

BRIEFING PAPER

NYC Homeless Shelter Population Reaches All-Time High

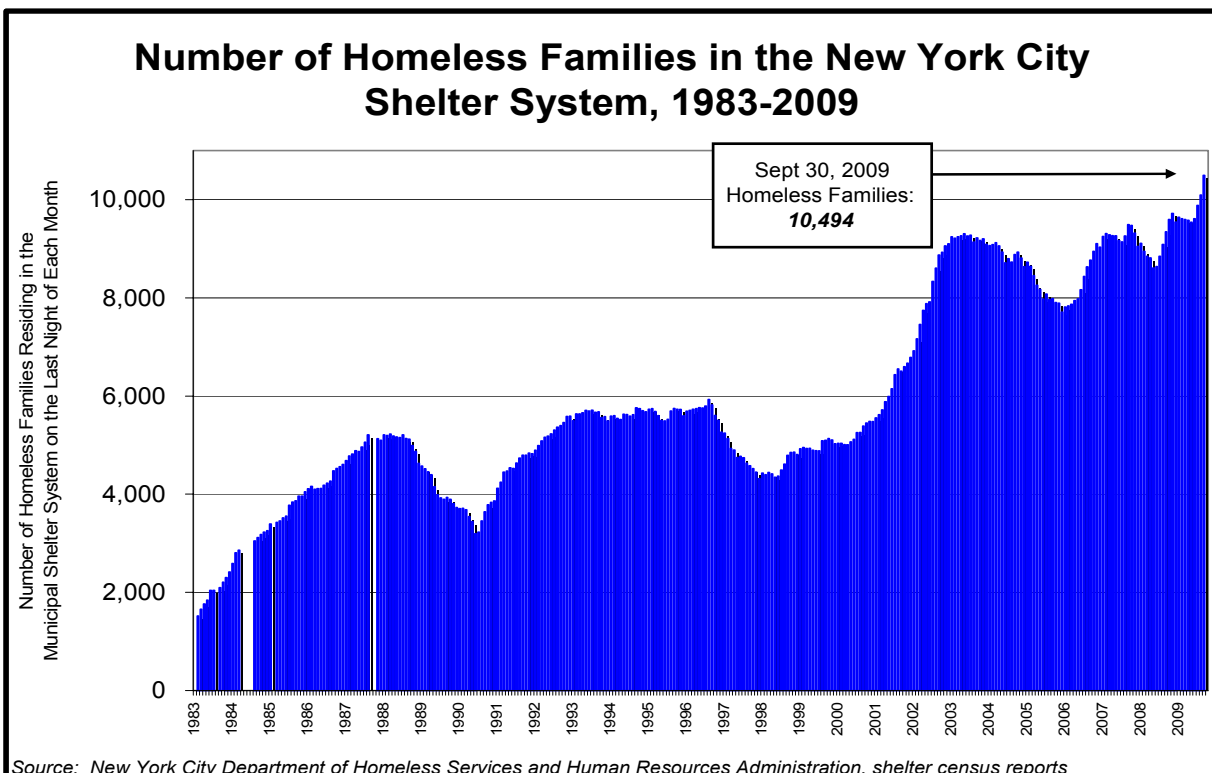
Over 39,000 Homeless People and 10,000 Homeless Families in Shelters Each Night; 45 Percent More New Yorkers Homeless Each Year Since Mayor Bloomberg Took Office

October 13, 2009

By Patrick Markee, Senior Policy Analyst, Coalition for the Homeless

Newly released data show that, for the first time ever, more than 39,000 homeless New Yorkers – including more than 10,000 homeless families, an all-time high -- sleep in municipal shelters each night. City data also show that, since Mayor Bloomberg took office, 45 percent more New Yorkers sleep in municipal homeless shelters each year. All in all, the new City data confirm that the current year is the worst on record for New York City homelessness since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Following are the highlights:

- ***There are now more than 39,000 homeless adults and children sleeping in the New York City shelter system each night – the first time ever the shelter population has reached this level.***
- ***There are also more than 10,000 homeless families (with more than 16,500 children) sleeping each night in New York City shelters, an all-time record. Since last year the number of homeless families sleeping each night in municipal shelters has increased by 12 percent.***
- ***During the recently-ended City fiscal year, more than 120,000 different New Yorkers (including nearly 44,000 children) slept in municipal homeless shelters. And since Mayor Bloomberg took office, 45 percent more New Yorkers sleep in municipal shelters each year.***



By every available measure, homelessness in New York City has not only worsened dramatically over the past year, but also has risen to historically record levels.

The new City data is further evidence for an immediate change in the Bloomberg administration's approach to homelessness. Mayor Bloomberg's 2004 five-year plan to reduce homelessness by two-thirds has failed, and homelessness in New York City is now worse than ever. The Bloomberg administration's central homeless policies must be reformed.

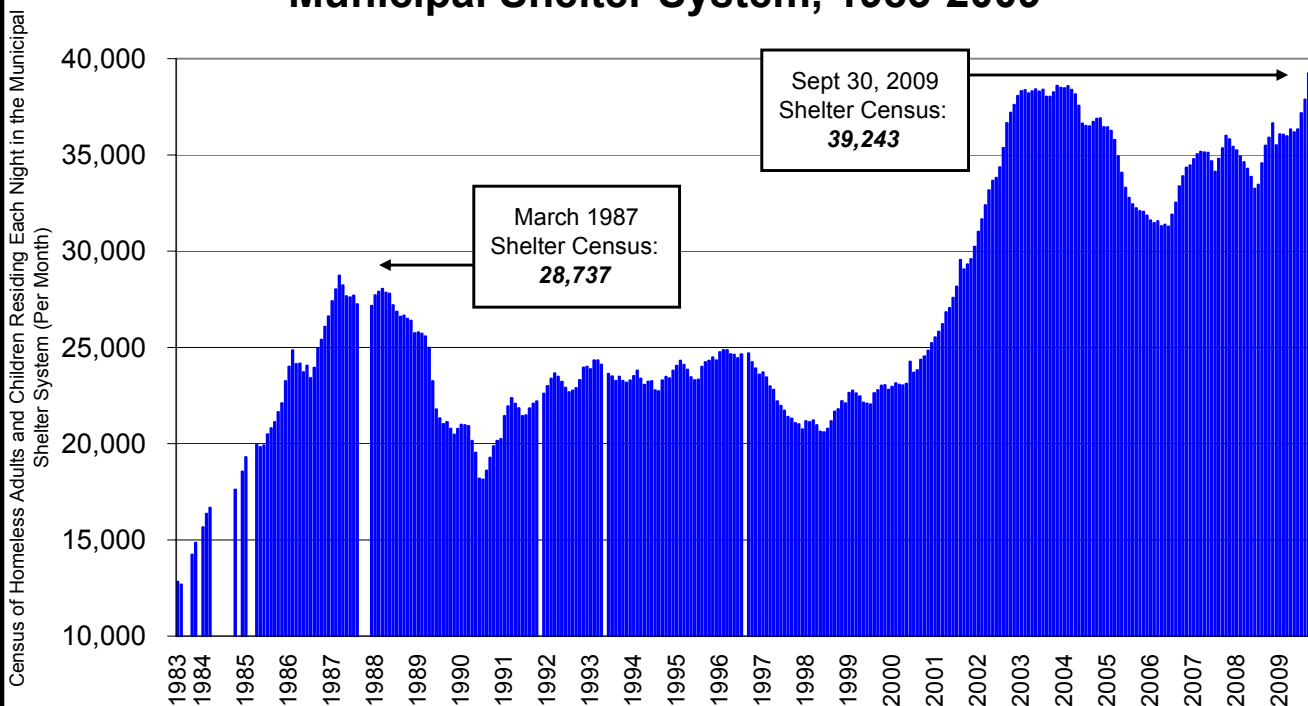
Coalition for the Homeless calls on the next New York City mayor to abandon the current approach to homelessness and instead to embrace proven, successful policies that will genuinely reduce homelessness. This includes providing long-term affordable housing assistance (including Federal housing aid) to homeless families and children, and providing permanent supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other disabilities.

