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A Lost Decade for Homelessness in New York City?

Advocacy and Public Policy Challenges Amidst Worsening Homelessness in New York City

January 22, 2009

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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness?

Overview

Record Number of Homeless Families in New York City

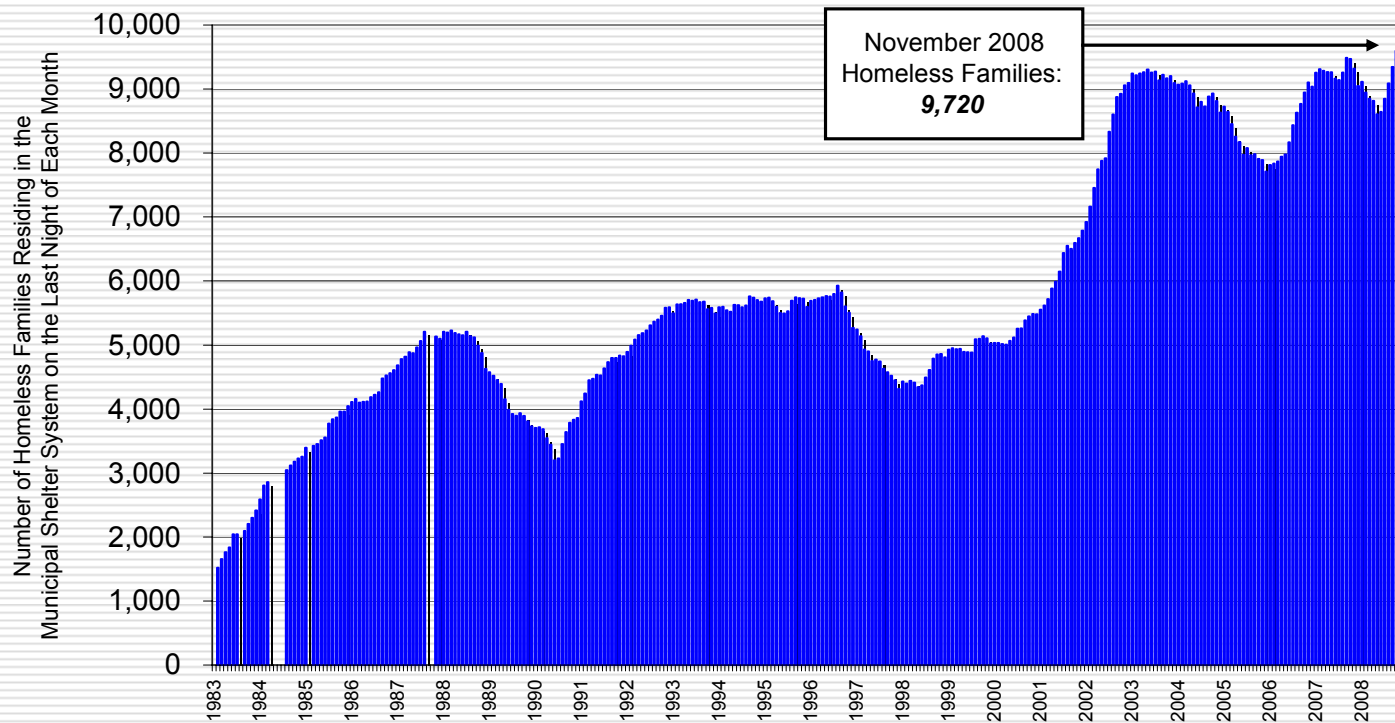
- ◆ **At the end of November, there were 9,720 homeless families sleeping in the New York City municipal shelter system.**
- ◆ **This is the highest number since the City of New York began reporting this data more than 25 years ago.**
- ◆ **The previous record number of homeless families in shelter was recorded a year ago, in September 2007, when nearly 9,500 homeless families were in municipal shelters.**



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Increasing Number of Homeless Families

Number of Homeless Families in the New York City Shelter System, 1983-2008



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration, shelter census reports



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Surge in New Homeless Families

Increasing Number of New Homeless NYC Families

- ◆ During the past six months alone, the nightly census of homeless families has soared by 13 percent, from 8,607 homeless families in municipal shelters at the end of May to 9,720 families at the end of November.
- ◆ According to City data, in recent months the number of new homeless families entering municipal shelters has reached all-time record levels.



