

Nothing Was Done

How New York City's supportive housing system
fails tenants, and what must change.



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**SHOUT members rally
for Local Law 3**

**(Photo by David Brand,
City Limits)**

About the Authors

SHOUT

SHOUT (Supportive Housing Organized and United Tenants) is New York's first and only organizing group made by and for supportive housing tenants and applicants. We work to shift the power between tenants and supportive housing providers and landlords in order to hold these providers accountable to both the tenants and applicants they are intended to support. SHOUT's membership includes individuals in the LGBTQ+ community, seniors, people with disabilities, people of color, people living with mental illness, veterans, domestic and gender based violence survivors, people with HIV/AIDS, people impacted by incarceration, people aging out of foster-care, individuals struggling with substance abuse, and low-income people who are experiencing/ have experienced homelessness.



TakeRoot Justice

TakeRoot Justice provides legal, participatory research and policy support to strengthen the work of grassroots and community-based groups in New York City to dismantle racial, economic, and social oppression. TakeRoot's Research and Policy Initiative partners with and provides strategic support to grassroots community organizations to build the power of their organizing and advocacy work. We utilize a participatory action research model in which low-income and excluded communities are central to the design and development of research and policy.



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Introduction

New York's supportive housing model is the first of its kind — an expansive program intended to offer affordable, permanent housing coupled with mental health and supportive services to individuals and families, including those who have experienced homelessness, are low-income, have physical disabilities, have chronic health conditions, mental illness, HIV/AIDS, live with past or present substance abuse and/or are youth who have aged out of foster care.

In theory, New York's supportive housing system is intended to enable the stability and independence of individuals, but, in practice, the system is fraught with bureaucratic dysfunctions, opaque guidelines and oppressive restrictions that cause multiple harms to tenants.

What was once a fairly grassroots effort to provide stabilizing services for homeless individuals has become a vast industry that is hard to distinguish from other business sectors, even though it is primarily composed of non-profit organizations.ⁱ As the supportive housing industry has grown, it has courted policymakers, even under conservative administrations, by framing “support” in ways that are understood, by policymakers and lobbyists alike, to also serve surveillance and social control functions in relation to populations that are perpetually deemed “at risk” or a risk.

A small number of organizations dominate the field, and asset portfolios have grown exponentially over recent decades.ⁱⁱ Close relationships with lending institutions, private investors, development firms, architects, and tax-credit experts have become crucial for non-profit organizations who see providing supportive housing as both part of their mission and as critical to their growth.ⁱⁱⁱ Like the traditional for-profit sectors, the growth of the supportive housing industry in New York City has come to include deep inequalities. It is widely acknowledged that the frontline workforce is substantially underpaid.^{iv} While no widescale report has been compiled about executive salaries, there are multiple examples in which executive compensation has been named as exorbitantly high.^v As the supportive housing industry's orientation toward corporate logics has deepened, so has its tendency toward insular self-protection, and the inequality seen between executives and front-line staff has, increasingly, found its mirror reflection in inequality between tenants on one hand and providers on the other.

Supportive housing tenants often find themselves in a very similar situation as non-supportive housing tenants when they seek accountability from landlords or government. Supportive housing tenants have limited recourse when supportive housing providers fail to respect tenants' rights, fail to provide necessary services, or fail to make repairs. The systems by which tenants can make complaints and demand changes are woefully insufficient and extremely difficult to navigate for even the most motivated tenants, and virtually impenetrable for tenants who experience greater barriers to navigating complex bureaucratic systems. The various guidelines that govern supportive housing are insufficient and non-binding, and the multiple and overlapping oversight structures are inconsistently applied and operate without a unified enforcement framework, leaving tenants without a clear and reliable avenue for accountability.

Complaining to supportive housing providers risks retaliation and fails to bring about results. Tenants can technically lodge complaints directly with the government agency that oversees their housing, but figuring out how to do so is difficult and time-consuming. Even if a tenant does manage to reach the relevant government oversight agency, officials have created systems that deflect responsibility, fail to properly track or investigate complaints, and often take the landlord's word over that of tenants. Tenants report that their mental health diagnoses are sometimes used against them to undermine the credibility of their complaints: just one example of the use of pathologization by people in power as a common tactic to disempower supportive housing tenants in their relationship vis-à-vis landlords and providers. Tenants often have legitimate fear and experience retaliation from staff for making complaints. These factors contribute to an interconnected set of barriers which make it extremely difficult for tenants to assert their rights or rectify problems in their housing.

SHOUT is the first organizing group in New York City created for and by supportive housing tenants and applicants. SHOUT members and their peers have experienced the issues described above and have developed a campaign to improve accountability and oversight of supportive housing providers to ensure that tenants who seek to make complaints can do so easily, meaningfully, and without reprisal. SHOUT does not allow supportive housing providers into meetings and prioritizes autonomous spaces for applicants and tenants to assess and act on issues in supportive housing without ties to or influence of industry groups.

SHOUT, with the support of TakeRoot Justice, conducted participatory research to learn about and document the failures of supportive housing providers to meet the needs of tenants, and how tenants are limited in their ability to demand changes because of non-aligned and poorly designed oversight mechanisms, confusing complaints systems, insufficient processes of investigation, and retaliation from supportive housing providers.

Our research finds that:

- **Supportive housing often fails to support.** Survey respondents report experiences of harassment, threatening behavior and violations of both the spirit and policies of “support.”
- **Repairs processes are fraught with problems,** including being insufficiently explained and failing to bring about results.
- **Providers’ grievance processes fall short,** including failure to explain procedures and failure to respond to complaints.
- **The 311 process is insufficient for supportive housing tenants,** and most survey respondents felt their problem was not resolved by calling 311.
- **The process of making complaints to government contracting agencies, which should be an effective remedy for tenants, is inaccessible and fails to achieve results.**
- **Concerns about retaliation, impacts on mental and physical health, and fear of losing housing have a chilling effect on tenant complaints.**
- **Tenants report numerous negative experiences navigating complaint and grievance processes and have experienced significant harms as a result of these processes.**

These findings, and others, are detailed throughout this report.

We demand immediate changes to strengthen oversight of supportive housing and ensure meaningful accountability of providers — in both their social service and property management capacities. Here, we are pressing to shift the power dynamic such that it prioritizes the needs of supportive housing tenants. Government officials and agencies must make tenant-friendly reforms in their governing of the industry and everyday practice.

Tenants need secure, permanent homes in order to be able to integrate into communities, improve their health and plan their lives. Supportive housing cannot possibly accomplish this if tenants' housing fails to meet their needs, their diagnoses are weaponized against them, and, when they try to use what limited recourse they have, they face threats of retaliation and fears of losing their housing, reigniting the traumas of homelessness.

Necessary reforms are required to ensure that supportive housing can fulfill its stated goals and purpose.

Our policy recommendations include:

- **Strengthening and enforcing the rules** governing the provision of supportive housing.
- **Standardizing policies and practices** across contracting agencies and supportive housing providers, including comprehensive, standardized complaint processes at both the provider and agency levels.
- **Improving transparency**, so tenants can more easily learn their rights and access information about their providers.
- **Developing and implementing new practices** to ensure apartments are sufficiently inspected for repair needs.
- **Improving training and protocol** for calls made to 311.
- **Creating meaningful, enforceable anti-eviction protections** for supportive housing tenants.

These recommendations are detailed at length in the Policy Recommendations section of our report.

What is supportive housing and who is it for?

Supportive housing is intended to offer a permanent solution to housing insecurity and social service needs for individuals and families by combining housing and support services. Supportive housing tenants include individuals and families who have experienced homelessness, survivors of domestic violence, formerly incarcerated people, low-income individuals and families, seniors, veterans, people with physical and/or mental health disabilities, chronic health conditions, HIV/AIDS, drug use issues, and youth who have aged out of foster care.

In New York City, there are two models of supportive housing: single-site, also known as congregate housing, in which families and individuals have leases for private rooms or apartments in designated buildings that are owned or operated by nonprofits. On-site services are provided. Rental income from tenants (paid in full or in part by rental subsidies) supports the management and maintenance of buildings. Congregate housing requires capital funding to develop new or maintain existing housing.

Scattered-site supportive housing offers units in traditional apartment buildings owned by private landlords. Supportive housing nonprofits rent one or more units from landlords and in turn, facilitate a direct lease or sublease the units to supportive housing tenants. Offices of the service provider are off-site.

