It can be hard to live in a shelter, let alone find permanent housing. But you're not alone and this guide can help you.

FROM SHELTER

- What your rights are in NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS) shelters
- What to do if your rights are violated
- How to start looking for a permanent home
- How to get help along the way

TO APARTMENT
YOUR RIGHTS IN DHS SHELTERS

DHS shelters can be city-run or operated by organizations under contract with DHS. These include shelters for families with children, adult families, and single adults.

There are federal, state, and city laws that give you rights! Everyone has the right to:

- Practice your civil and religious freedoms
- Manage your own finances
- Have your medical, personal, and financial information kept confidential by DHS and shelter staff
- Send and receive mail
- Meet privately with your legal representatives or advocates
- Be treated fairly and respectfully by staff
- Receive free interpretation services when communicating with DHS and shelter staff and get documents translated into your preferred language
- Leave and return to the shelter within curfew hours; late and early passes can be requested from your case manager
- Not be physically restrained or confined
- Be notified in writing of transfers and sanctions, and have the opportunity to fight them
- Be placed in a room with the gender you identify with

...& there are more rights!

Bathrooms in single adult shelters should be cleaned at least twice a day.

Showers and tubs should be private or have privacy curtains or dividers.

There must be 24-hour access to bathrooms that are working, with hot and cold water.

There must be at least 1 sink and toilet for every 10 residents.

If you have dietary or nutritional needs verified by a medical professional, the shelter must accommodate your needs.

You should have three well-balanced, nutritious meals that meet the NYC Food Standards, plus snacks, every day.

If your food doesn’t meet these standards (is moldy, expired, not nutritious, or not enough), file a complaint with DHS (see back cover).

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In shelters that provide meals in common areas in sleeping rooms in bathrooms

You have the right to receive visitors.

If you have dietary or nutritional needs verified by a medical professional, the shelter must accommodate your needs.

For single adult shelters, the shelter must offer at least 10 hours of recreational activities each week.

Living areas should be regularly cleaned, safe, and well-lighted.

If your food doesn’t meet these standards (is moldy, expired, not nutritious, or not enough), file a complaint with DHS (see back cover).

In shelters for single adults

You have the right to a secure locker but not a private room.

Sleeping rooms should have:

- At least 60 square feet per resident if for 2 or more, with a minimum of 3 feet between beds
- At least 80 square feet per resident if single occupancy

In shelters for families

You have the right to:

- A private room with a lock
- Space and equipment for bathing/changing infants and young children
- Access to refrigeration for your child’s food
- If you’re in a shelter for families with children under 18, you should have at least 50 square feet per family member (50 square feet = 5 feet by 10 feet)

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IF YOU HAVE A DISABILITY OR HEALTH ISSUES
Your rights are protected by federal, state, and city laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

DHS must work with you to make sure shelter services and facilities are accessible to you. You may need to provide DHS a letter about your health issues or disabilities from your doctor or a social worker.

FOR EXAMPLE:

- If you can't climb up stairs, but your room is on the second floor, you can ask to be moved to the ground floor.
- If you use a wheelchair and can't access facilities, you can ask to be put in a facility that's wheelchair-accessible.
- If your medication needs to be refrigerated, you can ask to get access to refrigeration and storage.
- If you can't access facilities, if you use a wheelchair and need them to be wheelchair-accessible.
- A "Reasonable Accommodation" (or RA) is a request for DHS to adjust their policies, practices, or facilities to make them accessible to you. This could involve DHS transferring you to a different shelter that's more appropriate for your needs.

REQUEST A REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION
Ask for a Reasonable Accommodation by talking to your case manager at the shelter or by filling out the RA Request Form, which you submit to the Shelter Director. They must give you a copy or you can get the form at:


SUBMIT YOUR REQUEST
DHS must give you a written notice about its decision on your Reasonable Accommodation request. You can appeal if it is denied.

DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL?
Children staying in a shelter or with family or friends while a parent or guardian is in a shelter have the right, under the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, to:

A CHOOSE WHERE THEY GO TO SCHOOL
Your child can choose the school they were in before they entered shelter, or if you want your children to be in school together.

B ASK FOR A SHELTER TRANSFER
You have the right to request a transfer from your case manager based on your child's needs (if current shelter is too far from the school, or if you're asking for children to be in school together).

INCOME SAVINGS REQUIREMENT
Some shelters ask residents who have income from employment to save money each month they're in shelter.

If you have a New York State ID, register online at:

voterreg.dmv.ny.gov/MotorVoter

IF YOU'RE NOT REGISTERED YET, REGISTER AT THE ADDRESS WHERE YOU'RE LIVING NOW, OR YOU CAN REGISTER AT THE ADDRESS WHERE YOU'RE LIVING NOW.

