

Testimony of the New York Housing Conference

New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Testimony

March 17, 2026

Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Cheney. I am Director of Policy and Operations at the New York Housing Conference (NYHC). I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify about the FY 2027 preliminary budget.

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.

New York City's affordability crisis has led to growing housing instability and homelessness and federal cuts to SNAP and healthcare will put even more pressure on local programs in upcoming years, [pushing an estimated 70,000 New York City residents into poverty](#) each year between 2028 and 2034. In recent years, the City has aided tens of thousands of households with local rental assistance and arrears programs and in 2019 required new affordable housing projects set-aside 15% of their units for households experiencing homelessness.

However, while the city's social services agencies have aided record numbers of households with emergency shelter, rental assistance and cash assistance programs in recent years, the agencies have not received adequate resources or support in planning appropriate staffing levels. With a new administration keen on addressing public excellence and service delivery, now is the time to properly plan for staff needs based on current and future processing needs. These programs are necessary to prevent and end homelessness.

At times, insufficient planning has led to processing delays impacting benefit access resulting in lawsuits from legal services organizations. Inadequate staffing levels for DSS means that people stay in shelter longer, which is more costly to the city, and means affordable housing units stay vacant longer waiting for tenants to move in, costing the providers income they need to run the building.

Since the pandemic, staffing at the city's Human Resources Administration and the Department of Homeless Services have decreased dramatically and not recovered. Many agencies lost staff during the pandemic due to budget cuts, hiring freezes, and policies around remote work.

The headcount at HRA was 12,528 in December 2019 before the pandemic and was just 10,866 in January according to the most recent data. The Department of Homeless Services saw headcount decrease from 2,257 to 1,621. Meanwhile, HPD staffing decreased during the pandemic but has since recovered to slightly more than before the pandemic.

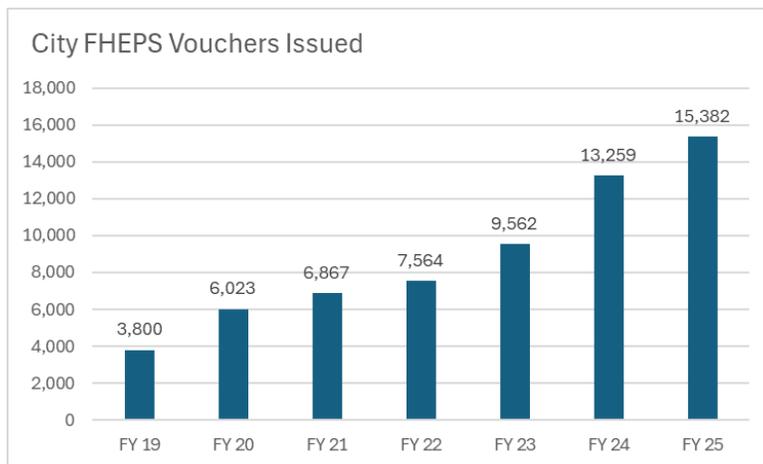
Actual Headcount at HRA and DHS

	Dec. 2019	Dec. 2021	Oct. 2022	Sep. 2023	Jan. 2024	Jan. 2025	Jan. 2026	Percent Change From 2019
HRA	12,528	11,298	10,468	10,942	10,981	10,991	10,866	-13%
DHS	2,257	1,874	1,818	1,794	1,792	1,763	1,621	-28%

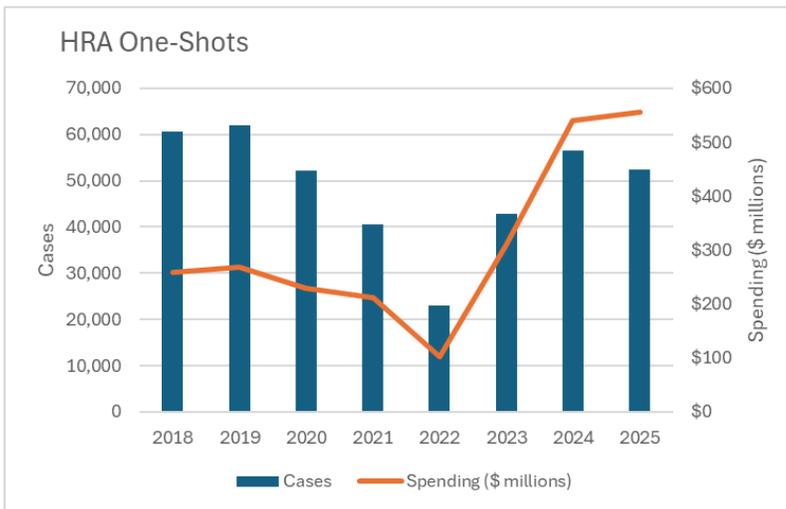
Source: NYHC Analysis of OMB and NYC Comptroller Data

The decrease in staffing at HRA has impacted how effectively the agency can utilize the programs. HRA has wide-ranging programs, from cash assistance and food stamps, to adult protective services and homeless prevention. The unit responsible for rental assistance and one-shots, among other things, saw headcount decrease 5 percent over that time, from 4,479 staff to 4,259. And this is a time period when need and funding for these programs has increased, but staffing has decreased.