1. All-Time Record New York City Homeless Shelter Population

Amidst rising unemployment and the acute shortage of low-cost rental housing, the number of homeless people and the number of homeless families in New York City municipal shelters has reached all-time record highs. Following are highlights of recently released City data:¹

- At the end of September there were **39,243 homeless adults and children sleeping in New York City municipal shelters, an all-time record.** This is the first time ever that the number of homeless people sleeping each night in the New York City shelter system has exceeded 39,000 people.
- Since last year, the **number of homeless adults and children in New York City shelters each night has increased by 11 percent.**
- At the end of September there were **10,494 homeless families sleeping in New York City municipal shelters, an all-time record.**² In late August the number of homeless families in municipal shelters each night exceeded 10,000 families for the first time ever.
- Since last year, the **number of homeless families in New York City shelters each night has increased by 12 percent.**
- At the end of September there were **16,615 homeless children sleeping in municipal shelters.**³ Over the past year the **number of homeless children in shelters has increased by 10 percent.**
- The growing homeless family shelter population has been driven by historically high numbers of newly homeless families entering the municipal shelter system. In August, an all-time record 1,914 new homeless families entered the shelter system, and the past year has seen the **largest number of new homeless families entering shelters since modern homelessness began.**⁴
- As Coalition for the Homeless noted in a recent briefing paper, the number of homeless single adults has also increased significantly during the past year, and **the municipal shelter system is currently on the verge of running out of beds for homeless single men and women.**⁵ At the end of September there were **7,631 homeless single adults in municipal shelters, an increase of 11 percent from the previous year.**⁶

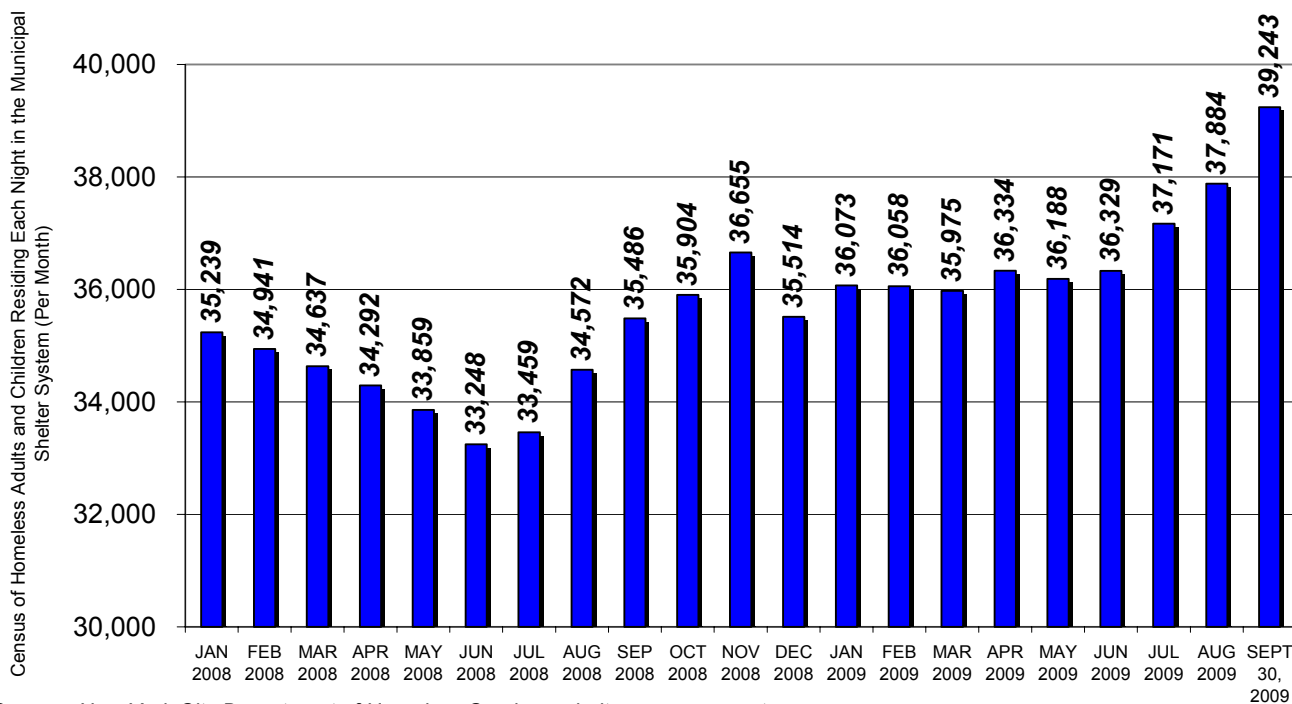
New York City: Census of Homeless People in the Municipal Shelter System, 1983-2009



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration, shelter census reports

Note: Data for 2008 and 2009 does not include homeless people in "stabilization beds" -- DHS does not publicly report this data.

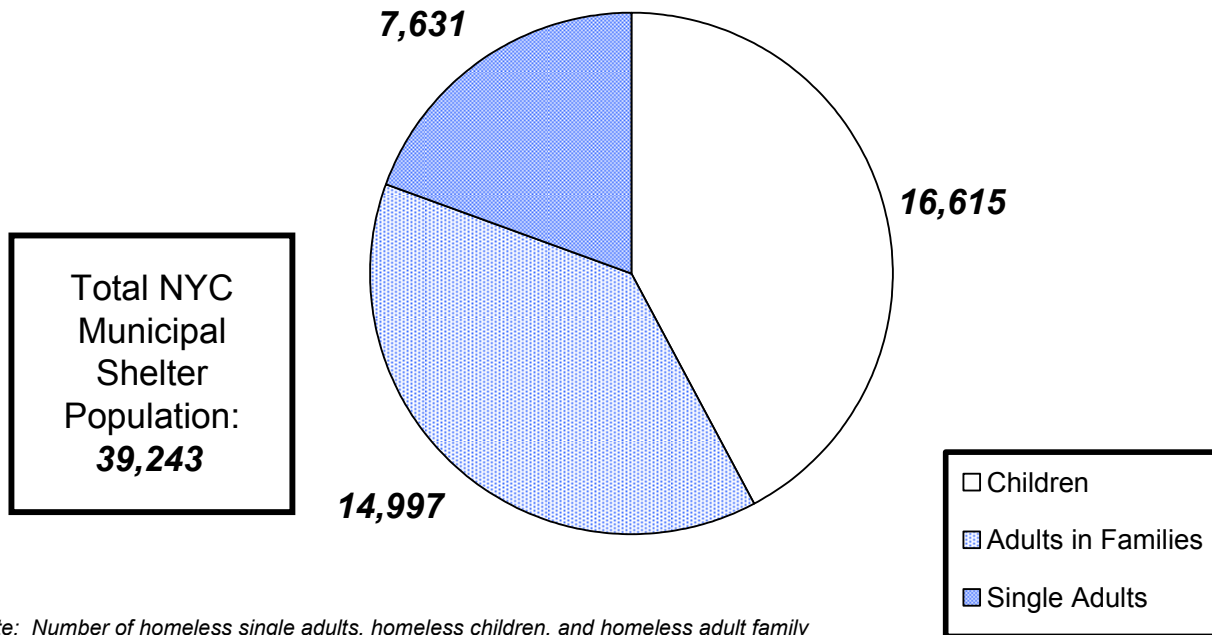
New York City: Number of Homeless People in the Municipal Shelter System, 2008-2009



