



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

Testimony from State Senator Gustavo Rivera at Bronx Public Hearing on Rent Guidelines Board's Upcoming Vote on Lease Renewal Guidelines

GUSTAVO RIVERA June 14, 2017

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As the State Senator of the 33rd Senate District for the last 7 years, one thing has become crystal clear – our affordable housing stock continues to dwindle and each year New Yorkers become increasingly rent burdened.

Last year the Rent Guidelines Board provided tenants in rent-stabilized units with a bit of relief by passing another rent freeze, so landlords explored new avenues to increase tenants' monthly rent and continue to exacerbate the housing crisis in our City. In the last five years, the Division of Housing & Community Renewal (DHCR) has approved nearly \$1 billion in Major Capital Improvement (MCI) rent increases. That means that, on average, a tenant of a two bedroom whose building had been approved for an MCI has seen a permanent increase in their rent of \$126.40. Many times, the improvements landlords implement to qualify for these increases are simply overdue repairs or maintenance, do not improve the tenants living conditions, and cause unhealthy and costly conditions for tenants during construction. Furthermore, my office has witnessed an increase in the number of landlords in the Bronx who have stripped their tenants of the preferential rent they once provided, at times

increasing the monthly rent of a tenant by hundreds of dollars and giving them no other option than to move out of their home, further driving up the rent through vacancy bonuses. Landlords have had enough rent increases already.

While tenants have continued to see increases in their rents in one way or another, the operating costs for landlords are still below that of previous years. It is important to remember that these increases push each unit closer to deregulation, threatening our limited affordable housing and bringing families closer to eviction and to our shelter system. At the same time, neglect, harassment, and discrimination against tenants continue to be prevalent in districts like mine and demonstrate a growing effort to push tenants out of rent regulated units.

Tenants desperately need rent relief and our City needs to protect and preserve the affordable housing stock it has left. If we are to consider the economic conditions faced by landlords and tenants alike, there is no legitimate argument that could be made to raise rents by any amount. Instead, a rent rollback is necessary to begin to correct the burden placed on tenants.