



THE CITY OF NEW YORK
OFFICE OF THE COMPTROLLER
SCOTT M. STRINGER

July 17, 2014

Gilbert Taylor
Commissioner
New York City Department of Homeless Services
33 Beaver Street, 17th Floor
New York, NY 10004

Dear Commissioner Taylor:

New York City is facing a significant homelessness crisis, particularly among families. As of Tuesday, July 15th, 54,439 individuals were living in City shelters, with children comprising over 43 percent of that population. HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan has recently noted that the homelessness trends in New York City are not occurring in other parts of the country and publicly available data supports that contention. According to HUD's 2013 annual homeless assessment, homelessness has declined by nine percent nationwide since 2007, yet in New York City, homelessness surged by over 51 percent during that same time period. Many diverse causes contribute to the shocking rise of homelessness in New York City, but one thing is certain – the current playbook for dealing with homelessness in the five boroughs is failing.

Especially concerning to my office is the emergency contracting approach that the Department of Homeless Services (DHS) has employed to site new facilities in neighborhoods with minimal community consultation. Time and time again, I have seen communities that were traditionally welcoming of shelter facilities and supportive housing react negatively to a rushed DHS placement due to a failure to consider either legitimate potential neighborhood impacts or the health of the families the residences are intended to support.

DHS must begin to immediately repair its relationships with local communities by creating a robust consultative process with community stakeholders for all of its currently planned sites and for those proposed in the future. This process should allow for meaningful input from local stakeholders, advocacy groups, and elected officials. Most importantly, DHS must clearly delineate for the public what its consultative process will entail, with transparent and dependable timelines, so that communities and stakeholders are no longer notified of new sites at the 11th hour. If DHS continues to neglect communities until after emergency contracting decisions have been made it will neither benefit from local knowledge of the area nor engender harmonious integration with the surrounding communities.

Further, community dialogue must be a component of a larger five-borough solution that is much broader than the current strategies for housing at-need individuals. This plan must include programs to reduce the total number of individuals in need of transitional housing and metrics to judge the plan as it progresses. Only with such a plan can we begin to delineate the difference

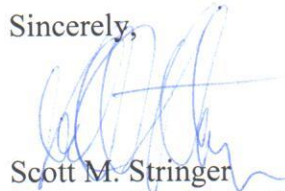


between a true emergency situation and a persistent failure to solve an on-going, decades-long problem.

I believe that working together with local and regional elected officials, community boards, advocacy groups, and local stakeholders we can begin to ameliorate this situation. Given the magnitude of this crisis for both those in need of housing and the local communities that feel ignored, I do not believe we can wait to have this conversation.

I look forward to speaking with you more on this matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me directly.

Sincerely,



Scott M. Stringer
Comptroller, City of New York