Both housing models typically require tenants in permanent supportive housing to pay 30% of their income, if any, with a rental subsidy covering the remainder.

Support services are provided by non-profit agencies that partner with housing providers (though in many cases, as mentioned above, the same provider offers both the housing and support services). Services are, at their best, intended to be individualized and tenant-centered, and can include case management, educational and vocational services, recovery, mental health and drug treatment, medication management, assistance in accessing government benefits and referrals for community-based services, including legal assistance. Often, however, the service relationship is reduced to rent reminders and referrals to get help somewhere else.

Supportive housing in New York City is funded, contracted, and overseen by multiple state and city agencies.¹ At the state level, these include the New York State Office of Mental Health (“OMH”), Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (“OTDA”), New York State Department of Health (“DOH”), Office of Addiction Services and Supports (“OASAS”), and Office for People with Developmental Disabilities (“OPWDD”). At the city level, supportive housing is overseen by New York City agencies including the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (“DOHMH”), the Department of Social Services (“DSS”) and the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (“HPD”). Each agency operates under its own contracting rules, guidelines, and oversight processes.

The growth of supportive housing:

From grassroots, activist-led initiatives to a fragmented and corporatized system

There is no rigorous, scholarly study of the historical development of supportive housing at the time of this report. Rather, there are scattered segments of history in studies of homelessness, housing, tenant rights, and/or mental illness.^{vi} The main meta-narratives that are available are almost exclusively published by industry groups and cannot be relied upon to fairly tell the story of how things have gotten to where they are.^{vii}

New York’s supportive housing model, emerging in the 1980s, was developed primarily as a response to the rise of mass homelessness among individuals that began in the late 1970s, and as one response to the demands of activists at the height of the AIDS crisis.^{viii} Religious activists, anti-poverty activists, and others played critical roles in developing small models and pushing the government to fund housing with attached supports.^{ix}

In the decades that followed, the supportive housing system both grew substantially and became increasingly corporatized.^x This dynamic, fueled by injections of funding without strategic planning, has resulted in a patchwork system fraught with challenges and with fragmented and insufficient oversight.

As noted above, the unique history of supportive housing in New York has produced a sprawling, multi-agency contracting and oversight structure. Numerous nonprofit providers operate supportive housing under different city and state agencies, each with distinct rules, funding streams, and monitoring systems — creating complexity that directly affects tenants’ ability to navigate and seek accountability within the system.

1 Federal funding, typically administered through City or State agencies, is also critical, but not the subject of this report.

SHOUT's work to increase transparency in supportive housing

Because supportive housing in New York City developed in fits and starts and its creation is related to a wide variety of political interests and pushes, understanding the rules and numbers can be very difficult. Data on supportive housing is notoriously difficult to compile. The system involves opaque layers of bureaucracy, confusing tiers of providers, agencies, and landlords that exist alongside outdated systems. SHOUT has led some recent advocacy efforts to address the lack of transparency in supportive housing, but there is still a long way to go.

Local Law 3 of 2022

In January 2022, New York City implemented Local Law 3: the first bill requiring the New York Department of Social Services (“DSS”) to compile data on supportive housing applications, interviews, acceptances and rejections and produce a report of application referrals and tenant-selection outcomes from supportive housing data contained in the Coordinated Assessment and Placement System, an online platform used by supportive housing providers and agencies.^{xi} This has shown troubling patterns year over year.^{xii}

The context of the bill was a sprawling supportive housing application process that gives applicants little say, and where rejections have been allowed for any reason the provider decides, leading to significant concerns about “creaming” or “cherry picking,” discrimination, and fair housing violations by selecting applicants whose needs make them easier to house.^{xiii}

Even with Local Law 3 in force, providers still have the unchecked discretion and ability to reject applicants with little explanation, and often for reasons for which no one should be rejected from supportive housing. According to Fiscal Year 2025's report, the following reasons were among those used to reject prospective supportive housing tenants.^{xiv}

- “There is a complication with pa cash benefits”
- “Client was not a good fit for this program”
- “After conducting the interview, agency feels client is not ready for housing at this time”
- “Not accepted. Behavioral History”
- “The client never lived on her own and was not sure of what voucher she had and how it would apply to SH.”
- “The family was not open to answering questions and was guarded with their responses, making it difficult to communicate during the interview.”
- “The family does not have supports near the program”
- “The candidate lacked insight on his mental health”
- “Tenant stated that he has abandonment issues, not sure ready to move.”

While these are clearly not reasons that people should be rejected from housing designed to support them, SHOUT members also have concerns that after the implementation of Local Law 3, providers have worked to disguise the real reasons for their

rejections to avoid them being made public.^{xv} There are likely many more egregious rejections that do not show up in the records.

The victory of passing and implementing Local Law 3 followed a dedicated organizing campaign by supportive housing tenants and their allies, including many who became SHOUT members when SHOUT was founded.

Local Law 135 of 2025

It is difficult to even measure the current and exact number of supportive housing units in New York City. The clearest number is compiled by the Department of Social Services and submitted to the federal government for the Department of Housing and Urban Development's Housing Inventory Count ("HIC") report, last published in 2024, which stated that there are 39,794 beds citywide.^{xvi} However, the report does not clearly break-down scatter-site and congregate units, nor does it breakdown by eligibility category, funding sources, relationship of the service provider to the property management organization, and so on. Accordingly, the public is largely left to trade publications to understand these numbers. A recent industry report estimates that as of March 2024 there were 40,472 units of supportive housing in New York City: 23,125 congregate sites and 17,347 scattered site units.^{xvii}

During December 2021 testimony to the New York City Council, a leading supportive housing trade group raised concerns, based on a survey of its members, that some 10-percent of supportive housing units in New York City were vacant.^{xviii} SHOUT and allies also raised alarms about vacancies, issuing subsequent Freedom of Information Law ("FOIL") requests in a push for transparency and to draw attention to the troubled application process, resulting in repeated and widespread press coverage to the issue.^{xix} The different approaches are of note. An industry survey is private business data that is released when the opportunity presents and it is strategically useful for a given sector or company. A FOIL request, however, demands that the government release records not yet disclosed to the public. In this case, the information returned through FOIL requests supported SHOUT's contention that the lack of transparency was preventing real, serious discussion of changes needed in the application and "tenant selection" process.^{xx}

In 2025, the City Council passed what became Local Law 135, which succeeds in bringing ongoing transparency to the longstanding vacancy issue.^{xxi} The law now requires DSS to publicize the total number and percentage of vacant supportive housing units in the City on a monthly and quarterly basis.^{xxii}

Supportive Housing Tenants Notice of Rights

Separate from the push for government data about applications and vacancies, tenants and allies have also pushed for transparency and education about tenant rights.² SHOUT leaders fought for a City law, ultimately passed in January 2022, that came to require the first ever Supportive Housing Tenants Notice of Rights with the aim of increasing

² The use of the word "tenant" is important here. SHOUT members had to fight uphill as industry groups sought to water down the original bill in a number of ways, including calling it a "resident" bill of rights. SHOUT leaders demanded they be seen as tenants, just like everyone else who rents an apartment, and won that fight, creating the Supportive Housing Tenant Notice of Rights.

transparency and accountability across New York City’s “patchwork” supportive housing system.^{xxiii} This bill was important to SHOUT members because of personal experiences where supportive housing providers had acted in troubling ways, and based on a political analysis that many others were experiencing similar situations.

As a result of this organizing, as of May 2022, every supportive housing provider in the City must provide every supportive housing tenant with a notice that explains their rights during their tenancy and other key information about their housing. All supportive housing tenants in New York City are entitled to the rights delineated in the notice. However, the State Office of Mental Health (“OMH”) took an unorthodox and problematic reading of the legislation to mean that it did not apply to their contracted providers because the bill is required by a City law. This decision by OMH further fractures enforcement of what should be a simple, informational, and low-lift ask of supportive housing providers. The resulting confusion means that thousands of New York City supportive housing tenants are deprived of the Supportive Housing Tenants Notice of Rights by virtue of being in a state-contracted supportive housing program. SHOUT is organizing towards a state-wide adoption of the Notice of Rights; at the time of writing, Assembly Bill A868.^{xxiv}

Unfortunately, while these transparency and disclosure reforms represent important progress, they do not by themselves resolve the structural gaps in oversight identified in this report.

