March 5, 2019

The Honorable Bill de Blasio
Mayor of the City of New York
City Hall
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

On behalf of the undersigned New York City organizations dedicated to the well-being of children and families, we are writing to urge you to provide critical support for students who are homeless. Given the record numbers of students experiencing homelessness and the significant needs of these students, we are deeply concerned that your Fiscal Year 2020 Preliminary Budget would eliminate funding for key educational support for students living in shelters. **We urge you to restore the $13.9 million included in the FY 19 budget for support for these students and add $6.5 million for the following initiatives:**

1) **Increase the number of DOE Bridging the Gap social workers for students in shelters from 69 to 100 and add 5 clinical supervisors ($5M)**
2) **Establish an Educational Support Center at PATH ($500,000)**
3) **Increase the number of Students in Temporary Housing Central and Regional Managers ($1M)**

In 2017-18, a record 114,659 New York City students were identified as homeless. This represents an increase of 3,097 students from the 2016-17 school year and a 66 percent total increase since 2010-11. These numbers are staggering: more than 1 in 10 NYC students are experiencing homelessness – a number that would fill the seats at Yankee Stadium twice. Students in temporary housing have worse educational outcomes than their permanently housed peers. Outcomes are particularly bleak for students living in New York City shelters—nearly 38,000 students during the 2017-18 school year. Homelessness can expose children to high levels of stress. In addition to the trauma of housing loss, students may have been exposed to other traumatic experiences, such as domestic violence, which is currently a leading cause of homelessness in the City. Students living in shelters have higher rates of disability, higher rates of suspension, lower literacy levels, and higher rates of chronic absenteeism.

Three years ago, your Administration began several successful initiatives to provide educational support for students living in shelters, including Bridging the Gap social workers to work in schools with high populations of students living in shelters, after-school literacy programs at shelters, and enrollment support for families living in shelters. Given the positive impact of these initiatives, we were very troubled and disappointed that the FY 20 Preliminary Budget eliminated the funding for these critical and impactful programs. **To support the growing number of students who are homeless, the City must restore the $13.9 million included in the FY 19 budget and provide an additional $6.5 million to hire an increased number of Bridging the Gap social workers to focus on serving these students, establish an Educational Support Center at PATH, and hire additional central and regional managers to help run the DOE's Students in Temporary Housing program**.

1. **Increase the number of DOE Bridging the Gap school-based social workers for students in shelters from 69 to 100 ($5M)**

For the past three years, your Administration has supported students living in shelters through the Bridging the Gap social worker program. This year, 69 DOE social workers are working in schools with high populations of students living in shelters. These social workers provide much-needed counseling services, connect students with academic support and mental health resources, and work to combat chronic absenteeism. However, more than 100 schools with 50 or more students living in a shelter do not yet have a Bridging the Gap social worker. This includes 30 schools with 70 or more students living in a shelter.

While the City recently announced it would increase staffing for students who are homeless by hiring community coordinators, these new community coordinators are not social workers and lack the qualifications to provide the social-emotional support students living in shelters often need to succeed in school. Social workers are trained to address the underlying stress and trauma that hold back students from thriving academically and socially and have the skillset to help families navigate the overlapping systems that can pose barriers to children attending school consistently.

To continue the success of this vital program and fill gaps in services, we recommend that you restore the existing funding for the 69 social workers and add an additional 31 social workers in order to provide a total of 100 Bridging the Gap social workers. We also recommend that you add 5 clinical supervisors to help the Bridging the Gap social workers address the complex issues facing many students and families in shelter.

2. **Establish an Education Support Center at PATH ($500,000)**

In New York City, every family applying for shelter spends many hours sitting in PATH, the City's shelter intake center, waiting to be placed in and transported to a shelter. While families wait, the City is missing a key opportunity to talk to families about their educational options. Currently, there are only 3 DOE employees at PATH, and these employees only meet with parents who proactively request to speak with DOE staff. Moreover, there are no DOE staff members at PATH available to meet with families during the weekends or in the evening hours.

The City should launch an Education Support Center at PATH and ensure that every family who participates in the shelter intake process has the opportunity to meet with a DOE staff member who can share information with families about where their children can go to school, how their children can get there, and contact information for ongoing assistance. The DOE staff should help to identify and address cases in which there will be barriers to school attendance, such as a family who is unable to use public transportation to get their children to school until bus service is arranged. These additional support staff members at PATH should also be available to families as a resource after the eligibility process is completed in order to accommodate families' needs throughout their experience in the shelter system.

The City should establish an Education Support Center at PATH, staffed by a DOE manager and 6 full-time DOE staff members with staggered schedules, including evenings and weekends, in order to ensure that DOE personnel can meet with families who apply for shelter at PATH.

3. **Increase the Number of Students in Temporary Housing Central and Regional Managers ($1M)**

Recently, the DOE added regional managers to focus on serving students in temporary housing. However, with more than 100,000 students experiencing homelessness, additional central and regional managers are necessary to provide support for these students. The Students in Temporary Housing Program needs more managers to support additional staff, including the 100 new community coordinators in this program. Moreover, additional personnel are needed to assist children, schools, families, and shelter staff. **The City should add at least 4 Students in Temporary Housing Regional Managers for a total of 22 Regional Managers and add at least 2 Central Managers** to help ensure the Students in Temporary Housing Program is directed and operated effectively.

We strongly urge you to **restore the $13.9 million to fund existing supports and add $6.5 million to (1) increase the number of DOE Bridging the Gap school-based social workers for students in shelters from 69 to 100 and add 5 clinical supervisors; (2) establish an Education Support Center at PATH; and (3) increase the number of Students in Temporary Housing Central and Regional Managers.** Given the record high number of students identified as homeless in New York City, now is not the time for the City to turn away. Rather, the City must increase investments to help students who are homeless succeed in school and break the cycle of homelessness in New York City.

Respectfully,

Advocates for Children of New York

Alliance for Quality Education

Children's Aid

Children's Defense Fund-New York

Citizens' Committee for Children of New York

Coalition for the Homeless

Committee for Hispanic Children and Families (CHCF)

Educators for Excellence-New York

Federation of Protestant Welfare Agencies (FPWA)

Good Shepherd Services

Henry Street Settlement

Homeless Services United

The Legal Aid Society

New York Junior League

Partnership with Children

United Federation of Teachers (UFT)

Win