

# Equal funding for supportive housing

[Tori Lyon](#) January 6, 2024 at 5:00 a.m.



Robert Blake, 43, a resident of Haven apartments who was formerly homeless, enters his apartment, Tuesday, Dec. 8, 2015, Bronx, N.Y. Facing a swell in homelessness, the city is embarking on investing in “supportive housing” like Haven, where homeless and mentally ill residents have their own apartments with comprehensive on-site services. (AP Photo/Bebeto Matthews)

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A stark state funding inequity is holding back New York nonprofits from doing our best to reduce homelessness.

New York City and State can be applauded for their pioneering roles in championing [supportive housing](#) as a proven path to stability for individuals and families. Yet a stubborn blind spot remains as legislators grossly

underfund one of the oldest programs in the state — creating barriers to the housing outcomes we all seek.

[The New York State Supportive Housing Program](#), known as NYSSHP, was created in the 1980s as the first statewide initiative to provide individuals experiencing homelessness with housing and onsite counseling to get back on their feet.

The supportive housing model — where a tenant pays one-third of their income for an apartment with access to those services — is widely recognized for its success in keeping people housed. Yet the dollars allocated to NYSSHP have barely budged — currently \$2,736 for individuals and \$3,672 for families annually. In a seemingly parallel universe, state supportive housing units funded by the [Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative](#) (ESSHI), now in its sixth year, receive \$25,000 annually. Moreover, the [city's NYC 15/15](#) supportive housing program sites receive \$30,000 per unit.

The result of this gap is that nonprofits receiving NYSSHP funding must dip into their general coffers to meet industry-wide standards of care and cover the basics of safety and maintenance in older buildings. A \$200,000 boiler replacement doesn't fund itself.

We here at [Jericho Project](#) are a nonprofit that owns and manages nine supportive housing residences in New York City — three of which are solely NYSSHP funded — and we have invested \$9 million in maintenance alone for those three.

To rectify this inequity, the state could spend a relatively modest \$32 million in the next year as a first step in a five-year approach converting 9,000 severely underfunded NYSSHP contracts to ESSHI levels.

Why the discrepancy to begin with? In part, it's due to the evolution of the NYSSHP program which began providing housing and services for a broad swath of people, including those who had fallen on hard times but not necessarily due to mental health or substance abuse issues. Today, as our industry follows a "housing first" approach — getting people into the stability of permanent housing before tackling these kinds of challenges — we support residents with vastly greater needs than originally funded.

Jericho compensates our staff equally. Yet due to funding inequities, our social workers at NYSSHP sites carry a caseload that is 40% greater than their peers in NYC 15/15 — an average 25:1 ratio compared to 15:1.

In considering this, think about a school classroom. The smaller class size allows a teacher to focus on students' learning styles and special needs; the overflowing one results in overtime, burnout and less individual attention paid to each child. It's also true in a supportive housing program.

Jericho was founded 40 years ago by community and faith leaders whose ethos of compassion for aging, street bound New Yorkers inspires our work today. Our extraordinary staff are the lifeblood of our mission, delivering vital services to 2,000 individuals and families annually, and running nine supportive housing residences where tenants have the dignity of their own lease and key. And it really works: 95% of our residents maintain stable housing.

Regardless of a building's age, we create a holistic environment of support with onsite counseling and access to medical, mental health, employment and recreational services. We talk with clients about their hopes and dreams, often for the first time in their lives.

At the heart of our work are everyday heroes like Sabrina Lopez, our managing program director, who sleeps with her phone by her bed in case of

emergency. She says, "many of our tenants have very difficult histories and find themselves on lonely, unprotected paths. But with our trauma-informed and non-judgmental care, they discover that they belong."

For some, the trauma began with the loss of a parent or abuse. For veterans, it might be hidden wounds of war. For LGBTQ young adults, being ostracized by their families. Trauma does not distinguish between NYSSHP or ESSHI or NYC 15/15.

That's why we deliver the highest level of services to all our clients. But it comes at a price. By subsidizing those services with Jericho's general funds, we are also strangling the opportunity we have to channel them into meaningful growth and the ability to reduce the pain and change the lives of more New Yorkers.

We entreat Gov. Hochul and the Legislature as they prepare to work on the state budget for the coming year, to please reaffirm our great state's leadership in meeting the needs of our most vulnerable neighbors.

*Lyon is the CEO of Jericho Project.*

# Guest Column: A simple state change will bring equity to supportive housing in Kingston

Guest January 10, 2024 at 3:22 p.m.