Supportive housing guidelines and guidance

Supportive housing is overwhelmingly funded through contracts between non-profit organizations and government agencies.^{xxv} While there are persistent fights for more funding, the supportive housing providers and their collective representatives have succeeded in holding back a significant number of requirements, regulations, and oversight, often at the expense of tenants and applicants. This is especially the case with guidelines and guidance that, along with individual contracts, govern daily procedures and practice at the tenant level.

Goals of supportive housing

New York State’s Office of Mental Health (OMH) and New York City’s Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) — the two agencies overseeing the largest number of supportive housing units in New York City — publish guidelines that apply to the programs they fund.^{xxvi} Other contracting agencies, particularly but not only the DSS, also issue guidance, contributing to a particularly complex regulatory landscape.^{xxvii} Crucially, OMH and DOHMH’s guidelines are neither binding nor consistently enforced, and in some cases set differing expectations across agencies. As a result, tenants and their advocates lack clear, enforceable standards against which to hold providers accountable.

The guidelines contain information on applicability, target populations, funding, services and more. According to the most recently available OMH guidelines, the “goal of Supportive Housing is to provide assistance that enables Tenants to remain housed in the community until they no longer need such assistance” while “increased independence is the aim of the supportive housing approach.”^{xxviii}

Tenant choices include “involvement in the choice of housing; type, frequency, and intensity of services; determining who is involved in their services; and [the] exercising of their rights and responsibilities as Tenants, individuals and members of the community.”^{xxix}

The OMH guidelines state that the “minimum” requirements of supportive housing are to develop a personalized support plan, conduct one monthly in person interaction and a home visit “as needed...but at least once every three months” as well as an annual income verification. The guidelines also state that residents “receive written Tenant’s Rights and Grievance Procedures upon enrollment in the Supportive housing program” the receipt and acknowledgement of which should be documented. Providers are also supposed to “review rights and grievance procedures with Residents quarterly during review of the support plan. Residents have input into the development and implementation of agency supportive housing practices.” Another purported tenet of supportive housing is “providing flexibility so that Residents may remain in the housing of their choice while services change to meet their varying needs.”

Our research indicates that many of these stated requirements are not consistently followed in practice, resulting in harm to tenants. The policy recommendations in this report call for unifying, strengthening, revising, and enforcing these guidelines to ensure that supportive housing fulfills its stated goals.

Methodology

Our participatory action research project used the following methods:

Surveys: SHOUT members designed and were then trained to administer a survey to supportive housing tenants to investigate their experiences with providers and with seeking recourse related to complaints and repairs regarding their housing. The surveying process provided base-building opportunities for SHOUT, which allowed SHOUT to reach prospective new members. Surveying also offered opportunities for skill-building and leadership. Surveys were administered to 49 supportive housing tenants.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews with current and former supportive housing tenants were conducted by trained SHOUT members. These interviews informed the profiles present in the report.

Literature review and secondary research: SHOUT and TakeRoot Justice reviewed existing articles, studies, and reports on supportive housing in New York.

Research Limitations

Our survey was conducted in English. This means that those living in supportive housing who are not fluent in English were not included in our research sample. In addition, as a supportive housing tenant advocacy organization, we reached tenants who may be more knowledgeable than average about the rights available to them because they are connected to tenant advocacy groups. Our research sample allows us to show a snapshot of the New Yorkers living in supportive housing whose providers failed to meet their needs, and of the gaps in accountability and oversight identified in this report.

Supportive Housing Tenant Profile: Anita

Anita was born and raised in Spanish Harlem and is a proud grandmother of three college graduates. She is homebound and fiercely independent, having taken care of herself since she was 18 years old.

Anita's supportive housing provider denied an accommodation request for phone visits over in-person visits. She explains that her health puts her in a "high-risk category, being a senior and having all these other health issues...[and it makes] me being leery of catching COVID or any other upper respiratory infection." She made her accommodation request through the proper channels; "I sent a letter as I was directed to do to [my supportive housing provider] and I followed the direction like I was directed to do, and they refused." She does not understand why they have denied her right to the accommodation. While her medical team of nurses and doctors make home visits, they take substantial precautions: "They respect the fact of what my diagnosis is...when the nurse comes, she's in full gear...Everybody's in full gear protected. Everything else is done over the phone or by telehealth." Of her provider's visits she said "they come anywhere they want to, and I refuse to let them in." This situation causes Anita anguish: "my mental state has been affected because I have health issues. My health has been affected. My physical health has been affected. I live in fear because I don't know what they may try to do by me refusing to allow them entry."

She has also faced difficulty getting repairs done and avoids involving her provider if she can because they have not been helpful in the past. Shortly after moving into her current home, Anita "got a notice that they were going to be redoing the bathroom and the kitchen area. Little did I know that they were going to be doing a complete rehab...ripping out the tub, the toilet, the walls, the floor. And I was forced to live in that," she said. Due to the construction, Anita's provider suggested she use a shared bathroom three flights above her unit, but the stairs made it difficult for her to do so. The construction also caused rodents and vermin to appear.

Anita complained in person every month when her case worker would visit. "The case manager would make her monthly visits. She came, she saw, I complained and nothing was done." The construction lasted three months. "I was smart enough to take video of it and the time. I took pictures...[and] I made complaints to other agencies about it. That's all I could do...complain, complain, complain, complain, complain." While she doesn't recall the agency she spoke with, "nothing happened" in the end. She never heard back from them. "Mentally, it weighed heavy on me because it was nothing I could do. I couldn't remove myself on my own. You know what I mean? I felt trapped like I still do now. I really had to battle through the depression that I have."

When the construction finally wrapped up, a kitchen island was brought in, which Anita says is dangerous for her because she falls easily and fears she will hurt herself on the island. "That was one of my major complaints after the rehab was done and the caseworker came and she saw everything. And I let her know that that's a danger for me and something needs to be done about it... I let her know...I'm easily susceptible to fall, to trip". This was in 2014. The island is still in her kitchen. Several of Anita's caretakers have tripped on the island themselves, which concerned Anita to the point of taking out a rental insurance policy "in case someone gets hurt", which she pays for out of pocket.

These experiences make it difficult for Anita to live with dignity while in supportive housing. "I don't feel I'm looked at as a human because of the label of severe mental illness," she shared. "So, by the treatment that I receive, that's how I associate it. Not being heard, not being listened to, the feeling that I get of knowing what I want and need and not, and when I do express myself, I'm not heard. I'm not listened to. It's like, no matter what I say, others can override me. And that's what pisses me off." Her provider "act[s] as though they're not doing anything wrong. That's the problem."

Anita wants people to know that supportive housing tenants are "all individuals...they should not

put us all under one umbrella and treat us as though we're all the same because we're not. We're not. We need to be heard, listened to and heard and seen, and we're not." If she were in charge of overseeing supportive housing in NYC, Anita would center tenant needs. "Their needs would come first because that's why [supportive housing] was created and that's what I'm in the business of doing, helping people. These agencies were created to help people. And that's what the main focus should be, helping the people."



SHOUT members table at a conference

Demographics of Survey Sample

Borough n= 46	Brooklyn	48%
	Manhattan	26%
	The Bronx	17%
	Queens	9%
Time lived in supportive housing n= 46	Less than 1 year	2%
	1-2 years	17%
	3-4 years	17%
	5-10 years	26%
	11 years or more	37%
Age n= 46	18-24	2%
	25-44	28%
	45-64	50%
	65 years and over	20%
Gender identity** n= 46	Female	50%
	Male	39%
	Transgender	4%
	Nonbinary	4%
	Prefer to self-describe	2%
Race/Ethnicity** n= 46	White	46%
	Black or African American	35%
	Multiracial	13%
	Latinx (any race)	9%
	Native American	7%
	Prefer to self-describe	7%
	Asian or Asian American	2%
	Biracial	2%
Primary Language** n= 46	English	90%
	Spanish	6%
	French	2%
	Prefer to self-describe	2%

** Note that percentages in this category sum to more than 100%
because respondents could choose multiple answers

Findings

The following findings are based on 49 surveys of supportive housing tenants in New York City.

FINDING 1: Supportive housing fails to support.

Respondents report experiences fraught with harassment, discrimination, threatening behavior and violations of both the spirit and policies of “support.” Service plans, which should be mutually agreed upon and centered on tenant goals, were misused. Providers failed to support tenants in achieving their goals. Despite its stated goals, supportive housing did not have a positive impact on the mental or physical health of most respondents.

