



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

## Sen. Kavanagh, AM Lee, Legislative Colleagues, Public Housing and Section 8 Tenant Leaders and Housing Advocates Call for Adding \$389 Million for Emergency Rental Assistance Program to Cover All Eligible Tenants

BRIAN KAVANAGH March 9, 2023

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Albany, NY – Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblymember Grace Lee were joined by colleagues in the Legislature, public housing and subsidized housing tenant leaders, public housing authority officials, including NYCHA Council of Presidents members Danny Barber, Reginald Bowman, Barbara McFadden, and Aixa Torres, affordable housing providers, and housing advocates to call for the State budget to

include \$389 million in funding for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). The funding would cover the estimated cost of providing rental assistance for all eligible tenants throughout the state who have applied for assistance, but have been denied assistance to date solely because they reside in public housing or subsidized housing.

The New York State Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA) has estimated that a total of \$732 million in rental assistance remains to be paid out to eligible applicants who had submitted applications before the program portal closed on January 20th. Of this amount, an estimated \$343 million would be for eligible applications submitted by residents in private housing, and \$389 million would be for eligible residents in public and federal- and state-subsidized housing. The program currently has \$284 million available, and the U.S. Department of Treasury recently awarded New York State \$63 million. With a total of \$347 million, OTDA expects to have sufficient funds to cover the full portion of eligible private-housing applicants.

“It is long past time for the State to meet the emergency needs of residents of public and subsidized housing who have been relegated to last-in-line status for ERAP funding due to an unjust provision deprioritizing these New Yorkers’ applications,” **stated Senator Kavanagh, Chair of the Committee on Housing in the New York State Senate.** “We know that many public and subsidized housing tenants accrued rent arrears because they were unable to pay due to the hardships imposed on them by the COVID-19 pandemic. They shouldn’t be forced to bear the burden of this debt because they weren’t placed on equal footing with their fellow New Yorkers.”

“The goal of the emergency rental assistance program was to provide relief to New Yorkers who needed it, but by making it inaccessible to renters in public and subsidized housing, New York has not fully met that goal,” **stated Assemblymember Grace Lee, Member of the Committee on Housing in the New York State Assembly.** “At present, thousands of families living in public and subsidized housing across the state still face the threat of eviction, despite successfully applying for ERAP. This new funding will enable the program to offer these families the housing security they so desperately need and as the representative of a district with over 1,000 families from NYCHA and Section 8 housing who have applied for ERAP, I am personally committed to fight to fully fund the program for \$389 million in this year’s budget.”

“Our state’s families continue to struggle to pay rent and stay in their homes because of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Assemblymember Edward Gibbs** of District 68, East Harlem, Central Harlem and the Upper East Side. “Sadly, this is worse for the people most in need, those that reside in public and subsidized housing. In the 68th district, NYCHA residents currently have over \$39 million in rental arrears. Residents are uncertain of their housing security. I’m calling the Governor and my colleagues in the Assembly and Senate to fund ERAP to keep our NYCHA residents in their homes.”

“The Emergency Rental Assistance Program has been quite successful in keeping struggling New Yorkers in their homes, especially during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic,” **said Assemblymember Latrice Walker.** “Residents of public and supervised housing – often the most vulnerable among us -- incurred the same hardships, but have not received ERAP funds. I stand with dozens of my Assembly

colleagues in calling for \$389 million in the FY 2023-2024 state budget for ERAP, so that we can fairly support all New Yorkers in need. I know what housing insecurity looks like. I lived it. And I see it in the faces of the people in my district. Let's fix this now."

"Residents living in public housing cannot afford to languish in ERAP purgatory," **said Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal, Chair of the Committee on Housing in the New York State Assembly.** "Denying tenants and public housing authorities urgent rental relief because will prove to be an enormous debacle. We, as a State, have a moral imperative to make our most vulnerable New Yorkers financially whole. The State cannot begin to holistically address its burgeoning housing crisis without safeguarding thousands of public housing residents from eviction, while doing everything possible to keep our public housing authorities afloat. I look forward to continuing to fight for this dire funding in this year's budget."

**State Senator Brad Hoylman-Sigal said,** "The ERAP program was designed to assist our most vulnerable tenants who accumulated rental and utility arrears during the COVID-19 pandemic. We are in a housing crisis. New York must prioritize keeping families safely in their homes, which means providing assistance to all ERAP-eligible tenants, including those in public and subsidized housing. I echo Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Lee's call for the enacted budget to include \$389 million to ensure ERAP protects all eligible New Yorkers."

