



**2020 NYS Senate Manhattan State Budget Forum  
February 29, 2020  
Testimony of Michael McKee, Treasurer**

**Dear Senators Brian Benjamin, Brad Hoylman, Robert Jackson, Brian Kavanagh, Liz Krueger & Jose M. Serrano:**

**Here is my two-minute testimony:**

- 1. Tax the rich.**
- 2. House the poor.**
- 3. As someone who worked for many, many years to help you win the majority in the New York State Senate, I would not be making this suggestion if I thought it would cost you the majority, or even cost you seats in November 2020. There are other issues that create political problems for some of your marginals, but increasing taxes on the rich is not one of them.**
- 4. It is time for the state legislature to stand up to Andrew Cuomo and END HIS AUSTERITY REGIME. Obviously the governor has advantages in the budget process, but you also have weapons, if you choose to use them.**

**Michael McKee**

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## Homeless Services United Testimony for the NYS 2020-21 Budget Forum

February 29<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Respectfully submitted by Eric Lee, Director of Policy and Planning [elee@hsunited.org](mailto:elee@hsunited.org) (212) 367-1562

Homeless Services United (HSU) is a coalition representing the mission-driven, homeless service providers in New York City. HSU advocates for expansion of affordable housing and prevention services and for immediate access to safe, decent, emergency and transitional housing, outreach and drop-in services for homeless New Yorkers. Thank you Chair Krueger and members of the New York State Senate Manhattan Delegation for your continued leadership on the homelessness and housing crisis in New York. **The landmark tenant reforms legislation you passed last session will preserve rent-regulated apartments in New York City and affordable housing throughout the State.** We welcome this opportunity today to highlight areas where we feel the Legislature can build upon its commitments to sheltering and housing New Yorkers.

In order to address the homelessness crisis in New York, the State must support and coordinate with localities in three key areas: eviction prevention, homeless services and shelter, and affordable and supportive housing.

### **Relieving increased cost burdens to localities for shelter and housing:**

**New York State must recommit to help the City by paying its fair share of the cost of shelter and rental assistance supplements.** Over the past few years, the State has backed away from its commitment to funding the social safety net, passing more of the burden on to localities including New York City.

The SFY 2019-20 enacted budget created a 10% cut to New York City's Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) reimbursement rates for Family Assistance, a \$125 million cost shift to the City for public assistance and family shelter expenses.<sup>1</sup> **The SFY 2020-21 executive budget is proposing an additional 5% TANF reimbursement cost shift to the City for Family Assistance and Emergency Assistance for Needy Families programs, at an estimated cost to the City of \$51.4 million.<sup>2</sup>**

In addition to these two federal TANF percentage shifts, the City is burdened with paying 71% of the non-Federal share of the cost of Safety Net Assistance program, which was changed in the SFY 2011-12 budget from an equal 50/50 split between the City and State. Over the past two decades, Safety Net recipients has steadily increased, leaving New York City and other localities to foot the majority of the bill.

New York City, faced with record numbers of individuals and families in shelter, and many more perilously close to becoming homeless, needs the support of the State to fund these ever-growing needs. **We ask the Legislature to oppose the proposed 5% TANF reimbursement cut for Family Assistance and Emergency Assistance programs included in the Governor's executive budget, and restore the 10% TANF reimbursement cut to Family Assistance from last year's budget. Moreover,**

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<sup>1</sup> Commissioner Banks, DSS, Testimony before NYC General Welfare Committee on DSS FY20 Executive Budget, 5/22/19

<sup>2</sup> Comptroller DiNapoli, Report on the State Fiscal Year 2020-21 Executive Budget



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**New York State should restore cost-sharing for cash assistance programs to 50% Federal, 25% City, and 25% State.**

### **Creating widespread access to rental assistance:**

In order to ensure that New Yorkers have a viable way to attain and remain stably housed in the community, statewide rental assistance programs are needed. **Homeless Services United supports the passage and funding of both Chair Krueger's Housing Stability Support (HSS) A.1620/S.2375 and Chair Kavanagh's Housing Access Voucher Program (A.9657/S.7628) in the SFY 2020-21 budget.** Statewide housing vouchers will be an effective tool to combat the effects of gentrification and rising rents, gaining access to a much larger swath of housing stock Statewide. Families and individuals with CityFHEPS and FHEPS "shopping letters" are unable to find apartments whose rent levels are low enough to qualify. People living in shelter can search for months to over a year for an apartment, given the extremely low vacancy rate for lower rent units. **In order to effectively be utilized, housing voucher rent levels must be tied to Fair Market Rent (FMR).** HSU is heartened that both Home Stability Support and Housing Access Voucher Program include this core recommendation, with HSS allowing for localities to supplement additional funds to raise rent levels up to FMR, and Housing Access setting a band rent levels at 90 to 110% FMR.