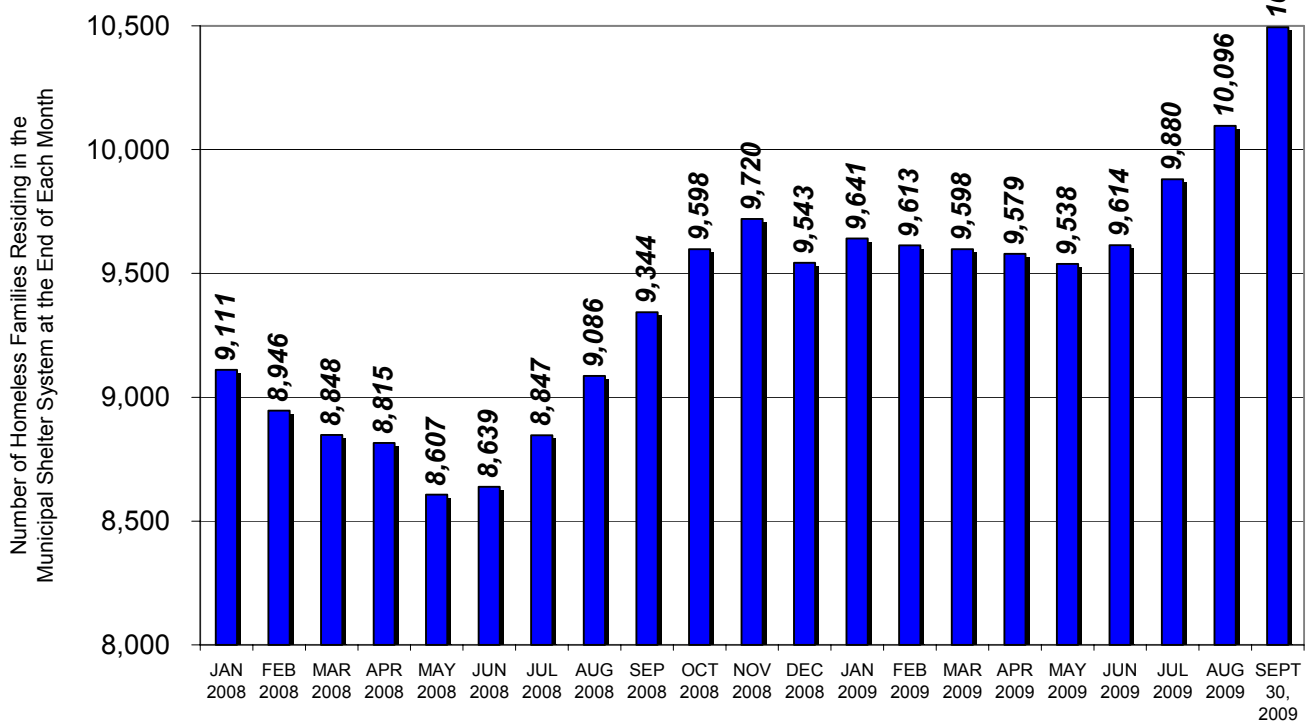
Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, shelter census reports

Note: Data for 2008 and 2009 does not include homeless people in "stabilization beds" -- DHS does not publicly report this data.

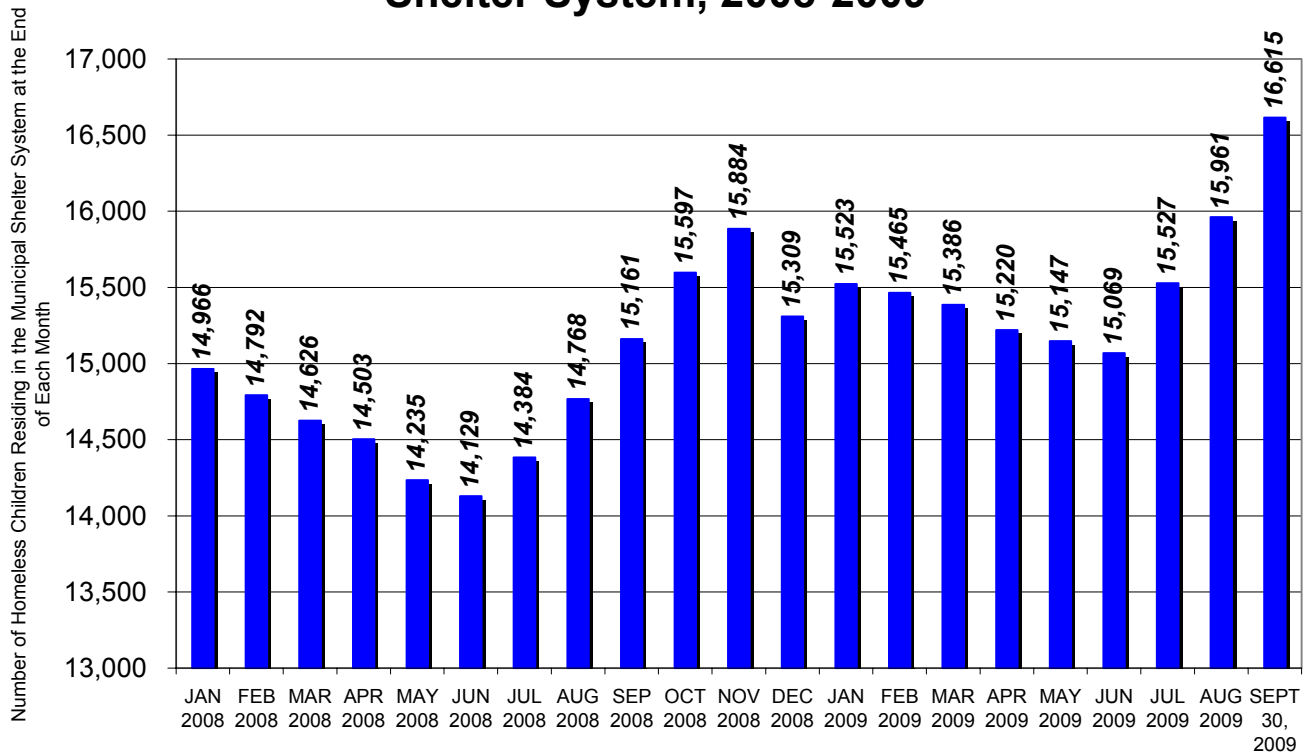
New York City: Census of Homeless People in the Municipal Shelter System, September 30, 2009



