



*City Council Executive Budget Hearing  
General Welfare and Finance Committees  
Fiscal Year 2013  
Tuesday, May 22, 2012*

Good afternoon Chairs Palma and Recchia and members of the General Welfare and Finance Committees. I'm Seth Diamond, Commissioner for the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) and joining me here today are Steve Pock, Deputy Commissioner for Fiscal and Procurement Operations, and Lula Urquhart, Assistant Commissioner for Budget and Audit.

I'd also like to introduce you to Douglas James, DHS' new Deputy Commissioner for Adult Services. Many of you may recognize Doug from his former position with DHS as Deputy General Counsel. In his new role, Doug will manage emergency shelters for single adults and adult families and provide services to individuals living on the street. Additionally, Doug will be interfacing with some of you at the Council as well as other City agencies, non-profit partners and key stakeholders to lead agency initiatives.

Today we are happy to be here to discuss Mayor Bloomberg's Fiscal Year 2013 Executive Budget for DHS and to update you on Agency initiatives and accomplishments.

## **HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION**

Two weeks ago, Homeless Services unveiled a new Citywide prevention campaign to urge families at-risk of homelessness to utilize Homebase prevention services. As you can see on our exhibit, the public awareness campaign centers around the slogan, "Reach out, before you're forced out of your home: We can help you avoid shelter."

The first phase of the campaign features ads in both English and Spanish on billboards, subways, check-cashing establishments, MTA buses and bus shelters. We identified key advertisement placements in the city's 15 highest risk communities to ensure that we are targeting families and individuals who are most at-risk of becoming homeless. The intent is to raise awareness and encourage families and individuals to access prevention services through Homebase before seeking shelter. In addition to the outdoor campaign, television public service announcements will air in July and a Web video will be available on DHS' Website.

DHS will also combine these public messages with a grassroots campaign to solicit Homebase referrals, working with community-based organizations and public officials who play a crucial role in helping families who are experiencing a housing crisis.

The campaign is off to a great start. Since the ads first went up, the daily average number of calls to 311 for Homebase services has doubled. Since inception, Homebase has served nearly

35,000 families and individuals and through this effort, we intend to reach even more New Yorkers before they seek shelter.

## **HOUSING COURT INTERVENTION**

In addition to our efforts to raise public awareness in high risk communities, DHS is continuing to place targeted homelessness prevention services in key locations. In April, we collaborated on a new eviction prevention pilot with the Office of Court Administration, Human Resources Administration (HRA) and Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) in Bronx Housing Court. Our staff has been screening Advantage petitioners as they enter Housing Court to expedite FEPS applications and providing an attorney to represent them in housing court as needed.

On average, from start to finish, eviction cases have been discontinued in less than 20 days, an unprecedented accomplishment. Later this week, we will be meeting with Deputy Chief Administrative Judge Fern Fisher and her staff to replicate the effective early intervention model in Brooklyn and Queens.

## **POST ADVANTAGE WORKSHOPS**

In preparing for the loss of Advantage, from April 2011 to January 2012, DHS sent monthly letters to Advantage households to ensure they understood the program was ending. We have also notified tenants of the City's prevention resources and strongly encouraged households to attend Homebase information workshops to avail themselves of support services to remain stably housed in the community. Since late September, we've hosted 325 information sessions throughout the five boroughs and have an additional 40 sessions scheduled through the end of June. Already reaching more than 3,500 former Advantage households, we will continue to provide these community housing advice workshops on a variety of topics geared to maximizing housing stability and increasing knowledge in communities around tenant rights and the services available to tenants and landlords.

## **HOME TO STAY**

DHS is also piloting a program for families who have a previous shelter history to assist them in their return independence. In the spring of 2010, the agency launched the Home to Stay program as a collaborative pilot project with four service providers: Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS), Community Solutions, Women In Need (WIN) and Jericho Project. Funded by the Robin Hood Foundation, the program is designed to place families into housing as quickly as possible and ensure families do not return to homelessness. Home to Stay provides housing placement, employment assistance and temporary social services to achieve independence and reduce recidivism to a targeted group of homeless families using Family Critical Time Intervention (CTI).

Early results from the pilot show promise, with a 17 percent increase in the percentage of families exiting shelter and 62 fewer days in shelter for families served in the Home to Stay program.

## **VETERANS**

While we are examining a cohort of families with shelter histories, we are also doing more to support veteran families. DHS has been a leader in innovative programming to help homeless veterans and we continue to explore new strategies. Since last fall, the Homebase program, through a grant to HELP USA, has been providing homeless prevention and rapid re-housing services for at-risk and homeless veteran households in New York City under the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Supportive Services for Veteran Families Program (SSVF).

The SSVF program focuses on serving two populations of veterans. The first group is ‘housed’ veterans who are at imminent risk of becoming homeless. The program assists these veteran households with an array of services, which includes anti-eviction services, short-term financial assistance, job placement, budget counseling and housing relocation services. The second population is sheltered homeless veterans. The SSVF program works with shelter providers to offer specialized veterans services and assists shelter staff to place these veterans back into housing in the community. The SSVF program then offers follow-up services to ensure veterans remain stably housed. The program also adds a specialized ‘veterans’ component to the City’s existing Homebase program and coordinates the work of Homebase with the range of services available through the VA. With an annual enrollment target of 225 at-risk and homeless veteran households, the program is on track to exceed its goals. Since its inception, the program has served 204 homeless and at-risk veteran households throughout City.

Additionally, last October, DHS launched the Veterans Outreach and Housing Placement Initiative in partnership with the Bowery Residents’ Committee (BRC), Common Ground and Goddard Riverside Community Center. With a goal of connecting homeless single veterans to services and housing, the initiative has resulted in 150 individuals being engaged to date, with 120 of these veterans having moved to either permanent or transitional housing. Furthermore, more than 80 percent of these clients have either been connected to benefits through the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs or other public benefits and/or entitlements. We anticipate that a total of 200 single veterans will be placed into housing through this initiative by October of this year.

## **FAMILY INTAKE CENTER IS HONORED**

DHS is also proud to announce that its Prevention Assistance & Temporary Housing (PATH) family intake center has been recognized by the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA) and the Society of American Registered Architects of New York (SARANY).

In early June, DHS will be honored at the CMAA’s 19th annual awards ceremony where PATH will be distinguished as one of five award recipients in 2012. Later in the month, PATH will be additionally honored by SARANY at its 17th annual “Celebration of Architecture & Design,”

awards. With this award, PATH will join the ranks of other exclusive awardees, including the High Line and Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Since its opening, PATH's innovative and efficient design has improved the intake process and allows DHS to better serve New Yorkers on a daily basis. I do hope that we are able to reschedule the General Welfare Committee's tour of PATH in the coming weeks.

### **Fiscal Year 2013 Executive Budget**

Finally, DHS' current FY12 expense budget is \$914 million; for next year, FY13, the budget is \$801 million; Advantage funding accounts for the most significant portion of the difference.

Of the \$801 million, \$410 million are City funds, \$107 million are State funds, \$279 million are federal funds, \$4 million are CD grant funding, and \$1 million are intra-City funding. The \$801 million budget allocates \$335 million to services for single adults, \$404 million to services for families, and \$62 million to support services.

The DHS Capital Plan for the five year period of FY12 – FY16 is currently \$103 million. Capital projects for homeless families total \$31 million; projects for single adults total \$40 million; \$21 million has been allocated for support services; and \$11 million is designated for City Council funded projects.

I'm now happy to answer any questions you may have.