

# HRA Rules Committee: CityFHEPS Unit Hold Discontinuance

By Michael Bell

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Greetings, and thank you to the members of the HRA Rules Committee for the opportunity to share my testimony today. My name is Michael Bell, a single parent, a former CityFHEPS voucher holder, a Leader with Neighbors Together, and a Community Outreach Liaison who focuses on areas where people need assistance.

I strongly oppose discontinuing the CityFHEPS Unit Hold Incentive. The CityFHEPS unit's hold incentive is not a bonus; it is the linchpin that secures housing for our most vulnerable neighbors. For families and individuals emerging from shelter, the voucher application process can take weeks or months. Without the unit holding payment, a landlord faces significant vacancy loss during this waiting period. They will, understandably, choose an applicant who can move in immediately. From experience, I have lost seven apartments when I tried to use a CityFHEPS voucher. You have no idea what that emotional roller coaster feels like unless you have endured it as a CityFHEPS recipient. It got to the point where I expected to fail and became numb to the process. This was mainly due to administrative issues with the voucher, resulting in communication gaps and delays. It was a grueling and frustrating experience for both my daughter and me; we even got our hopes up, only to be let down once again. This will only increase if there is no hold incentive in place with an administration that moves slowly. You must consider the implications and the mental health burden for those impacted. Adults and children will suffer, and something like this could affect them psychologically long-term.

The entire housing process, from the shelter housing specialist to keys in hand, is very slow and, in many cases, has a low success rate, given the actual ratio of apartments viewed to apartments secured. This is why the incentive shouldn't be removed. I know other CityFHEPS voucher holders can attest to my experience, and for those who have this voucher, removing the unit hold incentive will only add to a currently burdensome situation.

Eliminating the CityFHEPS Unit Hold incentive is counterproductive to the goal of securing a permanent home for individuals and families to transition out of homelessness. It pushes qualified, low-income New Yorkers back into the housing search, extending shelter stays, increasing the City's long-term shelter costs, and subjecting children to prolonged trauma and instability. The unit hold incentive is a practical investment that encourages landlord participation and ensures that the CityFHEPS voucher—the City's commonly used tool against homelessness—can actually be used to turn a key into a home. **CityFHEPS unit hold incentive must not be removed.**

Thank you for your time and commitment to supporting low-income, working-class homeless New Yorkers in need of a stable home.

Sincerely,

Michael Bell