



Addressing the Homelessness Crisis: Strategies to House and Defend New Yorkers Statewide

2026 State Legislative Platform

Every night, over 150,000 New Yorkers sleep in shelters or on the streets, with tens of thousands more doubled- or tripled-up. We know the bigger picture of the crisis is much broader, and there is not a precise, accurate count available of everyone impacted, unstably housed, or at imminent risk of becoming homeless.

Homelessness is a consequence of the accelerating affordability crises in the state and the longstanding systemic oppression across the country. As we enter 2026, the political climate necessitates that careful attention be paid to the causes, symptoms, and experiences of poverty. Every community across the state faces the consequences of government negligence and is witnessing firsthand the worsening homelessness crisis.

Cutting assistance or placing burdensome requirements on it, will only exacerbate the problem. In the last year, localities across the state have also publicized their practices of encampment sweeps as 'solutions' for homelessness, when the action actively inflicts harm through loss of property, trauma, public stigma, and financial burden. Criminalizing homelessness is an inhumane and wholly ineffective way of solving any community's problems.

Addressing the homelessness crisis with tangible resources, rather than cuts, will improve the long-term health, well-being, and stability of our communities. We are calling on the Governor and the legislature **to champion solutions that invest in housing and resources for New Yorkers at risk and to defend our people by fighting against the policies that put us in danger.**

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Follow Through: Stay Accountable to Homeless & Low-Income New Yorkers

When programs are created with the goal of assisting low-income people, people experiencing or at risk of homelessness should be sustainably included in those investments. By the same token, when addressing the issues our communities face at scale, statewide programs should account for the diversity and differences in barriers faced in jurisdictions across the state, in and outside of New York City.

→ **HIV Housing for NY - [S442/A3355](#) (Bronson):**

To end the HIV epidemic, New York State must expand the existing 30% rent cap, currently only available in the five boroughs, to HIV-positive New Yorkers Upstate and on Long Island. The legislation mandates that the state fund rental assistance for people living with HIV so that localities outside of NYC can afford to provide it for all eligible people, at a rate that makes finding stable housing possible. This can be life-saving rental assistance; we must ensure permanent access to the HIV Emergency Shelter Allowance program for low-income New Yorkers with HIV facing homelessness, regardless of where they live in the state.

→ **#WiFi4Homeless - [S8026/A1755](#) (Gonzalez/Reyes):**

Homeless New Yorkers residing in temporary housing still lack the basic internet access that many rely on to complete vital tasks. Without wi-fi, people living in shelters face significant obstacles trying to complete important tasks like finding permanent housing and jobs, participating in remote schooling, securing government benefits and receiving medical care. The bill requires high-quality broadband speeds alongside data protections for people living in temporary housing, so that they can bridge the digital divide without fearing monitoring and theft of personal data. The state would be required to cover the expenses incurred by local social service districts, using the existing funding stream created to increase digital equity across the state.

→ **Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) Implementation:**

The HAVP pilot is set to take effect in March 2026. The state must guarantee full funding and successful distribution of the vouchers that have been prescribed by this program. The program will specifically prioritize New Yorkers who are currently homeless or at risk of homelessness, with intentional inclusion of individuals and families that may be left out of other assistance programs. During the pilot stage, HAVP will reduce homelessness overall by increasing access to stable housing for New Yorkers at risk– and will continue to do so at a larger scale once it is established as a fully funded, permanent statewide rental assistance program.

Pushing Back: How to Counteract Ineffective Policies

Across the state, localities including Oswego, Elmira, Watertown, and Saratoga Springs, are using encampment sweeps to penalize homelessness— implementing costly and cruel policies to temporarily appease superficial concerns, instead of investing in proven solutions to provide homeless people with pathways to housing. Imposing fines and incarceration for sleeping or lying in public exacerbates the homelessness crisis, whereas the solutions on this platform will alleviate it. In addition to the three strategies listed above, these policies and programs should be enacted to counter the harm of criminalization and reinvest in communities:

→ **SLEEP Act [A05452](#) (Forrest):** This bill would prohibit imposing fines, imprisonment, or other penalties (such as forceful removal or loss of personal property) for sleeping and camping in public places. It would explicitly disallow the ordinances that promote encampment sweeps.

→ **Cash Assistance Reform:** Reforms to the cash assistance system must include increases in payment standards, expanding eligibility, and eliminating bureaucratic hurdles: combating the massive increases in cost of living with direct financial assistance, not cuts and barriers.

- **Increase Cash Assistance Now! - [S1127/A106](#) (Persaud/Rosenthal):** increases the payment standards of monthly need and home energy grants.
- **Equity in Public Assistance Payments - [S113/A108](#) (Cleare/Rosenthal):** ensures that shelter residents on public assistance receive the same payment standard as those who are housed. Currently, individuals in shelters providing meals receive only \$45 per month.

→ **Supportive Housing:** Supportive Housing is a critical resource and intervention for tackling the intersecting issues of homelessness, substance use, and unmet mental health needs. When evaluating and creating housing solutions, emergency and long-term supportive housing should be expanded and improved with appropriate onsite services and dignified living conditions.

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VOCAL-NY Homelessness and Positive Leaders Unions consist of community members who are currently and formerly homeless or are personally impacted by the HIV epidemic, respectively, fighting to end the homelessness crisis and win a guarantee of stable housing among New Yorkers in our communities.