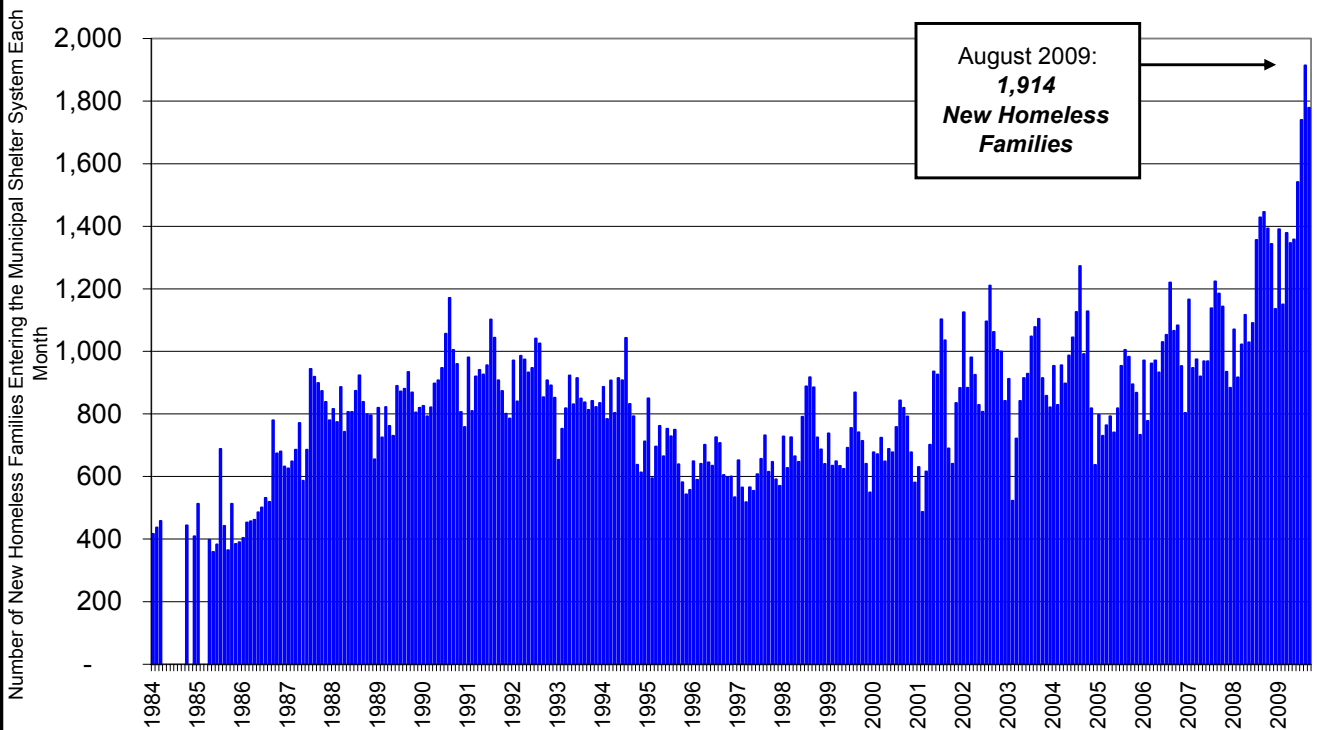
Number of Homeless Families in the New York City Shelter System, 2008-2009



Number of Homeless Children in the New York City Shelter System, 2008-2009

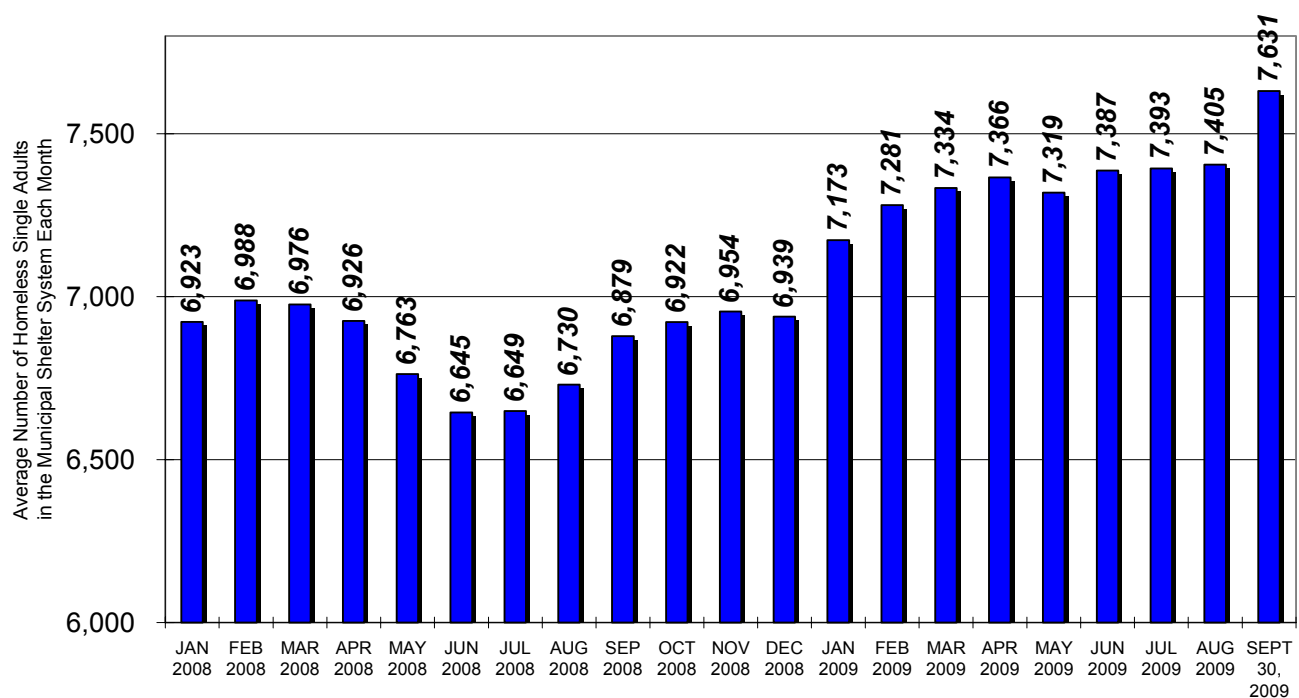


New York City: Number of New Homeless Families Entering Municipal Shelter System Each Month, 1983-2009



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services and Human Resources Administration, shelter census reports

New York City: Number of Homeless Single Adults in the Municipal Shelter System, 2008-2009



Source: New York City Department of Homeless Services, shelter census reports

Note: Data for 2008 and 2009 does not include homeless people in "stabilization beds" -- DHS does not publicly report this data.

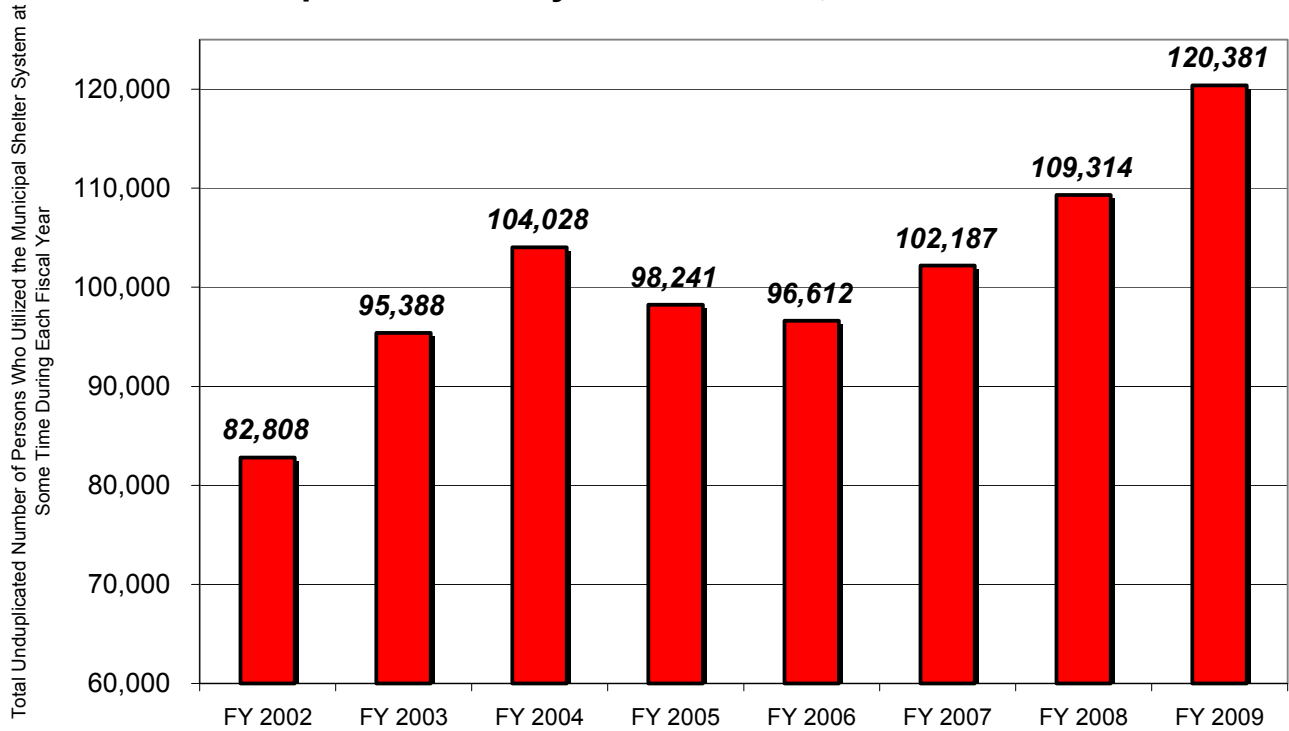
2. More New Yorkers Experiencing Homelessness Each Year