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Surge in New Homeless Families

Increasing Number of New Homeless NYC Families

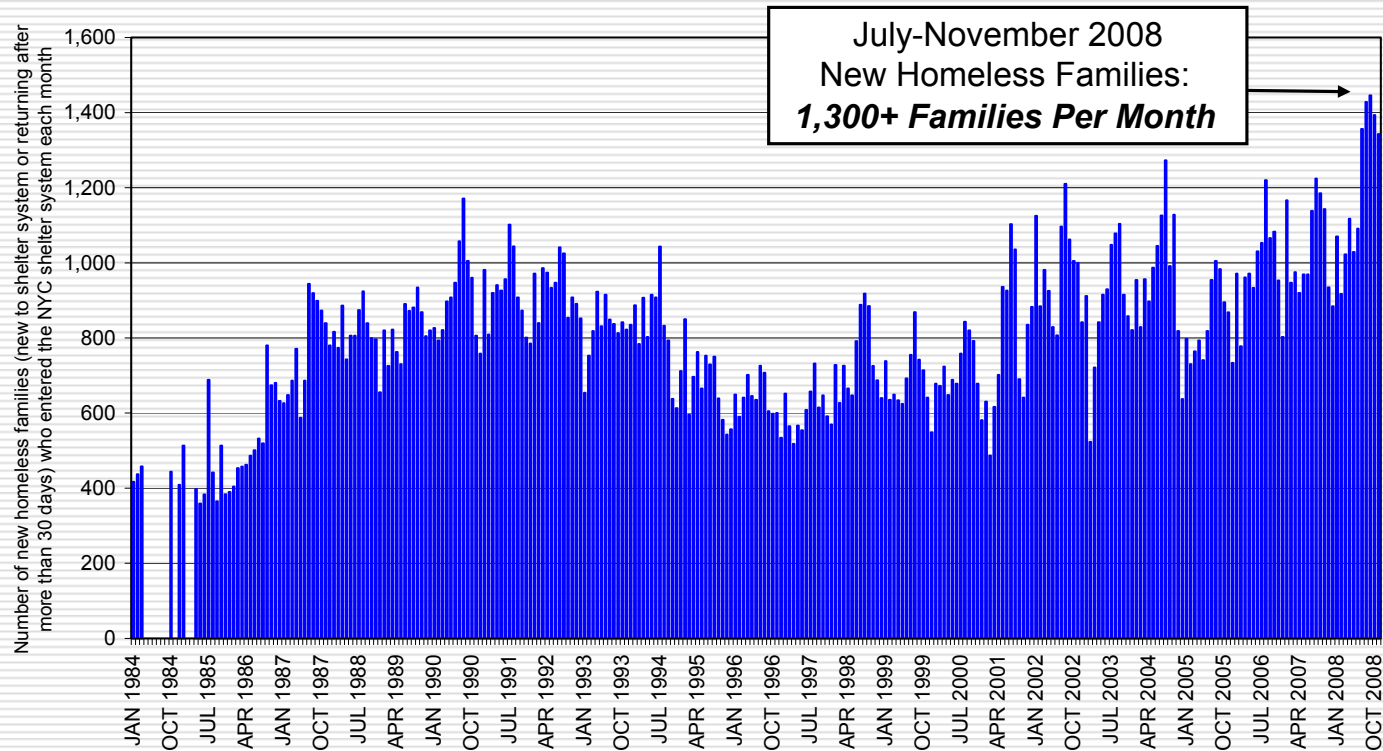
- ◆ In September, an all-time-record 1,464 new homeless families entered the municipal shelter system. And in November, an additional 1,343 new homeless families entered the shelter system.
- ◆ Altogether, the past five months (July through November) have seen the highest number of new homeless families -- more than 1,300 families each month -- entering the municipal shelter system in the 25 years that the City of New York has recorded this data.



