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Next STEPS Coalition Condemns NYC Department of Probation for Terminating Program Helping Young Adults Exposed to Crime Live More Productive Lives

Next STEPS Program Abruptly Shuttered, Leaving Youth Living in NYCHA Developments across NYC Without the Services They Need

For pictures and b-roll from today's rally click [here](#).

NEW YORK, NY – Today, the Next STEPS Coalition, a group of non-profit community organizations, organized a rally to support the continuation of the NextSTEPS program. Non-profit leaders, community activists, youth and elected officials gathered to urge the Adams Administration not to cut off crucial resources needed to aid young people in their transition to adulthood. The program plays a crucial role in the [Mayor's Action Plan for Neighborhood Safety](#) by offering one-on-one and group mentoring to young adults. It employs a curriculum based on cognitive behavioral therapy to guide them in making the necessary mindset and behavior shifts to steer clear of criminal activity and re-engage in education, employment, and the community.

The rally comes after the New York City Department of Probation sent an email late last month to contracted nonprofits stating that their contracts would be terminated and giving them 5 business days to terminate all programming in support of young adults. NextSTEPS (Striving Towards Engagement and Peaceful Solutions) is a transformative mentoring intervention for youth, ages 16 to 24, who are exposed to serious violent activity, gangs, or domestic violence. Through mentoring provided by trusted Credible Messengers, other community-support services, and a 9-month evidence-based interactive journaling curriculum, NextSTEPS works to help youth identify alternatives to their behaviors and set out on a path to a more positive and successful future.

Coalition members, advocates, and elected officials released the following statements following the rally:

"Proposed cuts to the NextSTEPS program are deeply disappointing, as it threatens to diminish the tremendous value it brings to young people across NYC. NextSTEPS meets young adults where they are, providing vital community mentorship from individuals who have walked the same path," **said Peleya Patterson, Vice President of Youth Justice Programs at Good Shepherd Services.** "The relationships forged through this program are profoundly impactful, as mentors draw from their own experiences to

connect with youth on shared challenges. These mentors not only offer hope but also serve as living proof that while they may be in a position of need today, they have the potential to be in a much different place after participating in this program.”

“It is very disappointing that the Department of Probation has decided to end the contract for the NextSTEPS program, which provides mentoring to young people ages 16 - 24. Mobilizing community-based resources, job training, increased employment opportunities, and early intervention are key to protecting our youth and communities, and for a long time, the Department of Probation has been a partner in diverting individuals from the criminal legal system. I am disheartened to hear that the Department is considering canceling other social service contracts and urge the administration to maintain funding levels for contracts as agreed to in the FY24 budget. We must refocus our approach to public safety and providers need consistent funding to support a healthy ecosystem of programs and services that improve quality of life and safety for all New Yorkers,” **said Council Member Carlina Rivera, Chair of the Committee on Criminal Justice.**

“NextSTEPS was a transformative program for young people, offering the intensive mentorship our youth need to grow and succeed. The abrupt termination of the program goes against everything we had been building with program participants. We call on Commissioner Holmes to immediately reinstate funding for NextSTEPS and to work collaboratively with nonprofit partners to meet the needs of young people throughout New York City,” **said Jonathan McLean, President & CEO of CASES,** which operated NextSTEPS at Tompkins Houses and Bushwick Houses, both in Brooklyn.

“Next STEPs was created to build trust among young people from historically marginalized communities, allow them to be vulnerable about the impact of violence on their lives, and create opportunities for them to imagine many possibilities for their futures,” **said Jeremy Kohomban, President & CEO of the Children’s Village.** “This violence-prevention program has positively impacted so many lives, and it’s unconscionable that the city pulled this funding from under-resourced neighborhoods without any conversation about the gap it would leave or investing in its place.”

“We are incredibly disheartened by the failure to recognize the value of programs like NextSTEPS,” **said Scott Short, CEO of RiseBoro Community Partnership.** “More importantly, it shows a lack of appreciation for the participants who engage with NextSTEPS, and who cannot be expected to simply move on to alternative programs. NextSTEPS built trust with the communities it served, and made sure participants had a supportive environment that cared about their growth and success in life. Anyone who thinks the defunding of this program doesn’t create yet another gap in the city’s support network is sorely mistaken about the cost to beneficiaries and the impact mentorship can have on them.”

“At a time when gun violence, gang activity, crime, and poverty are prevalent in these communities, the abrupt, short notice of cancellation of an 8-year program with no regard for the impact on youth who will suffer the most and the staff who lost their jobs with less than seven days notice, can only be described as appalling and a demonstrated lack of concern and judgment by a public servant called to serve youth, family and communities; elevate public safety for NYC; and show concern for the future of our youth,” **said Rev. Maurice Winley, Founder & President/CEO of Living Redemption Community Development Corporation.** “I am deeply saddened and disappointed, particularly given the partnership Living Redemption has established with the Department of Probation. We call for accountability and reinstatement of NextSTEPS.”

“Since 2014, Osborne Association has had the privilege of providing Next STEPS programming at Butler and Castle Hill Houses in the Bronx, serving more than 350 young people and their families in that time. These are NYCHA developments with the highest rates of violence and arrest in New York City, where onsite mentoring services for young people aged 16-24 have transformed lives. We believe in the evidence-based power of mentoring from skilled credible messengers, which can increase engagement with programs, reduce re-arrests, and benefit families and communities. We urge the Department of Probation to restore funding for Next STEPS now,” said **Archana Jayaram, President and CEO of Osborne Association.**

“The impact of Next STEPS makes the Queensbridge community safer for everyone and improves the outcomes for our young people. The small amount of funding required for Next STEPS provides a tremendous return on investment for NYC. Funding for the Next STEPS initiative needs to be restored” said **John M. Harrison, CEO of Community Mediation Services.**

The NextSTEPS Coalition is comprised of community organizations and elected officials from across New York, including Good Shepherd Services, the Center for Community Alternatives, Community Connections for Youth, Living Redemption Community Development Corporation, Exodus: Transitional Community, Osborne Association, Rising Ground, Community Mediation Services, The Children’s Village, CASES, Center for Justice Innovation, and RiseBoro.

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About Good Shepherd Services

Good Shepherd Services is one of the largest nonprofit youth and family services providers in New York City, operating over 90 programs that support more than 30,000 residents across Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. Guided by social and racial justice, Good Shepherd is located in communities that continue to face significant challenges due to longstanding and often systemic barriers, providing resources that build on their inherent strengths and expanding access to opportunities that help them thrive.