2024 Support Memo:
The Securing Access to Fair & Equal (SAFE) Shelter Act
A. 2583A/S. 15A (Hevesi/Gounardes)

Dear Governor Hochul:

We write to you as a mighty and growing coalition of advocates, survivors, and shelter providers **in support of the Securing Access to Fair & Equal (SAFE) Shelter Act - A. 2583A/S. 15A (Hevesi/Gounardes)**. This legislation would provide the funding flexibility shelter providers desperately need to house many more single adult survivors of trafficking and domestic and gender-based violence. That flexibility would empower the sector and ensure that all survivors, regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or family status, have equal access to life-saving temporary housing and supports.

New York's domestic violence shelter system was originally designed to administer services and supports to women with children fleeing domestic violence. As a result, the majority of temporary housing units for this population were built to accommodate families (i.e., a parent and one or more children), rather than individual adults. This flaw in the system disproportionately impacts members of already-marginalized communities, namely trafficking survivors, LBGTQIA+ survivors, and older adult survivors, populations less likely to seek shelter with minor children.

Currently, New York State reimburses domestic violence shelter providers **on a per person per night basis**, which places providers in a financial predicament when a single adult is seeking shelter and the only space available is designed for a family. This **"heads in beds"** reimbursement system means that a shelter provider that places a single survivor without children in a unit with two or more beds will lose significant revenue for the beds that are not used for the length of time the single survivor occupies that room.

There is a desperate shortage of temporary housing units for individuals seeking shelter without children. Providers **want** to provide shelter to every survivor seeking safety, but the sector simply cannot afford to downsize the number of units required to accommodate the high number of single adult survivors seeking shelter without children.

A Worsening Crisis for Single Survivors Without Children

Over the years, the number of single adult survivors of trafficking and domestic and gender-based violence seeking temporary housing has increased, but the number of units designed to accommodate them has remained mostly flat, and inadequate. According to data from the New York City's 24-hour Domestic Violence Hotline, operated by Safe Horizon, **in 2023 50% of calls were from single survivors without children in need of shelter. Of those, only 18% were connected to shelter, compared to 72% of survivors with one child and 66% of survivors with two children**.

The situation for single adult survivors of gender-based violence has only worsened over the past 5 years. In 2019, 45% of all survivors in need of shelter were individuals without children; 30% of which were placed. Since then, the percentage of survivors without children seeking shelter has increased while the percentage of placements has declined steadily.

	CY23		CY22		CY21		CY20		CY19	
Family Size	**% of all clients requesting shelter**	**% of requests that result in a link**	**% of all clients requesting shelter**	**% of requests that result in a link**	**% of all clients requesting shelter**	**% of requests that result in a link**	**% of all clients requesting shelter**	**% of requests that result in a link**	**% of all clients requesting shelter**	**% of requests that result in a link**
No Children	50%	18%	49%	22%	48%	31%	49%	31%	45%	30%
1 Child	26%	72%	27%	70%	28%	76%	27%	74%	30%	75%
2 Children	15%	66%	14%	63%	14%	78%	15%	75%	16%	71%
3 Children	6%	59%	7%	61%	7%	73%	6%	71%	7%	68%
4+ Children	3%	50%	3%	56%	3%	71%	3%	62%	3%	56%

The Limitations of the Current Per Diem System for Reimbursements

The current system of reimbursement places providers who would like to accommodate single adult survivors at a significant financial disadvantage. New York State regulations set a maximum 180-day length of stay for survivors in shelter. A provider that places a survivor without children in a room with two beds could lose nearly $21,000 for the 180-day length of stay. Compounded over time and adjusted to reflect additional units, agencies stand to lose hundreds of thousands of dollars annually, depending on the number of beds within the shelter. A loss of this magnitude would have a disastrous impact on the agency's ability to continue operations and stay afloat.

The Impact on Survivors Without Children

As a result of this system, many adult survivors of domestic and gender-based violence without children are remaining in or returning to unsafe situations. Survivors are being pushed into the homeless shelter system, which is not built to meet their needs or provide the trauma-informed care they deserve. Many survivors instead choose to live on the street or remain in dangerous and abusive environments, often with the people who have caused them harm.

The Impact to the State

The SAFE Shelter Act would help address the impossible bind facing shelter providers and survivors by expanding our collective capacity to shelter survivors without children. This legislation would ensure that the State provides full reimbursement to the provider when a room intended to accommodate two individuals is used to house a single adult survivor.

When OCFS sets its annual budget for the domestic violence shelter system, it assumes 100% shelter occupancy, meaning that it sets aside funding on the assumption that every bed in the system will be

occupied. As a result, implementing the SAFE Act will not lead to increased and unexpected costs to the state because it will not change the assumption that 100% of the beds will be occupied.

At the same time, the SAFE Shelter Act will help make our domestic violence shelter system more equitable and accessible to all survivors, regardless of age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or family size. Providers will have the flexibility and financial certainty needed to house single adult survivors of gender-based violence and trafficking without risking long-term financial ruin.

New York is experiencing a crisis of homelessness, driven in large part by domestic and gender-based violence. It is vital that the State responds to this crisis with all available tools, and the SAFE Shelter Act would go a long way to increasing shelter capacity for one of the most under-served and at-risk populations.

We urge you to support the SAFE Shelter Act. Thank you. For more information about this legislation or the issue, please contact:

Michael Polenberg, Vice President of Government Affairs, Safe Horizon
michael.polenberg@safehorizon.org or 212.577.7735

Wilfredo Lopez, Senior Director of Government Affairs, Urban Resource Institute
wlopez@urinyc.org or 718.427.1132

Sincerely,

New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NYSCADV)
Safe Horizon
Urban Resource Institute (URI)
Volunteers of America - Greater New York
Allen Women's Resource Center
Barrier Free Living
CAMBA, Inc.
Care for the Homeless
Day One
HELP USA
Henry Street Settlement
Homeless Services United
Hope's Door
LI Against Domestic Violence
My Sisters' Place
Neighborhood Coalition for Shelter, Inc.
New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault
New York City Anti-Violence Project (AVP)
New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NYSCASA)
NYC Coalition of Domestic Violence Residential Providers
Pinnacle Community Services

Rise-NY
Safe Harbors of the Finger Lakes, Inc.
Samaritan Daytop Village
Sanctuary for Families
The Crime Victims Center
The Healing Center
The Safe Center, LI Inc.
Violence Intervention Program
West Side Federation for Senior and Supportive Housing
Willow Domestic Violence Center of Greater Rochester, Inc.
Womankind