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? New Homeless Families

Number of New Homeless Families Entering the NYC Shelter System Each Month, 1984-2008



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, "Emergency Housing for Homeless Families Monthly Report," 1984-2008



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NYC Homelessness in Current Decade

Worsening Homelessness Throughout the Decade

- ◆ **During the current decade both the number of homeless families and the total homeless shelter population have increased dramatically in New York City.**
- ◆ **At the start of the decade, in January 2000, there were 5,000 homeless families in shelter each night and the total homeless shelter population was 22,800 people.**



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NYC Homelessness in Current Decade

Mayor Bloomberg and Rising Homelessness

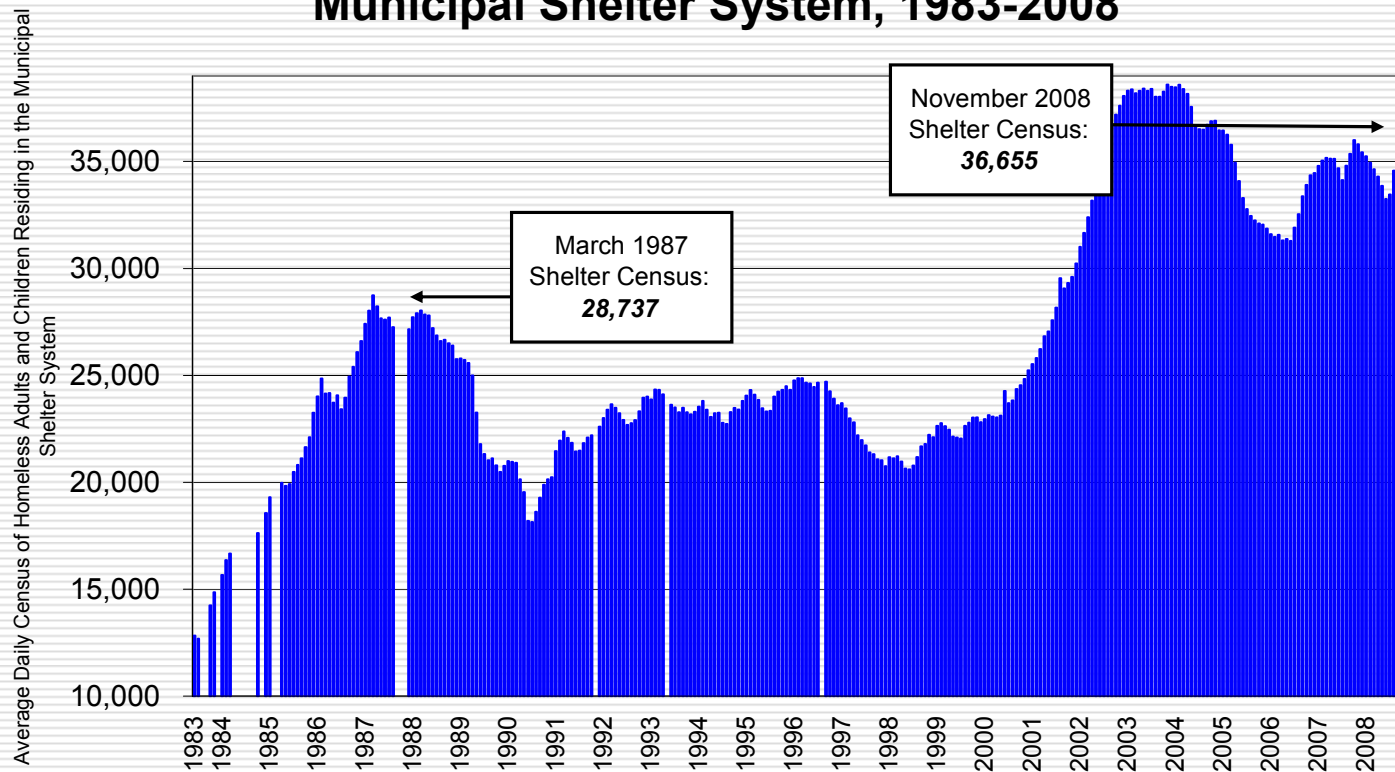
- ◆ **When Mayor Bloomberg took office there were 6,900 homeless families in municipal shelters and the total homeless shelter population was 31,000 people.**
 - ◆ **In June 2004, when the Mayor unveiled a plan to reduce homelessness by two-thirds over five years, there were 8,700 homeless families in shelters and the total shelter population was 36,400 people.**
 - ◆ **At the end of November 2008 there were 9,720 families in shelters and the total shelter population was an estimated 36,655 people.**
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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? NYC Homelessness on the Rise

New York City: Census of Homeless People in the Municipal Shelter System, 1983-2008



