

HOUSING

ISSUE BRIEF

NYC survivors of domestic, intimate partner, and gender-based violence who seek to obtain or maintain permanent, safe housing face significant difficulties originating not only from the abuse they experience, but also inadequate housing solutions and programs in NYC. At the heart of our recommendations, we commit to the value of housing as a human right. Attaining housing access for all is essential to ending gender-based and domestic violence.

Leaving an abusive relationship is the most dangerous, and often lethal, time in the relationship. Despite this danger, domestic violence is consistently the leading reason that people enter NYC homeless shelters -- 41% of those in homeless shelters cite it.¹ For those survivors who choose to leave and for those who know it is safer to stay, housing is a major factor in their safety and stability in the future. The economic nature of abuse creates multiple and significant barriers to finding housing. As mentioned in the Coerced Debt brief, 76% of survivors experience damaged credit or evictions as a result of abuse, which in turn will affect their ability to obtain housing in the future.² This, in conjunction with exclusionary policies of housing programs, presents critical barriers to leaving shelter and obtaining long-term stability and healing. Survivors who would like to leave abusive situations but do not want to go into shelter have few, if any, resources available to them. The by-products of these failings result in disproportionate, long-term impacts on the lives of Black, LGBTQ (particularly trans folks), foster youth, justice-involved, sex workers, elderly and undocumented survivors.³

New York City has programs to address homelessness, domestic violence, and the intersections, from Family Homeless & Eviction Prevention Program (FHEPS), to City FHEPS, Emergency Housing Voucher Program, NYCHA and supportive housing, housing connect, and existing HPD policies and pilot projects. We commend the city on the extensive and progressive programs that are currently offered for homeless and struggling New Yorkers. However, many of these programs are well-kept secrets and strongly gate-kept, meaning, all, or nearly all, are actually impossible for survivors to navigate or apply for without the assistance of an advocate. Historically, survivors had little to no input into how these programs were created, run, or carried out. Program eligibility often limits which survivors can access which program, legal tenant screening processes permit landlords to deny survivors with poor credit histories regardless of their survivor status,

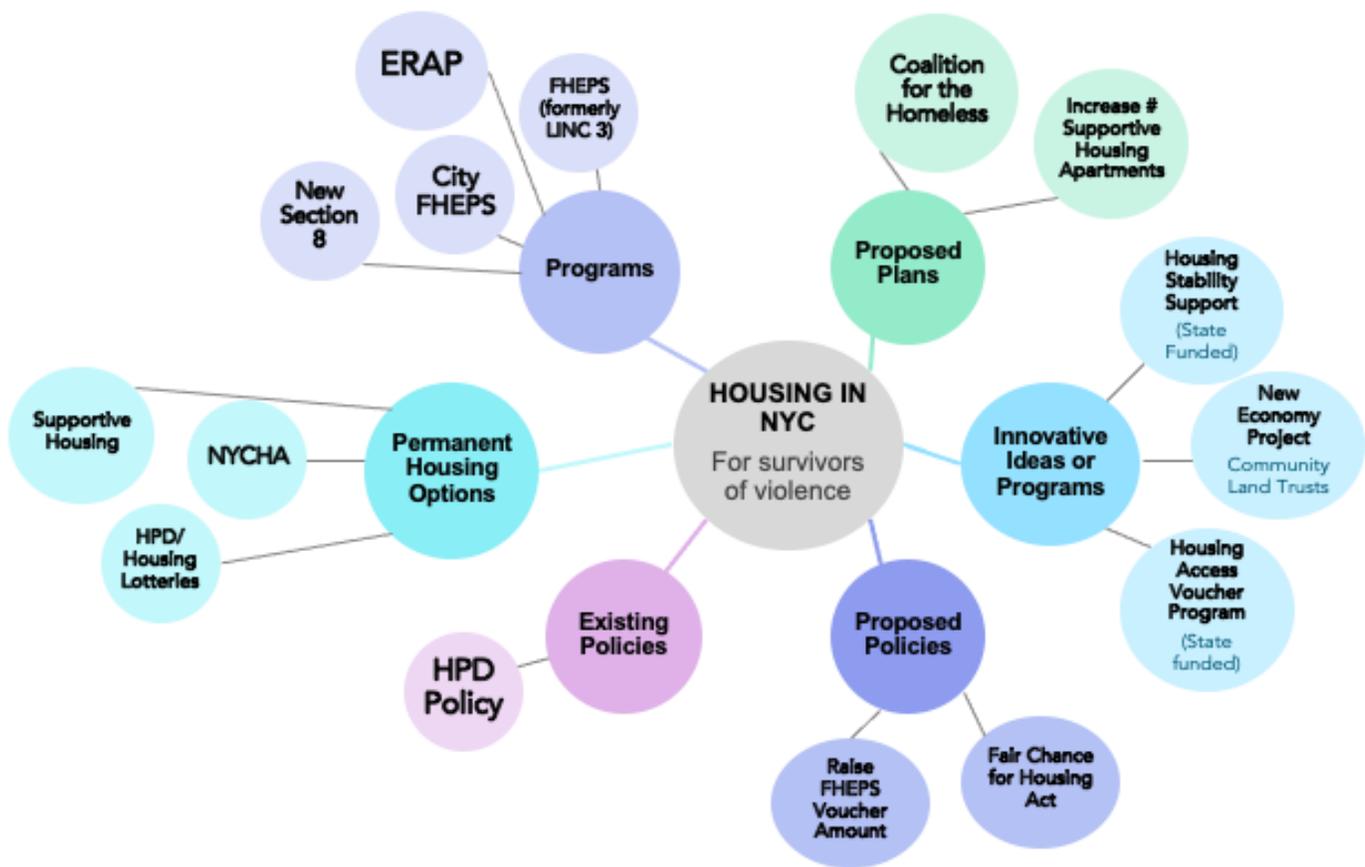
"I have an idea, a crazy one or a dream. I would like it if there was... I wish there was some kind of community only for people in distress. For example, women with small children can live in a big building that also has daycare, big laundries, and they can take turns to work there."

