

New York Public Welfare Association

NYPWA Testimony for the NYS Assembly Standing Committee on Social Services

Sheila Harrigan, Executive Director

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The New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) represents all fifty-eight local departments of social services statewide and provides information, policy analysis, and assistance to state and local policymakers and technical support to local districts. The NYPWA is dedicated to effective social services administration to enhance the quality of life in our communities while ensuring accountability for the use of public funds.

We need public policies that support access to housing for everyone who lives in our cities, towns, suburbs, and rural areas. When people are living without shelter, or in a temporary shelter, their circumstances are exacerbated by antiquated funding policies that keep them trapped in poverty. The fact that people are surviving with minimal cash assistance, and no other source of income, demonstrates personal tenacity and fortitude. But these qualities are not enough to lift them out of poverty and into stable homes and jobs where they can support themselves and their families. What we need is system-wide change.

We are nearing the 20-year mark of when the public assistance rental allowance was last increased in 2003. Inflation and a lot more happened in the past two decades. We have some catching up to do. A temporary infusion of Federal dollars prevented many evictions. This stability helped keep people safe and from falling deeper into poverty during a public health crisis. Now we need to focus on long-term solutions. Everyone has a role to play. Counties do their part, but the State sets the rules and those rules need to change.

First, we need the State to return to the table as our funding partners. This means restoring Safety Net Assistance (SNA) to 50/50 instead of 29/71 state/local shares. It also includes restoring the State's contribution to SNA administration and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) administration so that there are enough staff to process applications for assistance. These budget cuts were enacted in state fiscal year 2011/12. It is time to level the playing field once again so that counties have the resources to implement the state's laws.

Next, we need to do the right thing and raise the Family Assistance and Safety Net Assistance allowances for shelter, basic needs, and home energy. There are multiple reasons we can point to as

why this matter should be addressed, such as, the NYS Constitution Art. XVII, provision that “aid care and support of the needy are public concerns and shall be provided by the state...and its subdivisions, and in such manner and by such means, as the legislature may from time to time determine.” Many of those who presented testimony provided examples that show the need for funding reforms and for a dramatic increase in the development of housing for people with low incomes. It is inconceivable that people are expected to find housing with so little money and such a low housing supply. In addition, supportive housing with services and treatment is out of reach for most people who struggle with mental illness and addictions and end up living in temporary shelters.

The ability to maintain housing is rooted in public policies and state funding decisions. Legislation has been introduced, but we are seeking the funding commitment in the next state budget to support the intent of program bills and to bring about important policy shifts.

When we listen to all that has been said by those who presented their recommendations at this public hearing, it is conceivable that we have the collective compassion, motivation, and ability to come together on a journey to make housing accessible to all New Yorkers regardless of income.

In closing, we recognize that the NYS Assembly Social Services Committee has demonstrated strong leadership in boldly seeking policy changes that will address poverty and provide access to housing. We offer our support and expertise on behalf of local departments of social services across the State of New York.

References:

https://otda.ny.gov/policy/directives/2003/ADM/03_ADM-07.pdf

Increase in the Shelter Allowance in 2003

<https://otda.ny.gov/policy/directives/2012/ADM/12-ADM-05.pdf>

Increase in the Basic Allowance Component of the Standard of Need (only) in 2012

For additional information, contact:

Sheila Harrigan, Executive Director
Rick Terwilliger, Director of Policy
New York Public Welfare Association
info@nypwa.org • 518-465-9305