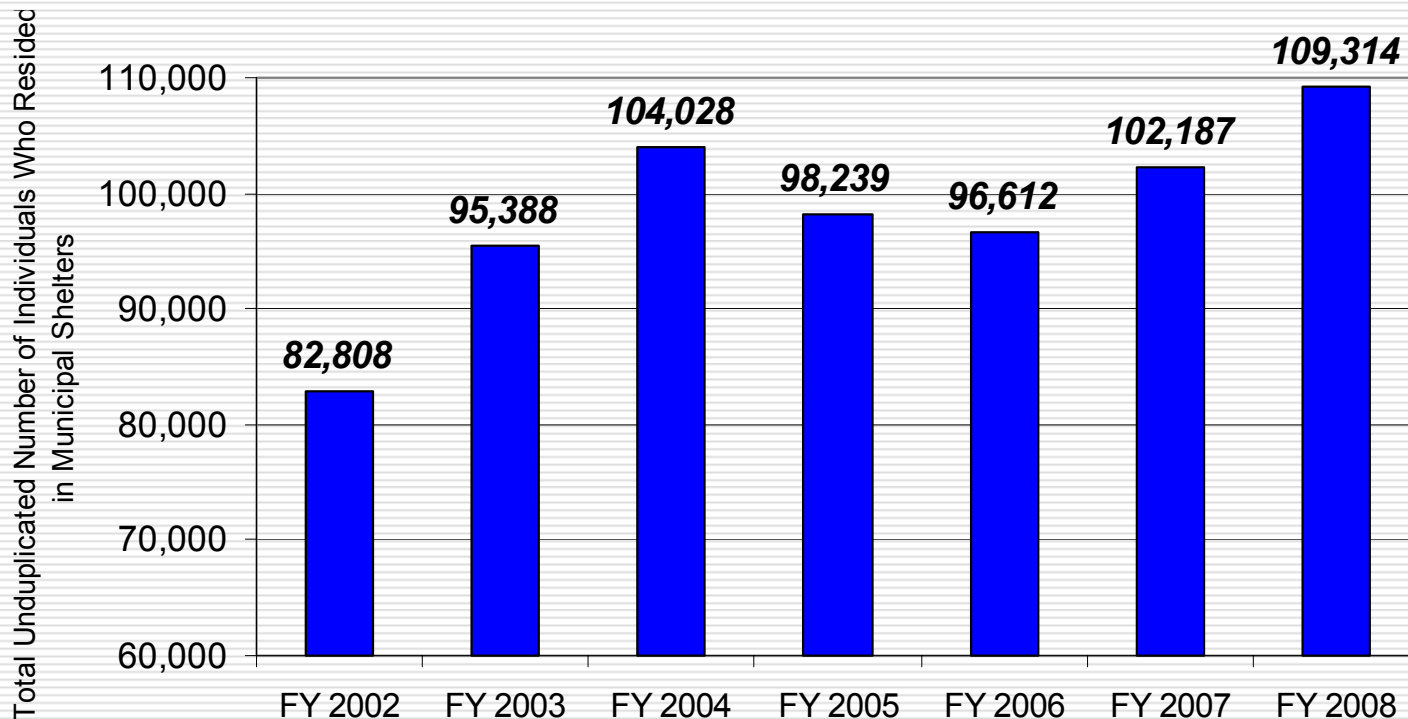
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration, shelter census reports



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More New Yorkers Use Homeless Shelters

