

TESTIMONY OF DON KEITH ALLEN, SR. BEFORE THE GENERAL WELFARE  
COMMITTEE, OCTOBER 24, 2007

Good afternoon. My name is Don Keith Allen, Sr., and my two sons and I are homeless. For almost two weeks, since DHS denied us shelter, we slept on the floor of the basement of St. Ann's Church in the Bronx. Last night, Path gave us an overnight placement, but I have no idea if they will give us one tonight.

I have two metal rods in my back and I walk with a cane, and sleeping on the floor has been very difficult for me. My older son, who is 20, has special needs and this process has been very difficult for him. My younger son, who is 11, has had a very difficult year and this whole experience has been traumatic for him.

The last place we had to stay was my mother's New York City Housing Authority apartment. My father lived there too until he died recently. My mother suffers from multiple medical problems, including asthma, diabetes, high blood pressure, cancer, and Parkinson's disease. She uses a wheelchair to get around. I lived there with my older son for about a year, after I had a car accident and was in bed for a few months myself. My mother's health got steadily worse from the stress of having us in her home. When my younger son came to live with us in September, it was clear that we could not stay in her home any more.

A few days after I regained custody of my younger son, we applied for emergency shelter at the DHS Path office. DHS visited my mother and she told them we could not stay with her. Even so, DHS found that we were ineligible for shelter because they said we could go back to my mother's. I gave DHS a letter from my mother's doctor in which he states that "It is NOT recommended that she be asked to accept NOR care for any of her relatives including her son..." He also says that our return "will unduly burden her and DOUBTLESS be detrimental to her health." But DHS found us ineligible again.

We reapplied and got overnight placements for a month. Every day we would wait at Path, and every night they would put us on a bus to a place to stay for the night. Some nights they did not place us until 12:30 am, but every morning we had to be out of the hotel by 6:00 or 6:30 am. It was very difficult for us to live this way. We had to keep all of our belongings with us at all times, and we never knew where we were going to sleep. At one of the places they sent us we could see through holes in the door and the sheets were filthy. Most of the places they sent us were unlivable.

On Friday, October 12, DHS told us we would not get any more overnight placements. We had nowhere else to go. It was bitter cold that night and I was afraid my sons and I were going to sleep in the park across the street from Path. Fortunately, that night we met Mother Martha of St. Ann's Church and she gave us a place to stay in her church's basement. We slept there that night with 4 other families, including pregnant women, tiny babies, and other people with illnesses and disabilities.

The next day a shelter outreach team from the Citizen's Advice Bureau took us to my mother's apartment and tried to get her to let us stay with her, but she began shaking and told them that "under no circumstances" would she allow us back in. The CAB staff then took us back to Path, where DHS workers told us we could not even enter the building to make a new application.

We are grateful to be able to sleep on the floor of the church basement, but this is no way for us to live. During the day I take my younger son to school and then my older son and I do laundry or go to the library.

Last Friday, Mother Martha accompanied us back to Path. The DHS workers there again would not let us in the building. We waited while they met in the Path office, and then a worker came out and told us we could not reapply and we should go to Pennsylvania, where we lived for a short time in a house that we left when we came to visit with my mother. My brother lives in Pennsylvania, but he shares a one-bedroom housing authority apartment with his daughter. We have never even been inside that place so I don't understand how DHS says that we can go to another State and stay someplace where we have never been.

If my sons and I had anywhere to go, we would go there. It is that simple. We are homeless, and DHS has turned us out into the cold.