- **81% of respondents said they experienced at least one substantial issue in their housing.** This includes:
 - ▶ **Half of respondents reported experiencing harassment by staff** (49%).
 - ▶ **Nearly half reported discrimination based on a protected class or characteristic** (race, color, national origin, immigrant or citizenship status, disability, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, pregnancy, caregiver status, family composition, domestic violence survivor status, age, religion, salary history, arrest record, or credit history) (43%).
 - ▶ **Over a third report that when problems with their supportive housing arose, they were threatened with eviction without being offered other solutions** (36%).
 - ▶ **A third report that their provider has entered their apartment without their consent** (34%).
 - ▶ **1 in 5 said their building or apartment is not ADA accessible** (21%).
 - ▶ **Nearly 1 in 5 report that their disability was not accommodated** (19%).
 - ▶ **Nearly 1 in 5 report that their provider told them to share their medical records with them, without explaining why** (19%).

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“My provider has shared confidential information with other tenants. My provider has put me in a position where I communicated not feeling safe around specific staff and calling me down to the office to find that staff member in that space without informing me first.”*
- ▶ *“Staff only help you if they like you. If you’ve had to complain about anything, they take it personally and refuse to see you.”*

- ▶ *“Staff establishes unprofessional relationships with tenants and breaches of personal information occur. There should be categories of information unavailable to junior staff and off limits to staff like security. However, at my housing, all of my personal information is available to all categories of staff...If I complain to a superior about another staff, they close ranks and refuse to address the complaint, and then refuses to give me the contact information for someone else to communicate my needs with. There is no privacy policy. So, how would tenants know when their rights are being violated? And provider staff seems not to know all the ways they violate tenants HIPAA rights. They have done things the same way for so long, it just continues.”*

- **Tenants report numerous problems with their service plans:**

- ▶ **Over a quarter reported that their provider created a service plan that does not match their needs (28%).**
- ▶ **Over a quarter reported they felt pressured to agree to something in their service plan, even though they did not want to (28%).**
- ▶ **Nearly a quarter reported that their provider did not give them an opportunity to discuss their service plan (23%).**
- ▶ **Over a quarter said their provider has not helped them reach the goals of their service plan (28%).**

- **Three-quarters of respondents reported at least one way in which their provider failed to support their goals or needs (74%). This includes:**

- ▶ **Almost half of survey respondents report that their provider did not support them when they wanted to move (48%).**
- ▶ **Almost a third said that they did not receive support from their provider when they needed help with rent payments (30%).**
- ▶ **1 in 5 reported that they did not receive support from their providers for employment matters (20%).**
- ▶ **1 in 5 reported they did not receive help getting benefits when they needed help (22%).**
- ▶ **1 in 5 reported they did not receive help getting or keeping health care or home healthcare when they needed help (22%).**

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“I needed help during emergencies such as COVID or during recovery from health emergencies, and during such times the provider never offered assistance.”*
- ▶ *“I do everything on my own because whenever I reached out for anything, they never came through.”*

- ▶ *“I did not have a case worker for about a year and a half, so there was no one to assist me when I needed help.”*

- **Despite its stated goals, supportive housing did not have a positive impact on the mental or physical health of most respondents:**

- ▶ **Most respondents said that their mental health was made worse by living in supportive housing (44%) or that living in supportive housing had no impact on their mental health (17%).** Only 40% said their mental health had been made better by living in supportive housing.
- ▶ **Most respondents said their physical health was made worse by living in supportive housing (38%) or that supportive housing had no impact on their physical health (34%).** Only 28% said their physical health had been made better by living in supportive housing.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“I have felt the stress of being under psychological assault and not having space or stability for over 10 years (since 2013) in supportive housing. I began developing serious physical health problems and experienced two TIAs (transient ischemic attacks) after only one year, with more and more serious physical problems diagnosed almost every year. My mental health has had the same negative curve. I developed an additional serious panic attack problem just because of the circumstances of my housing until January of this year, because of infestation and lack of safety and privacy.”*

FINDING 2: Some providers fail to proactively provide leases or rental agreements.

Of those respondents who had a lease or occupancy agreement, a quarter had to ask their provider before receiving the document.

- **While most respondents held a lease or sublease, a quarter of tenants reported they had to ask for such a document before receiving it.**

- ▶ **88% of respondents reported having a lease or agreement with their provider.**
 - 38% of respondents had a lease directly with their landlord, 42% had a sublease or occupancy agreement with their provider, and 13% had a lease, sublease or occupancy agreement but weren't sure which.
- ▶ **However, a quarter of those tenants had to ask for this document before receiving it (24%).**

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“Not only did I have to ask for a copy of the lease, I also had a housing lawyer support me in requesting I receive a paper copy of my lease including with each lease renewal, and that I had the right to receive it in time to have it be reviewed before signing it versus having to sign it before reading it or being able to have misinformation corrected before signing and dating it.”*

FINDING 3: Repairs processes are fraught with problems.

The processes are insufficiently explained or documented, providers fail to support tenants who need to navigate a repairs process, and repairs are often not completed in a timely manner, if at all.

- **Many respondents were never informed about a repairs process, and few received written information about repairs.**
 - ▶ **More than a third of respondents were not given information about a repairs process from their provider** (39%).
 - ▶ **Only 1 in 5 respondents received written information about a repairs process** (20%), while 46% were informed verbally about a repairs process.
- **The large majority of respondents had asked their provider for repairs, but few saw their repairs completed in a timely fashion.**
 - ▶ 85% of respondents had asked their provider for repairs. Of those:
 - Fewer than a third report that all repairs were completed in a timely fashion (29%).
 - 17% said that all of the repairs were completed, but not in a timely fashion.
 - 34% said that only some of the repairs were completed.
 - 17% said the provider or landlord never completed the repairs.
- **For most respondents, providers were not helpful in navigating the repairs process.**
 - **More than half of respondents report their provider was not helpful** in navigating the repairs process (54%).
 - Only a third said their provider was helpful in navigating the repairs process (34%)
 - 12% of respondents were not sure.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“I believe my repairs are being addressed in a timely manner now ONLY because of the lawyers I put in place after being ignored about the horrible conditions of the last apartment.”*
- ▶ *“I was forced to pay out of pocket for removing mold from my apartment and for plumbing issues.”*
- ▶ *“I usually try to avoid asking for repairs because whenever they come to fix something, they either don’t fix it properly or they break something else. On the rare occasions that I’ve asked for repairs, they did an exceptionally sloppy job and ruined some of my furniture and left a big mess. Last week, for example, I called them for a clogged bathroom sink and a leak under my kitchen sink. They ordered a part for the kitchen sink and said they’d come back in a week but they had supposedly fixed the bathroom sink. When they left, I checked and it was worse than it was before. It was only partially clogged before and now it’s fully clogged. When I called them back, they said they have too many emergencies but that they wrote an order for the repairmen to come back. It’s been 5 days and nothing yet.”*
- ▶ *“One leak lasted for a year and was ignored by provider, leading later to a flood. This leak had been reported to 311 and the landlord/provider told HPD it was fixed, and when HPD asked me I clarified it was still leaking. The month before a HUD visit is when they try to rush fixing everything demanding we be at home despite ignoring us for the months if not years before, and then enter our apartments without our permission, blow fuses where our refrigerator/freezer is hence ruining all food and never paying for damages caused.”*

FINDING 4: Providers’ grievance processes fall short.

Processes are insufficiently explained. Many respondents have filed grievances, demonstrating strong self-advocacy, but few have had their complaints resolved as a result, and patterns of problems persist.

- **More than a third of respondents report that no grievance process was ever explained to them by their provider (38%).**
 - ▶ Only about a third report their provider provided a written grievance process (35%).
 - ▶ 29% report their provider explained a grievance process verbally.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“I learned from an outside organization that they must have a grievance process. I then asked my provider repeatedly before I was given the document. However, the document does not state who I should file the grievance with, and staff claimed not to know.”*



SHOUT member speaks at a rally. (Photo by Ben Fractenberg, *The City Reporter*)

- ▶ *I was told only after a friend told me they must have a grievance process. And I had to repeatedly ask for the grievance form. The form also does identify who is ultimately responsible for addressing your complaint, and there is no time frame given.”*
- **40% of respondents had filed at least one grievance directly to their current provider, with many filing multiple grievances.**
 - ▶ 13% had filed one grievance; 6% had filed two or three grievances; 24% had filed more than three grievances.
- **Respondents report that grievances were filed about a range of serious issues, including:**
 - ▶ Challenges with neighbors or roommates (68%).
 - ▶ Need for repairs (64%).
 - ▶ Grievances about supportive housing staff (including harassment) (41%).
 - ▶ Retaliation by provider or landlord after a previous grievance (41%).
 - ▶ Discrimination (32%).
 - ▶ Failure to assist with a needed move to different housing (32%).

