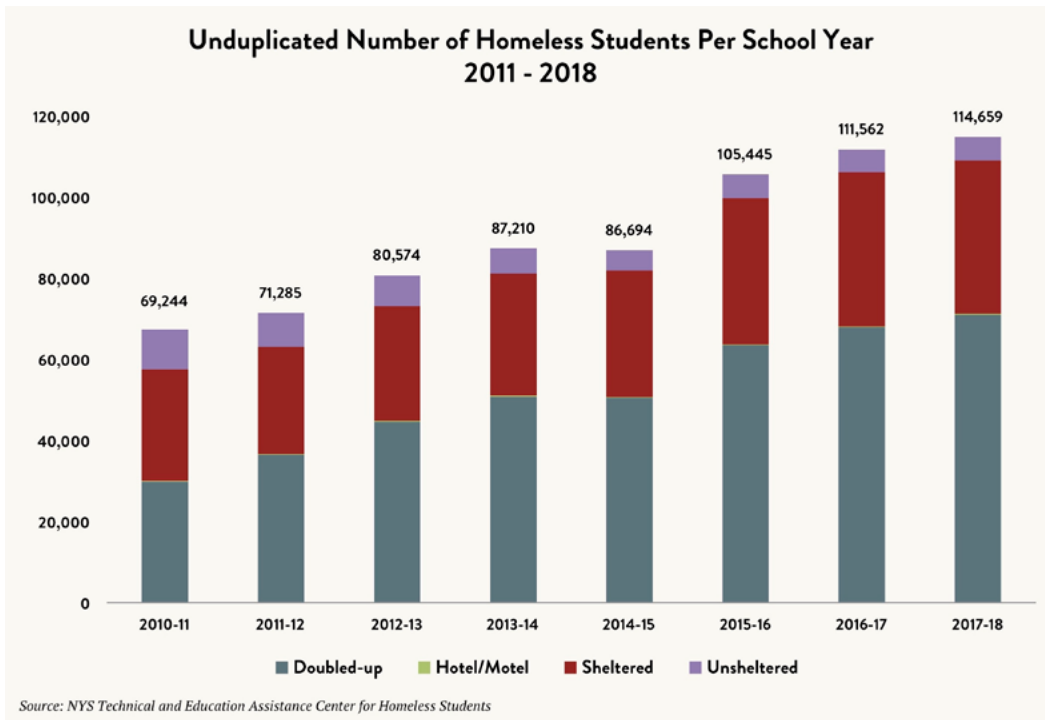
Homeless families are too rarely placed in shelters near their children’s schools, which poses significant obstacles that stand in the way of children getting to class on time and being ready to learn. Just under half of homeless families were placed in shelters near the school of their youngest child in fiscal year 2018, down from 95 percent in 2005. As New York City continues to contend with record homelessness and the shelter system operates with a very low vacancy rate, families are often placed in shelters based on the first available vacancy, rather than shelters located closer to a specific family’s anchors of life, such as schools, jobs, and support networks. The City has implemented bus routes to help transport students from shelters to schools, but the long commutes can be challenging without bus aides to ensure that these children are properly supported.

Chart 26



The issue of student homelessness extends beyond those children living in shelters. Tens of thousands of children live doubled-up with family or friends, sleep in motels, or stay on the streets. The number of New York City students experiencing homelessness during the 2017-2018 school year reached a record high of 114,659: One out of every 10 students was either sleeping in a shelter, doubled-up with family or friends, or unsheltered. This bleak milestone was largely fueled by an increase in the number of students living in doubled-up situations. Many of these precariously housed families are likely on the precipice of entering shelters. In the face of this crisis, the City has not provided adequate or consistent resources, such as social workers, to support schools that are struggling to serve such large numbers of homeless students.

Chart 27



The trauma of homelessness is also felt by the thousands of New York City children who are not yet old enough to attend school. In 2017, 1,164 newborns were brought “home” from the hospital to a shelter: In other words, a shocking *one out of every 100* babies born in the city is homeless. This was the second consecutive year in which more than 1,000 babies were born to mothers living in shelters, where it is unlikely that mothers and infants are receiving all of the prenatal and post-natal care that is so critical to their health and an infant’s early development.

