



THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR  
NEW YORK, NY 10007

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:** October 30, 2017

**CONTACT:** [pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov](mailto:pressoffice@cityhall.nyc.gov), (212) 788-2958

**MAYOR DE BLASIO APPOINTS ANNABEL PALMA AS DEPUTY COMMISSIONER  
OF STRATEGIC INITIATIVES AT THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES**

*Palma to focus on and expand community engagement initiatives and deepen community relationships across the five boroughs*

**NEW YORK**— Mayor Bill de Blasio today announced the appointment of Council Member Annabel Palma as Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives at the Department of Social Services (DSS). As a long-time Council Member representing the Bronx and the former Chairwoman of the Council’s General Welfare Committee, Palma brings a proven track record of engaging communities on social service issues. Building on her own personal experience as a young single mother, struggling to build a better life for her family, Palma worked tirelessly in the Council to make government more responsive to the needs of the community.

Palma will start in January 2018 and report to DSS Services Commissioner Steven Banks. Among other strategic initiatives to improve the lives of low-income families and individuals, Palma will work with and support Commissioner Banks, Department of Homeless Services Administrator Joslyn Carter and the entire leadership team at DSS to carry out the Mayor’s plan to transform the shelter system that has built up in a haphazard way over the past 30 years and implement the new borough-based approach to help more homeless New Yorkers get back on their feet, and ultimately transition out of shelter and back into housing in the community. She will also work with and support the Commissioner and Human Resources Administration Administrator Grace Bonilla and her team on other social services initiatives.

“For more than a decade, Annabel has worked day in and day out to help those in need, including those in her own backyard in the Bronx. I am thrilled to welcome Council Member Palma to the team and look forward to working together to ensure that New Yorkers most at risk of becoming homeless are provided the tools and opportunities to get back on their feet,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**.

“Councilmember Palma has spent years working and advocating for New Yorkers, and has dedicated her career towards making sure communities receive services and help in times of need” said **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio**. “We are thrilled to have Annabel on board to help us build on critical initiatives, including expanding

legal services for tenants facing evictions and investing in prevention tools to help more New Yorkers avoid homelessness.”

“For many years, Annabel and I worked together on the front lines to address the needs of low-income children and adults, and I know first-hand her commitment to improving the provision of social services. She is a perfect addition to our team, as we continue with our reform initiatives and implement the Mayor’s realistic plan to prevent and alleviate homelessness,” said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**.

“Homelessness exists in every community. I have spent over a decade helping homeless New Yorkers and based on my own experience know that homelessness is not a choice and can happen to anyone,” said **Council Member Annabel Palma**. “I am proud to join the Mayor and his team, playing an integral role in helping to change the perception of our homeless neighbors, while helping to carry out his plan to turn the tide on homelessness in our beloved city.”

“Council Member Annabel Palma’s personal experiences informed her desire to be a fierce advocate for the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and every day she brings with her that energy and motivation to improve the lives of others around her,” said **City Council Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito**. “She inspires all of us on the Council, and we have greatly enjoyed working with her to make our City a better place – especially for the homeless, women, and people of color. I wish her well in her next endeavor as Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives at the Department of Social Services.”

Earlier this year, the Mayor announced “Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City,” his borough-by-borough plan for addressing the challenge of homelessness, which affects every community across the five boroughs. To address and transform a shelter system that expanded in a haphazard way over the past four decades, the Mayor’s plan will completely end the use of all 360 cluster sites and hotel facilities citywide, while opening a smaller number of 90 new and more effective traditional shelters. This will reduce the number of Department of Homeless Services’ facilities by 45 percent across New York City and allow us to maintain a vacancy rate to ensure the flexibility we need to implement a more equitable, borough-based system that takes into account the individual needs of the children and adults we must shelter. The plan’s guiding principle is community and people first: giving homeless New Yorkers, who come from every community across the five boroughs, the opportunity to be sheltered closer to their home boroughs, support networks and anchors of life, including schools, jobs, healthcare, family, houses of worship, and communities they called home, in order to more quickly stabilize their lives.

“Councilwoman Palma’s combination of experience and knowledge of DSS makes her the perfect choice to be the next deputy commissioner for strategic initiatives within DSS,” said **Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair, Council Committee on General Welfare**. “Annabel has shown in the past a strong commitment to constituent engagement and a solid track record of helping people in need. I look forward to working with her to ensure that we are truly turning the tide on homelessness.”

“I want to commend Mayor de Blasio for appointing Council Member Annabel Palma as Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives at the Department of Social Services (DSS),” **said José Calderón, President of the Hispanic Federation.** “We have had the great privilege of working with Annabel in her role as Council Member, former Chairwoman of the Council's General Welfare Committee and advocate, and know first-hand how diligently and passionately she has worked on behalf of vulnerable New Yorkers. Annabel brings to DSS a wealth of experience in public and community service that will be a great asset to the agency as it carries out the Mayor's plan to transform the shelter system. The Hispanic Federation and its member agencies look forward to working with her in this new role as we work to improve the lives of low-income families and individuals throughout New York City.”

“I am delighted that Councilmember Annabel Palma has accepted appointment by Mayor De Blasio as Deputy Commissioner at the Department of Social Services. Annabel will provide additional leadership to address critical issues facing New York's vulnerable and poor individuals and families, especially those struggling with homelessness,” **said Monsignor Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York.** “Her understanding of the critical role human service agencies play in addressing these issues, in partnership with the City, will serve well in implementing the Mayor's commitments to strengthening the nonprofit sector. Councilmember Palma's personal and professional experience will be most valuable in tackling difficult problems that New York faces in being a more caring and fair City.”