YOU CAN KEEP VOTING IN THE DISTRICT WHERE YOU WERE REGISTERED BEFORE YOU MOVED—or you can register at the address where you're living now. If you're not registered yet, register at the address where you're living now.

You have a right to a complete copy of your DHS and shelter records. You can get them by submitting a Record Release Authorization Form, which can be found at:

safetynetactivists.org/ nyc-dhs-shelter-form

Email the form to:

records.access@dhs.nyc.gov

YOU MAY BE ABLE TO GET PUBLIC BENEFITS
If you're already receiving benefits, your benefit amounts may change when you move into a shelter.

If you aren't receiving benefits, you may be eligible now.

A If you apply and have no income, you may be eligible for expedited SNAP within 5 days or immediate needs grants (emergency cash) while you wait for your application to be processed.

B You may qualify for these additional grants while in shelter:

STORAGE GRANTS
To pay for storage while you're in a shelter.

TRANSPORTATION BENEFITS
If you have an active Cash Assistance case, you can apply for an apartment search grant to help cover transportation costs while you look for an apartment. Depending on your income, you may qualify for Fair Fares (a half-priced MetroCard).

RESTAURANT ALLOWANCE
If you don't have access to a working kitchen (and your shelter doesn't serve meals), or if you can't eat the meals at your shelter for medical or other reasons. You need an active Cash Assistance case to qualify.

DO YOU HAVE CHILDREN IN SCHOOL?

Every school has a liaison to support students. For help, contact NYS-TEACHS at (800) 388-2014.

I can choose my school!

DHS has emergency temperature policies, called "Code Blue" and "Code Red," with special rules to protect shelter residents from the cold and heat.

CODE RED
When temperatures reach 100°F for one day or 95°F for 2 or more days, shelters should have a "cooling area".

Homeless individuals should be allowed to access cooling areas at shelters, even if it is not their assigned shelter.

CODE BLUE
When the temperature falls below 32°F with wind chill, all homeless individuals can go to any shelter to seek space (although DHS may move you to a different site if needed).
moving to housing

it's important to start looking for housing right away because the process can take a long time. here's how to get started:

housing is considered "affordable" by the government if it costs no more than 30% of your income.

you have the right to stay in a DHS shelter until you can find, or the city offers you, a permanent housing placement that meets your needs. if a shelter is pressuring you to leave, it's not affordable, or not safe, or it’s illegal, and threatening to kick you out:

- Write a statement about the problems with the housing. Include details like unsafe or unhealthy physical conditions in the apartment, any health or disability-related issues that were affected, etc.
- Record the address and contact information of the person you met with.
- Take pictures of the problems with the unit.
- Report the groups on the back cover involved.

if you are being transferred to another shelter:

- At least 48 hours before the transfer, your shelter should provide you the written notice.
- You can challenge a transfer! in a family shelter, immediately request a transfer hearing. if you are transferred after this process, request an NY state fair hearing immediately.
- if you are a single adult shelter, immediately request an on-site supervisory review. before you transfer, you'll meet with the shelter director to present your objections.
- if the director does not withdraw the transfer, request an NY state fair hearing immediately.

you may have the right to appeal a transfer decision:

- if you ask to be transferred.
- if the director does not withdraw the transfer, the shelter must provide a written notice with a specific reason for transfer and the name and location of the shelter to which you are being transferred.
- if you disagree with your transfer, you do not need to sign the reason for transfer and the name and location of the shelter you are being transferred to.

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sanctions

You, your shelter, and any landlords can be sanctioned if you

- fail to meet your obligations as a tenant (e.g., pay rent, keep the apartment clean).
- fail to keep the apartment safe (e.g., don't let anyone stay who isn't your roommate, fix broken lights).

Sanctions can include:

- a financial penalty (e.g., a fine or deposit forfeiture).
- restrictions on your ability to move to another apartment or the city (e.g., an eviction).

You may be sanctioned if:

- you fail to meet your obligations as a tenant.
- you fail to keep the apartment safe.

You can appeal a sanction decision:

- if you disagree with the reason for the sanction.
- if you disagree with the amount of the penalty.

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ny state fair hearings

You have the right to challenge DHS's decision to terminate your tenancy or evict you by requesting a state fair hearing. you can also request a state fair hearing for other reasons, such as a rent increase or a landlord’s eviction.

information on how to request a hearing and groups that can help are on the back cover.

NYC Housing Connect

housing in NYC has become more expensive due to gentrification, but there are several programs to help make housing affordable to individuals and families.