Chart 28

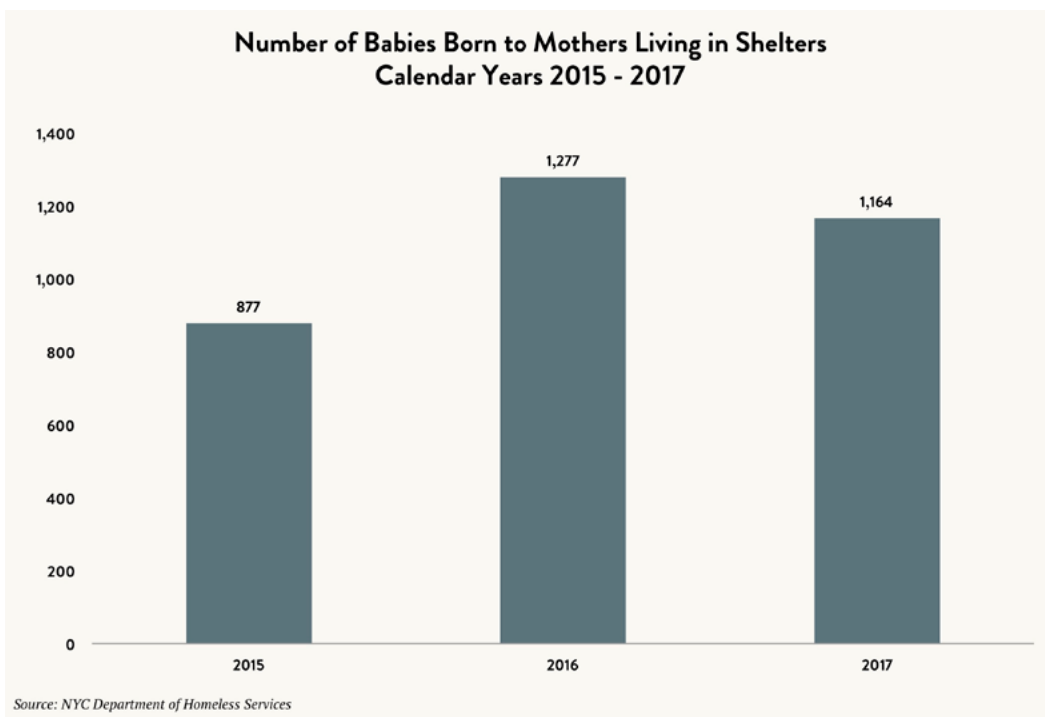




Photo by Coalition for the Homeless



Photo by Coalition for the Homeless



Photo by Coalition for the Homeless

PROJECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

HOUSING

Mayor de Blasio must:

- Follow the [House Our Future NY Campaign](#) recommendation to build at least 24,000 new units of deeply subsidized, affordable housing for homeless households through the *Housing New York 2.0* plan, and set aside at least 6,000 more units for homeless households through the preservation of already-occupied housing, for a total of 30,000 apartments. This goal will require that the Mayor build roughly 2,700 new apartments for homeless New Yorkers each year between 2019 and 2026, which constitutes 20 percent of the newly constructed apartments in the *Housing New York 2.0* plan.
- Continue to provide at least 8,000 City-initiated rent subsidies per year to households in shelters and those at risk of eviction and homelessness.
- Establish a protocol to guarantee that all housing placements made with the use of City rent subsidies are free from conditions that could harm the health and safety of formerly homeless people or force them to return to the shelter system, and ensure that recipients are never coerced to accept inappropriate placements.
- Increase the number of Section 8 vouchers provided to homeless families from 500 per year to 2,000.
- Increase the number of public housing placements for homeless families from 2,000 per year to 3,000.
- Accelerate the timeline for the creation of 15,000 City-funded supportive housing units by scheduling their completion by 2025 rather than 2030.

Governor Cuomo must:

- Implement the [Home Stability Support](#) program through legislation introduced by Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi and Senator Liz Krueger to create a State-funded, long-term rent subsidy for households on public assistance who are homeless or at risk of losing their housing due to eviction, domestic violence, or hazardous housing conditions.
- Accelerate the pace of production of the 20,000 units of supportive housing pledged by the Governor in 2016 by scheduling their completion within 10 rather than 15 years, and fully fund the construction and operation of the remaining 14,000 units for which funds have yet to be appropriated.
- Follow the recommendations of the [Bring it Home Campaign](#) and adequately fund existing community-based housing programs for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, as many of those programs have lost 40 to 70 percent of the value of their initial funding agreements due to inflation and inadequate State investment.
- Eliminate rent law loopholes and provide sufficient enforcement of rent regulation by eliminating vacancy bonuses, ending high-rent vacancy decontrol, and restoring preferential rent protections.
- Ensure effective reentry planning for individuals being released from State prisons in order to identify viable housing options prior to each individual's scheduled release date.
- Expand the Disability Rent Increase Exemption program (DRIE) to include households with a family member with a disability who is a child or an adult who is not the eligible head of household. This would help families retain their rent-stabilized housing, prevent their displacement to a system ill-equipped to meet their needs, and, simultaneously, prevent possible deregulation of their apartments.

