

Testimony of Brendan Cheney, New York Housing Conference

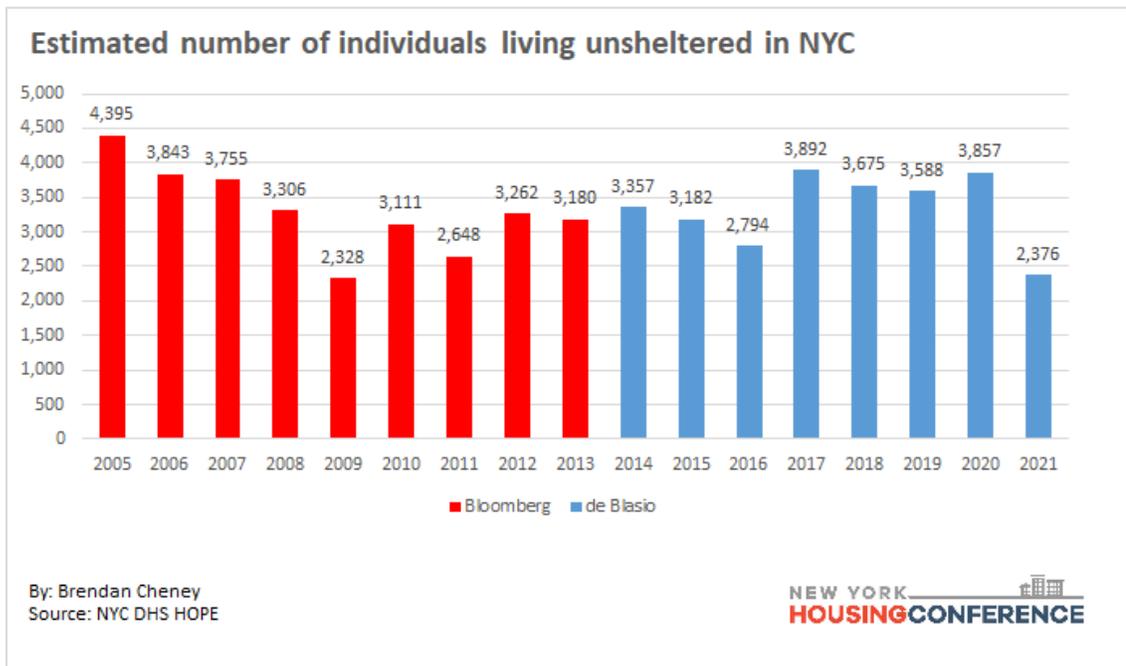
New York City Council General Welfare Committee
Oversight Hearing on Unsheltered Homelessness in New York City

May 3, 2022

Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Cheney. I am Director of Policy and Communications at the New York Housing Conference (NYHC). I would like to thank the Committee Chair Diana Ayala as well as the other members of the City Council Committee on General Welfare for the opportunity to testify about unsheltered homelessness.

NYHC is a nonprofit affordable housing policy and advocacy organization. As a broad-based coalition, our mission is to advance City, State and Federal policies and funding to support the development and preservation of decent and affordable housing for all New Yorkers.

We want to thank the committee for focusing on this issue. Every year the city estimates the number of people living unsheltered and it fluctuates between 2,300 and 4,000. The estimate comes from a survey once every year in the winter, though the estimate is likely as influenced by the weather on that night as it is on larger trends and advocates say it is likely an undercount. It is safe to say that there are several thousand people experiencing homelessness and living unsheltered in our city.



We agree with Mayor Eric Adams that it is inhumane to have people who are experiencing homelessness, especially those that are living unsheltered. But the humane solution is to have housing ready and available for them. We've been

disappointed that Mayor Adams hasn't made housing a part of his plans to address unsheltered homelessness. Housing must be part of the solution.

The housing first model, which prioritizes providing housing to end someone's homelessness experience, has been proven to work nationwide but New York City has been unable to implement it. For people living unsheltered, this would mean moving them straight into housing. Some providers are making it work. New Destiny Housing has a rapid rehousing program for victims of domestic violence. We should replicate these models, and provide enough permanent housing, citywide.

While we want to see the City use housing as the solution, we also want to acknowledge efforts that have been working, including outreach efforts and expansion of low threshold shelters.

Going back more than 10 years, the City has been funding outreach services where workers reach out to and develop relationships with people living unsheltered and offer them supports like traditional shelters, drop in centers, and low-threshold shelters like safe havens and stabilization beds. Former mayor de Blasio and Mayor Eric Adams have both expanded the number of desperately-needed drop-in centers and safe havens.

But shelters must be an emergency and temporary solution, which is not the case with long shelter stays in New York City. Single adults stay in DHS shelters on average for 483 days while adults families with no minor children stay an average of 773 days – over two years, according to the [most recent city data](#). DHS does not release data on length of stays at safe haven shelters, but Politico [reported several years ago](#) that people in safe havens were also facing extended stays – one person interviewed had been there for two years – while waiting for permanent housing.

Shelter can be a temporary solution but housing is the real long term solution and should be part of the plan to address this issues.

Thank you and we are happy to answer any questions.