

Promoting Access to Stable, Permanent Housing For All New Yorkers

September 15, 2015

The Honorable Andrew Cuomo
Governor of the State of New York

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York

Dear Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio,

We are writing today to recognize the considerable progress made by the City and State in improving access to housing for persons involved in the criminal justice system, and to offer our recommendations to strengthen your efforts moving forward. The attached document was prepared by experienced re-entry housing and service providers convened by CSH, a national leader in supportive housing.

There are too few housing resources in New York for persons exiting the criminal justice system. The lack of suitable housing puts the well over 100,000 New Yorkers exiting our prisons and jails each year at a high risk of homelessness and recidivism. An important part of the solution is supportive housing, a proven, cost-effective vehicle for ending the revolving door of homelessness, incarceration, and over-reliance on costly crisis services.

As we call out in this report, all persons with a criminal justice history deserve fair access, consistent with public safety, to supportive, affordable and market-rate housing in order to reinforce their successful reentry and reduce the risk of their reincarceration.

Our report highlights some major actions this year, including the formation of the New York State Council on Community Re-Entry and Reintegration, the New York State Office of Mental Health commitment of 100 new units of supported housing for people exiting state prisons with serious mental illness, and New York State Homes & Community Renewal exploring new policies to reduce barriers for people with criminal justice histories accessing State-funded affordable housing. Mayor de Blasio's Task Force on Behavioral Health and the Criminal Justice System Plan included significant expansion of public health services within the criminal justice system and included 267 new units of supportive housing focused on individuals with behavioral health needs cycling through the criminal justice system and homelessness. In addition, the Mayor's Three-Quarter House Taskforce has taken important steps toward protecting resident safety in three-quarter houses.

There are still many challenges that must be addressed. *There is not nearly enough supportive housing to meet the record need* and the current City-State supportive housing production initiative, the New York/New York III Agreement (NY/NY III), is expiring this year. *As New Yorkers, we urge you to work together to immediately finalize a new statewide supportive housing agreement that reflects the need and dedicate a portion of these units to people with criminal justice histories.*

Also, the City and State do not have a long-term plan for developing alternatives to unsafe three-quarter houses and it is unclear, given the dearth of available beds, how residents who are eligible will access supportive housing or what options will be available to those who do not need supportive housing. *We recommend a three-step approach to improve safety and program standards in existing three-quarter houses; closing houses that cannot meet basic safety standards; and implementing realistic policies to reduce demand on three-quarter houses over the long-term.*

Finally, *Housing discrimination in affordable and market-rate housing is still a major issue.* Because affordable housing is scarce, people with criminal records are often the first to be shut out, even though housing them is a cost-effective way to accomplish the same public safety goals driving their exclusion. *Persons with criminal justice history need fair access, consistent with public safety, to affordable and market-rate housing in order to support successful reentry and reduce the risk of reincarceration. New York State and City should adopt policy changes similar to those of HCR and include a requirement in regulatory agreements with all City-funded projects to prevent discrimination based on criminal justice history.* There are strong public policy reasons why housing supported by public dollars should contribute to making communities safer and healthier, including reduced recidivism, and less spending on incarceration and other services.

As these changes are realized, the *State and City will begin to see a reduction in criminal justice system costs.* The State and City should commit to justice reinvestment to *ensure savings are reinvested in housing and services for formerly incarcerated individuals,* thereby increasing the likelihood of successful reentry.

By implementing our recommendations, thousands of New Yorkers will avoid recidivism, find stable housing, strengthen families and children, and lead productive lives in our communities.

We will continue to provide our support and expertise in order to make these recommendations a reality and welcome the opportunity to discuss our findings and suggestions with you.

Sincerely,

The Bridge, Inc.

The Bronx Defenders

Brooklyn Community Housing and Services

CASES

Community Service Society of New York

CSH

The Fortune Society

From Punishment to Public Health

Greenhope Services for Women

Hour Children

Housing Plus Solutions

Legal Action Center

MFY Legal Services, Inc.

Neighbors Together

The Osborne Association

Prisoner Reentry Institute, John Jay College
of Criminal Justice

Providence House, Inc.