—survivor from visioning call, Jan 2022

landlord discrimination and exploitation are rampant (from sexual harassment to scamming survivors into paying application fees for apartments that are not actually available), and survivor rent portions are costly and prohibitive.

Current shelter and housing programs are structured in ways that cannot accommodate the immediate safety concerns of survivors and also have deeper racialized, homophobic, and anti-immigrant roots that function to exclude many of the most vulnerable survivors in NYC, including undocumented survivors. As survivors live through the economic devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is imperative that the City make the changes necessary to ensure that every New Yorker, particularly our most vulnerable neighbors, can move forward with safe and accessible housing options.

Housing Systems Map



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SURVIVOR HOUSING EQUITY

“Reserve a percentage of a building for subsidized housing. It would be great if the government, because it is the government who is in charge, reserved some of those houses for victims of domestic violence.”

— survivor from visioning call

Survivor recommendations:

- All survivors are eligible for shelter or housing assistance, do not have to receive other government assistance to qualify, and do not get stuck in shelter systems due to immigration, incarceration, or other impacts of systems involvement.
- Expand public benefits to immigrant survivors.
- Remove credit checks from housing applications.
- Provide cash instead of vouchers.
- Designate buildings and help fund “communities of care” beyond shelter — spaces where they can live, work, share childcare, and support each other.
- Expand housing options and the types of subsidies (eg. consider urban homesteading models).

Advocate recommendations:

- Housing programs for survivors must be **customizable** for each survivor & provide **options** allowing survivors to select the level of care that they need. We would recommend that these take place through a centralized portal & offer a variety of different options (in a community, designated building with support services, and NYCHA, etc.). This is a model already utilized by the city within the Supportive Housing system.
- **Eliminate unnecessary program eligibility requirements:**
 - » Program requirements often become barriers for survivors to qualify for specialized housing programs, often leaving them homeless or in danger. Specifically:
 - » Eliminate the requirement that applicants have an active public benefits case to qualify for housing programs;
 - » Enable individuals to self-attest to survivor “status” & not have to be fleeing an active DV/IPV situation or having to be in shelter to qualify;
 - » Streamline FHEPS B, including: Increasing the number of vouchers available to those trying to move or stay in their current housing without entering shelter, and offer more points of entry (not FJCs only).
 - » Prohibit landlords from using credit reports or tenant screening reports in evaluating survivors’ eligibility for housing;
 - » Remove asset limits.

- **Build and invest in housing and shelter programs outside of the public benefits system.** Survivors and advocates worry that building new flexible funding and housing programs within current public benefits systems will recreate similar problems. Pilot and test new funds and programs elsewhere, and ensure survivors are at the planning and implementation table.
- **Institute a housing oversight committee** (possibly through the Mayor's office and HRA) composed of advocates and survivors to provide guidance, feedback, and enact change to programs for survivors.

Additional recommendations:

- Prioritize domestic violence for all housing options (housing connect, etc.).
- Make the safety transfer process faster and easier.
- Create dedicated programming for undocumented survivors.
- Expand upon and increase dedicated programming and housing options that are affirming for LGBTQ+ and especially trans survivors.
- Continue to develop long and permanent housing options similar to Section 8 that offer long-term support.
- Increase the number of single domestic violence shelter beds across the city.
- Decrease tenant's share of rent to 0%-15%, regardless of income.
- Create an apartment database with available and affordable housing options.

ENDNOTES

- 1 New York City Comptroller, *supra* note 11.
- 2 Adrienne E. Adams, et. al., *supra* note 10.
- 3 See United States Census Bureau, *Income and Poverty in the United States: 2020* (2020) <https://www.census.gov/library/publications/2021/demo/p60-273.html> (last visited Sept. 8, 2022). See also Adam P. Romero, Shoshana K. Goldberg, & Luis A. Vasquez, *LGBT People and Housing Affordability, Discrimination, and Homelessness*, UCLA School of Law Williams Institute (2020) <https://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/publications/lgbt-housing-instability/> (last visited Sept. 8, 2022)

WE NEED REAL, BOLD ACTION

The first step toward an effective, bold plan is commitment. See below for a variety of ways to support, act, and hold yourself accountable to the vision and recommendations for survivor economic equity.

We invite individual survivors, advocates, community members, community-based organizations, and aligned gender-, racial-, and economic-justice initiatives to support this vision and join us in advocating change.

Join Our Call-To-Action

You can sign as an individual, group, or on behalf of an organization. Your name or organization will be added to a future webpage to help us demonstrate power behind this vision.

And we call on City agencies, elected officials, and other policy makers to support the vision and help us turn key recommendations into reality. Contact us to connect with survivor and advocacy groups to advise, draft, and help effect your policy and legislative agendas.

Show Your Support

Contact us: nyc_survivor_ej@csaj.org

Together we can bridge the ripple effect and transform the economic landscape facing survivors in NYC.

“We all count, we have a say. There is equality and comradeship in our community.”

— a survivor visioning call participant