

**Testimony of RuthAnne Visnauskas, Commissioner/CEO
New York State Homes and Community Renewal**

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing February 25, 2026

Good afternoon, Chairs Krueger, Pretlow, Kavanagh, and Rosenthal, and distinguished members of the Legislature.

I am RuthAnne Visnauskas, Commissioner and CEO of New York State Homes and Community Renewal. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on Governor Hochul's Fiscal Year 2027 Executive Budget and to share progress on HCR's efforts to increase housing affordability across New York.

Over the past year, under Governor Hochul's leadership, HCR has continued to deliver results for individuals, families, and communities across New York State.

We have implemented the Governor's \$25 billion five-year Housing Plan with urgency and focus, and I am pleased to report that as we near the final year of the plan, HCR will have financed the creation and preservation of more than 78,000 affordable homes and we are firmly on track to the 100,000 goal.

Our continued housing investments strengthen communities. They provide opportunity. They provide long-term stability for all New Yorkers – for seniors, for those who need services to live independently, for families, and for individuals. We make New York a more affordable and desirable place to call home with every dollar that we invest.

As I do each year, I have the pleasure of traveling around the state to see these investments take shape and to stand alongside Senators, Assemblymembers, municipal officials, and our partners in the housing community as we welcome residents to their new homes.

I can say without hesitation, these developments are making an enormous difference in the lives of New Yorkers and in the communities that make up this great state.

And I'm happy to say that our success goes beyond the creation and preservation of affordable housing.

For example, more than 400 municipalities have been certified as Pro-Housing Communities under Governor Hochul's leadership with more certified each month.

The Governor's program provides certified communities with exclusive access to \$750 million dollars in State discretionary funding. This includes \$100 million specifically dedicated to localities to address their infrastructure needs, such as water and sewer upgrades, that support housing development. The funds awarded to date support the creation of up to 20,000 homes statewide.

In addition to these capital dollars, certified municipalities were eligible to apply for \$5 million in technical assistance grants to support pro-housing related activities aimed at increasing housing supply. This included creating master plans, conducting market studies and zoning analyses, streamlining building permits, and similar actions that give localities concrete tools to grow their housing stock.

In addition to our Pro Housing Community work, I'd like to highlight two new initiatives from this past year where we are expanding our impact.

Housing Acceleration Fund

This year, we established New York's Housing Acceleration Fund.

This first-of-its kind program in the state provides low-cost construction financing to help accelerate the development of shovel-ready, mixed-income rental projects across New York.

It was one of the Governor's key housing proposals from her 2025 State of the State, and with support from the Legislature, is expected to result in 1,800 homes statewide.

Move-In NY

This year, we also launched MOVE-IN NY, an innovative program to increase new affordable homeownership options for New Yorkers.

The program focuses on factory-built housing and was successfully launched with the creation of three new starter homes sited in the cities of Schenectady and Syracuse, and the town of Newcomb in the Adirondacks.

We have expanded the pilot program to a statewide initiative and we expect to help build 200 additional starter homes this year – and done so at half the cost of traditional construction and twice as fast.

Shifting to this year's proposals – the Governor is again laser-focused on housing affordability and making sure government works on behalf of New Yorkers.

Prices are rising, people are struggling to afford rents, to buy homes, and to pay for life's necessities. The Governor continues to find innovative ways to tackle these challenges, and that promise is reflected in her ambitious State of the State and Executive Budget proposals.

To start, the Governor is proposing her landmark *Let Them Build* Agenda, a series of reforms designed to speed up and reduce the costs for housing and infrastructure development.

The main pillar of *Let Them Build* is a modernization and update to the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA).

As you and your constituents can likely attest, housing developments and infrastructure projects are often subject to a long and expensive process of analyzing environmental issues, only to uncover no concerns. Meanwhile, time goes by, costs go up, and New Yorkers are left without housing opportunities.

To remedy this, the Governor is proposing to exempt housing from SEQRA review if it meets certain criteria. This housing will still be required to comply with crucial State regulatory and permit requirements governing water use, air quality, environmental justice, and protection of natural resources. This proposal will not supersede local land use requirements – on the contrary, it removes a source of unnecessary delay for the development that localities need and support.

