



Thursday, May 20, 2021

The Honorable Corey Johnson
Speaker of the New York City Council
250 Broadway, New York, NY 10007

To Speaker Corey Johnson:

We are the leaders of VOCAL-NY -- we represent the thousands of people who spend every night suffering indignity and danger inside city shelters. We represent the thousands of children who have spent the last year without a safe place to learn, who tried to continue their education in a shelter system cut off from the internet. We represent anyone and everyone who has tried to find housing with a CityFHEPS voucher, only to see apartments outside of the voucher price range that have become the norm in every single neighborhood in this city.

Speaker Johnson -- we know you agree the price of the voucher must be raised. We have stood by your side time and time again and heard you argue that raising the amount of the cityFHEPS voucher is one of the most important ways we can help people struggling with housing get a permanent home.

We have full faith that you will be the leader we need, and get this bill passed, and offer hope to those of us who have suffered through such a difficult year.

As this city begins to recover from the worst public health crisis of living memory, we must remember that homeless New Yorkers were already in crisis, a crisis caused by a deeply unaffordable housing market, and a dispassionate government. When the two crises came together the effects were devastating for our community- and we learned that we can never again let our shelter population grow to the tens of thousands, we need a meaningful plan to get people housed, and intro 146 is an essential first step.

So why doesn't Mayor Bill de Blasio want this to come for a vote?

He is saying that we cannot raise the price of the cityFHEPS voucher without action from the state, saying on the radio last week "it would be like robbing peter to pay paul." To that we say three things:

- We know vouchers -- namely those that pay a market rate -- are successful in housing people. New York has many different voucher programs, but those that pay a market rate

have a dramatically higher success rate than those that do not, meaning more people get out of shelter, and stay out of shelter. The more programs we bring up to a fair market rate, the more people we will successfully house.

- We agree that the state government has a role to play in housing New Yorkers, but we can't wait for them to act. We have spent years lobbying the state government in an attempt to get a new market rate voucher in place, so no one is more frustrated than us by their lack of action. This cannot become an excuse to get our own city programs to work -- we must meet inaction with action, not excuses.
- We have long known that shelters cost more money than permanent housing. That's why intro 146 is more than a bill, it's an investment into a Caring and Compassionate New Deal in NYC. We stand to build a system that is not only more humane, dignified, and secure, but is also more cost-effective for all New Yorkers.

Speaker Johnson; we cannot let the Mayor continue to shirk his responsibility and poison this legislation with his lies. We must call intro 146 for a vote, and provide the desperately needed relief that can clear out our overburdened shelters. Know that the leaders of VOCAL-NY stand beside you, as well as all of those who dream of a City where no one is without a home.

Sincerely,

The Homelessness Union at VOCAL-NY

CC

Mayor Bill de Blasio

Commissioner Steven Banks

Councilmember Steve Levin