

**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF HOMELESS SERVICES**

**Procedure Number: DHS-PB-2018-15**

<b>SUBJECT:</b>  Housing Emergency Referral Operations (HERO) Procedure	<b>APPLICABLE TO:</b>  Staff of HERO, Outreach Providers, DHS Adult, Family, and Single Intake, Assessment, and Shelter staff, DHS Fleet Administration, and DSS Emergency Management	<b>ISSUED:</b>  12/11/2018
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<b>ADMINISTERED BY:</b>  HERO, Adult Services, Family Services	<b>APPROVED BY:</b>  Joslyn Carter, Administrator Department of Homeless Services
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**PURPOSE**

This procedure delineates the method by which Housing Emergency Referral Operations (HERO) manages shelter vacancy control, placement, and transfer of homeless New Yorkers within the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) Shelter System.

**HERO OVERVIEW**

HERO operates 24 hours a day, seven days (24/7) a week to ensure:

- the control of vacancies within the DHS Shelter System;
- the placement from Intake to shelter of Families with Children and Adult Families seeking Temporary Housing Assistance (THA);
- the placement of Single Adults from one shelter to another when there is an overage at a shelter after curfew;
- the transfer of all populations within the DHS Shelter System, and;
- the coordination of transportation for shelter placement for all populations within the DHS Shelter System.

HERO is also responsible for the capture and dissemination of data pertaining to vacancies, shelter assignments, and transfers to internal and external stakeholders.

## REQUIRED ACTION

### I. VACANCY CONTROL

Vacancy control and capacity management are critical to the smooth operation of the DHS Shelter System. The Vacancy Control staff of HERO manages the vacancies at all components of the System. Vacancy Control supports HERO's Placement and Transfer Units by reconciling data of occupied shelter units and beds against available and unavailable shelter units and beds.

#### 1. Families With Children and Adult Families Vacancy Control

Family Vacancy Control Specialists are assigned a shelter portfolio consisting of Tier II shelters, hotels, and cluster sites. Generally, each portfolio corresponds to regions assigned to Program Administrators. Vacancy Control Specialists use Client Assistance Rehousing Enterprise System (CARES) automated reports, the Capacity Dashboard (CapDash), and communication with shelter staff to compare and verify lodging data. This work, executed 24/7, enables DHS to efficiently and effectively manage the census and capacity demand.

Vacancy Control Specialists:

- Update unit statuses (online/offline);
- Process family composition changes (add-ons and removals);
- Process exits and record exit reasons; and
- Ensure accurate data is maintained in CARES for placement planning and reporting.

#### 2. Single Adult Vacancy Control

Adult Vacancy Control operates 7 days a week during the hours of 9:00 pm to 5:00 am. Adult Vacancy Control Specialists work with Shelter Providers throughout the night to reconcile and capture shelter censuses and vacancies. Single Adult Shelter Providers are required to process exits in CARES, and to inform Vacancy Control of their census, bed availability, and overages at regular intervals up to and including 2:00 am each night. Vacancy Control records this data in CapDash, compares it to data in CARES, and reconciles any discrepancies. Vacancy Control disseminates census and capacity data each morning to internal and external stakeholders.

### II. SHELTER PLACEMENTS

HERO manages all shelter placements of Families with children and Adult Families, as well as the Official Placements of Single Adults when a shelter has an overage at curfew.

## 1. **Families With Children Shelter Placement**

Families with children can apply for THA through the Prevention Assistance and Temporary Housing (PATH) Intake Center at any time. However, PATH completes intake and processes THA applications on a 9:00 am to 5:00 pm basis, seven days a week. HERO is responsible for the shelter placements of Families with Children who complete the intake and application process, and who are ready for conditional shelter.

Families who arrive at PATH after 5:00 pm are deemed Late Arrivals because they are unable to complete the intake process that day in a reasonable timeframe, and therefore will receive an overnight placement. Early Late Arrival (ELA) may be called when necessary to ensure expedited placement to shelter in a reasonable timeframe. On such days, Families with children who arrive after ELA is called are deemed Late Arrivals. HERO is responsible for the overnight shelter placement of all Late Arrivals, as well as any families who are unable to complete their THA application.

### **A. Conditional Shelter**

When a Family with children completes their THA application and is ready for a conditional shelter assignment, Intake staff submits a Shelter Assignment Request (SAR) in CARES that is transmitted to the HERO Work Queue. The SAR details the requisite information to match each family's placement needs to the most appropriate available vacancy within the DHS Shelter System. This includes information such as school location, domestic violence, case demographics, relationship of each case member to the head of household, and/or medical needs. Additionally, Intake staff can manually enter additional comments on a SAR.

A HERO Supervisor monitors the HERO Work Queue for SARs, and assigns cases to Placement Specialists. Placement Specialists review the profile of each case they are assigned, and determine the most appropriate available assignment based on that profile and the following hierarchy:

1. Family Composition
2. Safety Preclusions
3. Medical/Accessibility Needs
4. Neighborhood of Origin
5. School Proximity
6. Other Factors (ACS involvement, Sex Offender status, Advocate requests, etc.)

