



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Gustavo Rivera

## State Senator Gustavo Rivera Celebrates with Morris Houses Residents on the Settlement Reached with the New York City Housing Authority

GUSTAVO RIVERA November 20, 2017

| ISSUE: **NYCHA, MORRIS HOUSES, URBAN JUSTICE CENTER, LEGAL SETTLEMENT**

(Bronx, NY) - On Thursday, November 9, State Senator Gustavo Rivera and attorneys of the Urban Justice Center (UJC) joined a group of residents from 1460 Washington Avenue, part of Gouverneur Morris Houses, a New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) development, as they celebrated the settlement they reached with NYCHA on June 1 of this year.

In 2014, after years of facing hazardous and uninhabitable living conditions, Mothers on the Move, a community-based organization, worked with approximately two dozen residents of Gouverneur Morris Houses to contact the Urban Justice Center (UJC) in order to pursue legal action against NYCHA as a way to get the repairs they needed in their apartments. Some of the conditions affecting several units at Morris Houses included pervasive mold, leaks, infestations of rodents and roaches, leaking fixtures, warped flooring, chipping paint, and cracked plaster.

On August 26, 2016, after being contacted by UJC, State Senator Gustavo Rivera, witnessed firsthand these unsafe living conditions during a walkthrough he had in the building with Assemblymember Michael Blake and Councilmember Vanessa L. Gibson. During their visit,

they had the opportunity to meet a number of families, some of them with children suffering from respiratory issues due to their exposure to mold. Consequently, the three elected officials penned a joint letter to NYCHA's Chair, Shola Olatoye, requesting their cooperation in devising a viable plan, in both the short and long term, to address the outstanding repairs and renovation needs at Morris Houses.

In an auspicious move, NYCHA worked to improve the building's conditions, including hiring a new manager and making the necessary repairs to address the root causes affecting these tenants' apartments. NYCHA made an effort to maintain Senator Rivera's office informed about the progress made at each of the apartments participating in the lawsuit.

"We are celebrating that the residents of Morris Houses were able to successfully get the repairs they needed and deserved. They were living under perilous conditions for an extended period of time, but their actions and determination led to real results," said State Senator Gustavo Rivera. "It is my responsibility, as their representative, to hold NYCHA accountable and advocate for their rights and that is exactly what we did. I applaud the commitment and resilience demonstrated by these tenants and the attorneys of the UJC. The result of our joint efforts represent a testament to the power of organizing and the strength that we can yield as a group. I also must commend NYCHA for working to address these long due capital repairs as a way to improve the quality of life of their residents."

"This is the model: having a tight knit committed group of residents, support from elected officials...it takes all of that to get things done." Rajiv Jaswa, Urban Justice Center.

In order to achieve this legal victory, Morris Houses residents, with the assistance and guidance of the attorneys at UJC, worked together to appear in court and testify, grant access to their apartments, take days off for repairs and inspections, and meet regularly to

assert their power as a group.

"We all come from different backgrounds and different countries, but we came together for the common good. We all want the same thing: a decent place to live, hot and cold running water, heat, safety, and a sense of community," said Sonia Reid, resident of Morris Houses.

"The Urban Justice Center worked so hard. They were so patient with this multicultural group to help each and every one of us. They encouraged us when we thought it wasn't going anywhere and we wanted to give up. You stuck by us and that means a lot. Thank you very, very, very much. I feel justified because it's like someone is actually listening and seeing everything that's going on. I had to stop myself and say, am I just complaining about nothing? But then I heard that everyone else had the same problems and it's good to finally get what you deserve. I'm a New Yorker, I'm an American, I just want what I was promised: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. That's all I want," said Rosie Washington, resident of Morris Houses.

"I want to say thank you to everyone for working so hard to fix everything in my apartment. Three years ago, I had no hot water, I needed repairs in the kitchen and the bathroom, but after you guys worked so hard for us, now my apartment is fixed. I just want to say thank you so much and God bless you," said Yaqueline Garcia, resident of Morris Houses.