RUPCO Chief Executive Officer Kevin O'Connor speaks in front of 33 Franklin Street Wednesday, March 8, 2023. (Tania Barricklo/Daily Freeman)

## **By Kevin O'Connor, CEO of RUPCO**

The 40 residents of The Stuyvesant in the Stockade District have a lot of needs. To be eligible to live in the historic building that was converted to

supportive housing, individuals must be either formerly homeless and coping with a disabling condition, or elderly. Some are both. As a result, they require assistance with everything from managing their physical and behavioral care to activities of daily living to transportation to making end-of-life plans. For more than a decade, a single caseworker has handled all these needs – and more – because The Stuyvesant is supported by a chronically underfunded state program that hasn't seen a significant increase since its creation some 40 years ago.

Allison, who prefers her last name not be disclosed, is The Stuyvesant residents' lifeline. She refuses to leave them, turning down promotions and a bigger paycheck to stay by their side. Though Allison's fierce loyalty and work ethic are laudatory, having a single case manager handle an entire building of vulnerable and aging adults is clearly not sustainable. But hiring more staff is not possible, because The Stuyvesant is funded through the antiquated New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP).

Meanwhile, across town at Landmark Place, another RUPCO supportive housing residence with 35 formerly homeless and elderly individuals, there are two cases managers – one a behavioral specialist, the other a licensed practical nurse – plus 24-hour front desk staff, and two part-time bus drivers.

What's the difference? Landmark Place is funded by the 2016 Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), which pays up to \$25,000 per unit to cover both services and rental assistance, compared to NYSSHP's \$2,736 with no dedicated rental assistance Statewide, some 9,000 supportive housing units supported solely by NYSSHP. Their tenants are in the same boat as The Stuyvesant's residents.

A logical and cost-effective solution exists. The governor and state lawmakers must include a plan in the upcoming state budget to convert the 9,000 endangered NYSSHP units to ESSHI. The first year of a five-year phased-in conversion approach would cost just \$32 million. That's a small fraction of the annual multibillion-dollar state budget, but an investment that would more than pay for itself over time by avoiding the high cost of adding to the homeless population. It would protect 9,000 desperately needed deeply affordable housing from going offline, protecting 9,000 of our most marginalized neighbors from potentially becoming homeless yet again. And Allison could have a less-than-Herculean workload.

At a time when New York is facing multiple crises – affordability, mental health, deadly opioids – it cannot afford to lose a single unit of supportive housing, which has been proven to be one of the most effective tools to combat chronic homelessness. Some of The Stuyvesant's residents, if unable to age in place, likely would eventually require nursing home care – at a significant cost to the state.

The lack of an increase in NYSSHP rates has left nonprofits like ours scrambling to find alternate funding sources to make ends meet. But even through fundraising and grants, which take time and energy to secure, many nonprofits have been forced to do more with less. That includes being unable to offer competitive salaries to our hardworking staff, which makes it difficult to retain our workforce and contributes to a labor shortage exacerbated by the COVID crisis. The Stuyvesant's residents deserve the same benefits their Landmark counterparts have. I'd like to hire another case manager to share Allison's load – and a behavior specialist, and bus drivers, and front desk staff. The entire population of a single building shouldn't have to depend on the health and well-being of just one person. I don't want to think about what we'd do without her.

The truth is that not every nonprofit has an Allison, and the state shouldn't perpetuate such an unbalanced and untenable system. The governor and state lawmakers need to do the right thing this budget season by converting the at-risk NYSSHP units to ESSHI. Everyone – supportive housing tenants and staff alike – will be better off for it.

*Kevin O'Connor is CEO of affordable housing agency RUPCO.*

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OPINION

## Preserve, improve housing for vulnerable New Yorkers (Guest Opinion by Ben Lockwood)

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Ben Lockwood is president and CEO of Housing Visions Unlimited. (Marie Morelli|mmorelli@syracuse.com)



**By Ben Lockwood | Housing Visions Unlimited LLC**

*Benjamin Lockwood is president and CEO of [Housing Visions Unlimited Inc.](#), a Syracuse nonprofit that develops, constructs, and manages real estate projects that revitalize communities.*

The stories of two formerly homeless local women are both heartbreaking and painfully familiar.

Briselida fled domestic violence, while Tammy struggled with substance abuse and a traumatic brain injury — all challenges that, statistically speaking, increase the likelihood of becoming unhoused. Thankfully, however, after years of fear and uncertainty, Briselida and Tammy were able to find stability and the chance to build new lives at Ethel T. Chamberlain Women’s Residence and Shelter, which provides a mix of permanent supportive housing units and temporary shelter beds.

