



Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance

ANDREW M. CUOMO
Governor

SAMUEL D. ROBERTS
Commissioner

SHARON DEVINE
Executive Deputy Commissioner

February 10, 2016

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

Dear Commissioner Banks:

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) was deeply disturbed to receive a report that a mother and her three daughters who were receiving temporary housing assistance were stabbed at the Ramada Staten Island at 535 North Gannon Road on February 10, 2016, resulting in the death of the mother and two of the girls. This is the most recent in a rash of violent incidents in emergency shelters in your district over the past several weeks, including the death of Deven Black on January 27, 2016 and the injuries sustained by a 36 year old resident at a different shelter on January 30, 2016 after they were attacked by other shelter residents bearing knives. This trend of violence in emergency shelters is simply unacceptable and you, as the district receiving funding to provide safe and habitable services and shelter, must take immediate and effective action to protect your residents.

In the case of serious health and safety violations in emergency shelters, OTDA is authorized to impose immediate remediation measures. We believe such measures are warranted. First, OTDA directs the New York City Department of Homeless Services (DHS) to immediately remove all recipients of temporary housing assistance (THA) from the Ramada Staten Island at 535 North Gannon Road, and to refrain from placing any other individuals or families receiving THA at that facility until further notice. Further, you must have a relocation plan that places all affected residents in appropriate, safe and habitable housing.

Second, with respect to those hotels/motels in your jurisdiction which are being used exclusively to provide emergency shelter (Dedicated Facilities), DHS is directed to certify, within 24 hours, that aggressive and effective security measures are being taken at each Dedicated Facility, including the posting of around-the-clock law enforcement at each facility.

Third, DHS must ensure that all THA recipients residing in hotels/motels and in cluster sites within your jurisdiction are safe, and that all state laws and regulations are being followed in those shelters. Accordingly, DHS is directed to take the following action within 24 hours:

- With respect to all hotels/motels and cluster sites in your jurisdiction which are being used to house any recipients of THA, DHS must provide to OTDA an assessment of security measures in place, as well as an aggressive plan for providing and improving security measures at each facility.

- Conduct and provide to OTDA an assessment of the security protocols in place at the Ramada Staten Island at 535 North Gannon Road and determine whether those protocols are adequate, generally, and whether they were adequate on February 10, 2016. Explain why or why not. If inadequate, describe how these protocols will be improved.
- Provide a copy of any incident, investigative or police reports prepared as a result of the incident at the Ramada Staten Island within 24 hours, or as soon as such report(s) are made available.
- The incident at the Ramada Staten Island suggests that the adult murder victim should have been housed in a domestic violence shelter. Provide a summary of how DHS is identifying and housing victims of domestic violence and whether those procedures were properly followed with respect to this family.

This is the third incident of horrific violence in one of your facilities in less than a month. We expect and demand that you take immediate action to protect shelter residents. Thank you for your prompt attention to this very important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sharon Devine", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Sharon Devine
Executive Deputy Commissioner