HSU applauds Chair Kavanagh's proposal (A.9657/S.7628) for not mandating households have an active Public Assistance case to qualify for a voucher. Public Assistance (PA) requirements for other vouchers have been a barrier to housing for undocumented immigrants, a bottleneck for applications, and even a destabilizing for tenants. Plagued by systemic inefficiencies and errors and archaic bureaucratic procedures, households can see their public assistance cases erroneously sanctioned or closed, and as an immediate result have their rental assistance halted. **Vouchered households should not be at risk of losing their housing due to fluctuations or changes to their public benefits.** Additionally, HSU supports the renewal eligibility criteria that ensures households can continue to increase income up until they are no longer "rent burdened", when the rent equals only 30% of their income.

Homelessness is an expansive social injustice touching hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers, and the as such, the solution is not cheap. But to do any less will not cure this ill, only its symptoms. **Homeless Services United urges the Legislature to fully fund and pass Home Stability Support (A.1620/S.2375) and Housing Access (A.9657/S.7628), and we are committing to standing with you to ensure that statewide rental assistance becomes a reality in New York.**

### **Creating a steady new supply of housing for homeless individuals:**

With the shelter census for Single Adults reaching a new record high one year ago, there is also an unprecedented need for supportive housing. **To ensure the future creation of supportive housing units remains uninterrupted, we urge the Legislature to hold Governor Cuomo to his previous commitment and include the following in the 2020-21 Budget:**

- 1. A capital appropriation to fully support the 14,000 supportive housing units yet to be funded from Gov. Cuomo's commitment to provide 20,000 units of supportive housing Statewide,**



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accompanied by annual service and operating fund allocations for to support the units as they come online

2. Accelerate the supportive housing pipeline as NYC did last year (they increased the annual commitment by 200 beds per year)

**Supporting the non-profit human services workforce:**

The nonprofit human services sector is eager to work with the Governor and the legislature to ensure that vital investments are made in the sector during the 2020-21 session. Our nonprofit organizations struggle to deliver vital services to their communities. New York State has heard from us time and again that the human services sector is at a breaking point. Despite an increasing need for these services, the Governor’s executive budget does not include funding necessary for the financial health of human services providers and the millions of people we serve. We recognize previous programmatic and workforce investment, notably the salary increases for direct care workers in the developmental disabilities, mental health, and addiction recovery fields, but more is needed to combat a decade of divestment.

It is more important than ever to make strategic investments in this sector so that we can better serve our communities. HSU asks the Governor and legislature to commit to a three percent increase across rates and contracts each year for the next five years, which is in line with the Governor’s statement that a 3 percent growth rate is projected and reasonable for Medicaid and education. Human services should be included in that projection, and this 3for5 investment is crucial to shoring up lifesaving services in New York.

Through these initiatives, the Legislature would deliver the keystone necessary to build a viable pathway out of shelter and back into permanent housing and further cement households’ ability to retain their housing when at risk of becoming homeless. New York City and other localities are struggling with the cost of shelter and housing and need the State to courageously recommit to sharing the burden of this all-encompassing crisis. Creating a Statewide housing voucher and upholding the promise of creating much needed supportive housing is not only the morally just choice, it makes good fiscal sense, resulting in cost-savings to both New York State and tax payers, reducing evictions and the need for emergency shelter and homeless services.

**Senate Budget Hearing**  
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Feb. 29, 2020

347 757 9251,

Written Testimony from Julie Hanlon with Supplemental News clip (Not oral testimony )

**Honorable Members of the Senate,**

Thank you for the privilege to speak.

May I ask your consideration for an area of need that may not yet be supported in a State Budget? It would fall under emergency or unexpected crisis faced by tenants enduring serial harassment from Landlords. Nationwide, Rent Stabilised Tenants are the last of a group of aging Tenants who have the luxury of affordable housing units. While we are protected by strict regulatory laws, it doesn't protect us from predatorial conduct & harassment by abusive landlords and their agents.

Let me explain: There has been a poisoning of our air up to 24 hours per day using chemicals not limited to pesticide poisons being dispersed by illegal, unlicensed people who were caught using restricted & illegal chemicals to make our air unfit for human life, and unsafe to breath. I know many tenants who fled their rooms permanently for fear of health safety.

Having spent 3 years in litigation I became aware of the need for budgeting that this could fall under. For tenants who can't move out, I believe this is an environmental crisis because you can't escape the air you breath. Imagine relaxing in your home and smelling formaldehyde while it stings to breath—all day long or rotting onion/sulfur fumes burning your skin & sinus while you slept or having acetone in your air all day and night mixed with pesticides —like DDT one elderly wheelchair bound tenant complained to the City about in 2017. His part time Aide quit fearful of what the fumes he was exposed to working there were doing to his health.

