



**Testimony to NYC Council**

Committee on Zoning and Franchises

City of Yes for Housing Opportunities

October 22, 2024

Hello, my name is Tierra Labrada, and I am the Associate Director of Advocacy at the Supportive Housing Network of New York. The Network represents more than 200 nonprofits that develop and operate supportive housing. As the state's only supportive housing membership organization, the Network serves as a voice for the provider community, and since our establishment in 1988, we have grown alongside the rapid expansion of the supportive housing movement, now representing a vast majority of New York's nonprofit supportive housing providers.

Supportive housing, a model pioneered right here in New York over 40 years ago, has proven to be one of the most effective solutions for addressing chronic homelessness. By combining deeply affordable, high-quality housing with case management and connection to services such as mental health and substance use counseling, job training, and other critical supports, supportive housing has helped people individuals with the greatest barriers to stability stay housed and succeed long term.

Today, the Network is here to show strong support of the City of Yes for Housing Opportunity plan and its overarching goal of expanding affordable housing across the five boroughs. The need for affordable housing—particularly supportive housing—has never been more urgent. Despite significant progress, including a record year of supportive housing development with over 2,100 units created or preserved, demand still far outstrips supply. According to the Local Law 3 report recently released by the city, there are more than 9,600 individuals eligible for supportive housing, yet only 2,400 units were available for occupancy in FY24. These New Yorkers deserve access to the housing and services they need to thrive, and we must act now to ensure those resources are available.

The current crisis is exacerbated by the private rental market, which operates at over 98% occupancy, leaving less than 2% of units available. This makes it nearly impossible for service providers and housing navigators to secure affordable, accessible units for those in need.

For nonprofits operating scattered-site supportive housing contracts—where they partner with the City or the State to place individuals experiencing homelessness into rental units on the private market—this vacancy rate poses a severe challenge. These contracts, which include mobile support services, are becoming unworkable due to the scarcity of available units. And, despite the city's commitment to award 500 scattered site units annually through the NYC 15/15 supportive housing initiative, no awards were made in the last three years.



But we have an opportunity to fix this. By fully committing to the City of Yes and reinforcing it with a reallocation of resources under NYC 15/15, we can dramatically expand access to both affordable and supportive housing. The city must scale back its unrealistic targets for the scattered-site model, and use every tool at its disposal to develop more single-site, or congregate housing. This investment is crucial and the City of Yes offers a critical pathway for this type of development.

One of the most promising aspects of the City of Yes proposal is its plan to modernize and streamline zoning regulations, which are currently outdated and contribute to housing scarcity—particularly in high-demand neighborhoods with access to transit, healthcare, and other essential amenities. The Department of City Planning’s proposal for a Universal Affordability Preference (UAP) framework, which would allow buildings to be 20% larger if they include permanently affordable housing, is a welcome and overdue change. This update would expand the use of floor area ratio (FAR) bonuses—currently limited to senior housing—to other types of affordable housing, including supportive housing, in R6 through R10 districts.

This reform is exactly the kind of forward-thinking policy we need to encourage the development of affordable and supportive units. The Network has long advocated for such changes, and we are encouraged to see them included in the City of Yes plan.

The City of Yes, combined with a reallocation of resources under the NYC 15/15 commitment, presents a powerful opportunity to address the housing needs of thousands of vulnerable New Yorkers. The Council has demonstrated its commitment to investing in supportive housing, as shown by your support for the Network’s NYC 15/15 reallocation proposal, including the sign-on letter and funding in the city budget. Today, we urge you to advance these initiatives and ensure that every New Yorker has access to safe, stable, and affordable housing.