- **Few respondents who had made a grievance received a written response to their grievance, while a quarter did not receive any response. Of those who had filed a grievance, for their most recent grievance:**

- ▶ 23% did not receive a response.
- ▶ 46% received a verbal response, while only 18% received a response in writing.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“It was returned under my door exactly as I had submitted it, with zero response from landlord in that section or program in their section. Exactly as I had turned it in, no answers, resolutions, etc. No follow-up or reference to it by case manager or program director in following days, weeks, months.”*
- ▶ *“Hand in grievance paper. Nothing was done. It was MY fault bc I didn’t follow up. Now, we report to the resident assistant, it gets put into the computer and the Director never gets it. Us vs. Them mentality”*
- ▶ *“It does not state who is responsible for this type of grievance or any type of grievance. It does not provide a time frame for response. There is no contact for follow-up if I do not hear from anyone. Staff takes the complaints personally whether it relates specifically to them individually or not. Staff has cursed at me for filing a grievance and informed other staff who also take a negative attitude toward me. Staff does not provide written responses to my written grievance”*
- ▶ *“It feels like it’s a useless process. You submit your complaint and unless an outside organization persists in trying to get a resolution, they do not bother to even respond.”*
- ▶ *“The Supportive Housing provider does not take the grievance process seriously. I was told if I am not happy, if I do not like it where I am, if I am not satisfied it isn’t what I was told by the intake office it would be, I can go back to the shelters and start over. If/when I try to call the main office, I either cannot find a person’s name in the phone directory or the times I can, their vm is full and cannot accept any further messages. I spent 2.5 years waiting to hear from one person. They insisted it was their program adjusting to changes from COVID-19. That many years to learn working from home or hybrid? By then many offices were back to work, and my grievance could have been met in very simple ways...instead it is ignored so they keep receiving my rent from HPD/HRA and I have nowhere else to go.”*

- **Of those who had submitted one or more grievances, all felt that there was a pattern of problems in their supportive housing that continued even if their individual grievance was resolved (100%).**

FINDING 5: The 311 process is insufficient for supportive housing tenants.

Few were told by their providers that they could contact 311, while others were actually dissuaded from contacting 311. Through self-advocacy, more than half of tenants had contacted 311, but of those, many encountered operators who were not familiar with supportive housing, and most did not feel their issue was resolved as a result.

- **Fewer than 10% of tenants were told by their provider that they could contact 311 to initiate a complaint about conditions in their housing** (6%).
 - ▶ Many tenants found out through a community group or service organization (32%) or through another supportive housing tenant(13%). 36% said they knew in another way, and most of those indicated in the write-in section that they weren't sure how they found out.
 - ▶ Nearly one in five tenants did not know, before taking the survey, that they could contact 311 to initiate a complaint about conditions in their housing (19%).
- **Nearly a quarter of tenants report that their provider has discouraged them from contacting 311 about conditions in their housing** (for example, being told not to call 311) (23%).
- **Demonstrating self-advocacy, more than half of respondents had contacted 311 in at least one way to make a complaint** (56%).
 - ▶ Half of survey respondents have contacted 311 by phone to make a complaint about their housing provider or housing conditions (50%). 13% had used an online form to make a complaint.
- **Of those who had contacted 311, only a quarter found the 311 operator to be familiar with supportive housing during their most recent contact with 311 (23%)**
 - ▶ More than a third said the operator was not familiar with supportive housing, and 39% were not sure.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *"When I called and mentioned supportive housing, I was transferred to more than one person. It felt like nobody knew what to do or cared to find out whom I could speak to. Hence the transfers."*

- **Of those who had contacted 311, nearly-three quarters said the issue they called about was not resolved as a result of contacting 311** (72%).

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ “Staff lies and tells them it is taken care of. And then they leave.”
- ▶ “They told me to call DOHMH. I called. DOHMH never called back, and there was no confirmation/tracking number.”

FINDING 6: The process of making complaints to government contracting agencies, which should be an effective remedy for tenants, is inaccessible and fails to achieve results.

Nearly a third of respondents did not know which agency oversees their supportive housing. Nearly a third of respondents did not know they could contact a government contracting agency directly to make a complaint, and, of those who did know, most found out through a community service group, organization or another tenant, rather than their provider. Government contracting agencies have failed to put in place systems by which tenants can track or follow up on their complaint cases. Through self-advocacy, nearly half of tenants had contacted an agency, but many did not receive follow-up information from the agency and most felt their issue was not resolved as a result of their complaint.

- **Nearly a third of respondents did not know which agency oversees their current supportive housing** (30%).
- **Nearly a third of respondents did not know they could contact a government contracting agency to make a complaint about their provider or housing conditions**, before they took the survey (30%).
 - 13% of respondents had heard of the agencies but did not know they could make complaints directly to them.
 - 17% had never heard of the agencies before the survey.
- **Only 13% of respondents had been told by their provider that they could make complaints directly to government contracting agencies** about their provider and housing conditions.
 - More than a quarter found out through a community group or service organization (28%) and 11% were told by another tenant.
- **Through self-advocacy, half of respondents had contacted a government contracting agency and/or had an advocate do so on their behalf:**
 - ▶ 46% had contacted a government contracting agency.
 - ▶ 17% said an advocate had contacted a government contracting agency on their behalf.
 - ▶ Of those who had contacted a government contracting agency, most had contacted

the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH) (65%) followed by the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene (DOHMH) (22%).

- Smaller numbers had contacted the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) (13%), the Human Resources Administration (HRA) (9%), the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) (4%), and the HIV/AIDS services administration (HASA) (4%).
- **Of those who had made a complaint directly to a government contracting agency, only about half felt the agency representative was attentive and made efforts to fully understand their issue**, during their most recent complaint (48%).
 - A quarter felt the agency representative did not meet these criteria (26%) and an additional 13% had never communicated directly with an agency representative. 13% were not sure.
- **Of those who had made a complaint directly to a government contracting agency, fewer than half report receiving follow-up information** from their most recent complaint (44%).
 - 44% said they did not receive follow up information, and an additional 13% were not sure.
- **Of those who had made a complaint directly to a government contracting agency, more than three-quarters felt the issue was not resolved as a result of contacting the agency** (78%).
- **Government contract agencies do not have systems in place to allow supportive housing tenants to track or follow-up on their complaint cases. The agencies do not give out tracking numbers, or otherwise provide a way for tenants to follow up.**

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“Agency spoke with provider, provider provided inaccurate information”*
- ▶ *“Representatives prefer to call and not use email as a way to avoid taking responsibility, it appears. I could not get the representative’s last name or email or telephone number. This means I could not follow up and my situation has not been resolved. Every time I call, it’s starting the process all over again because the new rep is hearing the issue for the first time. Then s/he disappears also and I need to repeat this process. This could go on for years without there being any record that I did speak to anyone.”*
- ▶ *“They do not provide written responses. I think as a way to not take responsibility. Then, it becomes difficult to follow-up because they do not want to provide email addresses and or telephone numbers. So I have to call back the complaint line and repeat myself. No continuity of the process and it takes a long time to resolve, it ever.”*

FINDING 7: Concerns about retaliation, impacts on mental and physical health, and fear of losing housing have a chilling effect on tenant complaints.

- **62% of respondents had either chosen not to file a complaint or grievance, or had stopped a complaint or grievance, because of concerns about the impact on their lives.**
 - ▶ 53% were concerned about retaliation.
 - ▶ 40% were concerned about losing their housing.
 - ▶ 40% were concerned it would harm their mental health.
 - ▶ 36% were concerned it would harm their physical health.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *“I was concerned that I would be considered a problematic tenant and that then they’d want me out of here and they’d make my life miserable.”*

FINDING 8: Tenants report numerous negative experiences navigating complaint and grievance processes, and have experienced significant harms as a result of these processes.