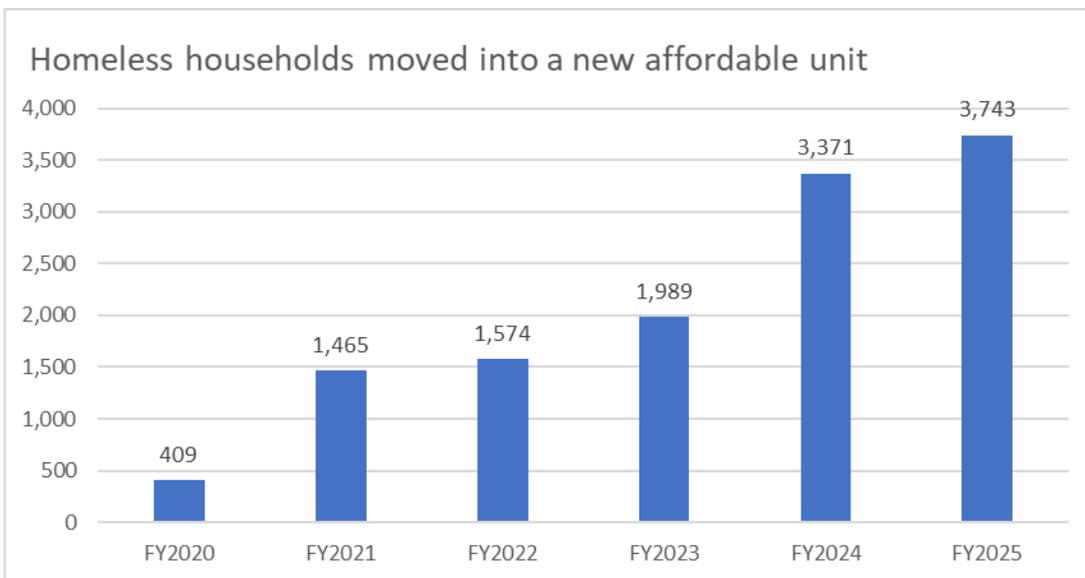
The city's CityFHEPS rental assistance program has grown since it started in 2019, increasing from issuing 3,800 vouchers that year to issuing more than 15,000 last year. Spending on the program has increased from roughly \$500 million in FY2023 to a projected \$2 billion in FY2026.



Meanwhile the city's One-Shot program is near historical levels, and is much higher than it was during the pandemic. Last fiscal year the City issued 52,300 One-Shots, compared to 23,100 in 2022. And spending on the program has grown significantly, increasing from \$102 million in 2022 to \$555 million last year. But the agency has fewer staff to process the funding.



Finally, the City is moving people from shelter into affordable housing set-aside units. DHS staff are responsible for referring people in shelter to HPD affordable housing units. Placements have increased while staffing has decreased. In 2009, the City moved just 409 households into affordable housing while in 2023 they were moving under 2,000 households. Last year the City moved more than 3,700 households into new affordable housing.



HRA staff may also see increased demand in their programs once cuts to federal programs, including SNAP and healthcare, start impacting New Yorkers.

While HRA and DHS clearly need more staffing, decreasing bureaucracy will make processes more efficient and can decrease staffing needs. For example, 3 out of 4 homeless households referred to affordable housing units by the City shelter system do not submit required paperwork even though they are assisted by caseworkers.

Recommendations

- **Plan for sufficient capacity: HRA must sufficiently staff the agency to meet the needs of its various programs and ensure timeliness of their processing. In addition, HRA can improve processes to make their staff and their policies more efficient.**
- **Ensure homeless referrals are supported and already approved:** The City's processes to rent up affordable housing buildings is bureaucratic and causes lengthy delays getting people into housing. In a case study, we looked at a project that took two years to rent up. In that project we found that it took nearly eight months to approve tenants for the 46 units reserved for people experiencing homelessness once the building was ready for occupancy. The City should ensure homeless referrals arrive income-eligible with rental assistance pre-approved.
- **Appoint coordinator for one-shots for proactive strategy:** In NYC, too many tenants in affordable housing face eviction due to nonpayment and wait months before they get assistance from HRA. HRA should establish an Affordable Housing Stability Coordinator to troubleshoot CityFHEPs processing, one-shot assistance and other benefit issues for tenants in affordable housing.
- **End CityFHEPS inspections:** CityFHEPs housing assistance should not require inspections to use the subsidy. These same apartments can immediately be rented without an inspection by a household who is not using a voucher.