**State Senator Robert Jackson said,** "We must do everything we can to ensure that public and subsidized housing tenants who have submitted approved applications to the State's rental assistance portal are not left behind. That is why I'm proud to be a co-sign of Senator Kavanagh's budget letter to request \$389 million in ERAP funding for public and subsidized housing applicants to cover their remaining rent arrears."

**Senator Luis Sepúlveda said:** "As we continue to recover from the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, it's critical that we support our most vulnerable communities. I fully support Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Grace Lee's call for \$389 million in ERAP funding to cover the remaining rent arrears of public and subsidized housing tenants. The Emergency Rental Assistance Program provides much-needed economic relief to tenants and landlords alike, helping to stabilize our communities and promote equitable recovery for all New Yorkers."

"Public housing residents deserve better than being placed at the back of the line," **said Assemblymember Khaleel M. Anderson.** "As our working-class communities emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic, hundreds of public housing residents in my district face eviction due to rent arrears. I join my colleague Assemblymember Lee in advocating for \$389 million in ERAP funding for public and subsidized housing tenants who deserve the same economic relief afforded to thousands of other working-class New Yorkers."

"ERAP is a lifeline for New Yorkers facing financial hardships," **said Assemblymember Brian Cunningham.** "Especially as New York's affordable housing stock dwindles and the cost of living continues to rise, ERAP provides tenants and property owners the critical foundation of housing security. I am proud to stand with my colleagues to support an additional \$389 million in the FY23-FY24 budget dedicated to rental assistance for those who need it most."

"Allocating \$389 million in the FY 2023-2024 budget for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program is not just a financial investment, it's a moral imperative," **said Assemblymember Maritza Davila.** "By covering the outstanding rental assistance needs for public and subsidized housing residents across New York State, we are not only providing much-needed relief to those who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic, but we are also investing in the economic stability and future prosperity of our communities. Supporting ERAP is not just the right thing to do, it's the smart thing to do for the long-term well-being of our state."

"I join my colleagues in calling for the inclusion of \$389 Million in ERAP Funding for Public and Subsidized housing tenants," **said Assemblymember Charles D. Fall.** "We know far too well that the effects and hardships from the pandemic are still being felt by New Yorkers today. As rent arrears grow, we must prioritize Public and Subsidized housing and lend our support to the tenants just as we did to the renters during the uncertainty of the pandemic."

"New Yorkers across the state are struggling to make ends meet. The cost of living crisis has compounded the ongoing housing crisis, and renters in public and subsidized housing need assistance to be able to stay in their homes," **said Assemblymember González-Rojas.** "I urge the legislature and Governor to include \$389 million in ERAP funding for public and subsidized housing tenants, and thank all the advocates and colleagues for leading the charge."

"Programs like ERAP create win-win solutions for renters, landlords, and communities. Keeping people in their homes gives them the stability they need to improve their economic standing," **said Assemblymember Dana Levenberg.** "Assisting renters helps landlords and public housing authorities remain whole, ensuring they will receive the income streams that they rely on. Communities are safer when people are housed. We need ERAP for all eligible recipients now!"

"New York State had a critical role in building, maintaining, and funding NYCHA developments until as recently as 1998, when a Republican Governor decided to walk away from our responsibilities," **said Assemblymember Zohran Mamdani.** "This is the year that Albany must reckon with this history, and repair it. And that begins with stopping the practice of locking public housing residents out from ERAP."

"Over 400,000 applications have been filed by residents throughout New York State seeking assistance in paying their rent," **said Assemblymember Demond Meeks.** "Yet, as of the end of February this year, there are still more than 175,000 applications left unfulfilled as the Emergency Rental Assistance Program awaits additional funding. Each day that we fail to deliver needed support, thousands of residents across our state remain without the support and tools necessary to maintain their welfare and livelihoods. It is essential that we remember our responsibility to the members of our community. Until no resident has to fear losing their homes, New York State must continue to provide for its residents and families. I stand with my state colleagues in calling for funding for the ERAP this legislative session."

"Housing stability is one of the most critical issues facing New Yorkers," **said Assemblymember Jo Anne Simon.** "This is really a matter of equity -- the state provided Covid rental assistance to those who needed it in private housing and we must expand it to those who live in public housing, as well. Thanks to Assemblymember Lee and Senator Kavanagh for spearheading this effort."

"The pandemic caused so many to lose their jobs and their ability to pay rent," **said Assemblymember Michaele Solages**. "Yet, working people in our state who live in social housing and receive housing assistance have been totally excluded from the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). This is an unacceptable fact that we must reverse. I will work with my colleagues to expand ERAP to cover our most vulnerable families."

