

## **Jennifer Chu – Rally to End Unsafe Pan Am Shelter 10/11/15**

Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you, Senator Avella, for your support and for coming today and speaking out about this unsafe shelter.

We are here today to call for an end to the Pan Am shelter. Let me be clear, we are not against homeless people or homeless families. Any one of us might find need of a shelter one day due to some unfortunate event. We are against the warehousing of men, women, and children in shelters and the exorbitant amount of taxpayer money going towards keeping the homeless, homeless.

It is difficult to speak out against homeless shelters, and maybe that's why the shelter system has gotten to be so ineffective and the conditions so horrendous. When you criticize the Mayor and DHS on its shelter policies, you're called callous or even racist. But this is just a well practiced strategy to deflect attention from the actual problems that the Mayor and DHS can't or won't fix.

The Pan Am is an old building that hasn't been well maintained. It's received a number of critical building and fire code violations, which makes it unsafe to live in, especially not for 200 plus families with young children. Recently, NYC's Department of Buildings was denied access to the Pan Am shelter. How can Samaritan Village justify denying access to a city agency when they have repeatedly applied for a lucrative \$42 million contract paid for with city taxpayer funds? Were they concerned that the NYC Department of Buildings would cite them for:

- blocked fire exits?
- an invalid Certificate of Occupancy?
- failure to adhere to NYC's Façade Safety Program?
- failure to file Annual Boiler Inspection reports and correct defects on their commercial boilers?
- work performed on fire sprinklers and standpipes without proper permits?

These are just some of the past violations issued for the Pan Am shelter under the operation of Samaritan Village.

For these reasons, the Comptroller has rightly rejected the contract to operate a family shelter in this building. And we thank the Comptroller for recognizing that this building is not safe and for not allowing the City to tolerate buildings and building owners that don't meet or follow City codes and law. All the time you hear about all those shelters in horrible conditions – rats, holes in walls, extensive leaks, broken stairways – that just continues to go unrepaired because the landlords know that the City will still pay them anyway, so why spend the money to fix the problems? Well, we can't let the Pan Am shelter operator and landlord get away with that here – getting paid to house homeless families in deteriorating and unsafe buildings. And shame on the Mayor and DHS for trying to allow the shelter operator and building landlord to get away with it, continuing to submit the contract 3 times, insisting on putting a shelter in such a hazardous and unsafe facility, knowing that

there are serious building and fire code violations, putting homeless families and children in danger. If the Mayor and DHS permits the contract to be submitted for an astounding fourth time to the Comptroller's office, it will serve to demonstrate that their highest priority is to ensure that Samaritan Village and the landlord are paid monies rather than the safety and well being of the homeless family and our Community.

For \$3,800 per month per hotel room, for a \$42 million long term 5 year contract, which is what the City would pay to the Pan Am shelter operator, the City could renovate one of their many foreclosed apartment buildings or vacant lots and create apartments for the homeless, rather than enriching these landlords.

We don't need more shelters, we need more permanent and affordable housing.