

December 12, 2016

Mr. Steven Banks
Commissioner
NYC Human Resources Administration
Department of Social Services
150 Greenwich Street, 42nd Floor
New York, NY 10007

Dear Commissioner Banks:

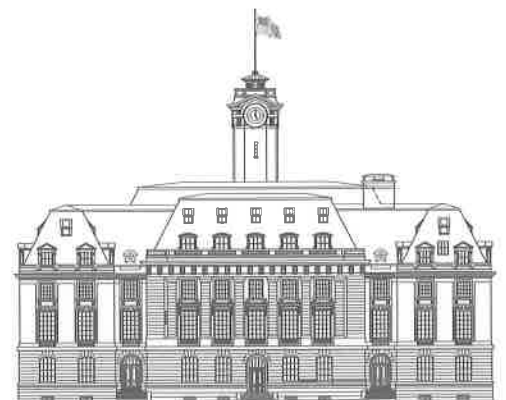
I hope this letter finds you well.

The intractable issue of homelessness has long stumped policymakers, advocates and academics. Only one widely accepted principle has emerged: there is no silver bullet.

To that end, I appreciate the responsive and collaborative approach, to date, of the Department of Homeless Services—under your stewardship—in dealing with the many facets of homelessness. I want to personally thank you for staying true to your commitment to no longer employ Staten Island hotels as *de facto* homeless shelters.

It is nevertheless my hope that Staten Island can play a role in developing innovative approaches to combat homelessness, especially street homelessness which has become both a significant public safety and quality-of-life issue for Staten Island residents. Increasingly, vulnerable individuals seem to cycle through the borough's transit areas, parks and streets without the opportunity to get meaningful help. In fact, just today, members of your staff attended a meeting at Borough Hall with North Shore business owners to discuss their experiences with the street homelessness issue.

To start the conversation, I am writing to propose one such out-of-the-box policy idea which continues to generate national attention and praise for its promising outcomes.



Last year, the city of Albuquerque, in partnership with a local non-profit, launched the “There’s a Better Way Program.” The initiative was specifically designed to tackle street homelessness and accompanying quality-of-life issues by providing unsheltered, homeless individuals with day jobs. Several days a week, the city deploys a van to pick up panhandlers willing to participate and provides them with 5-6 hours of paid work—typically litter removal or beautification efforts—at above minimum wage.

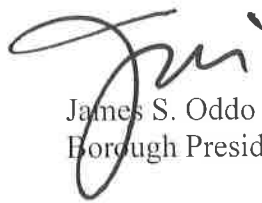
After running the program for a year, the city reports that they provided over 1,000 day jobs, removed over 100,000 pounds of litter, and cleaned almost 300 city blocks. Those statistics however, are of secondary importance. Through the program, it is reported that 20 people received housing, 139 were connected to mental health and substance abuse programs, and 185 began the process to secure long-term employment.

The program is designed to offer day jobs as an entry point to connect individuals to key services rather than a one-time opportunity to make money. It is that opportunity to make money legally, however, that allows the city to reach those in the shadows. Cities across the country have launched their own versions of this program, including progressive administrations in Seattle and Chicago.

With the Clean Team my staff operates at Borough Hall to address the borough’s litter problem, Staten Island may be best positioned to pilot this innovative approach for the City. I welcome a discussion with you and your team on the viability of this policy alternative and on your overall efforts to combat homelessness on Staten Island.

Thank you for your time, courtesy, and consideration.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James S. Oddo". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "O".

James S. Oddo
Borough President