32 Percent More New Yorkers Used Municipal Shelters in FY 2008 Compared to FY 2002



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Flawed Homeless Policies

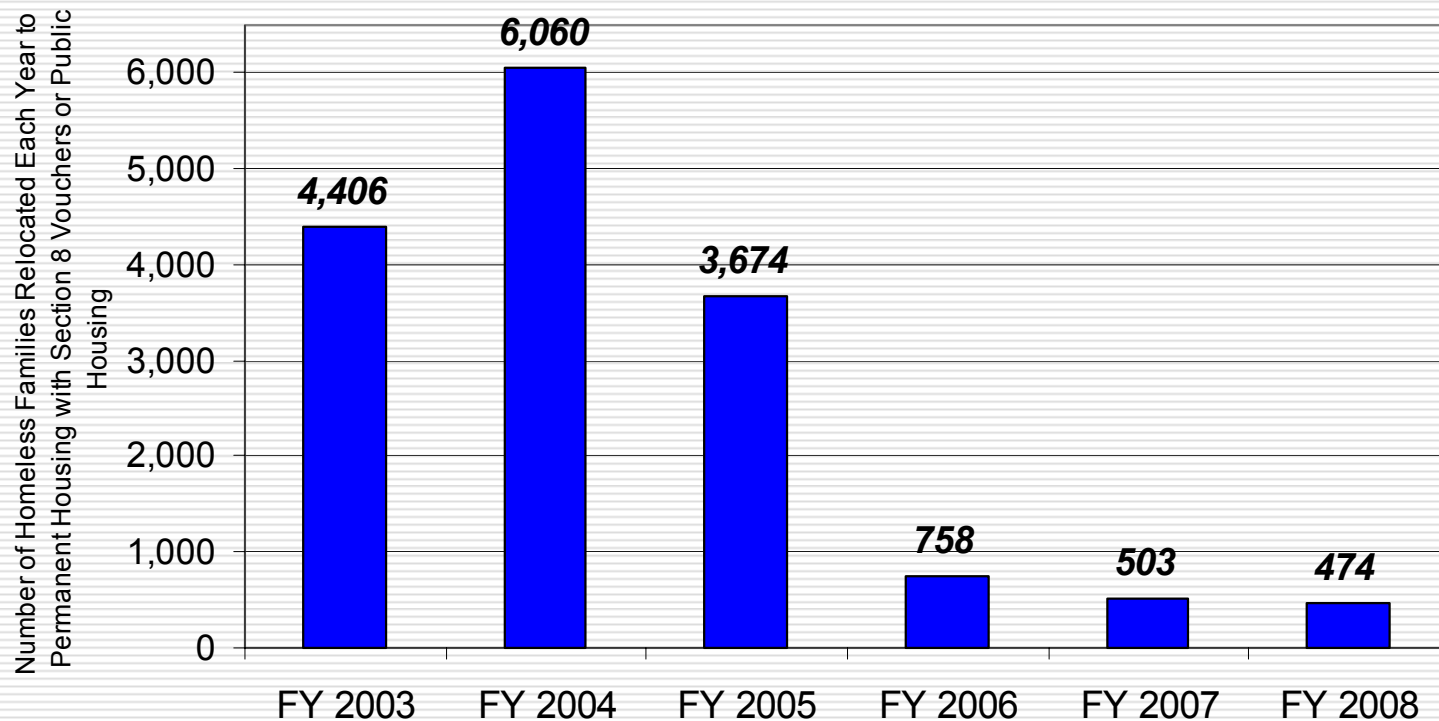
Cutting Off the Homeless from Federal Housing Aid:

- >> In late 2004, the Bloomberg administration dramatically changed City homeless policy – cutting off homeless from priority for Federal housing programs including Section 8 vouchers and public housing.**
- >> Bloomberg administration officials claimed “cut-off” policy would lead to fewer families seeking shelter – but more families have entered the shelter system each year.**