The transition to supportive housing was not easy. Both women arrived lonely and scared. But the staff and services at Ethel T. Chamberlain, a joint effort between Housing Visions and the Salvation Army Syracuse Area Services — including case management, crisis counseling, mental health treatment and more — established a strong foundation from Day One and helped them move forward.

“I could breathe again,” Tammy said. Briselida echoed that sentiment, adding: “I started to feel the motivation to try something new.”

Briselida is now enrolled in the SUNY Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center (EOC) Medical Billing & Coding program, while Tammy has achieved and maintained her sobriety and improved her memory.

These success stories wouldn’t be possible without the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), a program created in 2016 that provides both rental subsidies and supportive services for formerly unhoused New Yorkers. Supportive housing, which combines quality units with on-site services, has proven to be one of the most effective tools available to combat chronic homelessness.

Unfortunately, ESSHI is not universal. Thousands of units across the state are funded by the nearly four-decade-old New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP), which hasn’t seen a significant increase in state resources since its creation. NYSSHP pays just a quarter of what ESSHI pays for services and doesn’t cover any rental assistance.

As a result of the chronic underfunding of NYSSHP, 9,000 supportive housing units statewide are at risk of coming offline. In the face of an affordability crisis, rising homelessness, an influx of deadly synthetic opioids and an increase in mental health needs, New York cannot afford to lose a single unit.

There is an easy fix at hand: The governor and legislative leaders should include in this year's state budget a five-year plan to convert the 9,000 NYSSHP units to ESSHI. The cost of this conversion — a modest \$32 million in the first year — is a very small slice of the more than \$220 billion New York spends annually. But the positive impact on the lives of vulnerable New Yorkers would be significant.

NYSSHP currently provides an annual rate of \$2,736 per individual and \$3,672 per family, while ESSHI offers up to \$25,000 per unit annually for social services and rental assistance.

Programs funded solely through NYSSHP not only face limitations in the services they can provide but also in the salary level they can offer to employees, leading to high staff turnover and unfilled vacancies. Also, not having any rental assistance creates additional and unnecessary burdens for both providers and potential tenants.

Housing Visions, a mission-driven nonprofit develops, constructs, owns and operates affordable housing across Upstate New York. Its properties rely on both NYSSHP and ESSHI funding, providing first-hand experience of the discrepancies between the two programs.

Ethel T. Chamberlain House, which provides 15 emergency shelter beds in addition to the 16 units of permanent supportive housing, is proof that ESSHI works. It is a stepping-stone to self-sufficiency, funding not only critical services and adequate staff, but also move-in kits with essentials for formerly homeless residents who often have very little or even nothing when they arrive.

Briselida and Tammy have become integral members of the Ethel community. Briselida, who speaks fluent Spanish, often translates for other residents and those staying in the emergency shelter. Tammy is always one of the first to raise her hand to help and assists a fellow tenants who may be elderly and or in need of help.

Every formerly homeless New Yorker deserves the opportunity to experience what Briselida and Tammy have at the Ethel. It's up to the governor and state lawmakers to make that possible by saving the 9,000 at-risk NYSSHP units, converting them to ESSHI and ensuring some of our most vulnerable neighbors get the support and stability they need.

# Democrat & Chronicle

**OPINION** *This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.*

## Well-funded supportive housing can solve Westchester County's housing crisis

*3-minute read*

**Richard Nightingale** Special to the USA TODAY Network

Published 2:07 p.m. ET Jan. 31, 2024

Like the rest of New York, Westchester County is deep in the throes of a housing crisis that impacts residents of all backgrounds and threatens the long-term health and stability of our community.

While the creation of new housing is vitally important, it's equally critical that we preserve what we already have. If we fail to do so, we will simply be running in place as we add new units while older units simultaneously come offline.

This is particularly true for supportive housing, which combines affordable units with embedded services for families and individuals with special needs — including veterans, seniors and those living with disabilities. Supportive housing is a longstanding and proven method of combatting chronic homelessness. Unfortunately, the complex way that such housing is funded is leaving many units behind, and tenants and hardworking staff are paying the price.

Right now, 9,000 supportive housing units statewide are teetering on the edge of insolvency because they're funded by an outdated model — the New York State Supportive Housing Program, or NYSSHP— that hasn't seen a significant increase since its creation more than 30 years ago. The governor and legislative leaders can save these units by converting them in the 2024-25 state budget to the better-funded Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative, or ESSHI — a simple and affordable fix that will make a big impact on thousands of lives.

### Westhab's track record

For decades, Westhab has built a mix of affordable housing and supportive housing, demonstrating that the latter allows tenants to thrive while reducing homelessness in our community. We have done this in partnership with the state which has long recognized and

championed supportive housing. In 2016, the state created ESSHI, which pays for both rental assistance and on-site services at \$25,000 per household. These resources allow organizations like Westhab to cap rent at 30% of tenant income and deliver robust support services.

