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**Testimony to the MTA Board
The MTA's Homeless Problem
By Gerard Bringmann
Chair, Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council
February 18, 2021**

Good day, I am Gerard Bringmann, chair of the Long Island Rail Road Commuter Council.

Even before the horrible events over the past weekend I planned to speak about the MTA's homeless problem. Today, my call for action is even more urgent.

Managing the homeless population shouldn't be the MTA's problem, but it is, de facto. For months I've been hearing from my fellow commuters that they're seeing a growing number of homeless individuals in Penn Station and at our Long Island stations, along with an increase in aggressive panhandling. They don't feel safe. That feeling extends when they get into the subways. I see the same in my daily commute.

At our Council meeting last week, we heard from the director of the MTA's Homeless Program Office. She explained how she and her staff person collaborate with the various police and BRC and SUS, the two contractors who provide services to homeless in New York City and on Long Island. We appreciate those efforts, but the problem remains. Last June, an IG audit found deficiencies in the MTA's homeless outreach activities. We have questions: What is the MTA doing to correct them? What kind of resources is the MTA dedicating? Most importantly, what are the city and state doing to support these efforts?

It's time for a full court press, on an ongoing basis, to get these unfortunate people the help they need and a safe place to stay. The status quo is not OK. Penn Station and our stations on Long Island are not, nor should be, homeless shelters.