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**Testimony Before the New York State Senate
Standing Committee on Social Services,
Standing Committee on Housing, Construction & Community Development,
and Standing Committee on Aging**

**Joint Public Hearing: To assess rental assistance programs and examine the need for
expanded residential rental assistance to prevent evictions**

February 18, 2025

Good morning. My name is Gale A. Brewer and I represent District 6 in the New York City Council, which includes most of the Upper West Side and parts of Clinton, Hell's Kitchen, and Central Park South.

Thank you, Chairs, for the opportunity to testify in support of Senate Bill S1457A, sponsored by Sen. Brian Kavanagh, which would raise the maximum income threshold for SCRIE, DRIE, SCHE and DHE to \$67,000, and would require it to be increased according to consumer price index adjustments going forward.

In 2024 I introduced, and the City Council adopted unanimously, a resolution calling on the State Legislature to pass, and the Governor to sign, Sen. Kavanagh's legislation. Every elected official in New York City knows how important these programs are to constituents. I have a volunteer caseworker at my District Office every Monday to assist constituents with applications and other paperwork for these programs.

People who come in for SCRIE and DRIE help are often retired teachers. Our caseworker points out that retired city workers really need the maximum to be \$75,000. Many live off their savings until they it runs out. Then they are forced to leave New York City altogether—the city they devoted themselves to for decades.

Our caseworker also points out that the way information is about SCRIE and DRIE is disseminated is haphazard. People do not know the program exists. In the past, landlords of small buildings had the information available and would share it with tenants. As these buildings are bought up by corporate landlords, tenants lose access to information and wind up paying full rent. As a constituent advocate, our caseworker has to find the corporate office and point out that the client is eligible for the benefit. It takes time, effort, and in the meantime, the individual is paying full rent.

Seniors make up a significant portion of rent-regulated tenants. According to the 2023 Housing and Vacancy Survey, 31% of all rent-stabilized tenants are seniors. In rent-controlled housing, this rises to 53%. Comparatively, 28% of renters overall are seniors, showing that rent-regulated housing disproportionately houses our city's aging population.

The goal of Sen. Kavanagh's legislation is to ensure that older adult and disabled tenants can stay in their homes, avoid homelessness, and age in their communities with dignity and respect. The current \$50,000 threshold to access these benefits has not changed since 2014. In order for these programs to remain sustainable long term and to be relevant and effective, income thresholds must reflect changes to the cost of living.

More examples of New Yorkers who would benefit from a threshold increase:

- Memory loss and dementia are common reasons my constituents lose benefits. They receive a form in the mail and don't even know what it is, so they get cut off. There should be an automatic renewal, perhaps based on State tax returns or other existing documentation. One constituent's rent went from \$775 to \$1,100 for this exact reason.
- On constituent who lives at Independence Plaza was denied benefits for being over the income requirement by \$0.23.
- During the pandemic, constituents lost their benefits because economic stimulus payments pushed them over the income limit.
- I have constituents who are forced to choose between getting help and keeping their benefits. An older adult faced with increasing costs of living, including medical expenses, had a grandson offer to move in and provide care. His income would have pushed the household income over the \$50,000 limit.
- A 77 year old on disability since age 33 has been able to maintain stable living situation, afford basic necessities, and live with peace of mind and security. She lost her SCRIE benefit after Social Security pushed her income to approximately \$52,000.

Thank you for convening this hearing and pursuing the important legislation. I am happy to answer any questions.