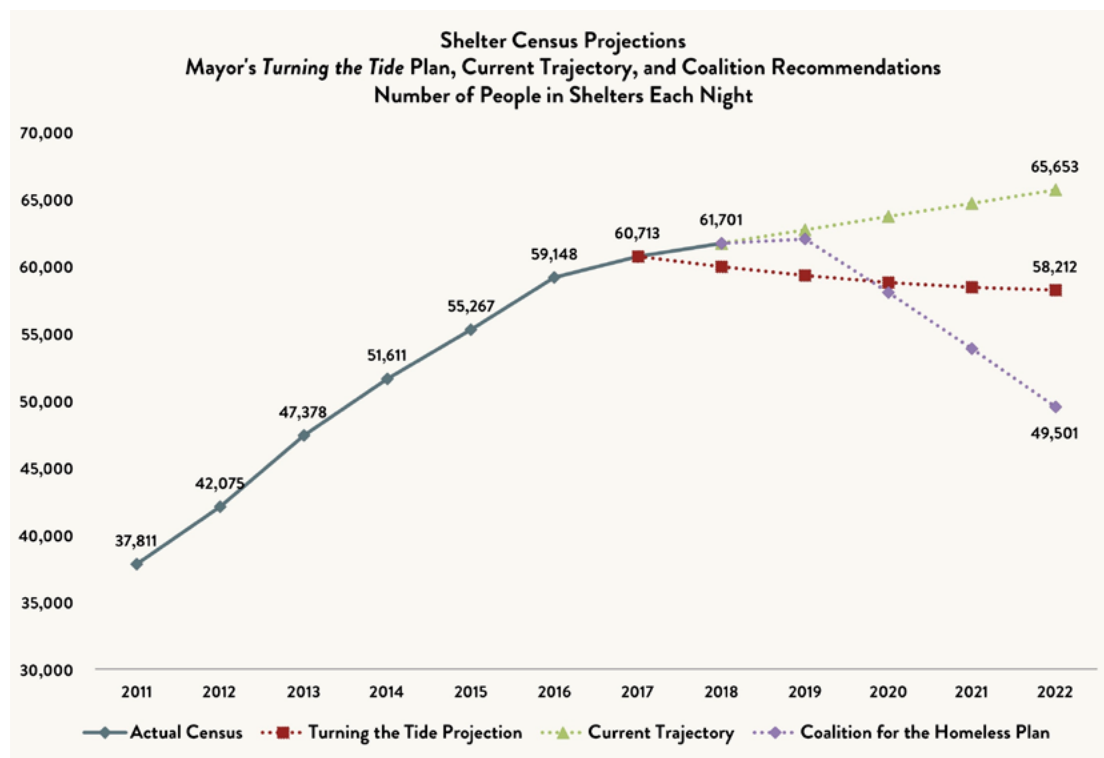
The Mayor and Governor together should:

- Expand access to supportive housing for adult families – a population with disproportionately high levels of disabilities and long shelter stays.
- Ensure that individuals who have served their prison sentences receive adequate support services and are not incarcerated past their release dates because of a lack of housing or shelter options.

Together, these recommendations will increase stable long-term housing placements, decrease the rate of people leaving shelters without any housing assistance, and ultimately result in fewer families and individuals returning to shelters. The family shelter census would thus be reduced by more than 25 percent in four years, while the sharp increase in single adults would also be mitigated. In total, the number of men, women, and children in shelters could be reduced by 20 percent in four years, to levels not seen since 2013.¹⁵

Moreover, because of the failure to produce enough permanent affordable housing, the City is already behind schedule on reaching even the nebulous shelter census goals advanced in *Turning the Tide*. If current trends continue, the shelter census will not decrease by 2,500 people by 2022 as planned, but it will *increase* by nearly 5,000 people. The Mayor and Governor must immediately take the above recommended actions if they truly wish to “turn the tide.”

