

**Testimony of Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner  
Department of Homeless Services**

**Before the New York City Council Public Safety and General Welfare Committees  
Oversight Hearing: NYPD and DHS Diversion Program  
January 21, 2020**

Good afternoon Chairperson Levin and members of the General Welfare Committee and Chairperson Richards and members of the Public Safety Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify and speak on the important work that New York City is doing to address long-term street homelessness in New York City, including the recently launched subway diversion program. Subway Diversion is one of a number of the elements of our overall citywide HOME-STAT outreach effort that is at the core of the Journey Home plan to end long-term street homelessness in New York City. My name is Molly Park, First Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services, and I will be presenting today's testimony on behalf of the agency.

**The Journey Home Plan**

Last month, the Administration announced its first-in-the nation, six-point Action Plan to end long-term street homelessness in New York City over the next five years. The plan will increase housing, mental health and medical services for unsheltered individuals, and enhance outreach resources to deliver more urgent and rapid responses to unsheltered individuals in need.

Our current strategies have helped more than 2,450 individuals come off the streets and into transitional programs and permanent housing since the launch of HOME-STAT (Homeless Outreach & Mobile Engagement Street Action Teams) in April 2016.

By marshaling new and critical resources, the Journey Home plan will:

1. Increase Safe Haven capacity by opening 1,000 new Safe Haven beds.
2. Create 1,000 new low-barrier permanent apartments by working with partners across the housing and social services sectors.
3. Deliver new health resources to people where they are, providing treatment through street medical care and behavioral health care, and building the trust needed for clients to come inside.
4. Provide coordinated rapid outreach response through the Street Homelessness Joint Command Center.
5. Leverage state-of-the-art outreach technology to better connect clients to the services they need to transition into housing.
6. Expand Diversion and Outreach in our subway system.

## **HOME-STAT**

The Journey Home plan builds on the nation's most comprehensive street outreach program, the Department of Homeless Services' HOME-STAT initiative—with outreach teams canvassing the five boroughs and engaging New Yorkers who are unsheltered 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every day of the year.

Through HOME-STAT, hundreds of highly-trained, not-for-profit outreach staff, including licensed social workers, canvass the streets, proactively engaging New Yorkers experiencing street homelessness. Outreach workers offer services and assistance, while working to gain trust with the goal of addressing the underlying issues that may have caused or contributed to street homelessness in order to ultimately help these individuals transition off the streets. HOME-STAT also provides aftercare services, continuing to work with individuals as they make that transition to ensure that they get the supports they need to remain in housing and off the streets.

Through HOME-STAT, we have:

- Implemented current strategies that have helped more than 2,450 individuals off the streets and into transitional programs and permanent housing since the launch of HOME-STAT in April 2016.
- Tripled the City's investment in street homelessness programs from approximately \$45M to more than \$140M before the additional investments for the Journey Home plan.
- Tripled the number of emergency Safe Haven and stabilization beds dedicated to serving street homeless New Yorkers citywide from 600 to more than 1,800 today.
- Tripled the number of outreach staff from fewer than 200 in 2014 to more than 550.
- Built the City's first-ever "By-Name" list of individuals known to be homeless and residing on the streets to improve delivery of services to help them come off the streets. Outreach teams now know approximately 1,300 street homeless individuals by name and actively engage another 2,400 individuals encountered on the streets to determine whether they are homeless.
- Increased joint outreach operations with the NYPD and partner agencies such as NYC Health + Hospitals (H+H), the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH), the FDNY Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and the Department of Parks & Recreation (Parks) to engage more New Yorkers and offer more supports.

## **The Transit System**

This Administration has dedicated millions of dollars to transit system outreach efforts, with teams out year-round on subway trains, platforms, terminals, and end-of-line stations, engaging individuals experiencing homelessness and offering a range of services to meet their unique needs, person by person.

DHS partners with the MTA and Bowery Residents' Committee (BRC) to provide outreach and services in subway stations, with a focus on high-activity stations and end-of-line stations. To that end, all street homeless outreach teams have access to:

- licensed clinicians who work with clients on the streets, provide on-going case management, and assess each individual for immediate risk/crisis during each encounter;
- psychiatrists who perform psychiatric evaluations on the streets, as needed, helping understand and better meet the individual needs of each New Yorker experiencing street homelessness; and
- substance use resources, including the ability to immediately connect clients to detox and other rehabilitation programs, and staff who are trained in naloxone administration.

While BRC primarily focuses on high-activity subway stations, including terminals (Grand Central and Penn Station) and end-of-line stations, the NYPD's Transit Bureau primarily focuses on subway cars and the overall subway system. Additionally, BRC outreach teams work in coordination with trained NYPD colleagues, including conducting end of line outreach to encourage New Yorkers experiencing homelessness to come inside from the subways and into transitional and permanent programs.

As you heard earlier from the NYPD, this summer, the Administration launched the Subway Diversion Project, a collaborative, progressive initiative with the NYPD, the Manhattan District Attorney, the MTA, and HOME-STAT outreach provider BRC to divert unsheltered New Yorkers from unnecessary criminal justice processes, and towards shelter and services. The program has now been implemented across the subway system.

Through this Subway Diversion Project, individuals experiencing unsheltered homelessness (having no active legal address at the time of engagement and not residing in shelter) encountered by the NYPD in the transit system (i.e. in subway cars and subway stations) and observed by the NYPD to be in violation of New York City Transit Code of Conduct rules, such as violating Transit Authority signs/notices, are being offered referrals to services in lieu of civil summonses. Participants who opt into the program complete an assessment with a BRC outreach team, receive a referral to shelter and/or other services, and have their summonses cleared in coordination with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, ultimately diverting them towards shelter away from unnecessary formal court processes and helping more people come inside and out of the subways.

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to the citywide challenge of homelessness. Our outreach enhancements are about continually strengthening our person-to-person engagement to get know more unsheltered New Yorkers, understand their unique needs, and build the trust that will ultimately encourage them to accept services and come indoors, which can take hundreds of contacts and supportive conversations. Every engagement or every conversation represents progress in the right direction, and the more opportunities we have for engaging New Yorkers in need, the better. An individual who may not be ready to accept services today may be ready to make that transition tomorrow—and through enhancements like the Subway Diversion Project, we remain focused on increasing pathways off the street for these New Yorkers.