

# New York Public Welfare Association

**NYPWA Statement Before the Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction &  
Community Development  
Standing Senate Committee on Social Services  
Standing Committee on Aging**

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*The New York Public Welfare Association (NYPWA) represents all fifty-eight local departments of social services statewide. Our members are dedicated to improving the quality and effectiveness of social welfare policy so that it is accountable to taxpayers and protective of vulnerable people.*

## **Stable Housing is a Necessity for Individuals and Families in New York**

Households in the State of New York deserve stability in terms of where they reside. In the post pandemic era, social service districts have seen eviction proceedings increase, housing costs escalate, and the corresponding impact of these events jeopardized the housing stability of many New Yorkers. As was pointed out in the recent report issued by New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli, in January 2025, there was a near tripling of homeless people in families from 2022 to 2024. Once a household becomes homeless, securing the necessary resources to establish a new residence can be extraordinarily difficult, not to mention the experience and disruption of residing in temporary housing until permanent housing can be reestablished.

## **Mechanisms to Prevent Eviction**

Local social services commissioners and their staff stay committed to serving vulnerable children and adults in New York State. Districts appreciated the State's eviction moratorium and the allocation of federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funding. These were vital steps to maintaining housing security, but the moratorium has expired and the ERAP dollars have been fully obligated. However, the work to combat homelessness continues in local districts, and it remains true that the best way to keep people housed is to prevent homelessness in the first place.

Temporary emergency housing is like using a hospital emergency room. It is important that it is available in a crisis, but it is better to maintain stability and prevent emergencies by providing sufficient resources to retain housing. In many instances when a household is faced with an eviction, they may present at the local district office and apply for Emergency Assistance to Families (EAF) or Emergency Safety Net Assistance (ESNA). Even if determined to be financially eligible, there are

additional program requirements which would prevent a district from making payment for shelter arrears.

We're grateful for the action taken by the Legislature and the Governor as part of the 2024-2025 Budget Negotiation to create the New York State Shelter Arrears Eviction Forestallment (SAEF) Program. The appropriation of \$10 million to local districts has created a unique opportunity to be able to prevent evictions that might otherwise have moved forward. The funding and corresponding flexibility of SAEF adds an additional tool district may use to prevent homelessness which would otherwise add to the existing homeless population and allow vulnerable families the opportunity to maintain their existing housing.

### **Features of the New York State Shelter Arrears Eviction Forestallment Program**

The SAEF Program does require a household to apply for an EAF or ESNA as appropriate and determined to be financially eligible. If the household is eligible for an EAF or ESNA benefit, the arrears can be paid from those programs. However, both programs have limitations. Typically, the application for emergency assistance would be accompanied by some form of documentation that an eviction proceeding is eminent. Often this triggering event may occur so late that a landlord would not consider accepting payment of a past due amount to forestall the eviction. SAEF requires no such documentation of a pending eviction.

EAF and ESNA also require analysis of the ability to pay the shelter amount going forward prior to receiving an approval for payment. This requirement fails to take into consideration earning potential within a household to meet the future shelter obligation and focuses on a point in time which may not be relevant to the future earnings within the household.

Additionally, the granting of an EAF is limited to six months in a five-year period. For a recipient of ESNA if they have had a prior grant and not paid the arrears amount back to the district within a twelve-month period the consumer would be denied the benefit.

SAEF doesn't have these limitations and affords a flexibility that allows an eligible household the opportunity to retain their existing housing. SAEF also has the added benefit of not being considered a resource to the household for other assistance programs such as public assistance, Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), or Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) meaning the SAEF grant does not have a negative financial impact on other benefits the household may be receiving.

### **Program Status of the Shelter Arrears Eviction Forestallment Program**

Guidance was issued by the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) to local departments of social services by way of a Local Commissioners Memorandum (24-LCM-12, Dated 9/18/24). The guidance document established the operating parameters for the program and

provided allocation figures to each social services district. Since that time, districts have established protocols on how best to run their program, whether that be internally, or contracting to a community-based organization. OTDA has provided a sample application, appropriate notifications and districts have established local processes for administrative review in the event there is a denial of a SAEF application.

Because payments to landlords are not processed through the Welfare Management System (WMS) county budget amendments needed to be completed and payment mechanisms had to be established.

This information is relevant to SAEF program operation when examining financial claims that have been submitted by the districts to the state for reimbursement. The start-up process as described has taken time, as has the development of mechanisms to evaluate applications for EAF, ESNA and SAEF. Current claiming data may not be indicative of program activity as SAEF ramps up. We ask that you keep that in mind as state budget negotiations occur.

### **The New York State Shelter Arrears Eviction Forestallment Program Moving Forward**

Speaking on behalf of the social service districts throughout the state we are grateful to the Legislature and the Governor for the creation of the SAEF Program. While still in its early operational stages it is already making an impact in terms of allowing households to remain in their residence without fear of eviction and the real possibility of becoming homeless. It also affords a flexibility that permits districts to serve households that might otherwise be ineligible for assistance if it were not for SAEF. As we move into the next state fiscal year, we strongly support SAEF and ask that you consider not only on-going funding for the SAEF Program, but an increase in funding to support an expansion of a service that will of benefit to vulnerable households in the State of New York.

*In closing*, we wish to thank the NYS Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction & Community Development, the NYS Senate Standing Committee on Social Services and the NYS Senate Standing Committee on Aging for your leadership in bringing attention to the challenging fiscal and policy issues affecting social services.

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