

The logo for the New York City Bar, featuring the text "NEW YORK CITY BAR" in a serif font, centered between two horizontal blue bars.

NEW YORK
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**Legal and Nonprofit Organizations, Community Groups and Activists
Call On Governor Hochul to Fund Internet Access in All Shelters Serving
New Yorkers Experiencing Homelessness in 2022 Budget**

New York, December 17, 2021 – Citing the ongoing homelessness crisis and growing digital divide, legal and nonprofit organizations, community groups and activists have joined together to call on Governor Kathy Hochul to ensure that all individuals residing in temporary housing throughout New York State are provided internet access in next year’s State budget.

[In a joint letter](#), the group urged the Governor to incorporate into her forthcoming budget pending legislation sponsored by Senator Alessandra Biaggi and Assembly Member Karines Reyes (S.3593-A/A.8552) that would require local social services districts to provide internet access to all individuals residing in temporary housing in their district.

According to a [May 2020 report](#) issued by the City Bar Justice Center, only 6% of homeless residents surveyed at the time had internet access through their shelter. “While there has been increasing attention paid to the need for high quality, reliable internet access, and steps are being taken across the state to close the digital divide, New Yorkers experiencing homelessness and residing in temporary housing are often forgotten,” says the letter. Without reliable internet access, New Yorkers experiencing homelessness are unable to search and apply for permanent housing and jobs, reliably participate in remote schooling, apply for government benefits or obtain necessary medical care.

“New Yorkers experiencing homelessness and residing in temporary housing facilities are some of our most vulnerable residents; particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. A lack of internet access in shelters means residents are lacking an essential service which could help reduce the length of their stay in shelter and facilitate their exit into permanent housing. We must address this issue at a state-wide level” said **Katharine Deabler, Chair of the New York City Bar Association’s Social Welfare Committee**.

“The pandemic has highlighted the fact that reliable wireless internet is a lifeline and should be considered a basic utility. The Coalition for the Homeless urges the City and State to ensure that wireless internet access is available to all individuals sleeping in shelters, so that they can continue the search for permanent housing, apply for work and benefits, attend

telehealth appointments, and keep in touch with loved ones. Internet access isn't a luxury – it's a basic necessity that all New Yorkers deserve," said **Deborah B. Diamant, Esq., Director of Government Relations and Legal Affairs with Coalition for the Homeless.**

"The Legal Aid Society is proud to stand with other organizations and call for Governor Hochul to include funding to support Senator Biaggi and Assembly Member Reyes' bill (S.3593-A/A.8552) in her forthcoming budget," said **Beth Hofmeister, Staff Attorney in LAS' Homeless Rights Project.** "After we settled our lawsuit requiring the City of New York to provide WiFi to our clients in family shelters, we saw the positive impact ripple beyond access to online education opportunities. Every New Yorker residing in temporary housing across the state should be given access to this vital resource."

"With federal support and push for the expansion of broadband, this legislation has the opportunity to address the digital apartheid that is being experienced by homeless people across New York State, many of whom are disproportionately Black and Brown single adults. We must continue to remove even the most invisible of racialized barriers to housing for people experiencing homelessness. Expanding access to the internet in shelters provides a pathway to ensure that critical health care, housing, employment and educational needs are met for EVERY New Yorker." said **Celina Trowell, LMSW, VOCAL-NY Homelessness Union Organizer.**

Read the joint letter here: <https://bit.ly/32g64hu>

List of Signatories:

Brooklyn Defender Services
Citizens' Committee for Children of New York
Coalition for Homeless Youth
Coalition for the Homeless
Community Service Society of New York
Covenant House New York
Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer US LLP
The Legal Aid Society
Mobilization for Justice
National Center for Law and Economic Justice
New York City Bar Association
New York Legal Assistance Group
New York State Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Open Hearts Initiative
Shams DaBaron aka Da Homeless Hero
VOCAL-NY Homelessness Union
Willkie Farr & Gallagher LLP

About the Association

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