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**MAYOR DE BLASIO AND DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES
ANNOUNCE PLAN TO REFORM TWO LARGEST DHS SHELTERS**

***City to Transition All Families With Children Out of the Auburn Family and Catherine Street
Shelters***

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio and the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) Commissioner Gilbert Taylor today announced the administration’s plan to convert the Auburn Family Shelter and the Catherine Street Family Shelter – two of the largest city owned and operated family shelters – into facilities that will service homeless adult couples without minors.

Following a December 2013 New York Times investigative story profiling a homeless family at the Auburn Family Shelter in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, Mayor de Blasio charged the Department of Homeless Services Commissioner with developing a plan for the removal of all families with children from DHS-run shelters with congregate bathrooms.

“We won’t leave these children and these families behind. We believe in our fundamental responsibility to lift up those going through adversity and crisis,” said **Mayor de Blasio**. “The transition at the Auburn and Catherine Street shelters is our first public step in a larger strategy to improve homeless services, while we address the underlying causes that have left a record-number of adults and children living in New York City shelters.”

“It is my responsibility to advance the mission of DHS in a respectful and just manner – one that includes making certain that homeless children and all shelter residents are provided safe conditions in well-run shelters,” said **DHS Commissioner Gilbert Taylor**. “I will work with Mayor de Blasio to ensure that every individual residing in a homeless shelter is treated with the compassion they deserve to improve their experience while in our care.”

There are currently 64 families with children sheltered at Auburn. Each of these families will be relocated to other, non-congregate, homeless shelters or placed into permanent housing by the end of the school year. Maintaining educational stability and continuity of school enrollment for

the children in these families is one of the highest priorities in the planning efforts. Similarly, 83 families with children are currently residing at the Catherine Street shelter, where the conversion is expected to be completed by the fall.

The mayor's preliminary budget directs \$1.3 million in FY14 to improve the security and programming at both shelters. Funds for facility renovations at both sites are already included in DHS' capital plan.

Specifically, the plan for Auburn and Catherine Street includes:

Increased Security: Since January 2014, security at Auburn has been enhanced with the addition of more than 100 contracted security guards assigned to monitor all operational client bathrooms at the site during peak periods of use and to ensure safety throughout the facility. DHS is also in the process of configuring new closed circuit television (CCTV) systems in both Auburn and Catherine Street, which will provide an additional level of monitoring.

Facility Improvements: Physical plant improvements will commence shortly and will continue throughout this year and into next year, including modifications to the existing rooming units, and complete gut-renovations for the bathrooms at both facilities.

New Programming for Adult Families: At Auburn, the city plans to work with the community to create a culinary arts training program on the ground floor of the shelter. This resource will be accessible for use by both Auburn and neighborhood residents. The Catherine Street plan includes a security training and job placement program in the facility's newly renovated gymnasium, which will also be used for adult basketball leagues and be accessible to members of the surrounding community on the Lower East Side.

Since January 2014, DHS has been able to relocate more than 40 families who had been residing at the Auburn shelter, either to other non-congregate shelters or to permanent housing. Relocation efforts, however, have left many of the units at Auburn vacant. DHS has utilized these vacancies over the past few weeks to shelter families with children during Code Blue activations caused by the severe winter weather. As one of his first directives in office, Mayor de Blasio instructed DHS to suspend the discharge of ineligible families from shelter during Code Blue periods and grant automatic temporary placement to all re-applicant families.

"This is a great step towards ensuring our homeless population is treated with dignity and respect at New York City shelters. For too long, our homeless shelters were unsafe and often unsuitable for families who deserved better care than they were provided. The City Council is committed to addressing New York's homeless crisis and looks forward to working with the Administration to achieve that," said **City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**.

"It must be our mission as a city to stamp out poverty and to ensure that every child and family is provided a safe and healthy upbringing," said **City Council General Welfare Committee Chair Steve Levin**. "By transferring families with children out of the Auburn and Catherine Street Family Residences, we are taking a positive step forward in improving the lives of our children,

and I thank Mayor de Blasio and Commissioner Taylor for taking this immediate action to protect the children of New York City.”

“Phasing out the placement of families with children in Auburn and Catherine Street and providing training programs for the community and adult families in these facilities are major steps forward in reforming the city’s shelter system. Neither facility was appropriate for children, and the administration’s quick response to this problem will end the irreparable harm suffered by the thousands of children who passed through these two shelters each year,” said **Steven Banks, the Attorney-in-Chief of The Legal Aid Society**, which has represented homeless New Yorkers in right to shelter litigation over the past three decades.

“Moving vulnerable children out of New York’s two worst shelters is a significant piece of the swift, smart reform we hoped to see in the first 100 days of Mayor de Blasio’s administration. Countless thousands of girls and boys have endured the decrepit and dangerous conditions in the Auburn and LIFE shelters since the Koch era. Rescuing children is an essential first step as we work to fully stabilize their families in permanent housing,” said **Mary Brosnahan, Coalition for the Homeless’ President and CEO**.

“This is an important step toward reforming the homeless services system, and I commend Mayor de Blasio for taking action. Moving children away from mixed shelters where they’re too often left vulnerable is a common-sense and just decision. Given Auburn’s standing as a shelter that symbolizes neglect and abuse in the system, it’s apropos that reform be started there. We must continue to work together to rebuild the safety net for poor children and make sure no New Yorker is left behind,” said **NYC Public Advocate Letitia James**.

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