



Testimony Supporting Community Mediation to Preserve Affordable Housing
NYSDRA Pilot Proposal for Bridging Public and Affordable Housing Disputes

Bridging Public and Affordable Housing Disputes

Theresa Hobbs, Executive Director of the New York State Dispute Resolution Association (NYSDRA), on behalf of the statewide network of Community Dispute Resolution Centers, requests \$500,000 to pilot a dispute resolution program between tenants and landlords within four housing authorities across the state, and tenants and small property owners in the post-COVID landscape. This initiative aims to mitigate housing conflicts, foster better communication, and achieve fair and amicable resolutions, benefiting both tenants and landlords. NYSDRA is both a contract program administrator and a professional association - the CDRCs have been our members since 1985.

Governor Hochul spotlighted housing as a top priority in her recent State of the State address. As New York grapples with an ongoing affordable housing crisis, disputes between public housing authorities, subsidized housing administrators, tenants, and small landlords are also on the rise – further threatening housing stability. Unresolved issues regarding unpaid rent, needed repairs, lease violations, and communication breakdowns too often accelerate into formal evictions and property defects.

New York’s Community Dispute Resolution Centers (CDRCs) have significant expertise helping courts mediate housing disputes. In FY 2023 alone, CDRCs mediated over 3,400 cases serving more than 6,500 people, including nearly 200 housing disputes handled for the NYS Division of Housing. Yet much more significant housing conflict mitigation could be achieved.

To leverage CDRC capabilities, NYSDRA proposes the Bridging Public and Affordable Housing Disputes pilot initiative. Skilled mediators would facilitate sessions between income-eligible tenants and small landlords or property administrators. The goal is resolving issues constructively through open dialogue, education on rental programs, negotiated agreements stipulating tenant repayments and housing improvements, and restored relationships.

Additionally, NYSDRA will coordinate four regional housing authority pilots to incorporate mediation and conflict coaching into their property management practices. On-site services would amplify tenant voices, identify community needs, reduce formal complaints, and limit court interventions.

NYSDRA requests \$500,000 to launch Bridging Public and Affordable Housing Disputes over the next year. The funding will drive housing stability through reconciling tenant-owner disputes before displacement occurs and embedding on-site mediation into housing authorities’ standard operating procedures.

Affordable housing preservation requires mitigating conflicts exacerbated by financial desperation. CDRCs are proven resolution partners ready to meet growing housing dispute needs statewide. NYSDRA urges your support to pilot these innovative dispute resolution models to protect accessible, stable housing.

Submitted by: Theresa Hobbs, Executive Director

New York State Dispute Resolution Association, Inc.

300 Great Oaks Blvd, Suite 300-027 · Albany, NY 12203-7911