Worst Decade for NYC Homelessness? Homeless Cut Off from Federal Housing Aid

Sharp Drop in Homeless Families Moved to Housing Using Federal Housing Programs



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

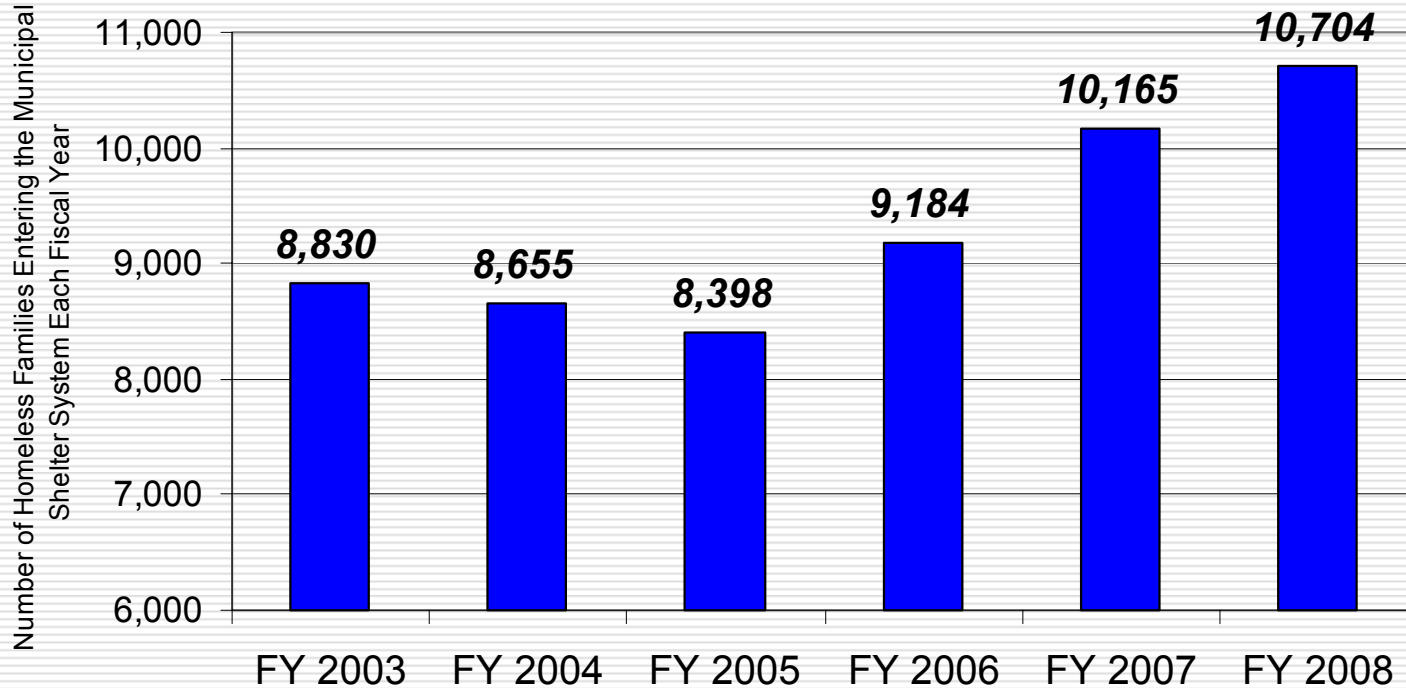


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More NYC Families Entering Shelters

Rising Number of Homeless Families Seeking Shelter Each Year



Source: Mayor's Management Reports



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More Funds for Shelter, Less for Housing

Less Housing Aid for Homeless Families Has Led to More City Taxpayer Dollars Spent on Emergency Shelter:

>> City now builds fewer City-funded apartments for homeless people than any time since the 1980s.

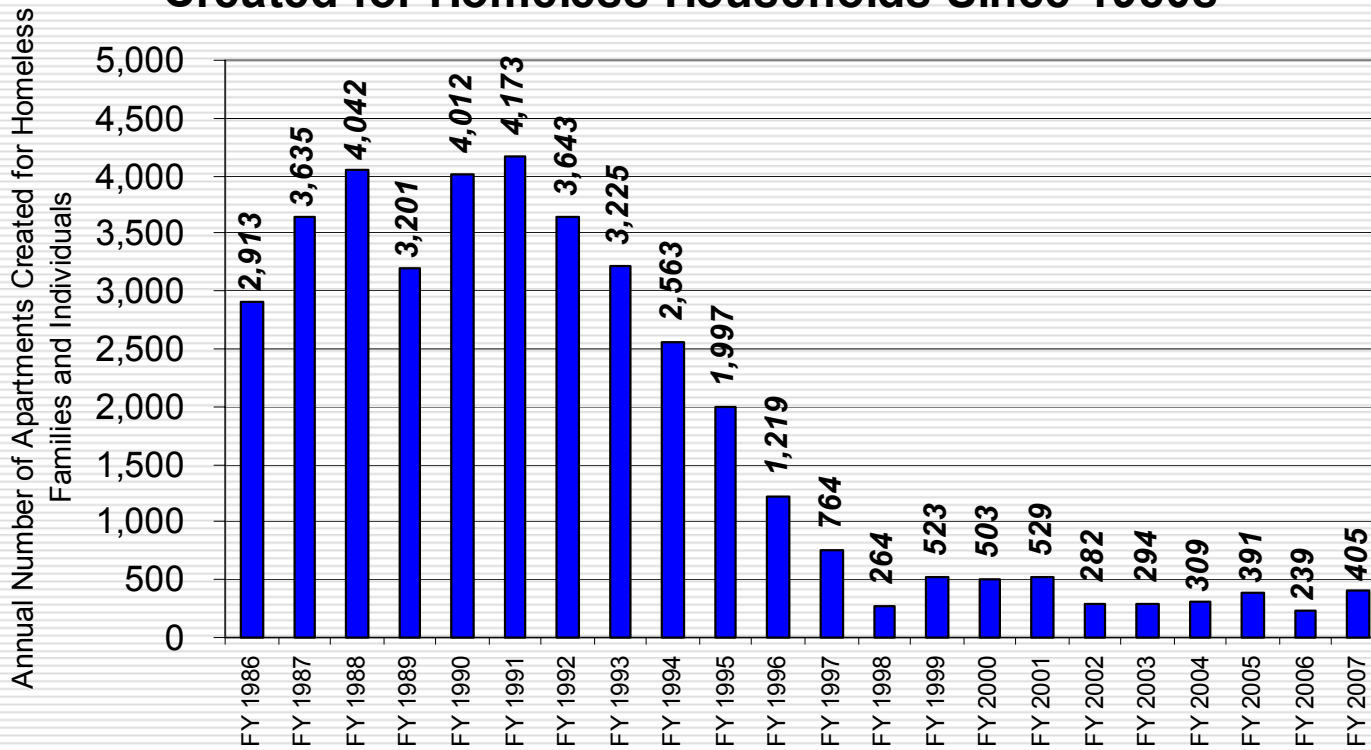
>> Over the past decade, total annual City expenditures on homeless shelter and services have nearly doubled – from \$433 million in FY 2000 to more than \$785 million in FY 2008.



