Advocates call for more homeless housing units in de Blasio's housing plan
By JANAKI CHADHA, POLITICO NEW YORK
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Advocates are pushing for more homes to be set aside for the homeless in Mayor Bill de Blasio's housing plan.

A group of organizations led by the Coalition for the Homeless submitted a letter to the mayor Monday calling for the city to double the 15,000 units currently allocated for homeless households within the city's goal of creating or preserving 300,000 units of affordable housing by 2026.

"We urge you to use every available tool to help the record 63,000 people — including nearly 24,000 children — sleeping in shelters each night," the letter reads. "With well over 15,000 families and more than 16,000 single adults sleeping in shelters each night, this is nowhere near the level of production necessary to meaningfully reduce record homelessness in New York City."

The coalition is calling on the mayor to up this number to a total of 30,000 units, with 24,000 of those created as new construction. The group argues the current 15,000-unit goal is heavy on preservation of existing occupied units and does not include enough new construction. Because of this, the coalition holds, it will not provide enough of a relief for families currently living in city shelters.

"At a time of record homelessness, the Mayor's housing plan simply fails to direct help where it is needed most," Giselle Routhier, policy director at the Coalition for the Homeless, said in a statement. "If New York City builds and preserves a record 300,000 units of housing without meaningfully reducing homelessness, we will have missed a once-in-a-generation opportunity — and thousands of children and families will suffer because of it."

According to the group, the new goal would require the city to build around 2,000 new homeless housing units per year between now and 2026. The letter, signed by organizations including the Legal Aid Society and New York Communities for Change, states this increased production is feasible given the de Blasio administration's expansion and acceleration of its housing plan. It also points to housing production under previous mayoral administrations.

"At a time when the shelter census was only a fraction of what it is today, Mayor Ed Koch created nearly 15,700 units of homeless housing — constituting more than 10 percent of the units in his 10-year plan," the coalition writes.

De Blasio's housing plan has resulted in the creation or preservation of 89,000 affordable homes to date, including 7,500 apartments set aside for homeless households, according to the city.

"This mayor has put forward [more] aggressive affordable and supportive housing plans than any mayor before him," mayoral spokeswoman Jaclyn Rothenberg said in a statement responding to the letter. "Between the dedicated significant resources towards free legal help for tenants fighting eviction and rental assistance programs for New Yorkers in need, we're building and protecting affordable homes at record pace and we're headed in the right direction."
City officials urge mayor to increase housing for homeless

By SAM RASKIN, POLITICO NEW YORK
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A slew of New York City elected officials have signed on to a letter urging Mayor Bill de Blasio to step up his commitment to combating homelessness by doubling the amount of units apportioned to the city’s homeless population.

“With a record 63,000 people — including nearly 24,000 children — sleeping in shelters each night, it is clear that more must be done,” reads the letter, signed by potential 2021 mayoral candidates Comptroller Scott Stringer, Brooklyn Borough President Eric Adams and Public Advocate Tish James, along with 32 Council members. “We must use every available tool at our disposal to reduce the number of New Yorkers relegated to shelters and the streets, and so we are asking the City to double the number of deeply subsidized affordable housing units targeted specifically to families and individuals in shelters.”

De Blasio has made increasing New York’s affordable housing stock the central focus of his administration, but has drawn criticism for his handling of homelessness. Among the critics has been the Coalition For The Homeless — the group that organized the letter. In January, the coalition released a report in which they delivered a similar assessment of the mayor’s record on reducing homelessness.

“Mayor de Blasio’s record on homelessness has been mixed — and in some instances wholly inadequate, despite some notably positive steps,” the group said in the report. Further, the coalition said de Blasio’s efforts on homelessness were “sluggish,” because they fail "to attack the problem at its core.”

Currently, the mayor’s housing plan aims to create or preserve 300,000 units of affordable housing, 15,000 of which will be dedicated for homeless households — an amount the letter labels a “paltry 5 percent.” Despite the roughly 7,500 units of housing for the homeless the city has built and preserved since the start of his mayoralty, and 1,400 homeless placements, the letter says de Blasio’s performance on the homelessness front is “nowhere near the level of production necessary to meaningfully reduce record homelessness in New York City.”

In lieu of his current program, the city officials are requesting that the mayor raise the amount to 30,000 or 10 percent of added units — double that of the existing plan. Additionally, the letter states, the lion’s share of the units set aside for homeless individuals are units being preserved as affordable, not newly built ones, so it requests the city create 24,000 of the 30,000 total units.

In a statement, de Blasio spokeswoman Jane Meyer defended the mayor's affordable housing plan, saying it was the "most aggressive" in city history.

"We are working on all fronts to build affordable homes at record pace, preserve affordable homes, and protect New Yorkers that are on the brink of homelessness from displacement with the help of free legal services, tenant harassment programs and more," she said. "Almost all of our programs require at least 10 percent set aside for homeless households, and we continue to push forward with our multi-pronged strategy to address homelessness in our city."

Read the full letter here.