

**TESTIMONY OF THE NEW YORK STATE
CATHOLIC CONFERENCE**

**REGARDING THE 2013-2014
HOUSING BUDGET**

**PRESENTED ON BEHALF OF
THE COUNCIL OF CATHOLIC CHARITIES DIRECTORS
BY
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**Albany, New York
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Good morning. My name is Deborah Damm O'Brien and I serve as Executive Director of the Catholic Charities Housing Office and DePaul Housing Management in the Diocese of Albany. I am also the Chairperson of the New York State Council of Catholic Charities Directors' Housing Committee. The New York State Catholic Conference represents the Bishops of the eight dioceses of New York State in matters of public policy. In the human services arena, the expertise, experience and advice of the Council of Catholic Charities Directors guides the Conference. The Catholic Church is the largest non-profit provider of education, health care and human services in the state.

For many New Yorkers, including many of the people Catholic Charities serves, having affordable, safe and quality housing remains just a dream. New York has long seen the housing challenges faced by many. In these days as we are recovering from the mortgage crisis, the recession, and the effects of hurricanes and other weather events we have seen the housing issue in a new light. We also know that the homeless (and especially homeless families), the working poor, and those with special needs continue to find it difficult to find and maintain affordable housing and, when needed, supportive housing. It is a sad commentary on our human community when someone is without this most basic of human rights.

Because of this, we were pleased that the Governor made a point of emphasizing the need for affordable housing in his State of the State Address and followed-up with a proposal in the Executive Budget, House NY, that would finance the creation and preservation of 14,300 affordable housing units. This initiative calls for a \$1 billion investment over five years. This is significant and we are hopeful the Legislature will continue to support this and other efforts to expand the development of affordable and supportive housing programs in this state. The need is great in urban and rural parts of our state and response is needed now.

Two traditional and effective sources of funding for affordable and supportive housing have been the Housing Trust Fund and the Homeless Housing Assistance Program. We are encouraged that the Executive Budget recommends level funding for both of these programs. The Executive Budget also recommends the streamlining of the administration of homeless housing development by moving the management and operations of the HHAP from the Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance to Homes and Community Renewal.

On this topic, we wish to recognize that HHAP has been an effective program for the development of affordable and supportive housing throughout the State. It has been used effectively by many Catholic Charities agencies, including many upstate agencies where it has been the sole or primary funder of a number of housing projects. It has been a strong program because it is only available to not for profit developers and projects, it can fund smaller housing projects (especially important for upstate and rural areas), and the HHAP process is a flexible one that balances technical assistance with essential contractual objectivity and oversight. It is essential that these strengths of the program be preserved and enhanced in any structure moving forward.

Last year Neighborhood Preservation Programs (NPP) and Rural Preservation Programs (RPP) received a combined \$14.3 million appropriation. The Executive Budget calls for consolidating those programs into a single Community Preservation Program (CPP). The consolidated program would be funded at \$12 million and funding would come from Mortgage Insurance Fund reserves. These changes raise questions, among them, whether rural communities will be disadvantaged by this merger. Traditionally urban programs have been able to serve larger numbers due to population density. The \$12 million could be exhausted in either the rural or urban areas of the state. The competition between rural and urban areas for funds from the same pool could result in sections of the state not receiving necessary funding. Another question is about the longer-term sustainability of these programs after the mortgage reserves are no longer available.

Supportive housing is another key part of the continuum of affordable housing. For people who have been homeless, have special needs, or whose lives have been complicated and challenging, supportive housing often provides them with the only opportunity they have to have a home. It is in supportive housing that they get the assistance they need to address the challenges in their lives and become as independent and contributing members of the community as their situation allows. So funding for housing development is only one part of the puzzle. We are, therefore, concerned about the Executive Budget recommendation for appropriation for the Homeless Housing Prevention Service Program that funds the NYS Supportive Housing Program, the Solutions to End Homelessness, and the Operating Support for AIDS Housing program. All of these programs provide operating support for both homelessness prevention programs and for the support services in supportive housing and AIDS Housing programs.

Last year, thanks to the legislature's action in adding an additional \$3 million to the Executive's recommendation for this program, the enacted budget appropriated \$30.3 million for this program. Unfortunately, this year's Executive Budget recommends funding this program at \$28.7 -- \$1.6 million less than this year's appropriation. We ask that the Legislature to once again act in recognition of the important work these programs fund and add to the proposed appropriation so that the program funding will be at least at last year's level. Certainly, as we see homelessness continue to be an issue, and as new supportive housing is developed, there will be a need for more of these services. However, we know that, at a minimum, we need these programs funded at last year's appropriation level if we want to keep all currently funded and operating prevention and supportive housing programs going.

Conclusion

Whether we are living in an apartment or a house, the stability and security of a home is one of the things that helps to give us the ability to meet each day with energy and commitment. As you continue to deliberate and make the tough decisions needed in these challenging financial times, we urge you to protect and preserve essential housing development and housing support programs. These programs not only provide our brothers and sisters with housing, they provide men, women and children throughout the state with the opportunity to have a home and the stability that having a home brings.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments. We would be happy to discuss our concerns and recommendations and the good work Catholic Charities' housing and related programs do throughout the state.