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Press Release

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[MTA Headquarters](#)

IMMEDIATE

MTA, State Agencies Announce Action Plan to Address Homelessness Crisis on the Subways

Task Force Delivers Recommendations to Reduce Number of Homeless Inappropriately Seeking Shelter in the Subway and Ensure Access to Critical Support Services

For Close to Two Months, MTA and OTDA-led Outreach Teams Have Been Engaging Individuals Experiencing Homelessness in the Transit System

OTDA Will Ensure Additional Assistance is Provided to Individuals in Need, Requiring NYC to Provide Enhanced Services with Clear Performance Measures on Strict Time Frames

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) and the New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) today announced a series of actions to address the growing challenge of individuals experiencing homelessness and using the MTA's transit system as an ill-equipped, de facto shelter, a disservice to them and to the MTA's eight million daily riders. These actions will ensure that these individuals are offered the services necessary to move to appropriate housing, and address physical and mental health needs. OTDA will require NYC to make these improvements quickly and will monitor progress through the implementation of strict performance standards and regular reporting.

The homeless population in the subway system has grown more than 20 percent in the past year, to nearly 2,200. This is a disproportionate increase compared with rates experienced citywide and is not sustainable by the system. This precipitous increase in homelessness in the subway system, coupled with concerns over the inaction of New York City and its shared contractors with the MTA, prompted OTDA to begin a state-run outreach program in the subway system. Since mid-August, teams of staff from OTDA have worked in the subway system providing direct outreach, in close coordination with the MTA, to individuals who are homeless to ensure services are provided to those in need.

In July, the MTA formed a [task force](#) with OTDA, the New York State Department of Health, the New York State Office of Mental Health, and the New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services. This task force looked at the issue of homelessness in the transit system and made certain recommendations to improve the situation and ensure these individuals are receiving the necessary services.

Metropolitan Transportation Authority Managing Director Ronnie Hakim said, "The MTA is working with our Task Force Partners to tackle homelessness in our system. Together, we have developed a series of immediate, comprehensive recommendations to address this issue head on and ensure vulnerable New Yorkers have access to the support they need. We will continue to work day and night to keep New Yorkers and our system safe."

MTA and OTDA have already taken unprecedented action, consistent with the recommendations of the task force, to address needed change. Over the past several weeks, MTA and OTDA-led outreach teams consisting of staff from State agencies, including OTDA and the New York State Office of Mental Health and others, have been active in the subway system during overnight hours to engage with individuals who are homeless. This outreach activity began at four end-of-line stations, is currently occurring at eight stations, and will expand over the coming weeks to include additional end of line locations and certain stations like Penn, Grand Central, and those in Jamaica where homelessness has also impacted commuter lines. MTA police are enforcing the MTA's Code of Conduct, while outreach staff offer individuals who are homeless access to shelter or other needed services. Each night, teams are engaging with hundreds of individuals. Information gathered as part of this hands-on effort has influenced and informed the task force recommendations.

The task force's recommendations, available at <https://new.mta.info/helphomeless>, call for:

- **Enhanced outreach and expanded oversight of New York City outreach efforts.** On an emergency basis, OTDA will continue to mobilize teams to deliver enhanced homeless outreach within the transit system, and require the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to enhance its existing homeless services on a permanent basis to better address the needs of those who are inappropriately seeking shelter in the transit system. OTDA will continuously evaluate the need to provide direct services, and will stop providing them when the situation has improved and can be sustained by DHS alone. OTDA will regularly review and monitor DHS' enhanced efforts to ensure they are adequately serving the population, holding DHS and its contractors to strict performance standards.
- **Expanded police force.** The MTA will grow its police force by more than half to keep the transportation system safe and secure. A portion of this expanded force will support the outreach efforts to help those in need access shelter or other services.
- **Educate the public on the MTA Rules of Conduct.** The MTA will undertake an effort to better educate the public about applicable rules and regulations, and improve compliance, and will partner with OTDA and other partner agencies on an information campaign so that the public is aware of assistance available to those experiencing homelessness.

- **Increased interagency cooperation to support homeless outreach.** The MTA will better coordinate with DHS and OTDA, as well as other appropriate partners, to support outreach efforts and so that resources are used effectively to reduce the number of individuals who are experiencing homelessness in the transit system and connect those in need with housing and services.
- **Oversight by MTA Inspector General.** It is recommended the MTA Inspector General oversee and evaluate the implementation of these recommendations and other related efforts on a regular basis. This will maximize transparency, improve outcomes and verify that services are being delivered by MTA, New York City and relevant partners in an efficient and effective manner.

The task force's recommendations, most of which are already underway, will bring expedited assistance to New Yorkers in need who are inappropriately seeking shelter in the transit system, while helping to improve the overall experience for the system's 8 million daily riders.

Through collaborative efforts across state government, New York has undertaken a multi-faceted approach to address homelessness statewide that includes increased capital construction, improved service delivery, and innovative policy approaches. New York recognizes that the causes of homelessness are complex and addressing the varied issues that lead to families and individuals experiencing homelessness requires a comprehensive approach.

A key component of the State's plan to combat homelessness is an historic \$20 billion, five-year investment to support homeless services and the creation or preservation of more than 100,000 units of affordable housing and 6,000 units of supportive housing. Funding for more than 5,500 units of supportive housing has already been awarded, with 3,700 units under construction, and more than 1,000 units already operational.

New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance Commissioner Michael Hein said, "Governor Cuomo's intervention has put a direct spotlight on this issue and has resulted in renewed action by many and a clear focus for MTA, New York City and all others going forward. These recommendations will help those in need better access essential services, as well as improve MTA's overall service for its eight million daily riders."

New York State Office of Mental Health Commissioner Dr. Ann Sullivan said, "Living on the street or in the subway exacerbates every mental health condition, and the first step towards access to treatment and recovery is helping these individuals move to safe and stable housing options and linking them to services. The recommendations of the task force highlights the need to proactively engage individuals experiencing homelessness to provide the opportunity for housing and treatment services."

New York State Health Commissioner Dr. Howard Zucker said, "It is imperative that individuals experiencing homelessness inappropriately seeking shelter in the subway and elsewhere across the state are able to access the services they need, including proper health care. Safe and secure housing is critical for public health, and we will continue to work with our partner agencies to combat the growing problem of homelessness in New York State."

New York State Office of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Services Commissioner Arlene González-Sánchez said, "Addiction and homelessness are often connected, and over the past several years, OASAS has worked to expand access to our services with numerous programs to help reach this population. This action plan will have a positive impact on New York State's efforts to combat both homelessness, and the addiction epidemic."