Recently released City data show that, during the past City fiscal year, **45 percent more New Yorkers slept in municipal shelters than when Mayor Bloomberg took office.** Indeed, **over the past year more New Yorkers – and more New York City families and children – experienced homelessness than at any time since the Great Depression of the 1930s.** Following are highlights of the new City data:⁷

- During the recently-ended City fiscal year (FY 2009), **an all-time record 120,381 different homeless men, women, and children slept in the New York City municipal shelter system.**
- **The number of homeless New Yorkers sleeping in municipal shelters in FY 2009 was 10 percent higher than the previous fiscal year, and was 45 percent higher than FY 2002, when Mayor Bloomberg took office.**
- During FY 2009, **an all-time record 43,826 different homeless New York City children** slept in the municipal shelter system. This was 13 percent more than the previous fiscal year, and **42 percent more than FY 2002, when Mayor Bloomberg took office.**
- During FY 2009, **an all-time record 26,353 homeless New York City families** slept in the municipal shelter system. This was 13 percent more than the previous fiscal year, and **65 percent more than FY 2002, when Mayor Bloomberg took office.**
- During FY 2009, **an all-time record 47,429 homeless New York City adults in families** slept in the municipal shelter system. This was 14 percent more than the previous fiscal year, and **83 percent more than FY 2002, when Mayor Bloomberg took office.**

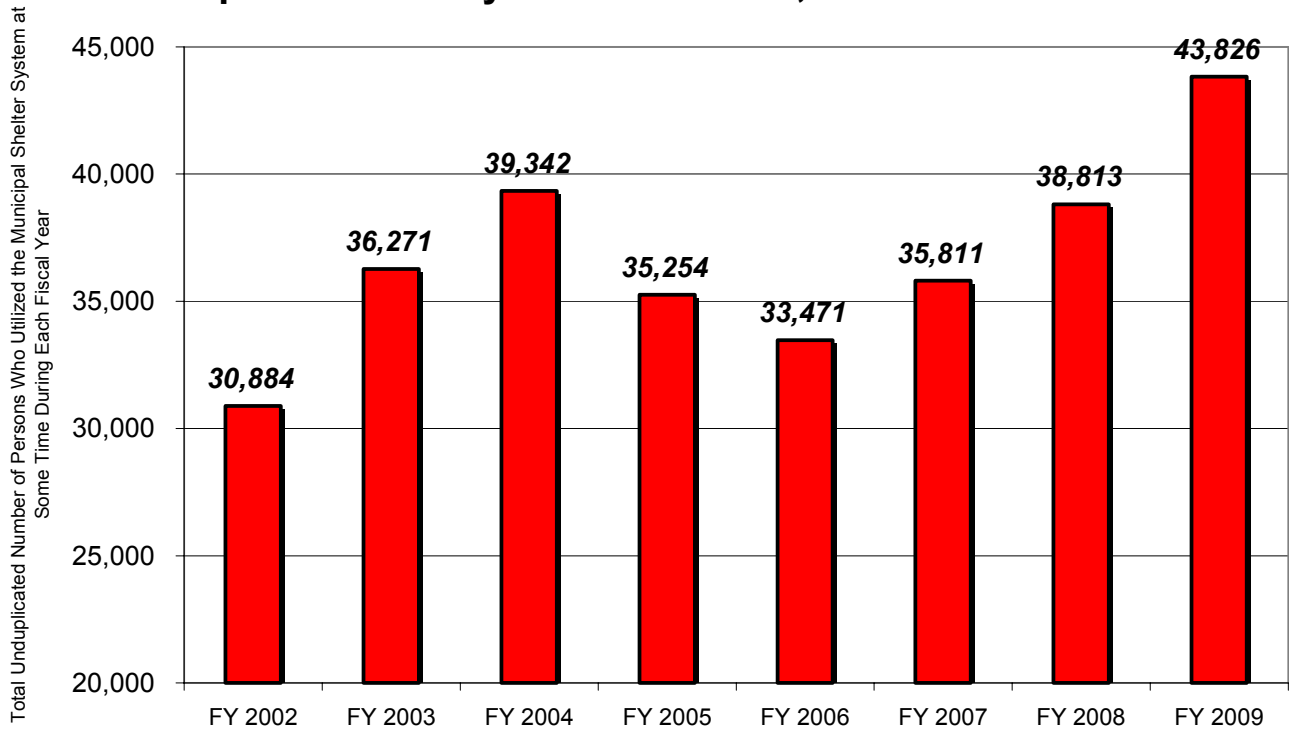
- During FY 2009, **29,126 homeless New York City single adults** slept in the municipal shelter system.⁸ This was 1 percent more than the previous fiscal year, and **12 percent more than FY 2002, when Mayor Bloomberg took office.**
- Over the past year the cost of sheltering homeless families also increased significantly. According to the recently released “Mayor’s Management Report,” in FY 2009 **the annual cost of sheltering a homeless family was \$38,405, which was a 5 percent increase from the previous fiscal year.**⁹
- In FY 2009 the **City of New York spent more on emergency shelter and services for homeless New Yorkers than at any time since modern homelessness began.** According to the “Mayor’s Management Report,” in FY 2009 the NYC Department of Homeless Services’ total expenditures were \$865.1 million, which was 10 percent (\$79.6 million) higher than the previous fiscal year and 60 percent (324.9 million) higher than in FY 2002, when Mayor Bloomberg took office.¹⁰

NYC: Number of Different Homeless Adults and Children Who Slept in Shelter System Per Year, FY 2002-FY 2009



