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**Testimony of New York State Senator Brad Hoylman
On the New York City Housing Authority's
Draft 2015 Annual Plan**

July 24, 2014

I represent New York State's 27th Senate District, in which Campos Plaza I and II, Jacob Riis Houses I and II, 344 East 28th Street, Fulton Houses, Lower East Side III, Lower East Side Rehab, and parts of Harborview Terrace, Chelsea, and Elliott Houses are located. As the State Senator representing the residents of these New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) developments as well as residents of Section 8 Leased Housing and other NYCHA units, I am particularly concerned about New York City's public housing stock and the well-being of its residents. Thank you for this opportunity to submit testimony on NYCHA's Draft Annual Plan for Fiscal Year 2015 ("Draft Plan").

When I testified last year on the Draft 2014 Annual Plan, the situation was dire. NYCHA was still paying the City of New York for police services and vehicles that public housing residents were already paying for with their taxes, residents had not seen a significant improvement in conditions from the agency's new Maintenance & Repair Action Plan, an ill-considered infill/land lease plan was set to move forward, and confidence of residents in the agency was low. I am pleased to note that much has changed since then. Most significantly, I commend Mayor de Blasio for forgiving NYCHA's annual payment of approximately \$70 million to the New York Police Department from the beginning of 2014 through the end of Fiscal Year 2015. I am hopeful that the memoranda of understanding that cover police payments as well as \$29 million annually in PILOT payments and approximately \$1 million annually for special sanitation pickups will be permanently discontinued. I also applaud the Mayor and NYCHA for committing to upgrade and preserve public housing, as outlined in the Mayor's Housing New York Plan, and for renewing efforts to improve outreach and communication with residents.

While I appreciate the steps that NYCHA has already taken under Mayor de Blasio and Chair & Chief Executive Officer Shola Olatoye, there is still more that must be



addressed in the final Annual Plan. I share the concerns and recommendations expressed in the Alliance to Preserve Public Housing's ("the Alliance") position paper, to which I signed on, and wish to highlight several points in particular.

The infill/land lease plan advanced by the previous administration without proper public input or engagement was extremely troubling. To ensure NYCHA residents and other community members have a real say on any such plans, I introduced Senate Bill 4641, the *NYCHA Real Property Public Review Act*, which would require that any disposition of land or buildings by NYCHA be subject to the Uniform Land Use Review Procedure ("ULURP"). I am pleased that the Draft Plan does not include the developments – including Campos Plaza in my district – targeted last year for infill/land lease and Section 18 disposition. However, both the Draft Plan and the Mayor's Housing New York Plan indicate the city will make use of available land in NYCHA developments for affordable housing and community redevelopment. Should NYCHA pursue these opportunities, community engagement must be robust and begin at the earliest stage in the process. NYCHA must comply with ULURP and hold special public hearings on Section 18 dispositions, and, to the extent possible, newly-created units must be affordable to low-income New Yorkers and give preference to current residents, with a priority placed on senior housing.

While I welcome NYCHA's renewed commitment to improving maintenance response and I am pleased to hear reports of its success in reducing the backlog of open work orders, problems persist and the need for transparency and accountability is great. I continue to hear from constituents who reside in public housing that requests for repairs have long gone unanswered. I believe the root of these delays is in the disparate treatment of code enforcement complaints by residents of public versus private housing. As you know, NYCHA residents currently submit all requests for maintenance and repairs to the Authority's own Customer Contact Center, which does not make that information publicly available. In addition, unlike private housing tenants, NYCHA residents cannot file complaints with other City agencies regarding suspected code violations in their apartments. Last year, I spearheaded a letter signed by a number of Alliance members to the then-Mayor and NYCHA Chair requesting the authorization of all agencies responsible for ensuring the safety and habitability of our City's housing stock, including the New York City Department of Housing, Preservation and Development, to process and respond to 311 complaints by public housing residents about their apartments and buildings. I respectfully ask that this unfulfilled request be honored by the current administration and adopted in the Final Annual Plan.

I appreciate the intent of the modification to the Tenant Selection and Assignment Plan to prioritize 750 of the NYCHA apartments that become available each year for assignment to homeless families; however this does not go far enough to address the homelessness crisis in our city. I urge NYCHA to allocate 2,500 units a year to homeless

families, eliminate the “working family” preference, and revert to the longstanding need-based system that gave our most vulnerable, including the homeless, domestic violence victims, and people with disabilities whose housing is a threat to their health, priority for newly available units. Public housing is a scarce resource; it should be allocated to those who need it most.

Regarding NYCHA’s continued intention to apply to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (“HUD”) to become a Moving-to-Work (“MTW”) agency, should legislation be enacted authorizing it to do so, I strongly believe that NYCHA must sign onto a binding Memorandum of Understanding explicitly stating that it will not take advantage of the program’s more regressive provisions, including significant rollbacks of residents’ rights, increases in the cap on rent in relation to percentage of income, and the imposition of work requirements on tenants. In addition, I urge NYCHA to subject the MTW proposal to rigorous public reviews, including specific and comprehensive written proposals, 45-day review periods and public hearings.

I am also deeply concerned about the Draft Plan’s proposed cuts to Section 8 Housing Choice vouchers. Such cuts will inevitably result in a flood of newly homeless families entering a shelter system that is bursting at the seams. As the Alliance has noted, NYCHA must put pressure on HUD to provide the Authority its fair share of the funds set aside to deal with the impact of the 2013 federal sequester on Section 8 residents. I also recognize that the State has an obligation to increase the shelter allowance payment for publicly-assisted Section 8 tenants in NYCHA buildings to the full levels now received by private landlords. Securing this increase is a high priority for me heading into the 2015 Legislative Session, and I urge NYCHA to continue to press me and my colleagues in Albany on this matter.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments as well as the testimony submitted by the Alliance to Preserve Public Housing. I look forward to continuing to work with NYCHA to preserve safe, affordable, and decent public housing for New York’s most vulnerable and disadvantaged residents.

