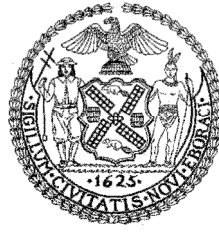


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The City of New York
Manhattan Community Board 8

Health, Seniors, and Social Services Committee Meeting

Lenox Hill Neighborhood House
331 East 70th Street
New York, New York
February 23, 2012

Community Board members present: Molly Blayney, Mary Pike, Ellen Polivy, and Hattie Quarnstrom

The meeting was called to order at 6:40pm.

The committee has been and remains seriously concerned with the devastating effects homelessness has on those in our city, including escalating numbers of women, children, and entire families. A companion concern is the growing number of people who must contend on a daily basis with the fearsome prospect of becoming homeless. That fear is likely to become a reality for many in the near future, owing to the recent demise of a New York City rent subsidies program that had enabled many to remain in their own apartments.

At the committee's December 2011 meeting, Alex Zablocki, director of community relations for the New York City Department of Homeless Services, addressed the committee and supplied much helpful information during the course of his presentation. Desirous of further information, the committee decided to schedule another informational meeting and sought speakers from both the Coalition for the Homeless and the Homeless Rights Project of the Legal Aid Society.

Although we were unsuccessful in securing a staff member from the Homeless Rights Project, the Coalition for the Homeless responded affirmatively and made policy analyst Giselle Routhier available to speak to us. The Coalition has been a consistent and effective advocate for homeless men, women, and children for more than 30 years, and owing to its expertise, serves as an invaluable resource for people who are homeless or in imminent danger of becoming so.

The information Ms. Routhier conveyed at the committee's meeting prompted committee members and members of the public to offer both questions and comments throughout her presentation, which resulted in an excellent discussion.

The points below are among those Ms. Routhier made during the course of her remarks:

*The number of homeless in New York City shelters is at an all-time high. The city's own figures show that the number of homeless people in its shelter system now tops 41,000. Some 17,000 of these shelter occupants are children, a record-breaking figure.

*The requirements one must satisfy in order to be eligible for admission to shelter housing have become more restrictive during the Bloomberg administration, making it even more difficult for people in dire need of shelter to be able to obtain it.

*Last year, the administration promulgated more rigorous shelter eligibility rules for single, homeless adults. Their implementation has been enjoined pending the resolution of lawsuits challenging their legal validity. The suits challenging the administration's new requirements were filed by the New York City Council, and by the Coalition for the Homeless and the Legal Aid Society.

*The administration's new rules essentially require an applicant for shelter to prove that he or she has no other place to go.

*Shelter applicants are also required to produce enough documentation in support of their application, which can be an extremely difficult standard to satisfy.

*Visual inspections of past addresses at which a shelter applicant has stayed may be conducted; if the inspector concludes there is adequate space for the person, his/her application for shelter can be denied *even* if the person with the legal right to occupancy of that space says he or she does not want the person there, will not permit the person to stay there, and will change the locks to deny him or her access.

*Applicants can challenge the denial of their shelter application by requesting a "fair hearing" but the process is essentially a rubber stamp exercise that validates the denial.

*Affordable housing is an essential component in reducing homelessness, and its availability reduces recidivism and saves the city money.

*There is a dire shortage of affordable housing in New York City, and it is compounded by the fact that the percentage of available New York City Housing Authority apartments is at its lowest level in some time.

*Affordable housing subsidies were cut off in 2005 and replaced by various time-limited, shorter-term subsidy arrangements.

*The arrangement that currently functions is a revolving door system where people go in and out of shelters with half of all people coming into the shelter system having been homeless before.

*As the result of a legal decision in early February, the city announced that beginning that month, it would not make rent subsidy payments that would otherwise have been due tenants under the Advantage program.

*These subsidies had made it possible for those who received them to remain in their apartments. Families constitute a majority of the households who receive these payments.

*As a result of the city's decision to terminate these payments, 8,000 to 9,000 families will be at risk of being evicted.

Ms. Routhier pointed out that substantial information about the homeless and those at risk is available at <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org>, the Coalition's website. Board members and others interested in greater detail about the worsening current situation can find a succinct statement of it in testimony the Coalition and the Legal Aid Society presented to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare in November 2011. See: <http://tools.coalitionforthehomeless.org/page/-/Testimony%20--%20City%20Council%20--%20Homeless%20Adult%20Eligibility%20Rules%2011-9-2011.pdf>

Future Meeting Subjects:

After the informational portion of the meeting, further discussion was had regarding topics and arrangements for upcoming committee meetings, and the prospective topics remain unchanged from those set out in the committee minutes for January.

**Ellen Polivy and Mary Pike
Co-Chairs
Health, Seniors, and Social Services Committee**