



**Testimony to the New York City Council Committee on General Welfare
Oversight – Unsheltered Homeless in New York City
May 3, 2022**

Introduction and Thanks:

My name is Patrick Boyle and I am the Assistant Vice President for Public Policy for Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). We are the local affiliate of the national organization, Volunteers of America, Inc. (VOA). I would like to thank Chair Ayala, as well as the other members of this Committee, for the opportunity to submit the following testimony.

About Us:

VOA-GNY is an anti-poverty organization that aims to end homelessness in Greater New York by 2050 through housing, health and wealth building services. We are one of the region's largest human service providers, impacting more than 11,000 adults and children annually through 65 programs in New York City, Northern New Jersey, and Westchester. We are also an active nonprofit developer of supportive and affordable housing, with a robust portfolio permanent supportive housing, affordable and senior housing properties—with more in the pipeline.

Unsheltered Homeless in NYC:

As we know, the problem of homelessness runs on a spectrum—there is no one type of individual who finds themselves experiencing homelessness. Many thousands of individuals who experience homelessness every year in New York City are working, and many are families with children. Some have experienced a temporary loss of income whereas others have persistent mental health challenges or substance use disorders. There is no “one size fits all” approach.

However, at VOA-GNY, with an assessment shelter and a Safe Haven location among our many programs for unhoused people, we can offer the following recommendations with respect to one population that is the specific focus of this hearing—the unsheltered homeless in New York City.

First, we applaud the Administration and the Council for their joint commitment to an additional \$170 million for Safe Haven and stabilization beds. As we can attest, Safe Havens are a model that have proven successful in reaching certain individuals who are for various reasons resistant to other types of temporary living arrangements. These so-called “low barrier programs” are able to bring individuals in off the street who might otherwise conclude that the streets are the best option for them. This of course is the critical first step toward developing a path toward permanent, safe housing for these individuals.

Second, it is a fact that a higher percentage of individuals than ever coming through our assessment shelter are experiencing mental health challenges, which are in many cases severe. Unfortunately, mental health assistance, whether from a psychiatrist, psychologist, psychiatric nurse practitioner, clinical social worker, or licensed therapist, is not available in every location. We need to ensure there is some form of direct assistance at the sites themselves, as people must be met where they are with the help they need. And with this, there must be better coordination with the hospital system. Shelters are not an appropriate place to be used as step down centers or quasi-hospital beds, but too often that is occurring.

Third, at VOA-GNY we were extremely disappointed to find that there was no Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) or other action on pay equity for human service workers, including frontline workers dealing with people experiencing homelessness. As you have heard from countless not-for-profit organizations in this field, poverty wages and salaries that cannot grow for our workers are not sustainable. This work is difficult, emotionally taxing, and when done correctly leads to transformational positive change in people's lives. Good providers losing staff, dealing with vacancies, and declining future opportunities because government does not pay fairly will not have good outcomes for the homelessness crisis we are all fighting to solve.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted by:

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