This change will allow localities to move forward in a way that prioritizes smarter housing growth and ensures we continue to preserve our environment and conserve our natural resources.

Last week, I was with the Governor touring some housing developments in the city of New Rochelle where you can see first-hand the value of building more homes faster.

Housing of all types – affordable and market rate, homeownership and rental – were supported by the city and the results today speak for themselves.

New Rochelle permitted just 39 homes annually in 2017. Since 2020, however, that number rose to nearly a thousand homes per year, resulting in a five percent decline in rent growth at a time when rents elsewhere were increasing by double digits.

When we build more housing and remove barriers, housing is more affordable for all.

The SEQRA process today adds more than \$82,000 per home in New York City, \$35,000 per home in cities like Rochester or Buffalo, \$40,000 per home in the Mid-Hudson region, and \$45,000 per home on Long Island, according to the Citizens Budget Commission. These added costs drive rents and housing costs up for everyone at a time when New Yorkers can least afford it.

As the Governor has made clear, she is steadfastly committed to addressing the state's housing crisis and wants to do so by building a wide variety of housing to meet the diverse needs of New Yorkers. This proposal is a critical step to partner with localities in achieving this essential goal.

To be clear: the proposed changes do not weaken standards, they modernize them.

We're proud that this innovative approach has earned the backing of the New York State Association of Counties, the New York State Association of Towns, the New York State Conference of Mayors, the Regional Plan Association, along with New York City Mayor Mamdani and dozens of other local elected officials. This diverse coalition demonstrates its wide appeal and extraordinary potential.

Executive Budget Highlights

To properly invest in New York's housing and local development needs, we continue to rely on a comprehensive strategy that reinforces successful programs while also directing resources towards new programs and approaches that can solve the problems of today and tomorrow.

To this end, the Governor's Budget would also invest:

- **\$250 million** in funding to accelerate the construction of thousands of new affordable homes;
- **\$100 million** for the MOVE-IN NY homeownership program, which leverages innovative technologies to build new homes twice as fast and at lower cost;
- **\$50 million** for the Resilient and Ready program to help homeowners recover from and better prepare for extreme weather events;
- **\$5 million** for the Manufactured Home Park Revolving Loan Fund to finance improvements to critical infrastructure and upgrades;

- **\$50 million** for the Housing Access Voucher Pilot Program (HAVPP), consistent with the pilot, designed to provide rental assistance for individuals and families who are homeless or who face an imminent loss of housing;
- **\$40 million** for the Homeowner Protection Program (HOPP) to provide legal assistance and housing counseling to help preserve homeownership and protect at-risk homeowners from foreclosure; and
- **\$20 million** for lead abatement programs to protect tenants from lead hazards in areas of high risk outside New York City.

In addition to that, the Governor is proposing to increase the eligibility for two important New York rent freeze programs – the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE). The income eligibility limits will increase from \$50,000 to \$75,000 which will ensure the most vulnerable New Yorkers are protected from rent increases.

In addition, we're reauthorizing J-51 for the next ten years, a crucial tool for allowing owners of rent stabilized buildings and co-ops to make capital investments in their buildings without increasing costs for residents. The Governor's proposal expands the universe of eligible homeownership buildings, makes it easier for owners to apply, and increases the total benefit.

Closing

While these examples represent only a fraction of the Governor's housing and community initiatives, they reflect many of the bold steps we're taking toward meeting the housing and community revitalization needs of our vibrant and diverse state, and I look forward to your support.

The challenges we face are significant, but so is the progress we have made and will continue to make together. I want to thank the Legislature for your ongoing support and for your shared vision and commitment to addressing housing affordability.

Together, we have delivered measurable results — 78,000 of them so far – thousands of new homes, renovated homes, homeownership opportunities, stronger communities, and a cleaner, greener environment.

I am confident that we will continue to be a model for the nation in how government works for the people. Thank you, and I am ready to take your questions.

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