

Steven Banks
Commissioner

March 23, 2020

Joslyn Carter
DHS Administrator

Good afternoon,

33 Beaver Street
New York, NY 10004

We write to update you on changes being implemented by the Department of Homeless Services at our family intake centers, the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) and the Adult Family Intake Center (AFIC), in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. These protocols are designed to minimize the need for clients to come to the Intake Centers and ensure that families experiencing homelessness can access shelter.

212 361 7963 tel

As an initial matter, we currently we have approximately 500 families on legal hold because we cannot in the current circumstances conduct a full investigation. They will remain on hold unless, in an individual case, we can connect a family to family or friends in the community. Whenever possible, we will continue to work with individual families who can reconnect with family or friends in the community, which can be beneficial both for a particular family and for access to shelter overall because any family who can be reunited with family or friends will free up emergency shelter beds for those who do not have any place to go in this crisis.

In addition to this approach for these families on legal hold, until further notice no families who are reapplying for shelter after an ineligibility decision will be required to come to the Intake Centers and these families can remain in their shelter placement during the reapplication process. They will have the opportunity to reapply by phone. Required documents can be submitted remotely, via phone, email, or fax to our intake staff. Applicants or re-applicants who have follow-up appointments with NoVA will have their assessments done via phone.

Families who are applying for shelter at PATH do not have to bring their children with them. Parents will be able to use FaceTime or Skype to provide PATH staff with an opportunity to evaluate the health and safety needs of the children. Follow up documents and assessments such as NoVA screening will be provided remotely.

Legal conferences are being conducted by telephone. We had our first telephone legal conference on Friday, and the outstanding issue was resolved, and the client was found eligible.

Similar changes have been instituted at AFIC. New clients can continue to apply at AFIC but follow up interviews will be conducted by phone. Legal conferences will be held by telephone. Reapplicants can remain at their conditional placement site and

can contact AFIC to re-apply. Additional documents can be submitted remotely. NoVA assessments will be conducted via phone. The shelter staff will provide a private space for phone calls when needed.

Finally, when families leave their placements without advising the shelter whether they intend to return, the grace period before the room is provided to another family who is seeking shelter has been extended from 48 hours to 96 hours.

These streamlined processes will make it easier for families experiencing homelessness to apply for and maintain shelter – and will also preserve shelter beds for those who have no alternatives.

We are continually monitoring the impact of our policies and will adjust them as needed to meet the demands of this crisis. Thank you for raising your concerns and understanding that in the current circumstances we need to be able to fully consider the impact of each change that we are making to address our mutual concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joslyn Carter". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Joslyn Carter
DHS Administrator

CC: Martha Calhoun
CC: Carolyn Wolpert