

February 4, 2022

Hon. Eric Adams, Mayor
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Gary Jenkins, Commissioner
Department of Social Services
180 Water Street
New York, NY 10038

Dear Mayor Adams and Commissioner Jenkins,

During the COVID-19 crisis, the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) made positive, but temporary changes to the application process for family shelter. We, the undersigned not-for-profit organizations serving families experiencing homelessness, commend these changes and collectively call on you to make them permanent. Specifically, we ask that you make permanent two current policies: (1) not requiring minor children to appear at PATH during the intake process, and (2) not ejecting families from conditional shelter when they are found ineligible and are reapplying. These changes minimize disruptions to children's education, prevent children from being forced to sleep outside, and allow families contending with homelessness to find stability.

As you know, in order to be found eligible for shelter in New York City, families are required to prove that they have no other housing options available to them. This process begins with every member of the family going to the central intake center to undergo assessments, interviews, and provide documentation. While DHS investigates their application, families are provided with a conditional shelter placement. If the 10 day investigations results in a finding of ineligibility, they must begin the process again by leaving their conditional placement and returning to the intake center to reapply. A family can be found ineligible because they were not able to provide a required document within the 10 day timeframe, because DHS was not able corroborate information with a third party, or for a number of other factors that do not mean that the family actually has a place to stay.

The changes DHS made in response to the pandemic helped make this process less agonizing for thousands of families. Exempting minor children from going to PATH with their parents allows them to instead go to school, child care, and other appropriate activities while sparing them from the stress of the intake process. Similarly, families — especially those with minor children — need stability, which cannot be obtained when they must pack up and move their belongings every 10-days, or worse, are forced to sleep outside because the city denies their application. The current policy of allowing families to reapply without having to pack up and leave shelter to return to the intake center, and of providing all families found ineligible with another conditional placement, creates the most stability for those families and is a much more humane way to treat our neighbors.

Making permanent pandemic prompted reforms is only a first step. Those of us working with families experiencing homelessness understand that many of the current shelter application requirements create unnecessary barriers, causing undue hardship and trauma. Our organizations have been raising these issues, and recent data [reported on by The City](#) serves as another exclamation point highlighting our concerns. We urge you to work with us to reform the intake and application system for homeless families so it truly provides a pathway to shelter and permanent housing, rather than a roadblock families must overcome.

We look forward to working together to ensure that families may be housed with safety, dignity, and stability. We would like the opportunity to meet with you at your earliest convenience to begin with a discussion on making permanent the current policies of reapplication from shelter and exemption of minor children from PATH.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children

Barrier Free Living

Brooklyn Defender Services

CAMBA

Coalition for the Homeless

Community Service Society

Henry Street Settlement

Legal Aid Society

New York Legal Assistance Group

Safe Horizon

VOCAL-NY

Win