Tenants report experiences intended to undermine their credibility, including having their status as a supportive housing tenant and their mental health diagnosis used against them. They had experiences which can be understood as retaliatory, including verbal abuse, harassment, intimidation, and threats of eviction. They experienced fear of losing their housing and becoming homeless. And they experienced harm to their mental health.

- **82% of those who engaged in a complaint or grievance process³ had an experience in which their credibility was undermined.** This includes:
 - ▶ **Over half reported feeling their status as a supportive housing tenant was used as a way to dismiss their complaint or grievance (59%).**
 - ▶ **More than a third were told supportive housing was different than other housing in New York (39%).**
 - ▶ **More than a third felt their mental health diagnosis was used against them (39%)**

³ This includes tenants who had engaged in their provider’s grievance process, contacted 311 and/or made a complaint to a government contracting agency.

- ▶ **Half reported that their provider denied the problem existed (52%).**
- ▶ **More than half said the provider tried to make it seem like the problem was the tenant's fault (55%).**
- ▶ **Nearly one in five said their provider refused to solve their problem until they were current on their rent (18%).**
- **78% of those who engaged in a complaint or grievance process had experiences which can be understood as retaliatory during or immediately after their grievance or complaint process.**
 - ▶ Nearly two-thirds experienced verbal abuse, harassment or intimidation by their provider or landlord (63%).
 - ▶ More than half felt personally targeted by their provider or landlord (59%).
 - ▶ More than half were refused assistance or services (56%).
 - ▶ Nearly a third received incorrect rent arrears notices (31%) and nearly a third had issues with lease renewals (31%).
 - ▶ 41% were threatened with eviction.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *"When you complain all members of staff will find out about it , even maintenance staff, and their behavior toward you becomes uniformly hostile, regardless of how well you got along with them until then."*

- **85% of those who had engaged in a complaint or grievance process experienced a negative impact on their wellbeing.**
 - ▶ 71% said their mental health was harmed.
 - ▶ 82% had disturbed sleep.
 - ▶ 82% experienced frustration.
 - ▶ 65% felt afraid of becoming homeless again.
 - ▶ 44% had missed or disrupted work or appointments.
 - ▶ 38% said their physical health was harmed.

Comments from surveyed tenants include:

- ▶ *"I am taking far more medicine than I was due to the stress from dealing with my provider."*
- ▶ *"I still think about the harassment I received when trying to move, so it negatively impacted my mental health."*

- ▶ *“The fact that the staff take things personally instead of remembering that they work in supportive housing aggravates the problems and does harm to tenants.”*
“The impact of the grievance process on my physical and mental health has been an increase of stress which triggers migraines, seizures, GERD, nightmares, also insomnia. Some weekends I have too little sleep and am in complete pain. Other times then it leads to where I oversleep catching up on sleep and miss appointments or other activities I was expected to be at. The grievance process itself also led to significant mistrust between my supportive housing provider and myself, or as some may say, seeing their true colors. Those who have been around the system long enough may say they aren’t surprised.”
- ▶ *“The experience of living in supportive housing can cause even total isolation on its own. Being involved in a complaint process can heighten the stress to the level that it does very serious damage to all relationship with the outside world.”*

Supportive Housing Tenant Profile: David

Bronx native David experienced the worst facets of New York City’s supportive housing system during his 25 years as a tenant in the system. As a result, David is a passionate advocate for improvements and accountability. “I don’t want [what] happened to me, to happen to anyone else. It can be avoided. I want to see things get better,” he says. He has been a member of SHOUT for two years.

David experienced numerous hardships in supportive housing, including uninhabitable living conditions and health hazards, such as burst pipes in his apartment and the one above him, lack of assistance maintaining benefits, being coerced into signing documents claiming he damaged his apartment in ways he did not, and being harassed and assaulted by staff. David’s supportive housing was supposed to help his mental health, but it harmed it instead. “I hadn’t been in the hospital for 30 years. That was one of my proudest accomplishments. I had been stable for 25 years and in less than two years, they undid that”, he says.

David received little or no support for basic necessities. After COVID, David needed to get on Medicaid. When he talked to his program director about it, she responded with “I know nothing about that,” he says. “Any benefits I have now are the result of me finding out and doing it myself. SNAP, the discount fare program, even my current housing—[that] was all me...They [were] no help at all.”

Threats of being made homeless shadowed attempts David made to address issues with his housing. David recalls a situation in which he stayed at a friend’s place to avoid noise from a neighbor, about which he had filed a 311 complaint. When David mentioned this to his housing and program directors “things got nasty,” he says. David recalls one of the directors saying: “You haven’t been living in your apartment, and we’ve been paying for it.” David explained that he was only away for a short time. “The first words out of that man’s mouth after I said that was, ‘Can you leave your apartment in moving condition?’” David received this as an explicit threat: “In other words, leave.” In another incident, David was assaulted by a housing program staff member. When he notified the program director about the incident, he was again threatened with loss of housing: “I said, ‘Look this guy did this’ and the housing people said... ‘You don’t sound like someone that would be in our housing program.’”

When his elderly dog had an accident on the floor of his apartment, another program director told him: “We’re going to have to tell your landlord about this.” This was terrifying for David. “The

minute she said that she sort of hinted that my housing was in jeopardy now because of this...I completely collapsed. I thought 'Oh my god, I'm going to be homeless.' I immediately equated this with being evicted again. I didn't know what evictions were. I didn't know anything about my rights."

David was never fully informed of his rights as a supportive housing tenant, including that tenants have the right to file complaints with their housing program's oversight agency. "No previous housing workers, including the Director, never mentioned anything about [taking complaints to the Oversight agency]. It was all 'You do this because we tell you to, you do that because we tell you to, or these consequences are going to happen to you.' It was intimidation. Nothing about actually doing something that would be positive for me as a tenant."

David made efforts to address these issues, despite information about his rights having been withheld. But he was met with barriers. After making the noise complaint to 311, he received a call back: "'There's nothing we can do,'" he was told. 'You have to take him to court.'" This was not possible for David due to the deterioration in his health caused by the very issues he sought to address, and the lack of support from his provider. "I wasn't going to go to Bronx Housing Court," he says. "I was barely functioning at this time." At one point, David's case manager visited his apartment and noticed that "maintenance issues" were needed but, David says, "they just didn't want to deal with them." So, David contacted OMH with a grievance: "You're the agency that oversees this program. Can't you do anything?" he asked. David never saw any outcome of this complaint. "They may have made an inquiry and made note of it, but they didn't do anything."

David says he "consider[s] that the repair issue [in supportive housing] is abuse." "They think we're only numbers on a ledger sheet," he says. "That's it. I don't have a name. I'm tenant so-and-so in apartment such-and-such. And they're getting such and such from OMH to pay for us. We're not human beings. We're dollar bills in their coffers. We're their future vacations."

David's experiences in supportive housing make him an expert at identifying crucial reforms and accountability measures within the system. He suggests "centralizing all complaints about supportive housing in one place. Instead of having...a smorgasbord of agencies." Complaints against supportive housing staff should also be streamlined along with a "mechanism in place to.... take these issues seriously. Investigate them and if there is clear evidence of abuse, that there be punitive, appropriate measures that can be taken, up to and including loss of job and arrest." Discrimination and abuse towards supportive housing tenants requires "consequences... Those million-dollar contracts they're getting, they need to lose them if they prove that they have a poor record when it comes to the rights of their supportive housing tenants. Some of these agencies, they get these contracts and it's like the Wild West, they think they can do anything."

A pseudonym was used for this profile.

Policy Recommendations

The following recommendations are designed to address the interconnected issues surfaced by our research and the experiences of our members. Because supportive housing in New York is overseen by multiple state and city agencies with separate standards, enforcement tools, and complaint pathways, accountability cannot be achieved through grievance processes alone. As this report documents, fragmentation allows complaints to fall between agencies, patterns of harm to go untracked, and enforcement responsibility to remain diffuse. Addressing these failures requires not only clearer

processes at the provider and agency level, but also a form of binding state-level oversight with authority to track patterns, enforce consistency, and intervene when existing oversight mechanisms fail — an issue that extends beyond the scope of these recommendations and is taken up in SHOUT’s legislative priorities.

Strengthen and enforce the rules governing the provision of supportive housing.