- up to 30% of your income (the government pays the rent)
- usually 30% of your income (the government pays the rent)
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special one-time assistance (sota)

people who are in shelter, leaving an unhealthy or dangerous situation, or moving from one shelter to another

- 30% of your income
- 10% of your income
- 20% of your income
- 20% of your income

NYCHA public housing

people who are pregnant or have a child under 18 (or under 21 in high school), and are eligible for public housing assistance

- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income

FHEPs vouchers

- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income

furniture

- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income

Moving services

- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income

Brokers fees

- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income
- 80% of your income

nyc housing connect

NYC housing connect is one of several programs to help make housing affordable to individuals and families.

you can apply for a FHEPs voucher:

- if you are not a public housing tenant
- if you're in a family shelter with children
- if you disagree with HRA's decision

supportive housing (HRA 2010e)

people who are in shelter, leaving a dangerous situation, or moving from one shelter to another

- 30% of your income
- 30% of your income
- 30% of your income
- 30% of your income

specialist will give you a "shopping list", a list of things you need to pay for rent and receive a personal needs allowance.

you can apply for these extra grants:

- enhanced one-shot deal
- furniture
- moving services
- brokers fees

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LEARN ABOUT YOUR HOUSING OPTIONS

Housing in NYC has become more expensive due to gentrification, but there are several programs to help make housing affordable to individuals and families.

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- usually 30% of your income
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To apply, create a profile at the relevant program’s website. For example, to apply for cityfares, sign into your nycfares account and click “Apply” to apply for cityfares. Be sure to check the website for any updates on your application.

If you have a housing voucher, say a public housing tenant or a government subsidized housing tenant, you may be able to help pay the money you owe. Public housing may also allow you to pay the money you owe.

If you're in a family shelter with children, you can apply for a SOTA to help pay the money you owe.

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If you disagree with HRA's decision, you can appeal their decision by requesting a state fair hearing. You can also contact your state senator for help.
TO REQUEST A NY STATE FAIR HEARING
(800) 342-3334
To request to reschedule: (877) 209-1134
14 Boerum Place, Ground Floor, Brooklyn, NY
otda.state.ny.us/oah/forms.asp (can be submitted 24/7)

TO FILE A COMPLAINT
If you have a complaint about shelter conditions and your experience there:
DSS Ombudsman’s Office (800) 994-6494
DSS Shelter Hotline (718) 291-4141
33 Beaver St, New York, NY
Walk In Hours: Monday-Friday 9AM-4PM
ombudsman@dss.nyc.gov
Ask for and write down the confirmation number and name of the person you speak to, so you can track your complaint.

FOR MORE HELP
Share your complaint with one of the organizations below or a local elected official, so you can ask for support if your shelter retaliates against you.

LEGAL AID SOCIETY HOMELESS RIGHTS PROJECT HOTLINE (800) 649-9125
Monday–Friday 9AM–5PM

SAFETY NET PROJECT (SNP) LEGAL CLINICS
Free legal assistance with HRA, Public Assistance, SNAP, and voucher issues at SNP’s walk–in legal clinics across NYC. To find the schedule:
safetynetproject.org (646) 602–5600

SAFETY NET ACTIVISTS organize for change to improve New York’s safety net programs, including Public Assistance, SNAP, and the shelter system. They hold meetings twice a month at:
40 Rector St, 9th Fl, Manhattan, NY
safetynetactivists.org (646) 481–4410

COALITION FOR THE HOMELESS-CRISIS INTERVENTION PROGRAM
Open Monday–Friday on a first-come, first-serve basis (Please arrive no later than 8AM).
129 Fulton Street, Manhattan, NY
coalitionforthehomeless.org

MAKING POLICY PUBLIC is a program of the Center for Urban Pedagogy (CUP). CUP partners with policy advocates and graphic designers to produce foldout posters that explain complicated policy issues, like this one. makingpolicypublic.net

COLLABORATORS
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Safety Net Project and Safety Net Activists: Kiana Davis, Phroska McAlister, Helen Strom, and with special thanks to Wendy O’Sheilds
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THE CENTER FOR URBAN PEDAGOGY (CUP) is a nonprofit organization that uses the power of design and art to increase meaningful civic engagement.
welcometocup.org

SAFETY NET PROJECT (SNP) advocates for safe and secure housing and fundamental resources like food and cash assistance for underserved and marginalized communities in New York City.
safetynetproject.org

SAFETY NET ACTIVISTS build power for low-income people, particularly those dealing with the public assistance, homelessness, and food stamps system in New York City.

13MILLISECONDS is an independent creative studio working in advocacy, film and education. 13milliseconds.com

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