



**Department of  
Homeless Services**

Department of  
Social Services

**Steven Banks**  
Commissioner

**Joslyn Carter**  
DHS Administrator

**33 Beaver Street**  
New York, NY 10004

212 361 7963 tel

June 23, 2021

Syderia Asberry-Chresfield  
Greater Harlem Coalition  
[syderia@aol.com](mailto:syderia@aol.com)

Dear Ms. Asberry-Chresfield,

Thank you for your recent correspondence regarding our efforts at the NYC Department of Social Services-Department of Homeless Services (DSS-DHS) to serve and support New Yorkers experiencing homelessness in the Harlem and East Harlem communities.

As you are aware, just over four years ago, the Mayor announced "[Turning the Tide on Homelessness in New York City](#)," our comprehensive plan for addressing the challenge of homelessness, which has built up over four decades and affects every community across the five boroughs. The plan's guiding principle is community and people first, focusing on: preventing homelessness whenever we can, connecting New Yorkers to permanent housing, addressing unsheltered homelessness, and providing New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, who come from every community across the five boroughs, the opportunity to be sheltered in their home boroughs. Among other actions, as part of *Turning the Tide*, we are phasing out the stop-gap quick-fixes of prior administrations, including the 21-year-old cluster program and the use of commercial hotels, which dates back on and off to the 1960s, and replacing them with a smaller number of high-quality borough-based shelter facilities closer to the anchors of life for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness, such as family support networks, schools, jobs, healthcare, and houses of worship.

For decades, past administrations have leaned on misguided approaches to addressing the citywide challenge of homelessness, including utilizing stop-gap quick fixes that were often disproportionately sited in certain communities in our City – for example, the majority of cluster sites have historically been located in the Bronx, whereas the majority of commercial hotel locations have historically been in Manhattan and Queens. Additionally, as you correctly note, under prior Administrations, new shelter locations were often developed in a manner that failed to adequately provide our neighbors experiencing homelessness with the requisite supports needed to help them get back on their feet and failed to engage the community about these resources.

However, as indicated above, the *Turning the Tide* plan recognizes that homelessness is a challenge that affects every community across the five boroughs, and thus a key component of this initiative is ensuring an equitable distribution of services for New Yorkers experiencing homelessness so as to meet the need, including in neighborhoods which historically have never had these critical resources for our neighbors who fall on hard times. This Administration's borough-based approach to locating and siting DSS-DHS shelter facilities is a

distinct shift from past approaches and ensures that all communities in our City do their part in addressing homelessness by providing New Yorkers experiencing homelessness with the opportunity to get back on their feet closer to support networks, like families, employment, educational opportunities, medical assistance, houses of worship, and communities they last called home.

And under this Administration, as outlined in our *Turning the Tide* plan, the City and the non-profit service provider partners we work with to help our neighbors experiencing homelessness are committed to ongoing, open engagement and working with all community stakeholders, including local elected officials, community board members, local block associations, as well as faith-based and community-based organizations so that, together, we can ensure that all DSS-DHS facilities are integrated seamlessly into the community and our clients receive a warm welcome. To that end, at all DSS-DHS shelter locations opened under the *Turning the Tide* initiative, we have established a Community Advisory Board (CAB) which holds regular meetings and maintains direct lines of communication between staff, including on-site security, and communities to ensure any concerns are proactively addressed as they arise. In addition, we notify communities at least 30 days' ahead of the potential opening of all new traditional shelter locations, and under *Turning the Tide*, we have provided a combined average of more than 200 days' notice regarding the opening of these locations.

Furthermore, as stated, a simultaneous and important component of the *Turning the Tide* plan is transforming a haphazard shelter system decades in the making by closing select DSS-DHS facilities we inherited that do not meet our high standards of services and care. To that end, since 2017, we've ended the use of nearly 270 shelter buildings across New York City as part of our commitment to ending the use of the Band-Aid measures of previous administrations, including the 21-year-old cluster program, which has reduced our overall system wide shelter footprint by 41%.

Moreover, through our prevention programs, including our first-in-the-nation right to counsel program, pre-pandemic, we had driven down evictions by City Marshals by 41%. And through our DSS rental assistance and rehousing programs, more than 165,000 New Yorkers have secured permanent housing, which has enabled us to drive down the DHS shelter census to below 48,000.

Finally, our efforts to support New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness, who you accurately point out face complex, multi-layered challenges - and are our most uniquely challenging population to engage - have continued undeterred throughout the pandemic. Since the start of HOME-STAT in 2016, the most comprehensive outreach initiative in the country, outreach teams have helped more than 4,200 New Yorkers experiencing unsheltered homelessness off the streets citywide, thanks to unprecedented new investments and a tripling of the size of outreach staff. Since taking office, this Administration has also more than quintupled the number of emergency 'Safe Haven' and 'stabilization' beds dedicated to serving unsheltered New Yorkers from 600 to more than 3,000, with more than 1,300 of these beds brought online since January 2020. In addition, as part of the broader citywide [HealingNYC initiative](#), this Administration has expanded its harm reduction outreach efforts to provide

increased services and supports to New Yorkers experiencing substance use challenges, under the leadership of the City's Health Department.

New Yorkers experiencing homelessness deserve access to the types of services and supports needed to help re-stabilize their lives with dignity—and as part of our borough-based approach, we remain committed to ensuring that communities in Manhattan have the critical safety net resources they need to support those who may fall on hard times, so they can get back on their feet closer to the anchors of their lives – such as their families, social services, houses of worship, and the communities they last called home.

We greatly appreciate your commitment as we work together to reach our shared goal of supporting New Yorkers experiencing homelessness in every way we can, including by ensuring that Harlem and East Harlem have critical safety net resources available for our neighbors in need as they get back on their feet. Thank you again for your correspondence, and we look forward to continuing our partnership with your organization to support and serve some of our City's most vulnerable neighbors.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joslyn Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joslyn Carter, LCSW  
DHS Administrator