



Testimony to NYC Council
Committee on Mental Health, Disabilities, &
Addiction
FY25 Preliminary Budget Hearing
March 21, 2024

Hello Chairperson and members of the New York City Council Housing and Buildings Committee. My name is Joelle Ballam-Schwan and I am with the Supportive Housing Network of NY. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. Today, I will focus on improving the NYC 15/15 initiative, crisis response, and fully staffing critical city agencies.

Chair Lee, thank you for all of your support around NYC 15/15, and a thank you to the entire Council for the COLA. We look forward to learning more details and ensuring that it covers all supportive housing programs.

As you know, we are concerned that the NYC 15/15 initiative is falling short of its goal to create 15k units by 2030. NYC 15/15 relies on the scattered site model, where nonprofits rent units on the private market and brings services to tenants. But, private market units aren't there, according to a Housing and Vacancy report that showed the rental vacancy rate at just 1.4%. This, along with inadequate service rates, has resulted in only 17% of scattered site units awarded after eight years, when the city should be at or above fifty percent.

This is also a racial equity issue. Black people are overrepresented in supportive housing applicants and make up the majority of tenants. Failing to cover the true cost of operating these programs means failing those the city has promised to support.

The Network has developed a plan to improve NYC 15/15 and ensure the city reaches its target- we seek to reallocate the 6,220 unawarded scattered site units as follows:

1. Develop additional congregate units, adding to the city's affordable housing stock;
2. Develop only a limited number of scattered site units, accounting for the low vacancy rate and the instability of the model;
3. Develop a supportive housing preservation program at HPD to ensure we do not lose a single existing unit;
4. Investigate an **affordable housing overlay model**, where scattered site contracts can be paired with city-funded homeless set-asides, bringing much-needed services to tenants in those units.

We also ask to increase and align all NYC 15/15 service and operating funding to ensure parity across the program and expand eligibility to include individuals exiting jail or prison and survivors of domestic violence. Domestic violence has long-lasting physical and psychological consequences. Permanent, supportive housing is a lifeline for domestic violence survivors who need housing and some level of support to attain and maintain stability.

More details on this plan can be found in our written testimony.

The Network is also a steering committee member of Correct Crisis Intervention Today (CCIT) – NYC, a coalition advocating for a peer-led, nonpolice mental health crisis response system. The current city pilot program, B-HEARD, omits peers from response teams. We ask that Council adopt the best practices and features of the CCIT-NYC model by focusing on placing trained peers on the B-HEARD response teams as well as restore prior B-HEARD PEG cuts.

Finally, **fully fund and staff City agencies building and filling affordable and supportive housing.** A recent report from the comptroller reveals that understaffing in city agencies is causing delays in affordable housing development. This creates inefficiencies in filling vacant units at a time when the city is facing significant strain on the homeless service system. Cutting positions or hiring freezes does not create efficiencies—instead it creates more of a strain on a system in dire need of a reprieve.