



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

## Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Rosenthal Announce Passage of Bill Expanding FHEPS Homelessness Prevention Program

BRIAN KAVANAGH June 10, 2021

| ISSUE: **HOUSING, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, HOUSING VOUCHERS, HOMELESSNESS, HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION**

| COMMITTEE: **HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**



---

**Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Rosenthal Announce Passage of Bill Expanding FHEPS Homelessness Prevention Program**

***Bill Raises the Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS) rent cap to Fair Market Rent (FMR) ensuring more recipients can utilize their vouchers***

New York, NY – State Senator Brian Kavanagh, Chair of the Senate Housing Committee and Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal (D/WF-Manhattan), Chair of the Assembly Social Services Committee, today announced that their bill to raise the maximum rent payable under the state Family Homelessness and Eviction Prevention Supplement (FHEPS) program ([S6573/A8009](#)) has passed both the New York State Assembly and Senate. The bill would raise the rent cap from 85% to 100% of HUD’s Fair Market Rent (FMR); it now heads to the Governor’s desk for signature.

“This legislation will ensure that more families experiencing homelessness can find stable housing, and more vouchers are used by those who need them. There are currently no neighborhoods in New York City where the median rent for a two-bedroom apartment is affordable with the existing voucher,” said Senator Kavanagh. “I thank Assemblymember Rosenthal for championing this bill in the Assembly and my colleague Senate Social Services Chair Roxanne Persaud for her avid support in the Senate. Thanks also to Commissioner Steven Banks for his efforts in supporting this bill, along with the more than 100 organizations, led by the [New York City Eviction Prevention Roundtable](#), who pushed for this critical reform. This is one more important step among many that we must take to end homelessness.”

“Once it is signed into law, my landmark bill with State Senator Brian Kavanagh will increase the State FHEPs voucher amount to cover the true cost of rent in New York City and help get thousands of unsheltered New Yorkers and their families off the streets or out of shelter and into safe and stable housing,” said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal. “New York is in the midst of a homelessness crisis, with more than 90,000 New Yorkers sleeping on the street or in shelter each night. The COVID-19 pandemic has made crystal clear what many of us

have said for years, that housing - safe, stable, affordable and permanent housing - is healthcare, and a home base from which to organize all other aspects of a meaningful and productive life. Along with our efforts to protect tenants and preserve affordable housing, making FHEPS vouchers more accessible is a practical way to address our homelessness crisis head on. I call on the Governor to sign this bill into law quickly to ensure that we do the most good for the most people in the least amount of time.”

“In order to receive a FHEPS voucher, which fails to pay even the lowest rents, a family on the brink of homelessness must be sued in housing court”, said Senator Roxanne J. Persaud, Chair of the Senate Social Services Committee. “Right now, we need a solution that brings stability to housing insecure New Yorkers. This starts with bringing FHEPS up to the Fair Market Rent and eliminating steep barriers to self-sufficiency.”

“Providing New Yorkers in need with rental assistance to secure permanent housing has been a key component of our multi-pronged social services approach to addressing homelessness in New York City — and our unprecedented investments in these programs have proven successful, with more than 165,000 New Yorkers securing housing since 2014 with the range of housing tools we provide, helping reduce the number of individuals residing in DHS shelter to lower than when the de Blasio Administration took office,” said DSS Commissioner Steven Banks. “As we have stated consistently, we believe that raising the value of all City and State rental assistance programs to the federal assistance levels, which will build on our progress, is the right thing to do, and we are heartened that our representatives in the State Legislature are making permanent housing opportunities a reality for even more New Yorkers. We thank our State representatives for their continued advocacy in support of New York City’s most vulnerable residents and look forward to continued collaboration to ensure that we keep reducing homelessness in New York City and across the State.”

“This legislation, which recognizes that FHEPS rent levels are woefully insufficient to prevent eviction and homelessness, will allow thousands of families with young children to remain in their homes,” said Judith Goldiner, Attorney-In-Charge of the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society. “The Legal Aid Society lauds Senate Majority Leader Andrea Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie for prioritizing this legislation, and sponsors Senator Brian Kavanaugh and Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal for sponsoring it. Lastly, we urge Governor Cuomo to enact it into law the moment it is sent to his desk.”

“Vouchers are one of the main pathways out of the shelter system. But for too long, the value of vouchers has consistently fallen short of the rents in available apartments. ANHD thanks Senator Kavanaugh, Senator Persaud, and Assemblymember Rosenthal for their leadership to raise the cap on the State FHEPS program. This bill will increase housing access and stability to New York voucher holders, many of whom are Black, Indigenous, and people of color. We look forward to working with these leaders and our partner housing advocates to create solutions that prevent families from falling into homelessness and ensure housing justice for all New Yorkers,” said Barika X Williams, Executive Director of the Association for Housing and Neighborhood Development (ANHD).

