

Testimony of Dr. Cleopatra Brown

Before the JOINT HEARING TO EXAMINE THE CRISIS FACING HOMEOWNERS

March 07, 2019

I would like to thank you for the opportunity to share my testimony here today. I am a homeowner in Brooklyn; US Navy Veteran having served (6) years; retiree from US Postal Service, Chairperson of CB#16 Veterans' Affair Committee; Member, CB16 Legislative and Youth Committee, Co-Chair of Brownsville Think Tank Matters Board, President of Strauss Street Block Association; Executive Director of CATS, Inc. and the Founder of Great Commission Outreach Ministry, Inc.

I have (2) concerns I would like to address: (1) Real Property Tax Exemptions for Cold War Veterans, and (2) Water and Sewage Rates and Service Line Protection.

- 1. According to the NYS Real Property Law Section 458-b**, it authorizes an exemption from real property taxation for qualified residential property owned by persons who rendered military service to the US during the Cold War period between September 2, 1945 – December 26, 1991. Each county, city, town, village, and school district has the option of deciding whether to grant the Cold War Veterans' Exemption. **According to NYC Department of Finance**, the only Veterans qualify for Real Property Tax Exemptions are those who served during the following conflicts: WWI, WWII, Korean War, Vietnam War, Gulf War, Iraq and Afghanistan. These conflicts **exclude** the Cold War Veterans. According to statistics generated by Congressional Leaders Hakeem Jeffries and Yvette Clarke, over 40,000 Veterans live in Brooklyn; 16,000-20,000 reside in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Oceanhill-Brownsville and ENY. The highest concentration of Veterans reside in CB#3 and 16. **According to Rockland County (Article XVII, Title 355-100)**, Nassau and other counties and cities in New York State adopted legislation to provide Cold War Veterans with a real property tax exemption similar to tax exemptions given to wartime veterans. On April 24, 2017, Senator Gallivan announces legislation to provide for the continuation of the real property tax exemption for Cold War Veterans providing that the exemption authorized previously applies to qualifying owners...as long as they remain qualifying owners, without regard to such ten-year limitation. This Bill (S5659A/A6510) was approved by Senate and Assembly in June 2017. **According to NYS Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie, Committee on Veterans' Affairs 2017 Annual Report, Section IIA2 (NYC Council Include Veterans' Exemption)**, allow the local legislative body of a city...to adopt a local law to grant veterans an exemption from their school taxes. This law was needed since the City of NY does not have a school board and there is no mechanism to grant the exemption to veterans residing in the (5) boroughs. At this time, Cold War Veterans, including myself, are being "Denied" and does not qualify as a Veteran. As

gentrification continues to rapidly increase in communities of color, our property taxes are also on the rise.

Recommendation: On behalf of Veteran's Homeowners, we recommend that the Senator and Assembly collaborate with NYC Council to opt into creating policy and/or legislation so that NYC Department of Finance will grant us the Cold War Veterans Real Property Tax Exemption for our service rendered to this country and to help us homeowners to lower our property tax bill as well.

2. I have been seeking answer from DEP and elected official in regards to the Sewage bill being charge at 125% higher than the Water bill. No one has been able to answer how DEP calculated that figure. Nonetheless, this cost does not cover the Water and Sewer Line Protection. If something happens to these Lines, the homeowners are solely responsible for the repairs of those lines. In addition to the Water and Sewage which is 125% of the Water bill, I am now paying approximately \$40 per month to DEP for Water and Sewer Line Protection which is not fair to homeowners.

Recommendation

Respectfully request to (1) allocate funding to **Honeywell Building Solutions** – Residential Water Survey Program Contractor for DEP – to create Leak Assistance Program (similar to the NYSERDA Weatherization Assistance Program) to help reduce water cost by replacing toilets and showerheads; repair toilet leaks, install faucet flow to conserve water, and to encourage all DEP account holders to enroll in their **Leak Notification System**. If the Automated Meter Reading (AMR) system identifies any leak or unusually high consumption within the home, “**grants**” should be made available to assist homeowners when they identify leaks. These measures alone can provide job training skills in Plumbing and create jobs. DEP does have Leak Forgiveness Program but if your Average Daily Flow (ADF) is not 200% higher than the representative bill, your account does not qualify for this Program; and/or (2) Provide Water Tax Exemptions to help lower the water bill (similar to the property tax exemption program).

Members of the Committee, thank you again for the opportunity to share my concerns and issue and the concerns of my fellow veterans and homeowners. I look forward to answering any questions you may have and working with the Committee in the future. For further information, I can be reached at (917) 445-2274.