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# Tenant & Landlord Groups Both Support a Proposed State Housing Voucher. Why Hasn't it Passed?

BY JEANMARIE EVELLY 2 DAYS AGO 5 MIN



Supporters of the Housing Access Voucher Program say it's needed now more than ever to curb rising homelessness, and as another federal rent subsidy is expected to run out of funding next year. But Gov. Kathy Hochul has yet to embrace the initiative.



Tenant organizers with the Housing Justice for All Coalition rallying at the Capitol building in Albany on March 19, 2024. They're once again pushing for the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) to make it into this year's budget. Photo by Chris Janaro.

It's rare for New York's tenant and landlord groups to agree on housing policy. But for the sixth legislative session in a row in Albany, they've coalesced around at least one proposal: a state-funded voucher that would help people experiencing or at risk of homelessness afford rent.

Lawmakers have introduced a bill to establish the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) each year since 2020, but it's yet to make it into law, despite broad support. Sponsored by State Sen. Brian Kavanagh and Assemblymember Linda Rosenthal, the vouchers would function similarly to federal Section 8 subsidies, with tenants paying up to 30 percent of their income toward rent and HAVP covering the rest.

New Yorkers would be eligible if they're unhoused or "facing imminent loss of housing," as long as they earn less than 50 percent of the Area Median Income, equivalent to \$77,650 for a four-person household in New York City, regardless of their immigration status.

Supporters say the vouchers would help combat rising rents and a surging statewide homeless population, which more than doubled over the last two years. In the city alone, more than 130,000 people were staying in the shelter system as of January, according to data tracked by City Limits.

"New York's housing crisis demands bold, immediate action," Ellen Davidson, a staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society said in a statement last month supporting the bill. "With homelessness rising at an alarming rate, we cannot afford to wait."

Both the Senate and the Assembly included \$250 million for HAVP in their budget proposals this year (the state budget was due April 1, but negotiations are currently in overtime). Gov. Kathy Hochul has yet to embrace the proposal, however, and previously cited concerns about costs. Speaking to reporters last month, she said her focus was on building new housing to bring rents down, according to NY1.

But the bill's supporters say housing more residents with vouchers will be cheaper in the long run than keeping them in homeless shelters.

"Direct rental assistance is a proven cost-effective method of ensuring people can stay in their homes and access new ones if so preferred," the Real Estate Board of New York (REBNY), a group representing property owners and development, said in testimony to the State Legislature in February.

"We have support from the landlords, so that's unique. We're in a unique position. I don't understand why the governor doesn't see it," said Althea Matthews, a leader with the advocacy group VOCAL-NY's Homeless Union.

Matthews, 67, spent three years in the shelter system herself, and says she was only able to move out through with the help of similar rental subsidy. She was one of thousands of New Yorkers to get an emergency voucher funded by the federal COVID-19 stimulus bill in 2022, which allowed her to rent an apartment that year where she lives currently.

The Trump administration last week announced that funding for those vouchers is expected to run out in 2026, four years sooner than expected, putting tenants like Matthews at potential risk of homelessness again.

Passing HAVP could help plug that gap, Matthews argues. "We need to have the HAVP passed now," she said. "The time is now, because it's going to get worse."

A rep for the governor's office did not respond directly to questions about Hochul's current HAVP stance, but said budget talks are ongoing.

"Governor Hochul continues to negotiate in good faith with the Senate and Assembly to pass a budget that makes New York safer and more affordable," a spokesperson said.

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Jeanmarie Evely, City Limits' Executive Editor since 2021, joined the team in 2018, previously serving as youth program manager, deputy editor, and managing editor. A veteran metro reporter, she covered Astoria and Long Island City for DNAinfo.com and reported for Bronx community papers, including the award-winning Norwood News. She holds degrees from SUNY New Paltz, the CUNY Graduate School of Journalism, and an MFA from Queens College. She lives in Sunset Park, Brooklyn.



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