“As we begin to recover from the pandemic, there has been a groundswell of support for policies that will provide homeless New Yorkers with the resources they need — and just this month, both the New York City Council and state legislature have voted to increase the value of housing vouchers” said Christine Quinn, President & CEO of Win. “Thanks to the committed advocacy of our broad coalition, our representatives in Albany — led by Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and Senator Brian Kavanaugh — are recognizing the need to help homeless families avoid or move out of shelter. With thousands depending on these vouchers, we are calling on Governor Cuomo to immediately sign this bill and provide hope for thousands of homeless families.”

“Homeless Services United is thrilled to learn of the Senate and Assembly passage of legislation to raise the FHEPS rent levels to the fair market rate. This aligns eviction prevention rental assistance benefits with the true cost of housing in New York. Families in New York City can now rest assured that there is meaningful support to help them maintain their homes not just in the form of one-time assistance but, ongoing as the economy slowly recovers from the economic fallout of the pandemic. Thank you Assembly Member Rosenthal and Senator Kavanagh for your leadership,” Catherine Trapani, Executive Director, Homeless Services United.

“We applaud the New York State Senate and Assembly for their leadership in passing this critical bill. We’re especially grateful to bill sponsors Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal and Senator Brian Kavanagh for their longtime championing of low-income New Yorkers. This legislation will improve the lives of thousands of New Yorkers by ensuring that their FHEPS rental assistance voucher can cover higher rent amounts that are more in line with New York housing costs. In turn, this will open up more apartments and neighborhoods to voucher holders and allow for stronger housing stability. We look forward to working with the State to ensure that enforcement agencies are sufficiently resourced going forward to prevent voucher discrimination. We thank the State Legislature and the countless fellow advocates who joined forces to call for this crucial reform,” said Lorraine Collins, Senior Director of Public Policy and External Affairs at Enterprise Community Partners.

“Gateway Housing applauds Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal’s leadership in making State FHEPS rent subsidies comply with federal and city payment standards. This is an essential step in making state rent subsidies as effective as they can be to help New York’s families and individuals escape homelessness and live in safe, permanent and affordable homes,” said Ted Houghton, Gateway Housing.

“Currently, vouchers are severely limited in number. This scarcity increases the rate of homelessness,” said Lourdes I. Rosa-Carrasquillo, Director of Advocacy at the Center for Independence of the Disabled, NY (CIDNY). “This bill, passed in the Assembly and moving forward in the Senate, would be a major win for people with disabilities. They need this desperately as homeless shelters are inaccessible and particularly dehumanizing for people with disabilities.”

“We applaud the legislature for increasing the FHEPS voucher amount to cover the real cost of rent,” stated Laura Mascuch, Executive Director of the Supportive Housing Network of NY. “While this legislation has been needed for years, it is exponentially more important now – after a year of COVID-related unemployment and illness, all of which has disproportionately impacted communities of color. We are deeply grateful to Assemblymember Rosenthal and Senator Kavanagh for their steadfast advocacy on behalf of New Yorkers in need.”

“We applaud Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Rosenthal for sponsoring this important legislation that will help New Yorkers leave the shelter system, open up thousands of affordable homes to voucher holders, and create economically diverse neighborhoods,” said Jolie Milstein, president and CEO of the New York State Association for Affordable Housing.

“Increasing the value of State FHEPS housing vouchers to align with Section 8 and newly increased CityFHEPs vouchers will help advance our shared goal of increasing access to housing for vulnerable New Yorkers. We applaud Assemblymember Rosenthal, Senator Kavanagh and the State Legislature for moving on this important legislation, and we look forward to seeing it passed into law as we continue working together to expand housing opportunities for all at this critical time,” said James Whelan, President, Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY).

The FHEPS Program is paid for with a combination of federal, state, and city funding. Below-market levels of rental assistance, coupled with an increasingly unaffordable housing market, have long impeded the prospects of permanent housing for low-income families experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of losing their home. The legislature's passage of this bill comes at a particularly opportune time, as access to the private rental market has greatly increased in the wake of COVID-19. According to research conducted by StreetEasy in April 2021, current market trends show record-high rent drops and newly expanded affordable inventory, greatly increasing the number of eligible units that will be available to voucher holders who can pay 100% of the fair market rent.

# # #