



Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

BARBARA C. GUINN
Acting Commissioner

February 9, 2024

Nadine Morrell
Audit Director
Office of the State Comptroller
110 State Street
Albany, NY 12236

Re: Homeless Services Housing Needs Assessment,
2021-S-023

Dear Nadine Morrell:

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) respectfully submits this 180-day response to the Office of the State Comptroller's (OSC) final report regarding the audit of Homeless Services Housing Needs Assessment (Report 2021-S-23 (August 2023)). The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on OTDA's implementation of the recommendations made by the OSC. Pursuant to Section 170 of the Executive Law, copies of this response will be sent separately to the Governor, the State Comptroller, and the leaders of the Legislature, as well as fiscal committees.

In response to the specific recommendations in OSC's report, OTDA responds as outlined below:

OSC's Recommendations

1. Work with Local Districts and shelter providers identified through annual inspections that have not prepared or have late or incomplete Assessments and Independent Living Plans (ILP).

OTDA Response: OTDA is implementing this recommendation. The Division of Shelter Oversight and Compliance (DSOC) inspectors have and will continue to consider the timeliness of and stress the importance of Needs Assessments (NAs) and ILPs as they conduct shelter inspections and, if necessary, DSOC will require remedial action as part of a corrective action plan. Additionally, in December 2023 and January 2024, OTDA delivered three online training sessions to districts on completion of NAs and ILPs. A recording of the training was sent to districts to share with shelter providers. Further, DSOC has and will continue to offer technical assistance to individual shelter providers or districts where appropriate, which may include on-site guidance or a referral to case management training offered through OTDA.

2. Reassess the oversight processes and develop new methods to supplement the annual inspections to identify Local Districts and shelter providers that have not prepared or have late or incomplete assessments and ILP's.

OTDA Response: OTDA respectfully asserts that the existing inspection and corrective action plan process, established pursuant to 18 NYCRR §§ 491.22, and 900.22, provides the appropriate mechanisms to address non-compliance with any of the regulations establishing programmatic and physical plant standards, including preparing and completing NAs and ILPs. As discussed above, OTDA is supplementing the inspection and corrective action plan process by offering additional trainings to districts and by providing technical assistance to shelter providers or districts where appropriate.

3. Work with Local Districts and shelter providers identified through annual inspections whose clients are not receiving the needed services identified in their Assessments and the service strategy set forth in the ILP.

OTDA Response: OTDA is implementing this recommendation. As part of the inspection process and as part of the training offered to districts and shelter providers, OTDA has and will continue to emphasize the importance of follow-up by districts/shelter staff to take action in an attempt to secure client engagement in necessary services. It is the responsibility of the districts to assure that clients have access to and can receive the necessary services, and to follow up on instances where clients are not cooperating or not progressing towards permanent housing.

4. Reassess the oversight processes and develop new methods to supplement the annual inspections to identify Local Districts and shelter providers whose clients are not receiving needed services identified in their Assessments and set forth in the ILP.

OTDA Response: OTDA respectfully submits that the existing inspection and corrective action plan process, established pursuant to 18 NYCRR §§ 491.22, and 900.22, provides the appropriate mechanisms to address non-compliance with any of the regulations establishing programmatic and physical plant standards, including preparing and completing NAs and ILPs. As discussed above, as part of the inspection process and as part of the training offered to districts and shelter providers, OTDA has and will continue to emphasize the importance of follow-up by districts/shelter staff to take action in an attempt to secure client engagement in necessary services.

5. Take additional steps to ensure that Local Districts and shelter providers complete treatment plans.

OTDA Response: OTDA is implementing this recommendation. As part of the inspection process and as part of the training offered to districts and shelter providers, OTDA has and will continue to emphasize the importance of follow-up by districts/shelter staff to take action in an attempt to secure client engagement in necessary services. It is the responsibility of the districts to identify services that clients need, to assure that clients receive the necessary services, and to follow up on instances where clients are not cooperating or progressing towards permanent housing.

6. Develop a standardized form for Local Districts and providers to use when documenting client services to be included in the ILP and monitor to ensure ILP implementation.

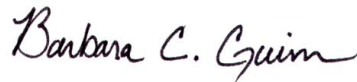
OTDA Response: OTDA has implemented this recommendation. OTDA updated the form that districts and providers use to complete ILPs. The form can be found at: <https://otda.ny.gov/programs/shelter/documents/C-FORMS/Independent-Living-Plan-Fillable-Form.pdf>. As part of the training deliveries, and in a subsequent email to districts, OTDA directed districts that all districts and providers must use this OTDA form unless OTDA approves an alternative form for use by a district or provider.

7. Collect and analyze aggregate data that will allow the Office to identify primary causes for clients not achieving permanent housing and address these issues.

OTDA Response: OTDA is evaluating what additional data the Office could collect and analyze regarding specific reasons individuals in New York enter and are unable to exit shelters, recognizing that shelter residents can, and often do, leave the shelter facility without explanation and may or may not have secured permanent housing. OTDA reviews State and national homelessness studies to remain informed of the reasons for homelessness and is cognizant of the fact that households often become homeless due to a variety of factors, such as: clients presenting with mental health, substance use and/or medical issues; a widespread shortage of affordable housing; and a shortage of landlords willing to rent to homeless tenants who have complex needs.

If you have questions or comments concerning our response in this letter, please contact Thomas Cooper at (518) 473-4601 or Thomas.Cooper@otda.ny.gov.

Sincerely,



Barbara C. Guinn
Acting Commissioner

cc: Rajni Chawla