



Testimony of Julia L. Davis, Esq.
Director of Youth Justice & Child Welfare
Children's Defense Fund-New York
815 2nd Avenue, 8th Floor
New York, New York 10017
(212) 697-0882 | www.cdfny.org

Before the Committee on Children and Youth
New York City Council Budget and Oversight Hearings on
The Preliminary Budget for Fiscal Year 2025, The Preliminary Capital Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2028, and
The Fiscal 2024 Preliminary Mayor's Management Report

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Children's Defense Fund – New York (CDF-NY) thanks the chairs and members of the Committee on Children and Youth for the opportunity to submit written testimony related to the City's FY 2025 Budget and the needs of young people who rely on the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD).

CDF-NY is a non-profit child advocacy organization that works statewide to ensure every child in New York State has a Healthy Start, a Head Start, a Fair Start, a Safe Start and a Moral Start in life and a successful passage to adulthood with the help of caring families and communities. As the New York office of the Children's Defense Fund, a national organization with roots in the Civil Rights Movement, we are committed to advancing racial equity and to leveling the playing field for marginalized New York children, youth and families. We envision a City where marginalized youth and families flourish, leaders prioritize their well-being and communities wield the power to ensure they thrive. Our policy priorities include racial justice, health equity, child welfare, youth justice, and economic mobility. To learn more about CDF-NY, please visit www.cdfny.org.

CDF-NY is also a part of Project UNITE¹, a partnership of the Youth Advisory Board at the Coalition for Homeless Youth and YouthNPower: Transforming Care at CDF-NY.² Our mission is to transfer power to young people with lived expertise navigating these broken systems to hold leaders accountable, to dismantle silos, and fill the gaps that perpetuate the intersection of the child welfare system and youth homelessness.

¹ To learn more about UNITE, see: [UPDATED PROPOSED NYC RECS 5.26.23 \(cdfny.org\)](https://www.cdfny.org/updates/2023/05/26/updated-proposed-nyc-recs-5.26.23).

² To learn more about YouthNPower: Transforming Care, see: [YouthNPower – Transforming Care!](https://www.youthnpower.org/).

Issue 1: We must increase access to permanent housing and successful transitions for all young people.

We must make youth experiencing homelessness in the DYCD-funded Runaway and Homeless Youth (RHY) programs as well as youth transitioning out of Administration for Children Services (ACS) care permanently, categorically eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter the adult Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelter system. Despite legislation passed by the City Council, the Mayor is refusing to follow the law and permit young people served in the RHY program to access CityFHEPS vouchers without having to enter adult shelters. Moreover, young people transitioning out of foster care with ACS were left out of this legislation increasing access to CityFHEPS. This is unacceptable.

The housing crisis in New York City is well-documented among adults and families, but there has been an absence of information focusing on the conditions of transition age youth, and those leaving foster care in particular. New research from YouthNPower shows that young people who have recently aged-out of the child welfare system in New York City face significant challenges finding and maintaining safe and stable housing.³ Notably, since they aged-out of foster care, **60% report at least one negative or coercive housing experience** (feeling stuck in a bad or dangerous housing situation; sleeping at other people's apartments for short periods of time, "couch-surfing"; living in a hotel, motel, or hostel; living in a shelter, drop-in center, or crisis services program; staying with an abusive family member because they had nowhere else to go; "doubling up" in a home that was not big enough; sleeping outside, for example in a park or on the street; living in a vehicle; sleeping on public transportation or at a bus or train station; doing something they did not want to do in order to have a place to sleep; being evicted; being harassed or taken advantage of by a landlord; or trading sex in exchange for a place to sleep).⁴

Access to vouchers is a critical step for vulnerable young people – many of whom navigate multiple city agencies and systems. For example, among youth aged 18-22 who recently aged-out of foster care in NYC, **nearly 1 in 5 (18%) had lived in a shelter, drop-in center or crisis program** since leaving ACS custody.⁵

There is also an urgent need to increase the number of DYCD Transitional Independent Living (TIL) Programs for homeless young adults ages 18-24. We must create 40 additional beds for youth aged 21-24, and 60 more beds for youth aged 18-21 (total \$5.6M). While young adults cannot be discharged to homelessness from ACS foster care in New York City, we have no parallel protections for young adults in the RHY system. This budget must include increased funding to support supportive settings for young adults coming through RHY services and the DYCD system.

³ Mica Baum-Tuccillo, María Elena Torre, Julia Davis, Maya Tellman, T'coy Adams, Laetitia Brutus, Shania Benjamin, Embraia Fraizer, Christine Joseph, Amal Kharoufi, Ellenie Liang, LaTroya Lovell, Justin Mercado, Mya Martinez, Shauntay Mayfield, Susan Notkin, Denice Ocana, Jose Perez, Chanel Smith, and Grace Tatom. (2024). *"We deserve action, not just words:" Findings of a Survey of Former Foster Youth in New York City*. Available at: [2024_YNP_SurveyDataBrief_FINAL.pdf \(secureserver.net\)](#).