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Fewer New Apartments Created for the Homeless

Lowest Number of New City-Funded Apartments Created for Homeless Households Since 1980s



Source: Mayor's Management Reports



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? City's Use of Illegal Dwellings

City Increases Use of Illegal Boarding Houses to Shelter Homeless Adults:

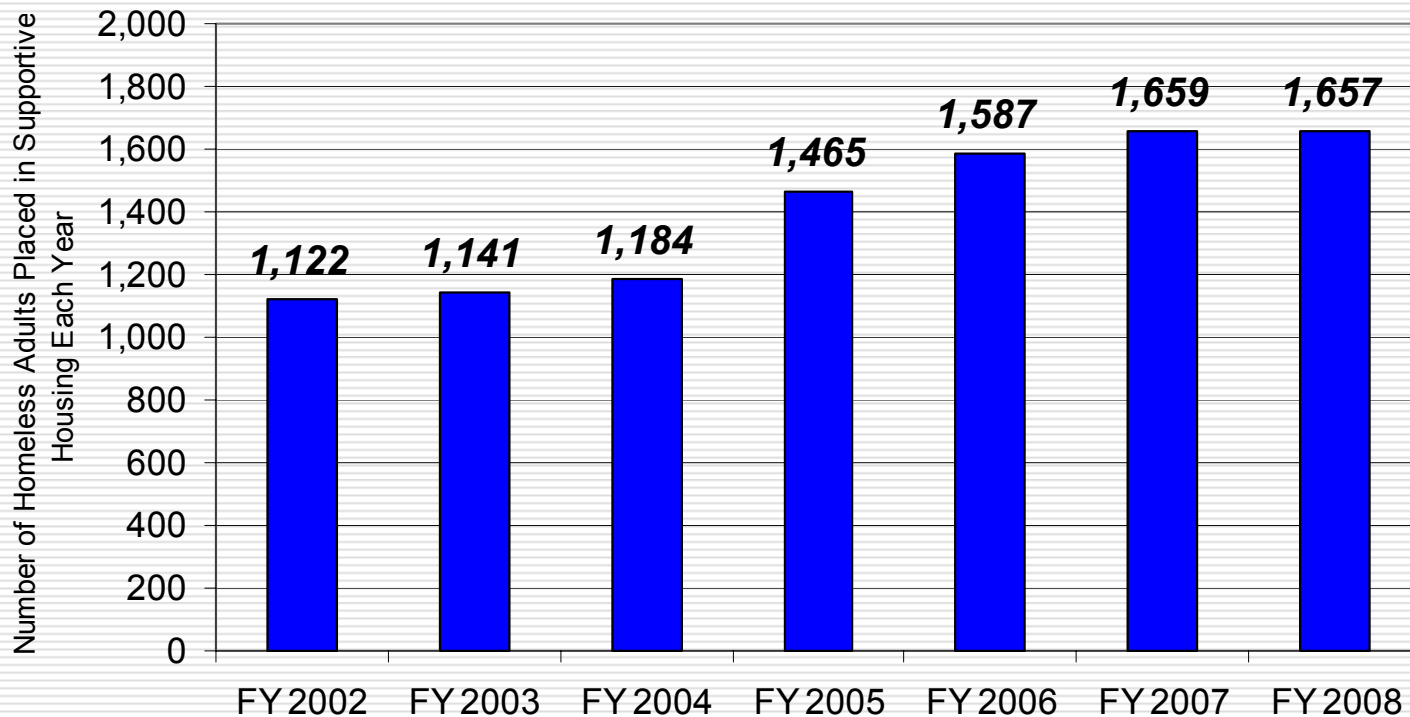
- >> City has referred thousands of homeless adults – including many living with mental illness – to more than 110 unsafe, illegal boarding houses, effectively creating an illegal, unregulated shelter system.
- >> City housing and buildings inspectors have issued vacate orders to at least 15 illegal boarding houses due to health and safety risks.