In 2021, Westhab opened the Dayspring Campus in Yonkers, which includes the 63-unit Dayspring Commons residence alongside the Dayspring Community Center, a central full-service hub that is open to tenants and the public alike. Of the 63 households, 37 are supported by ESSHI and exclusively serve individuals and families exiting the Westchester homeless system. Westhab will soon finish construction on a similar Yonkers project, Summit on Hudson.

The positive impact on tenants who move into these buildings is difficult to overstate. Families live in attractive new apartments and have on-site case managers who provide services and support. One Dayspring tenant, William, said: “I look outside, and it reminds me of where I was, where I am now, and where I am going. From me not having any support system, Westhab has become my support system.”

Supportive housing tenants at both Dayspring and Summit on Hudson are positioned for long-term success. This mix of affordable and supportive units works, and we’ve created strong, productive communities within each of our buildings.

But unfortunately, not every tenant receives this level of service because ESSHI hasn’t always been around. Westhab still operates buildings funded by the antiquated NYSSHP, which provides just \$2,736 per unit for support services. These buildings are financially fragile, can’t always support needed improvements, provide far fewer services for needy tenants, and generate ridiculously high caseloads for our hard-working staff.

In our ESSHI-funded building our case managers provide services to 15 tenants; in our NYSSHP buildings, that number rises to 54. Lizbeth, a long-time case manager with Westhab, shared, “I do everything I possibly can to make sure all of my families achieve long-term stability, but there are days where I’m just going from one emergency to the next.”

Westhab’s essential workers on the frontlines are inspiring, but no one should have to stretch the way Lizbeth and countless other social service heroes do.

## **How we can achieve a simple solution**

Again, the solution is simple: right-size NYSSHP to match ESSHI, ensuring that all formerly homeless tenants have what they need to thrive and the workers who support them are

appropriately compensated.

The first year of a five-year phased-in conversion approach for the 9,000 at-risk NYSSHP units would cost just \$32 million. That's a small fraction of the annual multibillion-dollar state budget, but an investment that would more than pay for itself over time by avoiding the high cost of some of our most marginalized neighbors from potentially becoming homeless again.

Westhab takes great pride in delivering high-quality housing and services to all our tenants, and we work to position each household for long-term success. To fully realize that mission, we need the state to modernize the programs that empower us to provide all tenants with the services they need and deserve.

*Richard Nightingale is president and CEO of Westhab, which is transforming communities by developing quality affordable housing and delivering the services that people and neighborhoods need to thrive.*

# poughkeepsie journal

**OPINION** This piece expresses the views of its author(s), separate from those of this publication.

## New York has a chance to get supportive housing right this year. We have to get there

*3-minute read*

**Christa Hines** Special to the USA TODAY Network

Published 4:27 a.m. ET Feb. 29, 2024 | Updated 4:27 a.m. ET Feb. 29, 2024

Solving social challenges like homelessness and housing insecurity is often viewed as impossible: the dynamics seem far too interwoven and complex for there to ever be a straightforward solution.

The reality is that we can help address chronic homelessness on the individual level. And when given the proper tools — most notably well-resourced supportive housing programs that provide on-site services along with affordable housing options — our success in preventing formerly unhoused individuals from returning to the streets is significant.

Consider Fallkill Commons, a 78-unit affordable and supportive housing residence nestled beside Fallkill Creek in the City of Poughkeepsie. The property, which opened in 2020 and uses the creek's natural edges and plants to create beautiful waterfront overlooks, is catalyzing personal growth for residents like Amelia Nejame and Kenneth Kelly through the creation of a stable community.

Nejame says Fallkill's on-site counseling helped her tackle mental health challenges, and has felt empowered through monthly tenant meetings. Kelly, meanwhile, has been able to easily access on-site Narcotics Anonymous meetings to overcome substance use which has given him confidence to become more involved in the community. He spearheaded two block parties this past summer where neighborhood residents, community organizations, and elected officials aimed to bring the community together.

Both Nejame and Kelly struggled with housing insecurity, and both are now thriving due to the essential services directly woven into their living situation. Their experience is a prime example of the power of supportive housing — something every vulnerable New Yorker should be able to access, but unfortunately cannot, due to longstanding state funding inequities.

This is a problem that must be addressed in the 2024-25 state budget currently being negotiated in Albany. If the governor and lawmakers fail to do so, thousands of supportive housing units across New York are in jeopardy of coming offline, potentially forcing tenants back into homelessness.

