

# CAMPAIGN TO IMPROVE AND EXPAND CITYFHEPS

## THE HOMELESSNESS CRISIS IN NEW YORK CITY

Today, a record number of people are experiencing homelessness. As of October 10th, over 60,000 people were in the city's shelter system, and thousands more were living on the streets and subways, or were crowded into unsafe and precarious living conditions. Average shelter stays are inordinately long – ranging from 483 days for single adults to 773 days for adult families, and shelter-to-housing move-out rates declined 27 percent in the last fiscal year.



### WHAT IS CITYFHEPS?

CityFHEPS (“City Fighting Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement”) is a voucher that helps tenants pay rent each month. There are different types of CityFHEPS vouchers, but the main version helps households leave homeless shelters and move into apartments. An additional smaller number of vouchers are meant to help people remain housed so they avoid entering shelter.



### WHO QUALIFIES FOR CITYFHEPS?

To receive CityFHEPS to exit shelter, you must meet many requirements. The main requirements include:

- 1. IMMIGRATION:** While the city could offer CityFHEPS vouchers to families where all members are undocumented, they currently do not. At least one household member must have a “qualifying immigration status” showing they are “lawfully present.” This person does NOT have to be a U.S. Citizen or green card holder specifically. There are MANY immigration statuses that count. Households with undocumented family members can still receive CityFHEPS but they only get a subsidy reflecting the number of documented household members.
- 2. INCOME:** During the first year of the program, the household must be at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Line. During the second and subsequent years, the income threshold increases, so households are allowed to earn more. Anyone eligible for Cash Assistance must receive it.
- 3. HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION:** The household must include at least one person who has been working for the past 30 days, OR an adult who is disabled, OR someone 60 or older, OR an adult exempt from Cash Assistance work requirements because they care for a disabled family member.
- 4. HOMELESSNESS:** Households must be in a shelter that is specifically run by the Human Resources Administration (HRA) or Department of Homeless Services (DHS) for at least 90 days. Those who are street homeless, staying in drop-in centers, or living in transitional housing must be receiving services from a DHS contracted provider for at least 90 days.
- 5. ELIGIBILITY FOR OTHER PROGRAMS:** Recipients must not be receiving support from any other rental assistance program.

## PROBLEMS WITH CITYFHEPS

While CityFHEPS helps people obtain stable housing, the program is plagued with issues, including:

1. **ELIGIBILITY:** Many households need CityFHEPS vouchers, yet strict rules limit who qualifies.
2. **DELAYS:** Unfortunately, it often takes months for someone with a CityFHEPS voucher to secure and move into an apartment. Typos, missing documents, and other minor mistakes cause entire applications to be denied or delayed, which forces some households to stay in shelter for longer than they have to.
3. **UNFAIR RULES:** Unnecessary rules make it difficult for voucher holders to secure apartments. Under one rule, the city deducts a “utility allowance” from allowable rents, reducing the maximum rent a voucher holder’s apartment can charge, and limiting the apartments they can choose from. Another rule allows the city to reject apartments where the rent is deemed “unreasonable” in comparison to other rents in the immediate neighborhood. This comparison is late in the process, is not a legal requirement, and makes it extremely difficult for households to find apartments, particularly in a tight rental market.
4. **DISCRIMINATION:** Many landlords do not want to accept vouchers, and therefore refuse to rent apartments to CityFHEPS households. This is called source of income (SOI) discrimination, which is illegal. Unfortunately, the City administration is failing to combat this problem. The NYC Human Rights Commission’s (CCHR) Source of Income Unit is supposed to represent voucher holders experiencing discrimination, but it currently has just four employees and cannot protect peoples’ rights.
5. **POOR APARTMENT CONDITIONS:** The limited pool of apartments available to and accepting of voucher holders are often in decrepit conditions. Landlords tend to do less upkeep and care for buildings where a majority of tenants have vouchers. This results in CityFHEPS households having to settle for substandard housing, particularly because there is nowhere they can go to complain, and because it is difficult to move out and find other apartments.

## PROSPECTIVE SOLUTIONS

Some steps the City can take to improve CityFHEPS include:

1. **EXPAND ELIGIBILITY** to more households, such as to families where everyone is undocumented.
2. **REFORM BUREAUCRATIC PROCESSES** to make sure that the City and shelter staff quickly process applications and that minor errors no longer result in month-long delays or outright denials.
3. **ELIMINATE UNNECESSARY RULES**, such as the 90-day shelter stay requirement, the utility allowance, and rent reasonableness rules.
4. **COMBAT DISCRIMINATION** by rebuilding the City’s source of income discrimination unit and making sure that it has the capacity to actually enforce the rights of CityFHEPS households.
5. **IMPROVE CODE ENFORCEMENT** by ensuring that oversight agencies regularly conduct thorough inspections, and that they have the capacity and expertise needed to enforce necessary repairs.



### WHERE CAN I LEARN MORE ABOUT CITYFHEPS?

More information about CityFHEPS is here:

[www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/hra/help/cityfheps.page)

If you are in shelter and want to learn whether you qualify for CityFHEPS, you can speak with a representative from your shelter.