“Annabel Palma is a terrific addition to the team at the Department of Homeless Services. Earlier this year, the Mayor announced his Turning the Tide plan on homelessness to address and transform a shelter system that expanded in a haphazard way over the past four decades,” **said Doug Lasdon, Executive Director, Urban Justice Center.** “Annabel has dedicated her entire career to helping New Yorkers in need and I know that she will be a welcome and strong addition to the leadership at the Department of Social Services—and help build on the progress they have already made to address the challenge of homelessness, which affects every community across the five boroughs.”

“Annabel Palma's leadership is centered in empathy for the poorest New Yorkers and their struggles. Food Bank For New York City applauds the Department of Homeless Services for this appointment, and looks forward to working closely with Council Member Palma as she transitions to her new role,” **said Margarette Purvis, President and CEO of Food Bank For New York City.**

“Over the past few years, the New York Common Pantry has been lucky to meet and get to know Annabel Palma in her role as Council Member and Chairwoman of the General Welfare Committee. In those roles, Annabelle was responsive and hands-on, and when she came to visit our sites she asked important questions, inquiring about best practices, and always demonstrated a commitment to helping the city's underserved,” **said Stephen Grimaldi, Executive Director, New York Common Pantry.** “We are delighted that her personal and professional expertise will be brought to bear as Deputy Commissioner of Strategic Initiatives at the Department of Social Services (DSS). She will continue the current march to providing innovative solutions to reduce homelessness and provide sustainable solutions that work for all.”

“Annabel will be a terrific asset to the Department of Social Services. She truly represents the people who she will be serving. As a life-long Bronx resident and dedicated public servant, their story is her story. The Department is fortunate to have such a committed and passionate person,” said **Marc Jerome, President, Monroe College.**

“Annabel Palma has been relentless in fighting for healthcare access, better schools, and affordable housing for New York City families. But her leadership on the complex issues affecting our homeless communities deserves special praise. Her track record, commitment and personal experiences make her an outstanding choice for Deputy Commissioner of Social Services. I congratulate Annabel and look forward to working with her on ensuring New York City’s social safety net remains strong as we work to provide a home for every family in need,” said **Dr. Rosa M. Gil, Founder and CEO of Comunilife.**

“Annabel Palma has been an asset to her constituencies and the communities she serves. Youth Development in her district was enhanced and inspired by her leadership and dedication to the children we serve. There’s no doubt she will do the same as deputy commissioner of social services!” said **Daniel Quintero, Executive Director, Kips Bays Boys and Girls Club.**

“We are thrilled and excited about Council Member Annabel Palma’s new position,” said **Jane Aoyama-Martin, Project Director for Bronx Legal Services.** “She has been a champion of the rights of low income Bronx residents and we look forward to continuing our work with her in her new position.”

### **About Annabel Palma**

Annabel Palma served as a Council Member for the 18<sup>th</sup> District in the Bronx, working tirelessly to improve the district she has lived in her entire life, drawing on her definitive struggle with poverty to fight for workers’ rights and fairer, more responsive representation for her constituents. In 1991, Annabel received her Certified Nursing Assistant certification from Bronx Community College. At St. Vincent De Paul Senior Residence, she became a practicing nursing assistant and was elected as a union representative in 1994 while earning an associate’s degree from Monroe College. In 1999, she was asked to join the staff at 1199SEIU as a full-time organizer, where she developed her passion for public service by organizing workers and leading walkouts to protest unfair working conditions. In her 14 years in the Council, Annabel allocated tens of millions of dollars to create affordable housing units for families, seniors, and veterans. She has also funded community programming in public housing developments to ensure low-income New Yorkers are getting the crucial resources they deserve. As the former chair of the Committee on General Welfare, Annabel has an acute understanding of our city’s homelessness challenges and has worked closely with service providers who help to our most vulnerable populations. Since 2003, Annabel has provided her constituents the voice they need to fight for a myriad of issues such as high-quality schools, good-paying jobs, a cleaner environment, and greater access to health care.

### **About the Department of Social Services**

The New York City Department of Social Services (DSS) is comprised of the Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration. As part of the 90-day review of

homeless services, the Mayor determined that to both prevent homelessness and more effectively coordinate services for families and individuals experiencing homelessness, the Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services should both report to a single Commissioner of the Department of Social Services. The Human Resource Administration is dedicated to fighting poverty and income inequality by providing New Yorkers in need with essential benefits. With over 14,000 employees, HRA helps more than three million New Yorkers annually with services like food assistance, cash assistance, emergency rental and utility assistance, job placement and training, public health insurance, child care, adult protective services, domestic violence shelter and assistance, HIV/AIDS support services, child support, and legal services. HRA's committed staff works every day to fight poverty, improve services, meet the changing needs of clients and ensure program integrity. The Department of Homeless Services works to prevent homelessness before it occurs, address street homelessness, and assist New Yorkers in transitioning from shelter and street homelessness to permanent housing. DHS collaborates with non-profit partners to provide temporary shelter and services that homeless New Yorkers need to achieve and maintain housing permanency. In February 2017, the Mayor announced his comprehensive plan to turn the tide on homelessness, neighborhood by neighborhood. The plan's guiding principle is community and people first, and giving homeless New Yorkers, who come from every community across the five boroughs, the opportunity to be sheltered closer to their support networks and anchors of life, including schools, jobs, healthcare, family, houses of worship, and communities they called home in order to more quickly stabilize their lives and return to independent living in the community. Learn more about how DHS is turning the tide on homelessness, neighborhood by neighborhood, at [nyc.gov/tide](http://nyc.gov/tide).