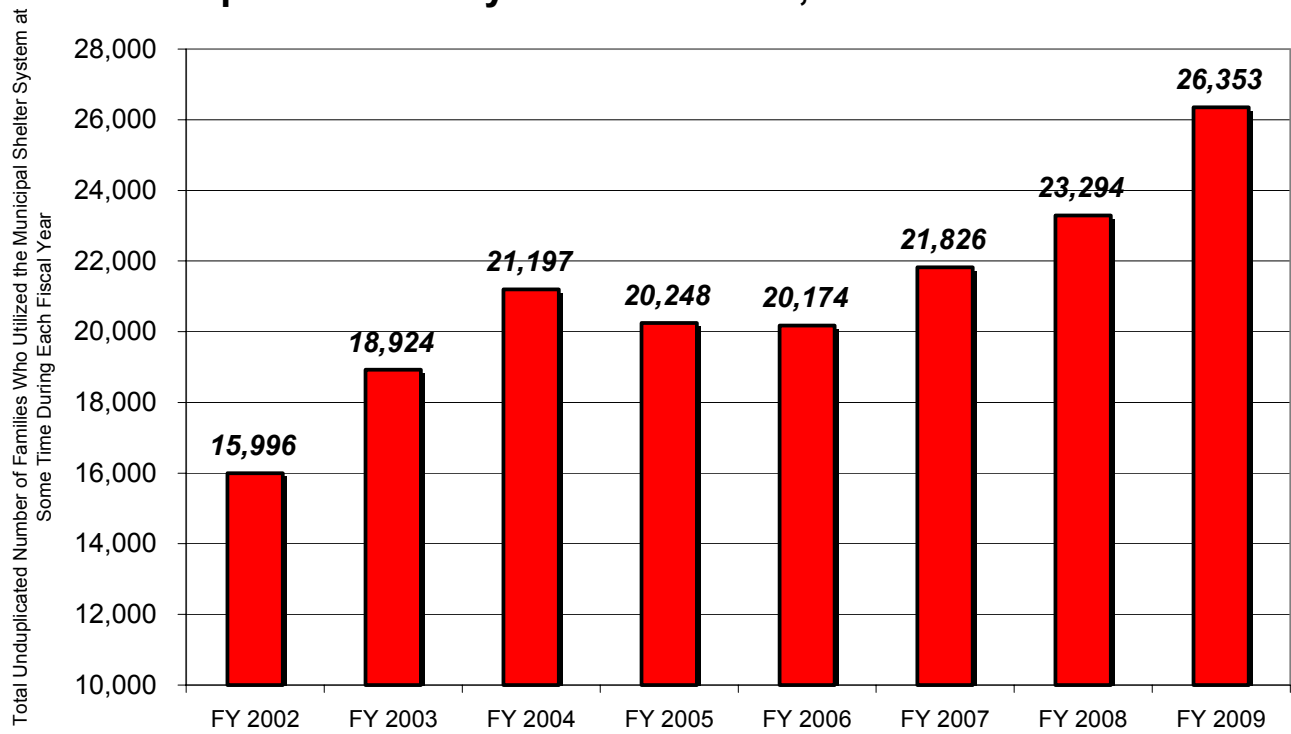
Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

NYC: Number of Different Homeless Children Who Slept in Shelter System Each Year, FY 2002-FY 2009



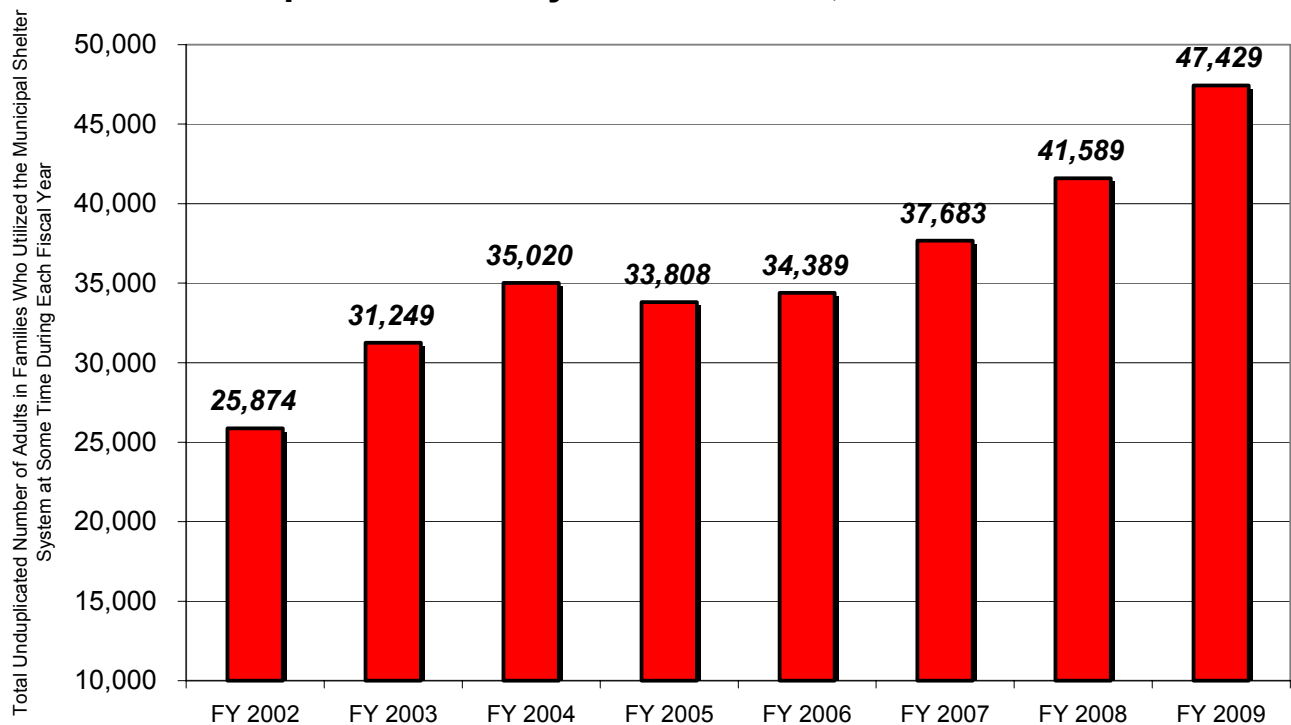
Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

NYC: Number of Different Homeless Families Who Slept in Shelter System Each Year, FY 2002-FY 2009



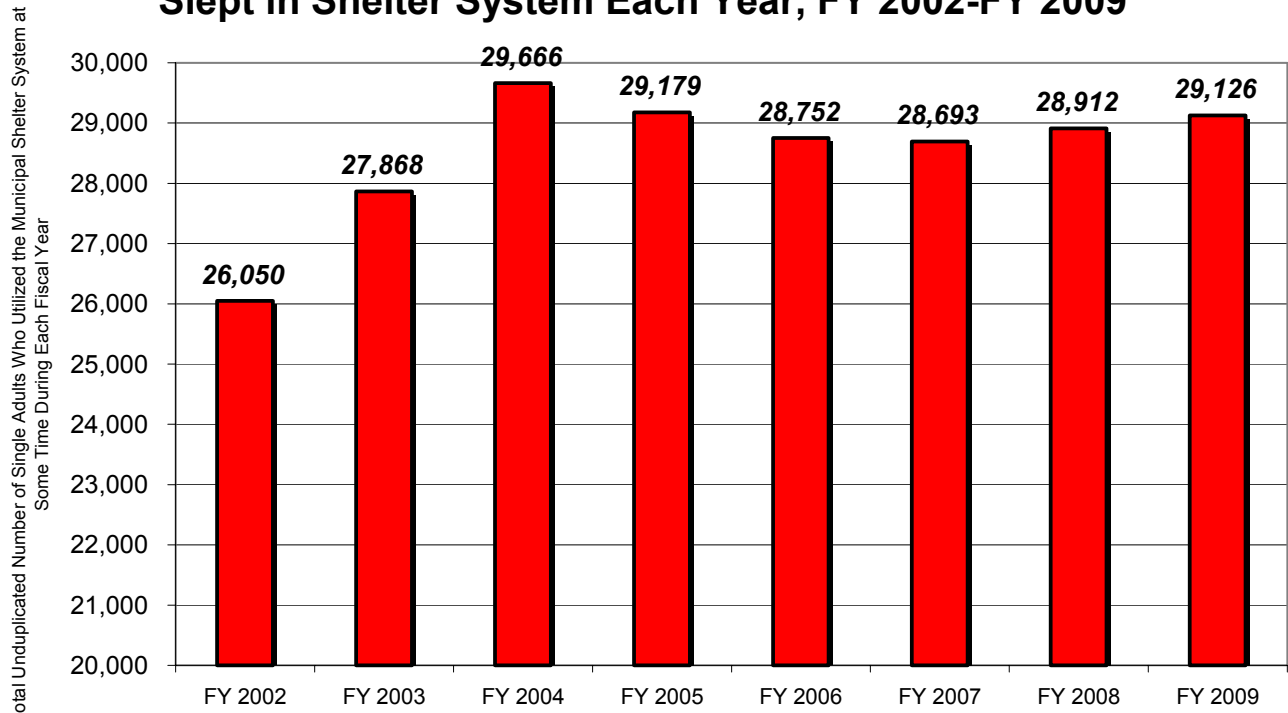
Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