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Homeless Adults and Supportive Housing

Number of Homeless Adults Placed in Supportive Housing Rises and Then Stagnates



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Need for Immediate Reforms

During Sharp Economic Downturn, City Must Act Now

>> During the last two economic recessions (1990-1991 and 2001), New York City experienced significant increases in homelessness.

>> Building on a wealth of research and experience, City officials can implement immediate reforms to help homeless families and individuals move rapidly from shelters to secure, safe, permanent housing.



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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Need for Immediate Reforms

Four Immediate Steps to Reduce NYC Homelessness

- 1. Restore priority for Federal housing aid – including Section 8 vouchers and public housing – to homeless New Yorkers.**
 - 2. Accelerate the development of permanent supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other special needs.**
 - 3. Halt referrals of homeless New Yorkers to unsafe, illegal boarding houses.**
 - 4. Halt cutbacks to homelessness prevention programs.**
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A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Need for Immediate Reforms

1. Target Federal Housing Aid to the Homeless:

- >> In late 2004, the Bloomberg administration cut off homeless from longstanding priority for Federal housing programs, including Section 8 vouchers and public housing.
- >> In 2009, the City will issue at least 12,000 new Section 8 vouchers to poor families – but almost none to the homeless.
- >> Research shows that families with Federal housing assistance have lowest rate of return to shelter.
- >> Reversing the City's misguided policy will save City taxpayer dollars spent on emergency shelter.



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2. Accelerate Construction of Supportive Housing:

>> In 2005, the City and State signed a ten-year agreement to provide supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other special needs.

>> However, more than half of the newly-constructed supportive housing – 3,276 units of the planned 6,250 new units – will not be built until at least 2011.

>> City and State officials should accelerate the development of supportive housing for homeless people with special needs.



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3. Halt Referrals of Homeless Adults to Illegal Dwellings:

>> City has referred hundreds of homeless adults – including many living with mental illness – to more than 110 unsafe, illegal boarding houses.

>> City inspectors have issued vacate orders to at least 15 illegal boarding houses due to health and fire safety risks – forcing the residents to return to shelters or the streets.

>> City officials should halt referrals of homeless adults living with mental illness or other disabilities to illegal boarding houses.



A Lost Decade for NYC Homelessness? Need for Immediate Reforms

4. Halt Cutbacks to Homelessness Prevention Services:

>> Last June, Mayor Bloomberg and NY City Council cut funding to the “Homelessness Prevention Fund” (by 50%) and to legal services for low-income tenants.

>> Governor Paterson has proposed eliminating \$5 million for the “Homelessness Prevention Program,” which helps 6,600 poor families each year secure rent supplements to prevent eviction.

>> Amidst recession and rising need, City and State officials should halt cutbacks to prevention services.



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Additional Advocacy & Public Policy Challenges

- 1. With new leadership in Washington, break away from failed Reagan-Bush legacy of Federal housing policy.**
- 2. Build on research consensus on proven solutions – i.e., supportive housing & “housing first,” and long-term housing assistance for homeless families.**
- 3. Halt Bloomberg administration plans to reduce access to shelter for street homeless (e.g., plan to move men’s intake center to Brooklyn).**



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Data Sources

Data Sources

All data used in this report is from the NYC Department of Homeless Services, including “Emergency Housing Services for Homeless Families Monthly Reports” and shelter census reports.

Acknowledgments

Report prepared by Patrick Markee, Senior Policy Analyst, Coalition for the Homeless.

For more information, please visit www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.