Consistent with the above considerations, HERO staff refers Families with children to shelters in the borough of the youngest school-aged child's school whenever possible and not precluded for safety reasons. To further minimize interruption to children's education, City-provided busing is available for elementary school children.

Families whose most recent address is not in New York City who do not present any specific neighborhood needs are referred to a shelter having the highest number of vacancies, consistent with their Family Composition, Safety Preclusions, and Medical/Accessibility Needs.

Placement Specialists use a list of vacancies and the Building Compliance System (BCS) to identify the most appropriate available placement based on the family's profile. Appropriate available vacancies are prioritized by shelter types as follows:

- Tier II Shelters
- Billing Sites (not yet under contract)
- Clusters and Commercial Hotels.

Once a Placement Specialist matches an appropriate shelter vacancy to a family's demographic profile, the Placement Specialist calls the location to confirm and complete the referral. This is critical in ensuring the smooth delivery of services from Intake to Placement. Shelters must accept all referrals from HERO, unless a restriction is indicated in their Operational Plan. In instances when a shelter has issues/questions concerning a particular referral, they must contact the HERO Supervisor immediately. The Placement Specialist then reserves the unit at the shelter in CARES, which automatically alerts PATH via the Intake Departure Queue and the Provider's Pending Arrival Queue in CARES.

Once a placement is reserved, the HERO Liaison at Intake offers the reservation to the family and presents the family with a BCS Shelter Information Sheet (SIS). The SIS includes shelter contact information, amenities, school district, transportation options and other useful details. If the family refuses the placement offer, the HERO Liaison and/or the Intake staff must interview the family to ascertain the reason for the rejection, and to determine whether a change of placement is warranted. If the family's reservation is changed, a new placement is offered. If it is not changed, the family is advised of the transfer process in shelter.

If a family accepts a placement offer, the family signs for their placement and Intake staff offer a MetroCard(s), or alternative transportation. When the family arrives at the shelter, the Shelter Provider will confirm arrival in CARES, which will conclude that family's placement process.

## **B. Late Arrivals**

HERO assigns overnight shelter placements to all Late Arrivals, as well as to any families who are unable to complete their THA application the day they apply. HERO refers these families to shelters dedicated to overnight placements, making assignments based primarily on family size, unit availability, and accessibility needs. PATH transports these families to their placements, where they stay overnight. The following morning they are transported back to PATH to resume the intake and application process, and to obtain other on-site services (e.g., Medical, Diversion).

### **2. Adult Families Shelter Placement**

Adult Families can apply for THA at the Adult Family Intake Center (AFIC) at any time during the day. AFIC processes applications for THA between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm seven days a week. HERO is responsible for the shelter placements of Adult Families who complete their intake and application process, and who are ready for conditional shelter.

Adult Families who arrive at AFIC after 8:00 pm are deemed Late Arrivals because they are unable to complete the intake process in a reasonable timeframe, and therefore will receive an overnight placement. Early Late Arrival (ELA) may be called when necessary to ensure expedited placement to shelter in a reasonable timeframe. On such days, Adult Families who arrive after ELA is called are deemed Late Arrivals. HERO is responsible for the overnight shelter placements of all Late Arrivals, as well as any Adult Families who were unable to complete their THA application.

## **A. Conditional Shelter**

When an Adult Family completes their THA application and is ready for a conditional shelter assignment, Intake staff submits a SAR in CARES that is transmitted to the HERO Work Queue.

A HERO Supervisor monitors the HERO Work Queue for SARs, and assigns cases to Placement Specialists. Placement Specialists review the profile of each case they are assigned, and determine the most appropriate available assignment based on that profile and the following hierarchy:

1. Safety Preclusions
2. Medical/Accessibility needs
3. Other Factors (Sex Offender status, Advocate requests, Veteran status, etc.).

Placement Specialists use a list of vacancies and BCS to identify appropriate available placements based on each family's demographics. Appropriate available vacancies are prioritized by shelter types as follows:

- Assessment Shelter
- Tier II Shelters
- Billing Sites (not yet under contract) and Commercial Hotels.

Once a Placement Specialist matches an appropriate shelter vacancy to an Adult Family's demographic profile, the Placement Specialist calls the location to confirm and complete the referral. This is critical to ensuring the smooth delivery of services from Intake to Placement. Shelters must accept all referrals from HERO, unless a restriction is indicated in their Operational Plan. In instances when a shelter has issues/questions concerning a particular referral, they must contact the HERO Supervisor immediately. The Placement Specialist then reserves the unit at the shelter in CARES, which automatically alerts AFIC via the Intake Departure Queue and the Provider's Pending Arrival Queue in CARES.

Once a placement is reserved, the HERO Liaison at Intake offers the reservation to the Adult Family and presents the family with an SIS. If the Adult Family refuses the placement offer, the HERO Liaison and/or the Intake staff must interview the Adult Family to ascertain the reason for the rejection, and to determine whether a change of placement is warranted. If the Adult Family's reservation is changed, a new placement is offered. If it is not changed, the Adult Family is advised of the transfer process in shelter.

