

Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing Statement from Allie Dentinger

My name is Allie Dentinger and I work with the City-Wide Tenant Union of Rochester, NY. I also work in the homeless services network providing regular street outreach and working in an emergency winter shelter. I am uniquely qualified to talk about the housing crisis in Rochester because I talk to people every day who are fighting to stay in their housing and others who are desperate to get into stable housing.

In Rochester alone, it is believed that over 20,000 households are behind on rent. The city court saw thousands of eviction cases in 2020. This was in spite of the courts being closed for months and the pause on filings. We became ground zero of the eviction crisis in December of 2020 when our Tenant Union pushed back against the system. Clianda Florance-Yarde was one of 114 warrants of eviction that were signed in Rochester from October 1st until the statewide eviction moratorium was put in place. This reprieve, although literally life saving, is hanging over the heads of the folks I talk to every day. People every day live in terror that the eviction machine will roar back to life in May 2021. People are still unable to pay their rent. Many do not qualify for the rental assistance programs in our city because of the stringent qualifications like no health and safety violations or the inability to pay rent going forward. The means testing of rental assistance is an absolute living nightmare for people behind on rent. We need to get rid of the back rent that is owed and support the small property owners that can demonstrate hardship. This is the only way to prevent mass displacement in our city and state. I strongly encourage the legislature to include in the budget the funding for the **COVID-19 Housing Relief and Recovery for All sponsored by Senator Salazar and Assemblymember Niou**. This will:

- Clears all back rent accrued during the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic
- Creates a landlord hardship fund, and directs HCR to ensure that the fund prioritizes landlords who need aid the most
- Fiscal Impact: \$2.5 - \$4 Billion in the operating budget

I also encourage the legislature to recognize the homelessness crisis that is in direct correlation to our housing crisis. The average price on one bedroom apartments has increased exponentially over the years but our wages have essentially remained stagnant. Our city is desperate for quality and deeply affordable supportive housing and the funding to get our chronically homeless into permanent housing. The private system will not create the housing needed, only governmental intervention will ensure that all New Yorkers have a right to safe and truly affordable housing. The funding through social services will not allow any individuals to get out of a shelter and into housing. We have thousands of residents in Rochester and Monroe County that are stuck in the shelter system because there is literally not enough funding to get out of it. The shelter I work in has served the same people for years and years. It's not that most of them don't want to be in housing. We simply do not have the funding and systems in place to get them there and support them when they do. We desperately need the state legislature to **fully fund 14,000 units of supportive housing** that was promised to us in 2016 by the Governor. In addition, I encourage the legislature to include in the budget the funding for the **Housing Access Voucher Program sponsored by Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Cymbrowitz**. This will:

- Creates a rental assistance program for New Yorkers who are currently homeless or are at risk of homelessness, including undocumented New Yorkers and those who are not currently on public assistance
- Fiscal Impact: The number of vouchers will depend on how deeply the program is funded. In 2021, we are requesting \$500 Million in funding for this program.

In Rochester, we are thankful to the NYS Legislature for hearing us out and taking steps over the last few years to expand tenant protections. We desperately need you to increase the states revenue to support our housing needs in our states budget. We believe the only way tenants across our state can make it through the economic implications of the COVID-19 crisis is with significant interventions from the legislature.