

# NYPD to take over security at New York City homeless shelters

Christopher Tiberio  
20 January 2017

Under the pretext of concerns about the dangers to the New York City's homeless, the city's Department of Homeless Services (DHS) announced earlier this month that the New York Police Department (NYPD) is now overseeing security of the city's temporary housing for the homeless.

The DHS has had a security force independent of the NYPD command structure since 1993, when Mayor David Dinkins established the department. Created ostensibly to combat rising homeless levels in the 1990s, the DHS has provided bare-bones and insufficient services while affording the city government with the appearance of caring for the homeless.

It is estimated that there are approximately 60,000 people, including 25,000 children, living in New York City with no permanent residence.

The NYPD presence comes on top of a security review by the DHS and months of a media campaign led by the city's two tabloids, the *Daily News* and the *New York Post*, the latter of which routinely refers to the unhoused homeless people as "bums." Both newspapers speak for the rich and the upper middle class that would like to see the homeless locked up and out of sight.

Housing for the homeless, a combination of city-run and city-regulated nonprofit shelters, has widely been considered dangerous, unhealthy and overcrowded for years. Nevertheless, there are hundreds of people each night who seek to pass bureaucratic hurdles as a last resort for shelter for themselves and their families. The rise in crime at shelters is an indication of the social crisis and demonstrates that the city cannot provide jobs, mental health care, drug treatment programs or even nourishment for large numbers of homeless who seek out the shelter system.

The police integration into the shelters is already under way. According to the DHS, 22 NYPD officers will be assigned to train the current 777 "peace officers" on "proper searching strategies and how best to use Tasers and other nonlethal weapons provided to DHS officers," according to the *New York Post*.

This news comes after the announcement in 2016 that the NYPD and the notoriously brutal Rikers Island prison guards are to be armed with Tasers. While these and other "non-lethal" devices are cited as effective ways to prevent shootings and other types of potentially deadly force, evidence has shown that police resort to these painful devices quickly and without cause. Most experts agree that Tasers, which have been responsible for hundreds of deaths, cannot justifiably be called "non-lethal." Stun guns were taken away from the NYPD after the cops used one to torture suspected drug dealer Mark Davidson in a Queens precinct in 1985.

The NYPD is supervising another 1,400 private security guards at shelters and hotels where the overflow of homeless are now housed. The security company "has also implemented new Guard Force and Geo fencing technology to monitor staffing deployment," the DHS web site notes. Geo fencing technology sets up a virtual perimeter based on satellite data. It is unclear to what extent the people living in the shelter will be monitored.

The homeless will also be subject to increased state surveillance. As the DHS notes, it has "revamped the surveillance system and infrastructure at the 30th Street Men's Shelter through the installation of more than 300 surveillance cameras, all of which are now fully operational."

While the social crisis itself has made shelters dangerous places, the NYPD supervision will not seek to protect the homeless, one of the most oppressed and

vulnerable segments of the population, but rather to terrorize and monitor them. With nearly 1,000 people killed by police in 2016 nationally—and nine in New York City—it is a farce to claim that the city’s homeless will be safer under NYPD oversight.

It is precisely the ever-growing number of homeless people in the city that has raised concerns in ruling circles of how to manage them. This is the real reason the NYPD has stepped in to police the shelters. It is in line with the NYPD’s notorious stop-and-frisk program that unconstitutionally searched hundreds of working class youth in public areas for years until the program was abated at the end of the tenure of Mayor Michael Bloomberg, because it was itself becoming a liability for the ruling class.

When the DHS web site notes that the NYPD has “instituted procedures for conducting searches in shelters,” one can be sure that the democratic rights of the people in the shelters will be disregarded.

New York City has increasingly become a playground for the super-rich and the wealthiest layers of the middle class. The construction of luxury apartments that cost thousands of dollars a month to rent and millions to purchase is proceeding at a heated pace.

After three years in the city mayor’s office, during which the homeless population has increased by 20 percent, Bill de Blasio, the representative of the so-called progressive wing of the Democratic Party, has shown his unwillingness and inability to meet even the most minimal needs of the working class. New York City, for most of its people, has simply become unlivable.



To contact the WSWWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**