If an Adult Family accepts a placement offer, the Adult Family signs for the placement and the Intake staff offers a MetroCard(s), or alternative transportation. When the Adult Family arrives to the shelter, the Shelter Provider will confirm arrival in CARES, which concludes the Adult Family's placement process.

### **B. Late Arrivals**

HERO assigns overnight shelter placements to all Late Arrivals, as well as to any Adult Families who are unable to complete their THA application the day they apply. HERO refers these Adult Families to shelters dedicated to overnight placements, making assignments based primarily on family size, unit availability, and accessibility needs. AFIC transports these Adult Families to their placements, where they stay overnight. These Adult Families continue their application process the following day.

## **3. Single Adult Shelter Placements**

### **A. Intake and Assessments**

HERO does not manage the placements of Single Adults from Intake or Assessment Shelters. Single Adult Intake Centers manage the placement of Single Adults into Assessment Shelters following intake. Assessment Shelters manage the placement of Single Adults in Official Shelters using available vacancies provided by Vacancy Control.

## **B. Overages**

HERO is responsible for the placement of Single Adults when there is an overage at a shelter after curfew. An overage occurs when a shelter does not have sufficient capacity after curfew to accommodate all Single Adults who return to that shelter on any given night. When this happens, HERO reassigns Single Adults to other shelters with available beds meeting the client's program needs, when possible.

## **III. SHELTER TRANSFER**

The HERO Transfer Unit manages the transfers of all client populations within the DHS Shelter System. Transfer Specialists work with Program Administrators to prioritize emergency transfers.

### **1. Families With Children and Adult Families Transfer**

Transfer SARS are submitted by shelters and are individually reviewed and approved by Program Administrators or by the Office of Legal Affairs. Approved Transfer SARs are systemically sent to the HERO Transfer Queue in CARES. Transfers may be approved for a variety of reasons. Transfer Supervisors monitor the HERO Transfer Queue in CARES and assign cases to Transfer Placement Specialists for completion. Transfers are reviewed and granted in the following priority categories:

- DV or Safety Concerns for Family
- Medical/Health/Accessibility Concern for Family
- Change in Family Composition Requiring a Different Size Unit
- Education
- Building Conditions
- More Intensive Services Needed
- Shelter Reassignment/Closure.

Transfer Placement Specialists use a list of vacancies and BCS to identify appropriate placements considering the reason for transfer and all other factors relevant to placement.

In addition to the transfers described above, HERO manages transfers pursuant to the School Proximity Project. The School Proximity Project is a DHS collaboration with the NYC Department of Education intended to move interested families with children closer to children's schools, ideally within five miles of a family's youngest school-aged child's school.

As part of the project, Transfer Placement Specialists work with Program Administrators and shelter staff to determine whether families in shelter far from their youngest child's school are interested in a School Proximity Project transfer. If a family is interested in a transfer, a Transfer Placement Specialist uses a list of vacancies and BCS to identify an appropriate available placement as close to the youngest school-aged child's school as possible.

When HERO matches an appropriate shelter vacancy to a Family with children or an Adult Family, the Transfer Placement Specialist calls the shelter to make the referral. The shelter notifies the Family of the new shelter location, as well as the date and time of transport, and gives the Family an SIS. The Transfer Placement Specialist then updates CARES and CapDash with the reservation. CapDash systemically notifies DHS Fleet of the transportation requirements.

When a Family refuses a specific placement offer, or when the transfer is unsuccessful, HERO collaborates with the Program Administrator to determine next steps for the Family on a case-by-case basis.

## **2. Single Adult Transfers**

When a Single Adult requires a transfer, Providers make every attempt to transfer the Single Adult to a shelter within their portfolio that meets the Single Adult's needs (e.g. Mental Health, Employment). When a Provider is unable to find an appropriate placement, it must submit a Transfer SAR to the Program Administrator in CARES for approval.

Approved Transfer SARs are systemically sent to the HERO Transfer Queue in CARES. Transfers may be approved for a variety of reasons. Transfer Supervisors monitor the HERO Transfer Queue in CARES and assign cases to Transfer Placement Specialists for completion. Transfers are reviewed and granted in the following priority categories:

- DV or Safety Concerns
- Medical/Health/Accessibility Concern
- Building Conditions
- More Intensive Services Needed
- Shelter Reassignment/Closure.

The Transfer Placement Specialist uses a list of vacancies and BCS to identify an appropriate available placement, taking into consideration all details surrounding the reason for transfer, while meeting the client's program needs, when possible.



When HERO identifies a shelter vacancy, the Transfer Placement Specialist calls the shelter to make the referral. The shelter must notify the Single Adult of the new shelter location and provide a MetroCard. If a request for transportation is needed for medical/accessibility reasons, the Provider will transport the client, or request DHS Fleet assistance in providing transportation.

When a Single Adult refuses a specific placement offer, HERO collaborates with the Program Administrator to determine next steps on a case-by-case basis.

*Effective Immediately.*