



247 LARK STREET
ALBANY, NY 12210
TEL 518-449-4207 FAX 518-449-4219
WWW.HOUSINGWORKS.ORG

DEMAND HOUSING
FOR HOMELESS PEOPLE
LIVING WITH AIDS & HIV

HOUSING WORKS

Testimony on the
adequacy of the public
assistance grant in
New York State

Assembly Social Services
Committee
Hon. Keith L.T. Wright, Chair

September 28, 2007



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Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of the clients, staff and volunteers of Housing Works.

Housing Works is the largest community-based HIV/AIDS service organization in New York and in the United States; we are also the nation's largest minority-controlled AIDS service organization.

HIV/AIDS and New York

Twenty-five years into the epidemic, New York has remained the epicenter of HIV/AIDS in America.

After 25 years of HIV/AIDS, the epidemic remains a terrible crisis in New York - New York City, for example, has more AIDS cases than Los Angeles, San Francisco, Miami and Washington DC combined.

HIV/AIDS in New York is accelerated by poverty, widespread homelessness and a lack of reliable, stable access to basic health care, services and HIV prevention tools among high-risk populations.

Today, between 180,000 and 250,000 New Yorkers are living with HIV/AIDS, according to state health officials. Eight out of ten are Black or Latino, and a majority will experience homelessness or extreme poverty at some point during their diagnosis.

HIV, poverty and homelessness or unstable housing

Homelessness is an independent risk factor for HIV in New York and in America, and HIV is a major risk factor for homelessness. And clearly, lack of

income to afford housing and survival basics puts low-income New Yorkers at risk for both.

According to studies by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Health and Columbia University, 50% of New Yorkers newly diagnosed with HIV last year were homeless.

Research studies demonstrate that homelessness and unstable housing are strongly linked to:

- Greater HIV risk among vulnerable populations;
- Poor health outcomes for persons living with HIV/AIDS;
- Early death from AIDS and related illnesses.

Specifically: people who are homeless or unstably housed are up to nine times more likely to be HIV-positive and up to six times more likely to engage in high-risk sex and drug-use practices, and people living with HIV who are homeless or unstably housed are five times more likely to die from AIDS.

Studies also show strong and consistent correlations between improved housing status and:

- Reduction in HIV/AIDS risk behavior;
- Better access to medical care;
- Improved health outcomes;
- Savings in taxpayer dollars.

People who move from unstable housing or homelessness into stable housing decrease high-risk behaviors like unsafe sex or drug use; increase connections with HIV prevention and services; are more likely to know their HIV status and receive

proper HIV treatment; and are less likely to transmit the virus to others.

The risks related to unstable housing and the benefits of improving housing status are particularly acute for people who are mentally ill and/or struggling with chemical dependency - stable housing is a particular benefit for HIV prevention and treatment among these groups.

So the connection between poverty, housing, homelessness and HIV is clear: if people don't have enough income to maintain their housing and basic needs, they will be at higher risk for HIV and more likely to suffer and die if they become HIV-positive, and public programs will pay far more for their shelter and health care as a result.

The economic costs of ongoing HIV transmissions and HIV treatment failure within this population are enormous. The estimated lifetime medical treatment cost of each new infection is over \$300,000.

Connections to welfare policy and law

Clearly, in New York basic welfare grants don't come close to meeting the cost of shelter and other survival needs.

Fair market rents for a two-bedroom apartment are far beyond welfare shelter allowances - or even the full welfare grant for a family:

- NYC FMR \$1133/mo
- Nassau-Suffolk FMR \$1280/mo
- Westchester FMR \$1132/mo



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- Albany-Schenectady-Troy FMR \$715/mo

For people living with or at high risk for HIV/AIDS, housing is a necessary foundation for lifesaving health care and HIV prevention services – and it's crucially important for people with other disabilities, including mental illness, mobility limitations or chemical dependency.

Housing Works urges new efforts to address survival, health and housing needs for low-income New Yorkers who rely on public assistance grants.

- We support increases in both the monthly cash grant and the shelter allowance to allow families and individuals to afford and maintain stable housing while assuring daily needs including nutrition and transportation.
- We support the use of HUD fair market rents to determine actual shelter costs for low-income families and individuals.
- We support targeted efforts to fight homelessness and unstable housing among people with disabilities, including people living with HIV.
- We support state legislation to cap rents for people living with HIV/AIDS to 30% of income, reflecting federal law and regulations for subsidized and supportive housing.
- We support expansion of the New York City HIV/AIDS Services Administration benefits and



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services to all low-income people living with
HIV across the state - "HASA for All."

New York should lead the nation with adequate
benefits, comprehensive legal protections and
funding: it's good antipoverty policy, housing
policy, good public health policy, and good
HIV/AIDS policy.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.