

January 31, 2023

The Honorable Kathy Hochul  
Governor of New York State  
NYS State Capitol Building  
Albany, NY 12224

Dear Governor Hochul:

We, the undersigned, write with an urgent request: that your administration include in your proposed budget (1) an increase in the amount of rent assistance made available to cash assistance recipients to reflect the actual cost of rent across New York State, and (2) an increase in the basic needs cash assistance allowance to reflect inflation. The current levels of these benefits – a key part of New York’s statutory safety net – have not been updated in decades. Each successive year that the state ignores its constitutional obligation to provide aid for those in need, New Yorkers are suffering in deep poverty, and, as a result, experience housing instability and homelessness, adverse health outcomes, poor long-term economic prospects, and a host of other negative collateral consequences. This is a problem that your administration has inherited, and we respectfully request that you address it this budget season. New Yorkers cannot wait.

### **Increase the Cash Assistance Shelter Allowance Amount to the HUD Fair Market Rent**

The current cash assistance shelter amounts are so low that, aside from federally subsidized housing units with rents set at 30% of tenant income, there are literally zero habitable rental units priced at the level of the shelter allowance anywhere in New York State. For example, in Albany, the cash assistance shelter allowance for a family of three is \$309. Data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development indicates that there are simply no apartments that meet basic housing quality standards in the private rental market for \$309 in Albany County. HUD’s data and analysis for every county in New York States shows that there are no units in the private market at or even near the meager cash assistance shelter allowance.

The appropriate measure of housing costs in New York State is the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Fair Market Rent, as your administration has recognized. In December 2021, you signed into law a bill that sets maximum subsidy levels at the HUD FMR for a subsection of cash assistance recipients (New York City families with children experiencing or at imminent risk of homelessness and who are eligible for a supplement called FHEPS). Your administration also used this standard last year when you approved limited funding for rental assistance set at 85% of the FMR for certain low-income households experiencing or at risk of homelessness.

Other state-funded rent subsidies available only cover a fraction of the cash assistance households who need help, and across the state, most waitlists for federally subsidized housing are closed and are years long.

New York State has a housing affordability crisis, and we appreciate your administration’s attention to this issue. However, any truly comprehensive statewide housing strategy must recognize that development of new affordable housing is not enough. Construction of new housing will take years, and even “affordable” housing funded with the State Low Income Housing Tax Credit program is out of reach for New Yorkers eligible for cash assistance. New Yorkers need assistance to pay for the housing that is currently available – and in many areas of New York State there are enough vacancies to meet the needs of low-income households – if only families had the resources to be able to pay the rent. Without increasing the shelter allowance, cash assistance recipients face chronic housing instability, living in substandard or overcrowded conditions, risking their health and welfare in unsafe living arrangements, falling behind on rent, getting evicted, or experiencing homelessness. The adverse health outcomes, lower educational attainment, and ability to improve long-term economic prospects for families experiencing housing instability due to the inadequacy of the cash assistance shelter allowance are beyond measure.

**Increase the Cash Assistance Basic Needs Allowance**

The basic needs allowance is designed to help people pay for necessities like clothing, diapers, hygiene products, over the counter medication, and transportation. But because the basic needs allowance has not been updated since 2011, and has never kept pace with inflation, it is woefully inadequate to cover these essential expenses. The utility supplement portions of the basic needs grant have also not been updated since they were established, in 1981 and 1986, respectively. The result is that a family of three with no other income is granted only \$389 a month to meet their basic needs, including money for utilities. A single person anywhere in the State, including New York City, is expected to survive on \$183 per month for their basic needs.

Increasing the maximum rent allowance for cash assistance recipients to the HUD FMR and increasing the basic needs allowance to keep pace with inflation will help lift affected New Yorkers out of deep poverty in every community comprising our great state.

Sincerely,

Empire Justice Center

The Legal Aid Society

Asian American Federation

Just Cause

Broadway Community, Inc.

Legal Services of Central New York, Inc.

Bronx Defenders

Make the Road New York

CAMBA, Inc.

Miguel Melendez, Rochester City Council  
President

Care for the Homeless

Catholic Charities Family and Community Services

Center for Elder Law & Justice

Center for Independence of the Disabled NY

City Bar Justice Center

Coalition for Homeless Youth

Corporation for Supportive Housing

Mary Lupien, Rochester City Council Vice President

Lurden Corona

Community Service Society of NY

Community Voices Heard

Citizens' Committee for Children of NY

Kadisha Davis

Disability Rights New York

Enterprise Community Partners, Inc.

Erie County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers Project

FPWA

Henry Street Settlement

Housing Works, Inc.

Homeless Services United

Hunger Free America

Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing

Ibero-American Action League

National Center on Law and Economic Justice

Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem

New Destiny Housing Corporation

New York Legal Assistance Group

Northern Manhattan Improvement Corp.

Queens County Bar Association Volunteer Lawyers

Queens Defenders

RiseBoro Community Partnership

Robin Hood

Rochester Housing Authority

Rochester Monroe Anti-Poverty Initiative (RMAPI)

Rural Law Center of New York

Safe Horizon

Sanctuary for Families

Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy

Settlement Housing Fund, Inc.

The Children's Agenda

The Family Center

The Legal Aid Society of Rochester

United Neighborhood Houses

Urban Justice Center - Safety Net Project

Urban Justice Center – Safety Net Activists

Urban Pathways

VOCAL-NY

Journey's End Refugee Services

Volunteer Lawyers Project of CNY, Inc.

Vicki Lens, Professor, Silberman School  
of Social Work, Hunter College

Volunteers of Legal Service (VOLS)

Mobilization for Justice, Inc.

Welfare Rights Initiative

WIN