Chart 29



¹⁵ Methodology for the projection graphs is as follows: The Mayor’s plan, *Turning the Tide on Homelessness in NYC*, projects that the total shelter census will decrease by 2,500 people between 2017 and 2022. This reduction is a combination of a decrease in the family shelter census that counteracts a predicted increase in the number of homeless single adults. The Mayor’s plan assumes that “the single adult census will increase at about the annual rate it has increased over the past decade” – about 10 percent per year. Coalition for the Homeless projections are based on assumptions about the number of families and single adults entering and leaving shelters each year between now and 2022. For families, new entrants will decrease incrementally each year due to increased prevention efforts; returning entrants will decrease as a percentage of all entrants each year due to increased long-term housing placements; and exits will increase immediately by 2,500 due to our recommended increases in Section 8 and NYCHA placements and then gradually increase in subsequent years as more HPD units are made available. For single adults, new entrants will remain at similar levels to 2018, but returning entrants will decrease incrementally each year as stable housing placements rise. For families and individuals, unsubsidized exits will decrease as more permanent subsidized housing placements are made. This analysis assumes an average family size of three, consistent with City assumptions.

Chart 30

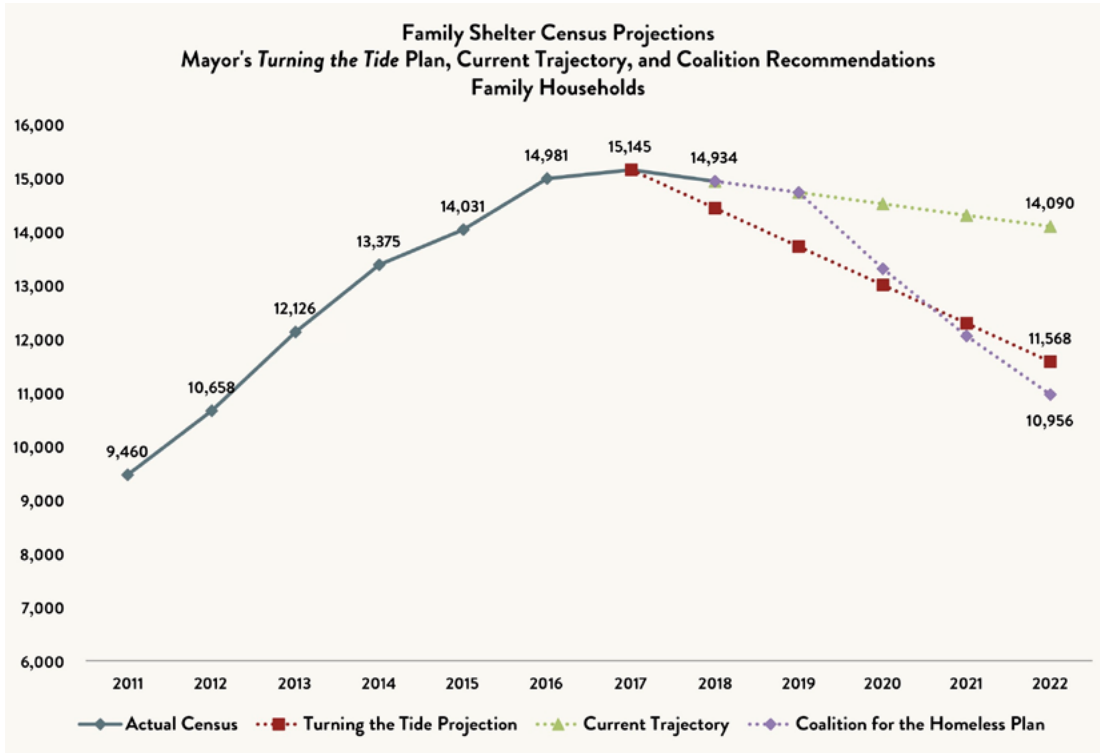
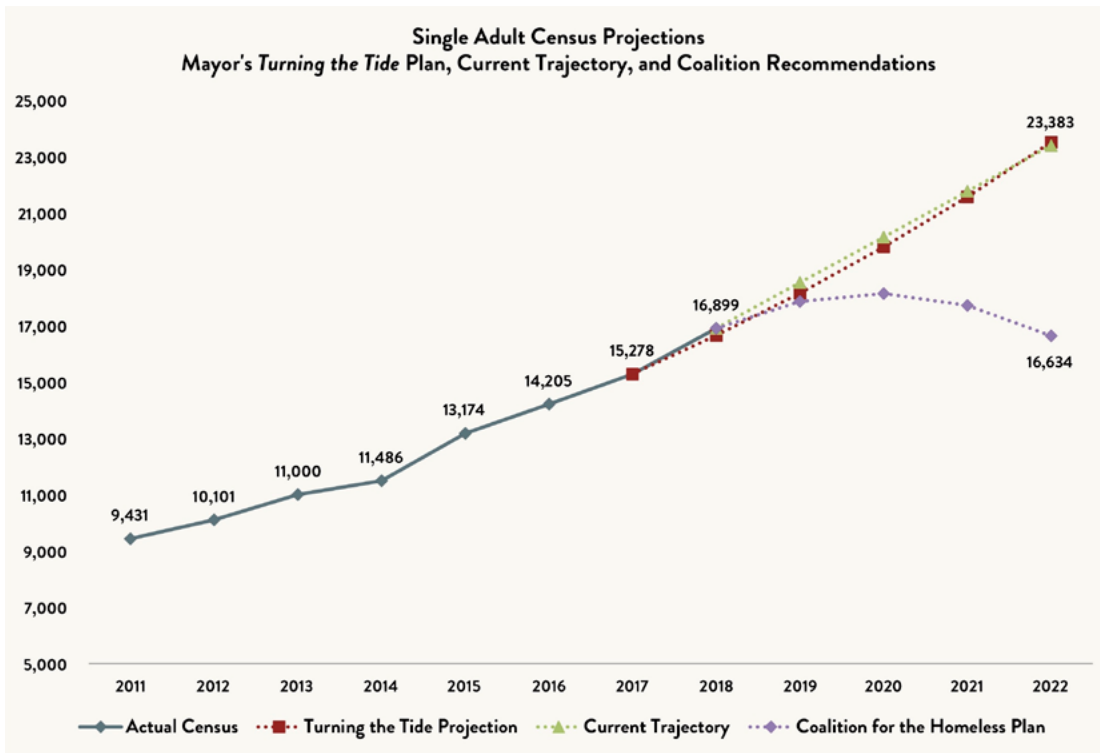