After Violations issued to them caught with a cache of pesticides in 2016 and a Quarrantine Order that wasn't obeyed, in 2017 ORDER TO CONSENT admitted their misuse and paid fines. Managing Agents familiar to Senator Kreuger (Jay Wartski & Robert(o) Goicochea) for Dexter 345, Inc. Slumlord Jay Wartski who owned The Sahara Hotel & The Bond

Hotel were reputed for harassing rent stabilised tenants.

This is the story published then just prior to the 2017 NYS DEC Order On Consent that Honorable Gov. Cuomo insured took place :

<https://nypost.com/2017/03/12/rent-controlled-tenants-say-landlord-tries-to-oust-them-with-pesticides/>

Without the costs provided by State Agency NYS DEC investigating in 2016 under a narrow scope of chemicals involved (Pesticides only) we would never have known what was being done to us since the 2004 takeover of our building. This was free to any tenant that filed an Oath Statement to the Inspectors involved. They are our heroes.

However, while caught, and even after paying fines, they did not stop the abuse. In my case I live with a death threat from one of the unlicensed, ex felon on parole convicts placed as a temporary neighbor. And more retaliatory abuse by those involved to this day. The fumes are reliably at night and unpredictable so as not to be caught by Inspections ongoing while tenants complained. In 2015 46 tenants signed a Petition to the Landlord asking them to help stop the harassment.

Costs for further Environmental & Air Quality tests for myself and my neighbours are beyond our means. We believe we are targeted. Our landlord has a criminal background and he lives up to the reputation placing drug addicts as our neighbours, unemployed people who pay rent? Hookers, you name it we've had all kinds of "at risk people" in our wings, usually a year or longer who are aggressive and think nothing of abusing people they don't even know. Jay Wartski was called "heartless" by one journalist and if he's allowing this abuse to proliferate it certainly proves it true.

Emergency needs for cases as unusual as this, being provided by the State could allow specific testing that City Agencies have no budget to conduct due to costs: Examples of such Tests that would be conclusive and reduce Court costs and time to prevent Trial costs to City:

- Environmental Toxicologists.
- The Toxicology blood and hair/nail forensics
- Air Hygenists needed to measure what volatile compounds are in our air and to what percent.

-Experts to analyse, testify and verify the truth of reports they translate to a Judge or Official where Orders to correct can be issued.

Volatile compounds breathed cause irritations and in cases of misuse can be fatal. They always induce suffering as a condition of their chemical makeup absorbed via inhalation, via skin absorption and ingesting. According to CDC, poisoning is one of the top 10 causes of death in America.

Having these kinds of tests provided by the State would be invaluable to the thousands of tenants who could find themselves faced with the need to have it addressed either legally or through mediation with Landlords responsible. Doing so requires you to identify them, the percentage level (s) and prove it's voracity in Court.

After Councilmember Helen Rosenthal's 2018 Town Hall with Mayor DeBlasio, he sent us DERTA Unit DEP Sr. Inspectors whose alarms proved volatile compounds were found on multiple floors in 2018 when arriving unannounced and at night. Taking them to floors and other tenants where offending air exists in chronic patterns of abuse, my home and shared public access areas. Alarms signalled above normal levels of the presence of Volatile Compounds.

My case is in Court (001340/16) and (current) the top City Attorney Aldo Caira, representing all City Agencies said the City DEP Agency cannot provide the costs of air monitors for the building. That is something that were it approved could be covered by NYS.

Due to a Tax Lien in 2009, Dexter 345, Inc & Dexter Properties, L.L.C. who own Dexter House SRO Hotel @ 345 W. 86th Street, were paid rent by a program I believe HPD Agency "Emergency Relief Tenant Placement" for people who would otherwise be homeless. The City HPD Officials are unaware of the air crisis they face once placed and in the recent passing of Gail Applewhite, she complained about fumes making her dizzy and blamed it for a fall that broke her hips, but said "I won't report it as they could make me homeless". She asked me to witness her air, and I was concerned to discover it was true as it was for 12 out of 16 floors of tenants.

Budgeting that could take on costs of these priceless tests, could secure

Court Orders to Correct for those involved responsible. 18 tenants have died here since their 2004 takeover and while it isn't known how in many cases, I did witness the air of some who complained about fumes fearful it would kill them. Violations were issued by DOH and DEP on two floors where three tenants who complained about fumes died. Given the conditions of poverty and being silenced for fear of eviction, many tenants in SRO's are silenced.

Thank you for your consideration.