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**Testimony for the Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing**

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My name is Nathylin Flowers Adesegun. I am a member of VOCAL-NY. VOCAL-NY is a grassroots organization, working to end AIDS, mass incarceration, the drug war, and homelessness. On behalf of VOCAL-NY, I want to thank the Senate and Assembly Housing Committee Chairs Brian Kavanagh and Steve Cymbrowitz, and the other members of this committee for the opportunity to provide testimony today.

VOCAL-NY is a part of the Housing Justice for All campaign. We are a coalition of over 70 organizations that represents tenants, homeless New Yorkers, and public housing residents from Brooklyn to Buffalo. We are fighting for a “#NYHomesGuarantee.” A #NYHomesGuarantee is the basic idea that every New Yorker has the right to a safe, stable, and affordable place to live.

My story of homelessness started in February 2015, when I was evicted from my apartment of 34 and a half years when I lost my rent stabilization status. Since then I’ve been living in a homeless shelter, along with more than 92,000 people across New York State. Many of the women in my shelter have become my closest friends. We share memories, experiences,



and most of all, we share solidarity with each other as we search for housing, stability, and basic dignity.

My shelter is in Queens. I have to leave my room each morning by 9 a.m., and be back by curfew at 10 p.m. Our toilet paper is rationed, because the shelter has so many plumbing issues. There is one microwave for 200 women. I'm a vegetarian and I love to cook, but the options for food at my shelter are sparse, at best. When I'm not at the shelter, I cook every chance I get.

Year after year, we have heard Governor Cuomo make announcements about his "unprecedented" commitment to housing and homelessness. He says he's investing historic resources to help homeless New Yorkers, so why hasn't all of that money materialized in housing for the homeless? The fact is, the Governor's words are empty if 92,000 are still homeless.

People are in desperate need of supportive housing. The Governor promised New York State 20,000 units of supportive housing in 2016, but only a fraction of the funds we need have been released. For every five approved supportive housing applications, only one vacancy exists. Meanwhile the overdose crisis has taken the lives of over 20,000 people since 2016 -- many of those lives could have been saved if more people had access to supportive housing. At the same time, prosecutors, police, and elected officials are doing whatever they can to roll back bail reform laws. We will never stop relying on incarceration without meeting the basic needs of the most marginalized New Yorkers, like housing.



Last year 150,000 students experienced homelessness across New York State. In New York City, over 70 percent of the city's homeless students failed state English exams last year and less than 60 percent graduated from the city's public high schools. Stable housing and quality education go hand-in-hand, but our young people face enormous obstacles to succeed due to instability in housing.

While homeless New Yorkers struggle every day, New York is home to 112 billionaires with over \$525 billion in wealth, and dozens more live here part-time in multi-million dollar luxury apartments. Meanwhile, our Governor refuses to tax the ultra-rich, even while our state faces a historic homelessness crisis. Raising taxes on New York's wealthiest could raise an estimated \$30 billion in needed revenue. Our State's budget and tax policies should be used to raise revenue, redistribute wealth, and ensure every New Yorker is housed.

The human cost of living in a shelter is higher than we'd like to admit. I worked for most of my life, I am retired, but I am still forced to live in a shelter. Children are growing up in shelters while their parents struggle to find housing, meet appointments, and keep jobs; students have to trek across the city to get to school, young people are losing out on critical growth opportunities because they live in constant instability, and people with mental and physical health needs are not getting the support they need. What kind of future are we building for New Yorkers, if we let these conditions persist in our state when we have the resources to change them?



New York State needs a housing plan that will drastically reduce the homeless crisis, not by the hundreds, but by the tens-of-thousands. The Governor will continue to manipulate reality with press announcements and empty promises, but that's why we need the legislature to step in and help us. Please help us by urging your leaders to prioritize homeless New Yorkers in the Assembly and Senate one-house budgets, by including \$500 million for a state-funded rental assistance program that would help homeless New Yorkers and those at risk of homelessness pay the rent, and by including funding for the full-20,000 units of supportive housing the state was promised back in 2016. Thank you.