NYC: Number of Different Homeless Adults in Families Who Slept in Shelter System Per Year, FY 2002-FY 2009



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

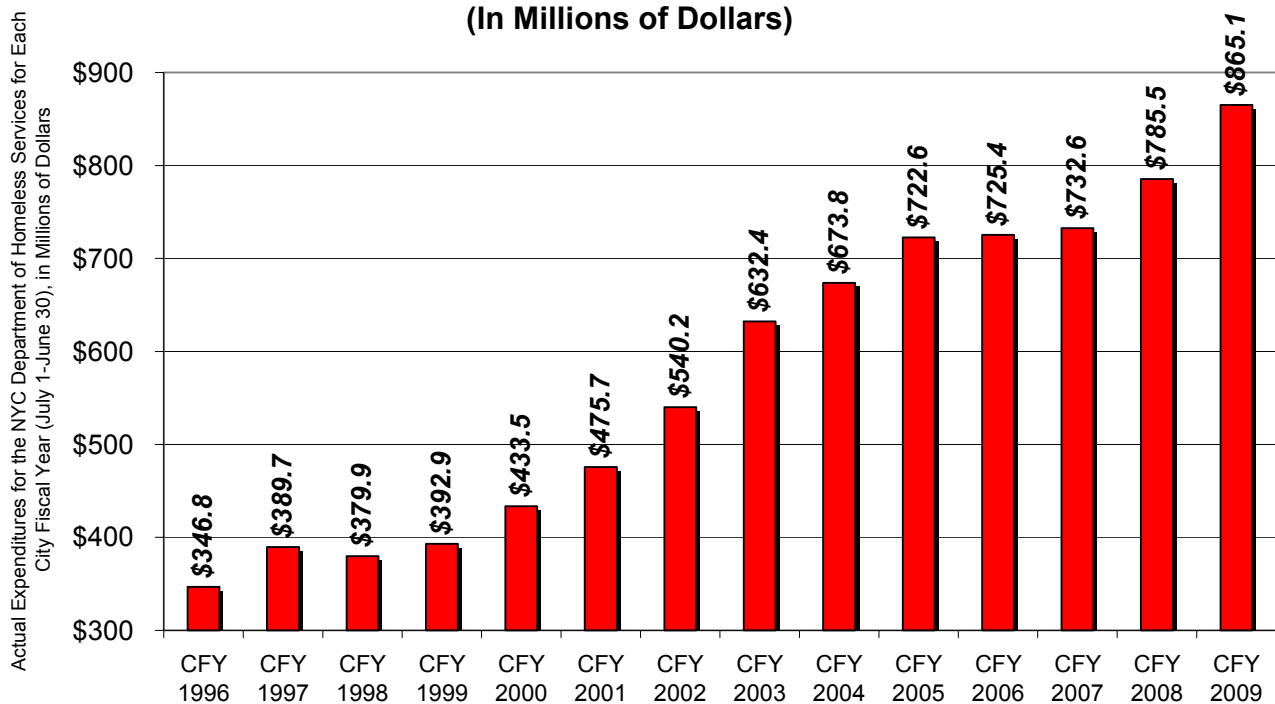
NYC: Number of Different Homeless Single Adults Who Slept in Shelter System Each Year, FY 2002-FY 2009



Source: NYC Department of Homeless Services, Critical Activities Reports

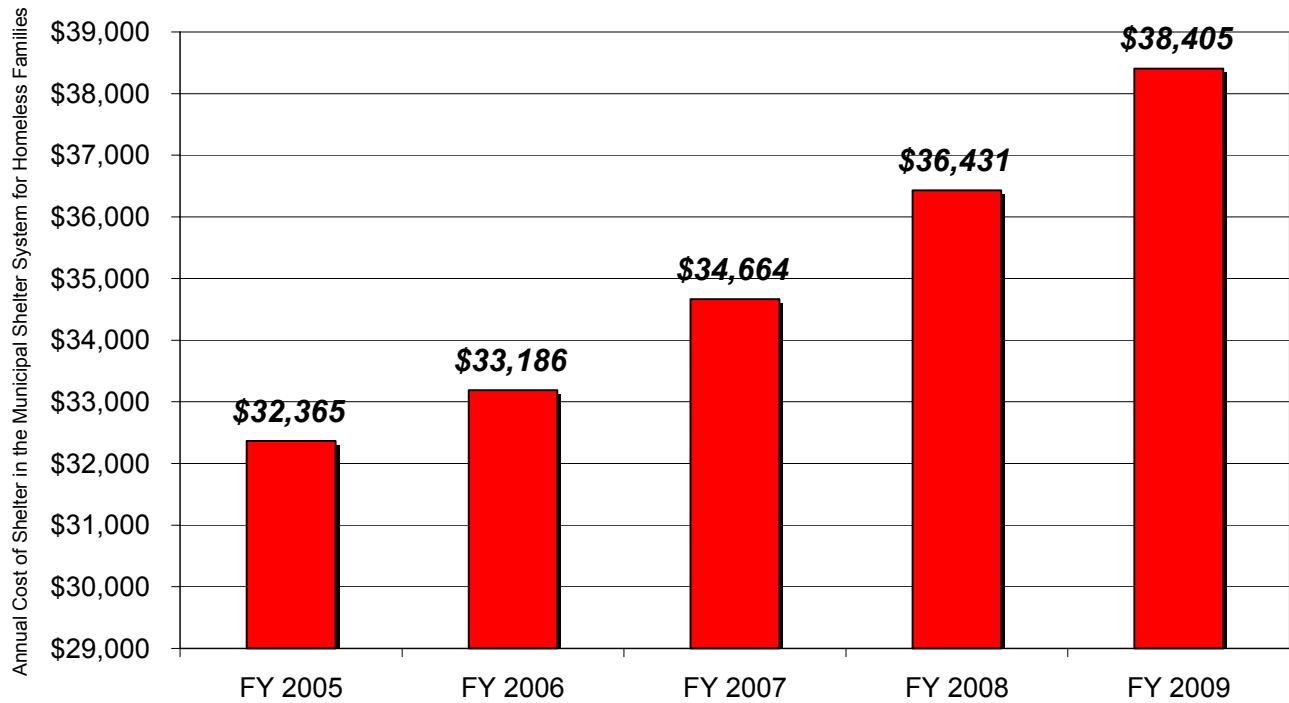
Note: FY 2008 and FY 2009 data do not include homeless adults residing in shelters for veterans and shelters for long-term street homeless individuals (i.e., "safe haven" shelters and "stabilization" beds), because DHS does not include this data in its reports.