"The Emergency Rental Assistance Program was enacted to keep renters in their homes at a time when many were out of work and at risk of being evicted. ERAP was successful at achieving its goals - but if you live in public housing it was a different story," **said Assemblymember John Zaccaro, Jr.** "New York State's public and subsidized housing residents have not received any ERAP funding and this is simply unacceptable. Being outraged is not enough, action is required. That is why I support the inclusion of \$389 million in funding to the Emergency Renters Assistance program for residents of NYCHA."

"NYCHA is our most critical affordable housing portfolio, but without new ERAP funding from the state, we are risking the future of these homes for tens of thousands of New Yorkers," **said Chief Housing Officer Jessica Katz**. "Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Lee are at the forefront of this fight, and we are grateful for their leadership in ensuring that public housing residents have stable, quality homes."

"I would like to give my sincerest thanks to our state legislative partners for organizing today's press conference," **said NYCHA Interim CEO Lisa Bova-Hiatt**. "We have an opportunity to provide relief to tens of thousands of tenants who were left behind during the pandemic. An investment in public housing will ensure residents are secure in their homes, allow for the continuation of vital services, and help housing authorities across the state balance their budgets."

"The New York State Public Housing Authority Directors Association (NYSPHADA) urges Governor Hochul and the legislature to fully fund rental arrears for public housing authorities throughout New York State. This crisis looms heavily on public housing authorities who continue to provide quality housing for our most needy New Yorkers but are in dire need of help to avert future operational challenges," **said William J. Simmons, President of NYSPHADA & Executive Director of the Syracuse Housing Authority**.

"From taking on the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic to being burdened with stifling inflation, it is incomprehensible why New York's assisted households would be ignored when it comes to rental assistance that other New Yorkers accessed," **stated David R. Jones, President and CEO of the Community Service Society of New York**. "Such an atypical approach represents a moral failing, that no other state but ours suffered from. This budget provides an opportunity to rectify this failing and at the least give residents of assisted households what all others were able to benefit from."

"Public housing residents suffered greatly during the pandemic, and these low-income households are still struggling to make ends meet due to skyrocketing prices for everyday basic needs," **said Juanita O. Lewis, Executive Director of Community Voices Heard**. "Residents of public housing should never have been cut out of receiving rental assistance. It is time to right that wrong by providing rental assistance to NYCHA and housing authorities across New York State, without requiring residents to jump through hoops to get back on track."

“According to our latest analysis, roughly one third of residents in affordable housing are more than 2 months behind on their rent – the latest sign of a severe emergency that extends beyond public housing and impacts tens of thousands of households statewide,” **said Rachel Fee, Executive Director of the New York Housing Conference.** “We hope to see the Legislature solve this problem now before it gets even worse, as failing to take action now will only contribute to poor living conditions and continued housing insecurity for public housing and affordable housing residents alike.”

“Solving the arrears crisis in New York requires a holistic approach to relieve struggling tenants and property owners in affordable housing as well as public housing residents and agencies,” **said Jolie Milstein, president and CEO of the New York State Association for Affordable Housing.** “While this is an important step forward, now we need to continue down this path and address the broad and deep arrears crisis afflicting affordable housing across the state.”

“It is critical that any final budget include funding to ensure that all New Yorkers — especially those in public or subsidized housing who have been unfairly denied access to ERAP benefits in the past — are protected from the extraordinary burden of housing insecurity,” **said Judith Goldiner, attorney-in-charge of the Civil Law Reform Unit at The Legal Aid Society.** “Albany has a clear opportunity to extend this desperately needed relief to its most marginalized constituents, and amidst the fallout from the pandemic and historically high inflation, it is paramount to prioritize these New Yorkers’ needs.”

“Many of the residents who had applied for ERAP are the breadwinner and/or care providers for disabled loved ones and/or children. Provided the protection of ERAP, our residents have anxiously awaited the decision on their cases to pay rent or seek out other financial assistance or direction on what to do next,” **said Tanya Castro Negrón, Chair of the Board of Directors for Lands End 2 Resident Association Inc.,** who represents the 937 residents of 265 and 275 Cherry Street from the Lower East Side.

“Recently, the landlord’s attorneys have served our residents arrears collection and letters of intent to pursue court proceedings. Please keep all [New Yorkers] united and sheltered before making decisions based on the equity of communities and neighborhoods.”

“I applied for the ERAP program in 2021 and was approved but still have not received any support,” **said NYCHA resident and Community Voices Heard member, Maria Arnold.** “I’ve suffered a lot. I lost my husband right before the pandemic, and I struggled to pay rent and deal with extra medical expenses because of the mold in my apartment. Public housing residents should never have been put at the back of line for rent relief. The State needs to make things right by helping public residents get back on their feet.”

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