Recommendation 1: Implement standard, binding guidelines on all providers contracted to provide supportive housing.

► Develop a single set of statewide supportive housing guidelines.

- Revise the NYS Office of Mental Health Supportive Housing Guidelines, and make them applicable across all agencies providing supportive housing. These revisions establish additional rules for providers and minimum standards for provision of supportive housing and protections for tenants.
- These revised guidelines should be implemented for all supportive housing providers, across all contracted agencies.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen contract requirements between government agencies and the housing providers they contract with. Such contract requirements must include:

- Collaborate with SHOUT to develop clear and actionable service requirements which meet the needs of supportive housing tenants.
- Ensure that service plans are developed with and tailored to each tenant, have a focus on what services the providers will provide (rather than what the tenant will do), and are well documented.⁴
- Ensure that the services available to supportive housing tenants are communicated clearly, so that tenants understand the scope of services that they are entitled to and that their providers are obligated to offer.
- Affirm tenants’ rights to decline any services without risking termination from the program, or to request and receive additional visits/supports as needed.
- Require contracted providers to maintain all supportive housing apartments in habitable condition, including free of code violations cited by any housing standards agency.
- Add clear and enforceable eviction prevention requirements, including maintenance of rent supports and other income-related benefits.
- Reduce the case load maximum for case workers, to allow for quality services.

⁴ These service plan requirements already exist in supportive housing guidelines but are emphasized here because tenants experience that they are not being followed.



SHOUT members testify at a New York City Council hearing. (Photo by NYC Council Media Unit)

The case load maximum should be reduced to 20 from 30, with programs given flexibility to further reduce case loads where caseworkers are supporting clients with particularly acute service needs.

- Ensure all contracts are inclusive of the Supportive Housing Guidelines.

Recommendation 3: Implement and enforce meaningful penalties for providers who violate their contractual requirements or fail to meet supportive housing guidelines.

- Require annual, thorough program audits.
 - Include tenants in the auditing process in a trauma-informed way that invites meaningful, comfortable participation. A tenant survey is not sufficient. Oversight agencies should solicit input from tenants through invitations to one-on-one, confidential conversations, rather than providers selecting the tenants to participate.
 - Providers should not be allowed to participate or be present for any conversations that include tenants.

- Tenant feedback should be maintained as anonymous to prevent any risk of provider retaliation for tenants who speak openly and honestly about their experiences.
- Require an automatic audit for programs who have filed an eviction case against more than 10 percent of tenants in a 12 month period.
- Ensure providers cannot be awarded new service contracts if they are not in compliance with contract requirements after an audit.
- Create a mechanism for agencies to withhold contract payments where provider is in default of their obligations.

Standardize policies and practices across contracting agencies and supportive housing providers, including comprehensive, standardized complaint processes at both the provider and agency levels.

Recommendation 4: Create and require the use of uniform document templates and provider processes across all supportive housing providers, including:

- Uniform client document request forms.
- Uniform reasonable accommodations policies (including service animals and emotional support animals).
- Uniform provider-level complaint process, including explicit advisories on tenants rights' to contact the agencies overseeing their supportive housing providers, along with contact information to do so (see Appendix 1).
- Uniform tenant rights notification documents.
- Uniform policy that no leases can be more restrictive than those for non-supportive housing tenants (e.g. prohibit clauses that say that tenants can't decorate, can't have a pet in a pet-friendly building, can't live with family, can't have guests or overnight guests, etc.).

Recommendation 5: Create and enforce standard guidance regarding frequency and nature of face-to-face visits:

- Clarify the number of annual inspections required in supportive housing programs, and the distinction between apartment inspections and face-to-face check-ins.
- Allow for flexibility and accommodations in face-to-face check-in scheduling, including options for phone or Zoom meetings and neutral meeting spaces (not in the tenants' apartment).
- Ensure providers provide reasonable accommodations for people who cannot do face-to-face visits or home visits due to health issues or disabilities.
- Affirm tenants' right to request more visits as needed.
- Prohibit unannounced visits except in the case of an emergency.

Recommendation 6: Create a uniform, mandatory provider-level complaint process across all supportive housing providers and oversight agencies, including uniform notices for providers to issue to tenants.

- See Appendix 1 for details.
- Ensure that tenants are protected from retaliation if engaging in a complaints process.
- Ensure that all provider-level complaint policies include information about how to make a complaint to the relevant oversight agency.

Recommendation 7: Create a uniform complaint process for tenants to file complaints directly with the oversight agency for their housing.

- See Appendix 2 for details.
- Ensure that tenants are protected from retaliation if engaging in a complaints process.

Recommendation 8: Explore the creation of a centralized Supportive Housing Ombudsman or Tenants Services Department, to streamline complaints and oversight across agencies.

Improve transparency, so tenants can more easily learn their rights and access information about their providers.

Recommendation 9: Pass State Assembly Bill A868 (2026) to create a uniform, mandatory Notice of Tenants Rights for all supportive housing tenants in New York State.

- **In the immediate term, OMH should align its Tenants Rights notice requirements and format with the DOHMH form Tenants Notice of Rights (which is primarily based on state-wide housing law and tenant protections).**

Recommendation 10: Create clear systems for tenants to obtain information about their rights, their providers' obligations, and the contracting agencies overseeing their housing.

- Post uniform tenant information, policy and guidance documents on provider and contracting agency websites in formats that are easy to navigate, written in plain language, and accessible to people with disabilities and limited digital literacy.
- Provide an accessible mechanism for tenants to determine what agency holds service contracts with their housing provider.



SHOUT members at City Hall with former Deputy Speaker of the New York City Council, Diana Ayala

Recommendation 11: Create and distribute plain-language materials to communicate (1) the source of funding for the provider, (2) what services the program is contracted to provide and (3) what services are actually being provided.

Recommendation 12: Increase transparency around provider violations including publishing violations and corrective action plans on the agency website.

Develop and implement new practices to ensure apartments are sufficiently inspected for repair needs.

Recommendation 13: Create an inspection requirement for all supportive housing before move-in (similar to inspections for Section 8, CityFHEPS, etc.).

- Providers should not receive their subsidy payments for a given unit until that unit passes inspection.

Recommendation 14: The Department of Housing Preservation and Development should hire additional code enforcement staff to conduct routine annual inspections in all supportive housing units in New York City.

Improve training and protocol for calls made to 311.

Recommendation 15: Provide additional training and develop protocol for 311 operators to:

- **Ensure all 311 operators are familiar with supportive housing.**
- **Ensure all 311 operators know how to appropriately direct complaints,** with complaints about providers being directed to the appropriate oversight agency, and complaints about repairs being directed to HPD.

Create meaningful, enforceable anti-eviction protections for supportive housing tenants.

Recommendation 16: Legislate a non-eviction approach across all New York State supportive housing.

Recommendation 17: Establish mandatory pre-eviction requirements for all providers, including minimum obligations to timely inform tenants of arrears owed (within one month of occurrence), affirmative requirements to provide meaningful case-management (i.e. not merely referrals) to preserve public benefits and apply for rent arrears assistance, and to provide notice to oversight agencies of any pending evictions.

Recommendation 18: Mandate that any eviction case filed against a tenant in supportive housing clearly identify the tenant's eligibility for supportive services in the petition.

Recommendation 19: Add protections to the Lease Requirements and Termination sections to prevent "at-will" terminations and terminations based on lease terms or program rules that are discriminatory in nature (i.e. terms which would not apply to non-supportive tenants).

Call to Action

Supportive housing all too often fails to support. Providers fail to respect tenants' rights, provide necessary services, or make repairs. When tenants seek to make complaints and demand changes related to issues with their housing conditions or their provider, they are met with nearly impenetrable systems, limited recourse, and threats of retaliation: impacting their mental and physical health and having a chilling effect on future complaints. This must change.

SHOUT calls on our elected officials and City and State agencies to take immediate action to enact our comprehensive recommendations to ensure that supportive housing can fulfill its stated goals and purpose.

