

**POST RELEASE:
February 9th 10:00AM**

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NEW REPORT SHOWS YEARS OF BLATANT HOUSING DISCRIMINATION AGAINST VOUCHER HOLDERS WHILE CITY'S ENFORCEMENT AGENCY IS UNDERFUNDED AND UNDERSTAFFED

Homeless New Yorkers and advocates demand more funding for the City Commission on Human Rights, pointing to years of data showing voucher holders suffer housing exclusion, segregation, and substandard housing units.

New York City, NY: In the midst of the Omicron variant tearing through city shelters, homeless New Yorkers are calling on the City to do more to make rental vouchers work and help them get housed. On Wednesday, dozens of homeless New Yorkers with rental assistance vouchers, advocates, New York City Council members, and service organizations rallied at City Hall to release a new report on housing disparities for voucher holders. The report, co-authored by Unlock NYC, Neighbors Together, The Anti-Eviction Mapping Project, and The Housing Data Coalition, finds that people with vouchers face widespread “source of income” discrimination by landlords and brokers, apartments with higher numbers of violations, and de facto redlining.

The VALUE in Housing Campaign, a campaign created by New Yorkers with rental assistance vouchers, has been fighting for over 3 years for improvements to vouchers. Leaders of the campaign said that despite recent wins for voucher holders like the increase to CityFHEPS, widespread discrimination remains a major barrier for people searching for housing with vouchers.

At today's rally, leaders of the campaign and advocates demanded a budget increase of \$1 million dollars for the Source of Income Unit at the City Commission on Human Rights, a city

agency tasked with enforcing against discrimination on behalf of voucher holders. *“We are calling on the city to increase funding for the Commission on Human Rights, so that it can help enforce against source of income discrimination. Fifty-four years after the Fair Housing Act was passed, the arc of justice has yet to be fully realized to help those who truly need the protection that the law provided. We hope that by exposing this egregious and rampant discrimination we can finally get to a place where everyone, regardless of how they pay for housing, receives the fair and balanced treatment that they should have been afforded by the law.”* said **Fannie Lou Diane, a voucher holder and leader at Neighbors Together.**

Authors of the report say that the data findings confirm what voucher holders have been saying for years; that substandard voucher payment rates and source of income discrimination lock them out of housing opportunities and keep them stuck in homelessness. *“We analyzed over 500 reports and the data is clear - source of income discrimination is rampant, and voucher holders face extremely limited options when looking for a home,”* shared **Manon Vergerio, one of the co-founders of Unlock NYC.**

Advocates and shelter providers at the rally echoed the call for increased funding for the Commission on Human Rights, stating that the agency’s lack of adequate staffing to fight against source of income discrimination made it harder to find housing for their clients.

Rally attendees said they will continue to fight for vouchers that work and plan to address administrative barriers, segregation, discrimination, and increased fines for those who break the Human Rights Law. *“We’ve had enough. We’ve been fighting for 4 years to make these vouchers work, and we’ve been saying these things all along. I’m glad we have a report that backs up what we’ve been telling elected officials, but they should believe what people are saying: we have to get rid of this discrimination and make vouchers work so that we can get out of homelessness once and for all,”* said **Naila, Neighbors Together leader and voucher holder.**

Read the full report “An Illusion of Choice: How Source of Income Discrimination and Voucher Policies Perpetuate Housing Inequality” at <https://weunlock.nyc/soi-report/>

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PHOTOS -

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1kAlagB-6dY71jcPTEMM6v74Pef2JGxQv?usp=sharing>

Facebook Live Link - <https://fb.watch/b3lrvkH9Cm/>

Twitter: @neighborstogthr & @WeUnlockNYC

"Our source of income discrimination laws are only as strong as the enforcement mechanisms behind them. Too many households are denied housing because of systemic discrimination, which is why we need to fully fund and expand our enforcement agencies, aggressively pursue those who ignore the law, and build more social housing that is democratic and affordable to those at the lowest income brackets," said **Councilmember Sandy Nurse**.