Hudson River Housing, manages 482 supportive housing units, 408 of which are funded by the New York State Supportive Housing Program (NYSSHP). When it was first created close to four decades ago, NYSSHP was a cutting-edge, nation-leading program. But it hasn't seen a significant funding increase since its inception, and the tenants and workers who fall under NYSSHP's umbrella are paying the price for this shortfall.

NYSSHP has been outpaced by newer programs like the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative (ESSHI), which offers far more resources to serve the same population. While NYSSHP units receive a meager \$2,964 for individuals and \$3,900 for families annually, ESSHI units benefit from a substantial \$25,000 annual allocation, covering case management, programming, and building operations.

ESSHI funding is directly responsible for the successes at Fallkill Commons. NYSSHP-funded units simply cannot afford to offer their residents the same programs. Many NYSSHP units are scattered throughout the area and require case workers to travel between them. Lacking a centralized location and staff, NYSSHP residents cannot benefit from tight-knit communities like the one that exists at Fallkill Commons.

This long-standing funding disparity has now reached a tipping point. Statewide 9,000 NYSSHP-funded supportive housing units risk going offline without additional funding. There is a solution at hand: Convert these endangered units to ESSHI over the next five years. Year One of this conversion would cost \$32 million – a small fraction of the state's multi-billion annual budget that can make an enormous difference in the lives of formerly unhoused New Yorkers.

When properly funded, supportive housing makes a huge difference in peoples' lives. Residents are empowered and assisted with major life milestones, including returning to school, acquiring vital documents like driver's licenses, and finding financial stability – all possible due to active support and a stable roof.

Hudson River Housing currently has 160 units in our real estate development pipeline for ESSHI-funded programs. If approved, these units are poised to help many more people in need of supportive housing services.



Yet, we cannot fully look ahead if we leave people behind. Hudson River Housing is proud of the care we give to our residents and our team of dedicated staff members. This simple funding conversion from NYSSHP to ESSHI would provide the resources to ensure all our residents have equal access to vital community programs and services. We joined 150 other supportive housing staff members and tenants in Albany on Wednesday at the Supportive Housing Network of New York Annual Lobby Day to make this case to lawmakers.

Together, we can create a future where everyone has the support they need to thrive, building a foundation for a brighter tomorrow — and proving that, with just a little political courage and foresight, seemingly intractable social problems can be solved after all.

*Christa Hines is president and CEO of Hudson River Housing, Inc.*

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# Outdated funding levels threaten supportive housing units

By [David Lombardo](#) Published On: March 1st, 2024 Categories: [Capitol Pressroom](#)

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Mar. 1, 2024 – Supportive Housing Network of New York Executive Director Pascale Leone highlights the lack of funding for longstanding supportive housing programs that are in jeopardy of folding if they don't get funding parity with new programs.

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*(Spectrum News 1)*

POLITICS

## Supportive housing advocates push to save 9,000 at-risk units in New York

BY [SUSAN ARBETTER](#) | ALBANY/CAPITAL REGION

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For homeless people, for families fleeing abusive relationships, for those suffering from mental illness, for children aging out of foster care, there is a special form of housing in New York state called “supportive housing.”

These are typically apartment units that come with on-site services to help individuals and families who need them.

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... Leone, right to lease lease, ... supportive housing ...  
New York, told *Capital Tonight*. "The NYSSHP program was innovative when it came about in the late 1980s. Sadly, it hasn't been funded to scale since."

NYSSHP provides annual funding for services of about \$2,900 for individuals and \$3,900 for families. That funding doesn't include rent.

One NYSSHP [advocate wrote](#) that "many NYSSHP buildings are one crisis away from going irreversibly into the red, and most supportive housing providers cannot continue to afford to pay for the buildings' costs."

"For many nonprofit building owners like us, it is not a question of if we will be able to keep these buildings as supportive housing. Rather, it is a question of how long we can afford to."

The second program that funds supportive housing appears to be thriving.

Under the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative, or ESSHI, (pronounced EE-shy), each unit may receive up to \$25,000 annually. The money covers both services and rental assistance. There is also a 2% built-in contract increase.

The state's goal is to fund 20,000 ESSHI units. There are currently about 5,000 in use. Supportive housing advocates like Leone want to move 9,000 NYSSHP units under the ESSHI program umbrella.

"It's about creating parity across the supportive housing programs essentially serving the same populations," she said. "There's no reason for this inequity."

The cost of the switch will be \$32 million annually over five years above the state's investment in supportive housing.

"Some of NYSSHP's buildings are centuries old," Leone explained. "Because of the low rates, there is a lot of deferred maintenance, and so we have leaky roofs, we have elevators that are broken down."

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