



Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on Education

New York City Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget

March 20, 2019

Gateway Housing is a 501c3 nonprofit working to improve the city's homeless shelter system by promoting proven financing methods and evidence-based practices. Better shelters and shelter programs will improve the lives of homeless adults and children, improving health and education outcomes and setting them up for long term stability.

We are testifying to oppose the cuts to the Department of Education's Bridging the Gap social workers. We have seen firsthand how these positions help improve school outcomes for homeless children. We are calling for the cut to be restored and the program to be expanded.

Almost 22,000 children stay in the city's shelters each night, and those children have worse education outcomes on average than their housed peers. In New York City, 34 percent of students in shelter are chronically absent, compared to 20 percent of those housed and receiving free lunch (an identifier that the family is low income) and 9 percent of students who are housed and don't receive free lunch.

If a child does not attend school regularly, it is almost impossible for them to succeed. Starting in the current school year, Gateway began implementing a pilot program focused on improving school attendance rates for homeless children.

Gateway's Improving School Attendance for Homeless Students (ISAHC) is a pilot program in three shelters focusing on homeless children. The program brings together and coordinates Department of Education's Bridging the Gap social workers and shelter-based client care coordinators to help remove barriers that are preventing children in shelter from having good attendance.

Our program has shown early positive results among children in families with some of the biggest challenges. We've found that after just four months of work, one-third of students that were chronically or severely chronically absent improved to good attendance, an extraordinary result that we expect to be sustained over time.

Unfortunately, the proposed budget cuts funding for the Bridging the Gap social workers. These positions provide crucial supports to homeless students in general, and are critical to the success of our program specifically.

We are calling on the city to restore funding, expand the program, and add additional supports for homeless students. The city should increase funding by \$5 million, to add 31 more Bridging the Gap social workers, bringing the total number to 100, and add at least five clinical supervisors; add \$500,000 to create an education support center at the PATH family shelter intake center in the Bronx; and add \$1 million to increase central and regional managers working on the issue.

Fully funding Bridging the Gap social workers is critical for improving attendance among homeless children, without which the children that stay in shelter cannot succeed in school.