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Subject: Shelter unit visit by Mayor de Blasio: Pool report 1 of 1

Mayor Bill de Blasio, HRA Commissioner Steven Banks and Win President and CEO Christine Quinn arrive with three gifts wrapped in red paper at 2:52 p.m. to the Win shelter apartment unit of Jennifer Ashford.

Quinn introduces de Blasio and Banks to Ashford, 40, who works as a "direct support professional" in mental health services, and to Robin Brown, the program director of Liberty Family Residence. Quinn says Brown has been "fabulous" in her role.

"And these are for the girls!" Quinn exclaims of the presents.

"What would you like to tell the mayor?" Quinn asks of Ashford.

"And all of your friends on behalf of the media," de Blasio interjects of the pool journalists observing from the kitchen space.

"We told you to ignore all of them and just talk to the mayor. It's good advice," Quinn quips.

Ashford told reporters before the mayor arrived that she has been staying in Win housing for about a year. She said she previously lived with her mother in a Bedford-Stuyvesant apartment until high rent rates forced the whole family out. Her mother is now staying with a cousin.

De Blasio presents the gifts to Ashford for her daughters, saying, "We want to make sure they have a little nicer Christmas." He asks for the ages and names of her children, writing "Faith" onto the label of one box for Ashford's youngest daughter.

Quinn encourages Ashford to tell the mayor about her struggles finding an apartment. Ashford says the landlords have been unwilling to accept vouchers, which de Blasio says is a form of discrimination.

Ashford stays in the unit with three of her four daughters, ages 7, 11 and 17. A 19-year-old daughter is a student at BMCC. (Ashford's daughters were not present for de Blasio's visit.)

The unit has one room with two sets of neatly made bunk beds and three dressers. Shoes are lined up beneath the beds and toys are put away in a large Tupperware container. A row of children's books and a television are arranged on the sill of the unit's only window. An attached kitchen space is equipped with a small stove, refrigerator and a table with two chairs.

Ashford says her stay at Win "hasn't been an unpleasant one" because the nonprofit has provided much-needed services for her family, but, "The apartment search has been very difficult for me. ... A lot of the landlords are not accepting the programs. ... The vouchers, yes."

"I would like to know what can be done so that we can have a better chance of finding apartments," she says.

Ashford is part of a class-action lawsuit fighting such discrimination. De Blasio says she is helping other people with the lawsuit. Quinn says she is brave. De Blasio agrees the action is "brave" and "very, very important."

Speaking about the chapter before he faced off with Quinn in Democratic mayoral primary, de Blasio says, "So several years ago, when Christine and I were both in the City Council, we passed legislation that said it was illegal to discriminate against someone based on their source of income. In other words, if you have a voucher or any other type of income with any other type of currency, it's all the same."

He said the Human Rights Commission enforces the law.

"You're unfortunately not the first person we're hearing this from," he said, adding his office would look for ways to "immediately" help Ashford's family.

With Quinn's urging, Ashford tells de Blasio she is going on Christmas Eve to look at an apartment in Coney Island for her family and tells the mayor about her 17-year-old daughter's many acceptance letters from colleges with help from the program ASSET.

Ashford then tells de Blasio about her work in mental health services. "I love my job," she says. De Blasio tells Ashford in turn about first lady Chirlane McCray's passion for mental health work. "I appreciate that you do that job. We have a lot of people who need help," de Blasio said. " ... So you're at the frontline of that."

Quinn says 40 percent of the heads of household with Win are working.

Ashford says she wants to do the work for the long-term, though she started in July. "It's very rewarding. ... It's always been my passion to help others," she says.

“I really appreciate all you’re doing. And I appreciate you helping other people through the lawsuit,” de Blasio tells Ashford. “And I’m really happy to hear things are starting to come together for you in terms of the housing search. I admire how much you’re devoted to helping other people.”

Quinn says she’ll say a prayer for Ashford’s family that the Coney Island apartment will work out.

The pool is ushered out of Ashford’s apartment unit at 2:57 p.m.

Please reach out at the below contact info if you need anything, fellow reporters. Happy holidays to you and your families!!

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