



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams
Before the Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare
September 28, 2017

Good morning Chairs Eugene and Levin and members of the City Council Committees on Youth Services and General Welfare. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on these five bills that can have a major impact on the lives of runaway and homeless youth (RHY) in our city. While this administration has made important efforts to address homelessness in New York City, there are still far too many young people without a place to call home due to abuse, neglect, and violence and that is an unacceptable situation.

One area where the City can make significant impact is by fulfilling its requirement to raise the age of who qualifies as homeless youth. Intro 1706 raises the age to 24. Earlier this year, the state legislature passed the “Raise the Age” provision, which was the subject of legislation that was introduced at my urging by Assembly Member Helene Weinstein and State Senator Diane Savino, raising the age for youth shelter to 25. I am pleased to see that last week, the New York City Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD) issued a concept paper, anticipating a new request for proposal (RFP) for a youth shelter that contemplates permitting access to youth up to age 25 for youth shelter. However, I remain concerned by the caveats and conditions that are noted in the concept paper. Specifically, I am concerned that the bureaucracy might find an excuse in the soon to be promulgated State regulations rather than a way to get this done. RHY are often homeless due to abuse and sexual assault, which disproportionately affects LBGTQ+ youth. How much longer should these young people have to wait while the City wraps itself in red tape? The State has met this challenge by raising the age so that RHY can get assistance in a safe, age-appropriate facility. Intro 1706 will take away any question of where New York City stands and require DYCD to make the change. These are vulnerable young people in need of refuge. We cannot, with good conscience, continue to use technicalities to deny them the resources and services they need.

The concept paper also indicates that “Raise the Age” is contingent upon the availability of additional resources. Additional resources that target youth homelessness, directing young

people to age- and resource-appropriate facilities are needed even without raising the age. This should not be permitted to stand in the way of implementing “Raise the Age.” We must find both the will and the way.

I fully support Intro 1699. RHY are, by definition, in crisis. When the City has an opportunity to positively interact with young people in crisis, we should not be limited in our response by time. Many RHY do not seek services. The ones who do should be given the full slate of resources the City has available for as long as those services are needed. To expect that RHY can fully address the varied causes of their personal crises within a prescribed timeframe is shortsighted. Our response to RHY who do manage to connect with our services should be one of compassion.

Finally, tracking data must be an important part of the City’s approach to addressing the RHY crisis. Intro 1700 will require the tracking of RHY as they interact with the City’s services. This data can help us increase efficiencies and serve more youth in need. We must understand the outcomes of the services provided if we are to thoroughly address the causes of homelessness and the effectiveness of our assistance. Significantly, this bill also creates a right to shelter for all who need it. Frankly, this is a debate we should be past, but let us remove any ambiguity regarding the City’s obligation to provide shelter to all. In the city with the most billionaires in the world, certainly we can ensure that no young person is relegated to live on the street, sleep on a subway grating, couch surf, or compromise their bodies, health, or self-respect in exchange for a place to sleep safely at night.