"Discrimination against users of rental assistance vouchers is a pernicious factor in perpetuating our city's homelessness crisis." said **Council Member Erik Bottcher**. "New Yorkers need a robust City Commission on Human Rights to push back against illegal and immoral source of income discrimination. I want to thank all of the organizations, advocates, and activists working on this critical issue."

"Ensuring that all New Yorkers have access to permanent housing is the best way to end homelessness and help unhoused individuals build a foundation from which they can pursue their dreams and improve their quality of life," said **Councilmember Sandra Ung**. "Increasing CityFHEPS vouchers to fair market rent levels was a big step forward, but we must now ensure that all New Yorkers have fair and equitable access to these vouchers. That requires the City Council to invest real resources in combating income and other forms of housing discrimination that prevents New Yorkers from accessing vouchers."

"Source of Income Discrimination is a significant barrier to the safe, healthy city we all need and deserve, and I'm proud to support the efforts of Neighbors Together to address it. I admire their multi-pronged approach, not only creating innovative tools and providing direct service to impacted New Yorkers, but also putting forth legislative recommendations to end this discrimination and move toward a guarantee of dignified, comfortable housing for all," said **Councilmember Tiffany Cabán**

"Its a necessity for the city to get more people with vouchers placed and address the discrimination folks face," said **VOCAL-NY Leader Don Cannon**. "We have been at a disadvantage for far too long, and if we don't have attorneys at the Commission on Human Rights to fight for us, we will continue to be stuck in place."

"Housing is a human right and we need to stop source of discrimination against voucher holders," said **Maria Walles, leader with the Safety Net Activists**. "The Commission on Human Rights must have enough staffing to fight with us to ensure people can get

apartments. Homeless New Yorkers fought hard to pass Intro 146 so that the voucher would be increased. We now need to address Source of Income discrimination so that people can get their apartments now."

"After being chronically homeless for many years, including years in family shelters as a single parent raising my son, I finally have a place to call home thanks to CityFHEPS — but it took me years plus becoming a public figure in order to finally become housed. A housing voucher should be the key to a home, not the key to a headache and more years of living on the streets or in congregate shelter "death traps" like it was for me. The program has potential but there are bureaucratic inefficiencies that need to be addressed to make the vouchers more appealing to landlords. We fought hard to get the voucher increased but without fixing the administrative problems within the City government and increasing funding for CCHR to fight source of income discrimination, the vouchers will not work for those who need it most. Voucher holders like me must be protected from the bureaucratic failures that have plagued city government for far too long at the expense of vulnerable New Yorkers," said **Shams DaBaron aka "Da Homeless Hero.**

"Open Hearts is proud to stand with our unhoused neighbors to demand that the city make vouchers work. Everybody deserves a place to call home, but for too many New Yorkers, rental assistance vouchers – which are designed to help – end up failing. The city must do more to get homeless New Yorkers into permanent housing, and increasing funding for the Commission on Human Rights is a crucial step towards ensuring voucher holders have the access to housing that everyone deserves," said **Sara Newman, Director of Organizing at the Open Hearts Initiative.**

"Source of income discrimination against those who are seeking housing with rental assistance vouchers is a persistent issue across the city that prevents people from exiting homelessness. The New Yorkers we serve spend exorbitant amounts of time hunting for housing with a voucher in hand that guarantees rent and are repeatedly turned away unlawfully. This is not right and the City must address this issue. Urban Pathways joins the call to increase the City Commission on Human Rights' budget by \$1 million as a first step to combatting unlawful source of income discrimination," said **Frederick Shack, Chief Executive Officer of Urban Pathways**

"Finally after years of fighting for and achieving City rental vouchers that will actually pay for available apartments, thousands of voucher holders now confront administrative and

bureaucratic obstacles from the city, and resistance and discrimination at the hands of landlords that can turn this dream of a new life into a nightmarish maze of delays and setbacks that can last many months and threaten to break the spirit of a family desperately praying for relief from life in a homeless shelter. We can and must do better than this for our most vulnerable households. To offer them hope only to see it dangled in front of their eyes, months on end is cruel beyond measure. Let's do what's needed now to deliver what we promise. All New Yorkers will be better for it!" said **Marc Greenberg, Executive Director of the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing**