



Joint Budgetary Legislative Hearing on Housing

March 1, 2023

Albany

Testimony of Rebecca Garrard, Legislative Director, Citizen Action of New York

I would like to thank the Chairs in both the Senate and Assembly for the opportunity to speak at today's hearing, and also thank the legislators who are participating in today's hearing.

This legislative session, I do not feel the need to convince our government officials that a housing crisis exists in our state. It has reached such epic proportions that it is obvious we are in a moment where there is a shared recognition of the need for legislative action. What I would like to speak to today is the necessity for the solutions that are passed and implemented to be comprehensive in nature, in order to ensure that there is relief for the millions of New Yorkers experiencing housing insecurity.

We know the Governor's proposal has centered on incentivizing development through subsidies and the removal of zoning restrictions. While the idea of increasing supply is not harmful as part of a package of housing solutions, it must coexist with tenant protections that prevent

displacement due to increased rents and no-fault evictions that result solely from proximity to the increased resources. In July of 2022, CityLimits published an article about the unfulfilled promises by the developers of Atlantic Yards. They received a 421a tax break yet were unable to meet their deadlines on the provision of affordable units. However, the most important information in the article was the details around the change in demographics to the neighborhood. As noted by the reporter who wrote the story, “In Brooklyn Community District 2, where the project is located, the number of Black residents decreased from 41.8 percent of the population in 2000 to 20.3 percent in 2015-2019, [according to a Furman Center analysis](#). The number of white residents increased during that time from 31.1 percent of the population to 52.1 percent.” Without Good Cause tenant protections, as provided in Senator Salazar’s and Assemblymember Hunter’s legislation, there is no mechanism for community members from historically disinvested, Black and brown communities to benefit from new development and resources. Instead, as a result of projects which claim to bring relief to communities, entire neighborhoods are displaced and gentrified out of areas which they have lived generationally. This is true not just in NYC, but in every neighborhood across the state when development is courted in the absence of protections for tenants who reside there. This is an aspect of the housing crisis which cannot be ignored any longer, and this must be the year we pass Good Cause tenant protections.

In addition, I ask the Senate and Assembly to consider what is the best use of state funds in terms of incentivizing housing stability. The reality is that development is enormously profitable, and funneling money into the pockets of real estate entities who are making record profits does not serve the public good. We continue to see increased purchases of housing stock from large private equity firms who often do not operate within our state, or even our country. True long term housing stability means creating the opportunity for tenants to own their units when buildings go up for sale. The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act, held by

Senator Myrie and Assemblymember Mitaynes, provides mechanisms and funding for these purchases to occur. True community stability means the creation of pathways for those who live in neighborhoods to own the housing stock that exists, instead of selling it to big corporations who have no personal investment in the quality of life within these neighborhoods.

Lastly, we must include in this year's budget immediate relief for tenants who are on the verge of eviction, and the countless New Yorkers who are unhoused. The Housing Access Voucher program, held by Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Rosenthal, ensures that there is immediate relief for those who are suffering from the inability to afford shelter. Across the state, New Yorkers are unable to find units that they can access, either due to the fact that their income is not high enough to afford rent, or because the vouchers they hold do not equate to the true cost of rent in neighborhoods. Without immediate investment in this crucial new voucher program, we will not address the scope of the housing crisis that includes New Yorkers who experience homelessness. Let this not be the year where our state once again turns a blind eye to the tragically large unhoused population in this state.

We have a unique opportunity this year to pass a package of housing bills that meaningfully address a housing crisis of epic proportions. I am grateful to the legislature for their attention to this matter, and urge you all to pass policies that meet the needs of all New Yorkers who are suffering due to housing security. There is no more time to waste. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today.