We encourage supportive housing tenants and applicants, as well as our allies, to learn more about SHOUT and the different ways to get involved: **www.shoutnyc.org**



SHOUT member speaks at a rally. (Photo by Ben Fractenberg, *The City Reporter*)

Appendices

Appendix 1: Uniform complaint process at the housing provider level

- **Provider must provide a clear, written notice to the tenant upon leasing/occupancy and on request explaining the program-level complaint process,** which must include the following uniform information:
 - A clear explanation as to how to submit either a verbal or written complaint to the provider, including a correct and up to date contact information for the program director or designee assigned to respond to complaints;
 - A clear statement that the tenant may initiate a complaint with the oversight agency for their housing at any time (regardless of whether they first initiate a complaint with their provider.);
 - A clear and uniform time frame for review of the complaint and the provision of a response. We recommend 7 days, with an immediate response required where complaints allege an immediate safety issue for the tenant or neighbors;
 - A clear explanation of how and when the individual or complainant is provided written notice of the program's resolution or decision;
 - Clear explanation of how to appeal the resolution or decision, including to the applicable oversight agency.
- **Requirement that a facility level resolution/response be provided in writing to the tenant, and, where requested, be read aloud or discussed verbally.**
- **Requirement that providers maintain comprehensive records of all complaints,** including the initial complaint, investigation details, actions taken, and resolutions. Oversight agencies should regularly review these records to identify patterns or systemic issues that require attention.
- **Requirement that providers and oversight agencies use the gathered data and feedback from complaints to identify areas for improvement in supportive housing operations.** Providers and oversight agencies should regularly review and update policies and procedures to prevent future complaints and enhance accountability.

Appendix 2 : Uniform Agency-Level Complaint Process

- **Centering and Accommodating Tenants with Mental Health Conditions and Disabilities:** Many supportive housing tenants are people living with apparent or non-apparent mental health conditions and disabilities. Ensuring disability justice and equity should be central to the approach to the complaint resolution process, including

a dedicated commitment to accommodating and assisting tenants to successfully report and resolve complaints. This may include: allowance of extra time to respond to agency communications, accommodation of tenant communication differences and accommodation of communication-related requests, staff assistance and support in the reporting and documentation process, and other measures necessary to facilitate an effective complaint resolution process as needed by the tenant-complainant.

- **Access to Information**

- ▶ Each oversight agency must make a user-friendly contact page, including phone number, email, and online complaint form, available through a Supportive Housing landing page.
- ▶ Each agency should create a tenant-friendly program lookup tool, where tenants can search by their address and/or program to identify their contracting agency.
- ▶ Each agency should require providers to include contact information for the agency complaint process on all provider level complaint policies along with clear guidance advising tenants of their right to make a complaint to their oversight agency at any time, regardless of whether they choose to initiate a provider-level complaint.

- **Transparency and Reporting:**

- ▶ Each agency should maintain transparency by providing regular reports on the number, types, and resolutions of complaints to stakeholders, including residents, staff, and relevant oversight bodies. This helps build trust and ensures accountability.

- **Due Process and Access to Legal Representation:**

- ▶ Agencies should uphold tenants' right to include an identified legal advocate in any communication with the agency, including through written OR verbal authorization.
- ▶ Agencies should uphold tenants' rights to access information and documentation of their complaint resolution on request and at any time.
- ▶ Regardless of whether or not a tenant is able to secure legal representation, agencies have a duty to assist tenants in reporting and documenting complaints at each stage of the agency complaint process.

- **AGENCY-LEVEL COMPLAINT PROCESS:**

- ▶ **Step 1: Tenant contact**

- Upon contacting their oversight agency, tenants should receive a reference number to track their customer service inquiry.

- If a tenant contacts 311 and is referred to their oversight agency, the agency should maintain records of both the tenant's agency complaint number, and the 311 Service Request Number.

► **Step 2: Initial Agency Outreach**

- Within two business days of a complaint, a representative from the oversight agency should attempt to make initial contact with the tenant-complainant. Outreach to the tenant should be made by phone and email.
- Upon making contact, tenants should be provided with a full name, title, and contact information (including email at which to send documents) for the field office representative assigned to their complaint.
- Where a complaint involves habitability concerns, the agency must affirmatively advise tenants of their right to report conditions in need of repair to the relevant housing enforcement agencies in their jurisdiction, and that tenants may provide the agency with the SR number or violation number (if any) for this complaint.

► **Step 3: Complaint Review**

- Within a week of initial contact, the agency field office representative should review the complaint in full with the tenant to clarify all issues and ensure information is accurate.
 - ◆ This review can be telephonic, over a web-conferencing system, or in person according to tenant preference.
 - ◆ Tenants in need of interpretation should receive the benefit of interpretation services during this call.
- Tenants should have the opportunity to submit any evidence pertaining to their complaint to the agency field office representative to support their complaint, and should receive a written confirmation of receipt of any supplemental evidence or documentation.
 - ◆ Agencies should provide clear pathways for how to submit evidence by mail, email, or in person.
 - ◆ Agency staff (including peers) have a duty to assist with evidence submission as needed or requested by the tenant.
- Tenants should receive a final written copy of the verified complaint, once reviewed by agency representatives.
- Any complaints that include allegations of immediate risk to life, health, or safety—including hazardous conditions in the unit or substantial risk of violent incidents—should be marked as “emergency” status and placed on an expedited resolution timeline.

► **Step 4: Agency Investigation**

- Upon completion of Complaint Review, the agency must send a copy of the finalized complaint to the agency Provider contact. The agency may include all evidence provided by the tenant in this initial contact as well as the tracking number for the complaint.
- Depending on the nature of the complaint, providers should provide a response within three days (non-emergency complaint) or 24 hours (emergency complaint).
- The agency should request relevant evidence necessary to investigate and resolve a tenant's complaint, including surveillance footage and incident reports.
- The agency should also investigate any records maintained by relevant city or state agencies pertaining to the complaint, including HPD violation and complaint reports and NYPD police reports.
- Any response or responsive evidence sent by the provider must be shared with the tenant and, if applicable, tenant's legal representatives.
- All correspondence with the provider must be made available to the tenant in writing, upon request, at any time in the proceeding.

► **Step 5: Resolution Process**

- Following investigation, the agency may schedule a meeting (virtual or in person) for resolution. The meeting shall include tenant, provider, an agency field office representative, peer advocates and/or counsel for any of the parties.
- A written decision shall result from the investigation and/or (if applicable) resolution meeting, which includes a summary of the issue and a description of the facts and evidence on which the agency based their decision. The written decision must be sent to the tenant, provider, and any identified legal representatives.
 - ◆ If the agency investigation substantiates the existence of an issue in need of correction, the resolution must include a corrective action plan with a timeline for full compliance.
 - ◆ If the agency investigation does not substantiate the tenant's complaint, the agency must additionally advise the tenant of their right to appeal the agency's decision on the complaint through appeal to the agency Commissioner and/or an Article 78 action.

► **Step 6: Post-Resolution Follow Up**

- The agency will maintain the complaint as "open" until all commitments in the corrective action plan are completed.

- “Completion” occurs when all parties agree that a corrective action was completed satisfactorily.
- Where the agency determines that resolution is not possible, the agency will assist the tenant in pursuing a transfer to a different program or provider.
- If any item is not resolved satisfactorily within the timeframe permitted in the corrective action plan, the agency will require the provider to provide a written update on a weekly basis as to the status of corrective action, not to exceed three weeks.
- After three weeks of noncompliance, the agency will place the provider on a probationary list. The probationary list will be published to the agency’s website.
- All records of retaliation and/or noncompliance with an agency corrective action plan will be included in the provider’s regular audits as an issue for corrective action under that provider’s agency contract.

► **Retaliation:**

- If a tenant reports retaliation as a result of their engagement with the agency complaint process, the agency will immediately investigate and, if substantiated, will add the provider to the probationary list.
- Agencies will require the provider and any staff engaged in retaliatory conduct to participate in a mandatory re-training on illegal retaliatory conduct, and will not remove the provider from the probationary list until such retraining is completed.

► **Enforcement:**

- Three or more instances of retaliation and/or noncompliance with an agency corrective action plan by a contracted provider shall result in a heightened corrective action plan, including mandatory discharge of non-compliant program staff members and, in severe instances, discontinuance of agency contracts.

► **Data, Monitoring, and Improvement:**

- Agencies should regularly monitor and review the complaint process to identify any systemic issues, recurring patterns, or areas for improvement. Use the data and feedback obtained from complaints to enhance policies, training, or procedures to prevent future complaints and improve oversight.
- This process should include follow-up interviews with tenants who have gone through the complaint process with the agency to discuss their experience and satisfaction with the resolution process.

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Near the publication of this report, three City agencies issued new guidance documents.

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Notes