New York City: Expenditures on Emergency Shelter and Homeless Services, CFY 1996-CFY 2009 (In Millions of Dollars)



Source: New York City Office of Management and Budget, and City of New York, "Mayor's Management Report FY 2009"

New York City: Annual Cost of Shelter for a Homeless Family, FY 2005-FY 2009



Source: City of New York, Mayor's Management Report, FY 2009

3. Changing Course: The Need for Immediate and Long-term Action

Amidst rising unemployment and the ongoing shortage of affordable rental housing, New York City's next mayor must abandon the flawed policies that have led to all-time record homelessness. The Bloomberg administration's central homeless policies are: (1) cutting off homeless New Yorkers from Federal housing assistance; (2) replacing the proven Federal programs with flawed and untested temporary rent subsidies that create a revolving door back to shelter; and (3) relying on a discredited and punitive "behaviorist" approach to homelessness.

Above all else, the next mayor must abandon these failed homeless policies that have dominated New York City for more than 15 years, during both the Giuliani and Bloomberg administrations. ***Indeed, in the midst of spiraling New York City homelessness and the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression, the only two major homeless policies introduced by Mayor Bloomberg this year were (1) rules to force working-poor homeless families to pay for the cost of shelter; and (2) rules allowing the City to eject homeless families and children from shelters to the streets for missing appointments or if their welfare cases are closed.***

The time to change course has arrived. New York City's next mayor must embrace proven, successful policies that genuinely address the housing affordability crisis affecting growing numbers of New Yorkers. Following is a summary of immediate steps the next mayor can take to reduce homelessness in New York City:

a. Target Federal Housing Aid to Homeless New Yorkers:

- In 2005, the Bloomberg administration cut off homeless New Yorkers from longstanding priority for Federal housing programs, including Section 8 rental vouchers and public housing.

- This year the City will distribute more than 10,000 Section 8 vouchers and more than 5,000 public housing apartments will be available to rent – but virtually none to homeless people.
- Numerous studies show that Section 8 vouchers successfully reduce family homelessness. Indeed Section 8 vouchers and public housing were the primary, successful vehicles by which previous mayoral administrations moved the majority of homeless families from shelters to permanent housing.
- Reversing the Bloomberg administration’s misguided policy will move thousands of homeless families to permanent housing – and will save City taxpayer dollars spent on emergency shelter.

b. Accelerate Construction of Permanent Supportive Housing:

- In 2005, the City and State signed a ten-year agreement to provide permanent supportive housing for homeless people living with mental illness and other special needs. However, more than half of the newly-constructed supportive housing – 3,276 units of the planned 6,250 new units – will not be built until at least 2011.
- City and State officials should accelerate the development of supportive housing for homeless people with special needs.

c. Halt Referrals of Homeless Adults to Illegal Dwellings:

- The City has referred thousands of homeless adults – including many living with mental illness – to more than 120 unsafe, illegal boarding houses.
- City inspectors have issued vacate orders to at least 15 illegal boarding houses due to health and fire safety risks – forcing the residents to return to shelters or the streets.
- City officials should halt referrals of homeless adults living with mental illness or other disabilities to illegal boarding houses.

d. Ensure Sufficient Shelter Capacity for Homeless New Yorkers This Winter:

- New York City’s next mayor will take office while the number of homeless single adults is rising, both due to high unemployment and due to the seasonal, cold-weather rise in need for shelter.
- The NYC Department of Homeless Services must ensure that there are sufficient shelter beds in the municipal shelter system immediately to meet the rising need for shelter.

For more information, please visit www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.

¹ All nightly shelter census data in this briefing paper is from reports produced by the NYC Department of Homeless Services (DHS). The data in this briefing paper, which is consistent with City homelessness data reported for more than 25 years, is more comprehensive than the more limited data available on the DHS website. Since 2005 the DHS website has, for reasons that have never been explained publicly, excluded data on homeless families and individuals residing in several different types of municipal shelters. For this reason, currently the DHS website’s homepage fails to include approximately 1,300 to 1,400 homeless people sleeping each night in municipal shelters, including approximately 200 families (with approximately 600 people) who reside in homeless shelters administered by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development; approximately 370 people residing in DHS shelters for homeless veterans; and approximately 380 people residing each night in DHS “safe haven” shelters, which are restricted to chronically street homeless adults. (Note that the large majority of shelters for veterans and “safe haven” shelters were once included as part of DHS’s daily adult shelter census report.) However, note that this briefing paper does not include data for homeless people sleeping in DHS “stabilization beds,” which are also restricted to chronically street homeless adults; DHS has never publicly released this data, although currently there are approximately 150 to 200 homeless people in “stabilization beds” each night.

² Data for homeless families is from DHS’s “Emergency Housing Services for Homeless Families Monthly Report,” which has been published by the City since the early 1980s. As noted above, this DHS monthly report includes approximately 200 families (with approximately 600 people) who reside in homeless shelters administered by the NYC Department of Housing Preservation and Development.

³ Data for homeless children is also from DHS’s “Emergency Housing Services for Homeless Families Monthly Report.”

⁴ Data for new families entering the municipal shelter system – which includes families new to the shelter system and those returning after more than 30 days – is also from DHS’s “Emergency Housing Services for Homeless Families Monthly Report.”

⁵ Coalition for the Homeless, “Capacity Crunch: The NYC Shelter System Risks Running Out of Shelter Beds for the Rising Number of Homeless Single Adults,” October 4, 2009, available at www.coalitionforthehomeless.org.

⁶ Data for homeless single adults in municipal shelters is from three sources: (1) DHS daily census reports for shelters for homeless single men and women, which have been produced daily by the City since 1982; (2) DHS census reports for shelters for homeless veterans; and (3) DHS census reports for “safe haven” shelters, which are restricted to chronically street homeless adults. (Note that the large majority of shelters for veterans and “safe haven” shelters were once included as part of the DHS daily adult shelter census report. These shelters were “converted” to different service models beginning in 2007 and were then excluded, in various stages, from DHS daily adult shelter census report and from DHS’s website.) As noted above, data for homeless single adults does not include data for homeless people sleeping in DHS “stabilization beds,” which are also restricted to chronically street homeless adults; DHS has never publicly released this data, although currently there are approximately 150 to 200 homeless people in “stabilization beds” each night.

⁷ Data on the (unduplicated) number of different homeless adults and children sleeping in municipal shelters during each City fiscal year is from the NYC Department of Homeless Services’ “Critical Activities Reports,” for FY 2002 through FY 2009, available on the DHS website, www.nyc.gov/dhs. (The City of New York fiscal year is from July 1st to June 30th.) Note that the “Critical Activities Reports” do not state whether the data for homeless single adults includes shelters for homeless veterans, “safe haven” shelters, and/or “stabilization beds.” Therefore the reports may not include data for some homeless single adults who used municipal shelters in FY 2008 and FY 2009.

⁸ As noted above, the DHS “Critical Activities Reports” do not state whether the data for homeless single adults includes shelters for homeless veterans, “safe haven” shelters, and/or “stabilization beds.” Therefore the reports may not include data for some homeless single adults who used municipal shelters in FY 2008 and FY 2009.

⁹ City of New York, Mayor’s Office of Operations, “Mayor’s Management Report FY 2009,” available at www.nyc.gov.

¹⁰ Data on NYC Department of Homeless Services expenditures is from the NYC Office of Management and Budget (budget documents for various City fiscal years) and the Mayor’s Office of Operations, “Mayor’s Management Report FY 2009,” all available at www.nyc.gov.