Chart 31



SHELTER PROCESSES AND CONDITIONS

Mayor de Blasio must:

- Increase capacity in the shelter system to maintain a vacancy rate of no less than 3 percent for each shelter population at all times so that homeless New Yorkers are no longer effectively denied access to decent shelters that meet their needs.
- Develop a medical respite program and longer-term residential supports to address the needs of individuals with medical conditions released from hospitals and other institutions who cannot be accommodated within the shelter system.
- Ensure that all shelters serve homeless individuals and families with dignity, provide a safe environment, and are adequately staffed at all times to provide meaningful social services, housing search assistance, and physical and mental health care and/or referrals.
- Direct the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to institute twice-monthly compliance monitoring of all single adult shelters to better assess and address problem conditions.
- Provide adequate capital funds to ensure that shelter facilities are properly maintained and repaired expeditiously.
- Place homeless families with children in shelters near the children’s schools.
- Eliminate the requirement that families applying for shelter bring their children to their first intake appointment, which results in children needlessly missing school.
- Ensure that homeless parents are made aware of all educational rights and resources.
- Enroll all homeless preschool children in early care or Pre-K.
- Guarantee annual [Bridging the Gap](#) funds for at least 100 school-based social workers to support homeless students.
- Ensure that all staff working with homeless children are fully trained to provide trauma-informed care.

Governor Cuomo must:

- Reverse harmful cuts to New York City’s emergency shelter system that have resulted in the State short-changing the City hundreds of millions of dollars over the past six years, and share equally with the City in the non-Federal cost of sheltering families and individuals.
- Establish a structure to regulate and finance medical respite programs.
- Conduct oversight of all hospitals and nursing homes to prevent inappropriate discharges to shelters.
- Raise the personal needs allowance for those living in shelters to at least \$144 per person per month, up from the current grossly inadequate amount of \$45 per month.
- Permanently eliminate the statewide requirement to pay “shelter rent” or equivalent program fees as a condition for receiving shelter.

The Mayor and Governor together should:

- Implement a less onerous shelter intake process for homeless families in which 1) applicants are assisted in obtaining necessary documents, 2) housing history documentation is limited to the prior six months, and 3) DHS-identified housing alternatives are investigated to confirm their availability, safety, and lack of risk to the potential host household’s tenancy.
- Fund additional services for individuals living with severe and persistent mental illnesses, such as expanding access to inpatient and outpatient psychiatric care, providing mental health services in more single adult shelters, and adding more Assertive Community Treatment (ACT) teams.



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