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Issue 2: We must expand unconditional direct cash transfer (also known as guaranteed income) opportunities in New York City, especially for system-impacted young people.

Last year, the City Council passed legislation to create a pathway for direct cash transfer (guaranteed income) pilot projects in New York City using City funding. (See Title 21, Ch. 10 NYC Admin. Code “Unconditional Direct Cash Assistance.”) Unfortunately, no pilot program has been funded with City dollars to date.

Unconditional cash has been shown to be a flexible and effective way to support young people in accessing and maintaining safe and stable housing.⁶ It has also been shown to reduce month-to-month income volatility, support full-time employment, and promote health and wellbeing.⁷ Multiple pilots focusing on system-impacted youth are underway in New York City.⁸

Now is the time to expand unconditional cash support for marginalized youth, especially those who have contact with the runaway and homeless youth system, child welfare and criminal legal system. We should be building a “pilot to policy” bridge to support emerging adults with not only robust services and programs, but the material resources they need to thrive.⁹

Issue 3: We must ensure that every young person has access to an experienced Housing Navigator/Specialist, who will connect them to all housing resources that they are eligible for, uphold their power of choice, and support them until they move in.

We need to see \$1.5M in the DYCD budget to restore housing navigators for young people in the RHY system. It has never been more important to support young people facing homelessness in New York City. The number of youth relying on DYCD and DHS services has skyrocketed.¹⁰ It is the wrong time to cut resources that are necessary for young adults to access housing benefits and find safe and stable homes.

⁶ Morton, M. H., Chávez, R., Kull, M. A., Carreon, E. D, Bishop, J., Daferede, S., Wood, E., Cohen, L., & Barreyro, P. (2020). *Developing a direct cash transfer program for youth experiencing homelessness: Results of a mixed methods, multi stakeholder design process*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at: [Developing-a-Direct-Cash-Transfer-Program-for-Youth.pdf \(chapinhall.org\)](#); Berger Gonzalez, S, Morton, M., & Farrell, A. (2022). *Maximizing the impact of direct cash transfers to young people: A policy toolkit*. Chicago, IL: Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago. Available at: [Cash-Transfers-Policy-Toolkit.pdf \(chapinhall.org\)](#).

⁷ Stockton Economic Empowerment Demonstration, Preliminary Analysis, available at: [SEED Preliminary+Analysis-SEEDs+First+Year_Final+Report_Individual+Pages+.pdf \(squarespace.com\)](#).

⁸ For example, the YouthNPower: Transforming Care direct cash transfer pilot project (see [www.YouthNPower.org](#)).

⁹ Mica Baum-Tuccillo, María Elena Torre, Julia Davis, Maya Tellman, T’coy Adams, Laetitia Brutus, Shania Benjamin, Embraia Fraizer, Christine Joseph, Amal Kharoufi, Ellenie Liang, LaTroya Lovell, Justin Mercado, Mya Martinez, Shauntay Mayfield, Susan Notkin, Denice Ocana, Jose Perez, Chanel Smith, and Grace Tatom. (2024). *“We deserve action, not just words:” Findings of a Survey of Former Foster Youth in New York City*. Available at: [2024 YNP SurveyDataBrief FINAL.pdf \(secureserver.net\)](#).

¹⁰ Hogan, Gwynne. Mar. 12, 2024. [Youth Shelter System Locks Out Hundreds as Migrants Seek Entry | THE CITY — NYC News](#).

Issue 4: We must ensure that young people have appropriate supports and resources in the community to stay permanently (long-term) housed.

While youth who have left foster care can go back to their foster care agency until they are 26 for individualized coaching and case management through Fair Futures, young people in the runaway and homeless youth system have no access to these kinds of services.

As we move toward creating trusted, community-based resources for all youth facing homelessness, we need to make critical investments right now in the RHY drop-in centers. To meet the urgent need facing youth in New York City now, the budget must include a one-time 30% contract increase for DYCD-funded Drop-in Centers (\$1.63M). And we must also restore funding for the 16 Peer Navigator positions in the DYCD-RHY System (\$1.6M).

Issue 5: We must restore cuts and make deeper investments in adolescents and emerging adults to reduce contact with the criminal legal system and the number of youth in detention.

As you saw at the December 2023 joint committee hearing, young people from across the City are demanding that we **#InvestDontArrest** to support their wellbeing and community safety. The increases in juvenile detention at Crossroads and Horizon require the City Council and the Administration to act immediately to restore and grow programs for young people with criminal legal system contacts, including alternative to detention services that will permit more young people to go home. Cuts to programs like ARCHES, Project Impact and Next Steps through the Department of Probation, as well as intensive family therapy and case management through community-based organizations like Esperanza, diminish our ability to serve young people in their own communities. As the FY2025 budget is negotiated and finalized, the Committee should explore whether ACS can help fill the gap by directly funding alternative to detention/incarceration, mentoring, family therapy, and intensive case management programs in the community.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this written testimony. For any questions, please reach out to me directly: JDavis@childrensdefense.org