



**Remarks before the New York State Legislature
January 15, 2025**

NY A.712: Shelter Stay Limits

Good morning, my name is Catherine Trapani, I am the Assistant Vice President for Public Policy and Volunteers of America-Greater New York (VOA-GNY). VOA-GNY is dedicated to ending homelessness in the New York Region. We operate over 60 programs designed to provide housing, shelter, health and wealth building services to help people from all walks of life maintain stable housing.

We strongly support A712 which would abolish arbitrary Shelter Stay Limits across all shelter types operating in the State of New York.

Regardless of the reason for one's homelessness, everyone deserves the chance to achieve safety and stability without arbitrary limitations on how long one can receive the specialized services they need to get there.

VOA-GNY operates many different kinds of shelter programs in recognition of the unique needs that people experiencing homelessness may have. We operate:

- A safe haven for people experiencing chronic street homelessness
- An employment shelter for single women who work but unable to afford housing
- A mental health and general shelter for single men experiencing homelessness
- 5 shelters for families with children experiencing homelessness in the general DHS shelter system
- 5 emergency and one Tier II domestic violence shelters under contract with HRA
- 3 "emergency shelters" for new arrivals under contract with DHS.

Each facility serves those with no alternative housing with programming tailored to meet the specific needs of these populations - but not all of our residents are afforded the same rights when it comes to maintaining their placement in shelter until they are able to find stability.

Our emergency DV shelters are subject to limits in length of stay imposed by OCFS regulations where residents are afforded an initial 90-day shelter stay with the possibility of up to two extensions for a total of 180 days. Contrast this strict limit to the over 400 days it takes an average DHS shelter system family to successfully link to housing.

This arbitrary time limit causes significant stress for the families that we serve. While we do everything in our power to help survivors find stability in that short period of time, more often than

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not, our teams must scramble to find alternative shelter arrangements, often in non-confidential settings in the DHS shelter system where there is no specialized support for DV survivors. The layer of uncertainty caused by time limits can lead some of our survivors to return to unsafe situations as true stability seems unattainable under the current system. What makes this practice particularly troubling is that this is not a resource issue. Often, we have ample vacancies in the DV shelter system to continue to meet the needs of the survivors we serve. In every case, survivors timing out of DV emergency shelters are entitled to a vacancy in the general DHS shelter system so either way, the State will be expending resources to shelter these households. The only question is, are we going to do it in a way that promotes stability or not? We implore the State to pass this legislation so we can allow survivors to stay as long as necessary to safely transition from appropriate, specialized shelter to independent housing.

The families at our emergency facilities for new arrivals may soon fare no better than our DV survivors currently subject to time limits. Several weeks ago, we were informed that families newly arrived in the US residing in our emergency shelter programs would soon be subject to time limits of a maximum of 60 days. The news sent shock waves through those facilities as families had few, if any, resources to successfully relocate in such a short amount of time. Our teams are working tirelessly to connect families to legal services, public benefits for those who qualify, and have screened every household for a potential exemption to the rule. This work is labor intensive. Our staff time would be better spent supporting families to transition out of shelter – something we've been successful with for those families who have so far been afforded sufficient time to navigate immigration applications, secure PRUCOL status or even work authorization.

The fact is that no one in our DV shelters or our emergency shelters for new arrivals should be treated any differently than those that reside in our other temporary housing programs. No one should have to forfeit specialized services for a chance at more stability in a shelter program ill-equipped to meet their needs, and certainly no one should be denied the chance to make the choice of what programs could best support their households. By aligning the regulatory framework to ensure that every New Yorker has access to ongoing shelter across all shelter systems, the State could ensure that everyone without a home has access to the right shelter to best help end homelessness.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our ideas this morning.