



**Testimony** Michael Prohaska, Laborers Local 79  
**Hearing** FY24 Budget Housing Hearing  
**Topic** Housing Compact  
**Date** March 1, 2023

Hello, my name is Michael Prohaska. I'm the Business Manager of the 17,000-member Mason Tenders District Council of Greater New York (MTDC) and Laborers Local 79, a 10,000-member construction union included in the MTDC and based in New York City that works on some of our state's most historic and vital construction projects. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the FY24 budget and Housing Compact.

Laborers Local 79 members are essential workers that helped construct COVID-19 emergency facilities, rebuild lower Manhattan after the September 11th attack, revitalize Penn Station to make it a modern transit hub, rehabilitate NYCHA's aging housing stock, and recover from the devastation of Hurricane Sandy, for example. Through this work we've been able to gain a unique perspective on the opportunities and challenges our industry and state are facing as we recover from the pandemic and address economic realities our country hasn't seen in generations.

COVID-19 illuminated issues in our state that had long been affecting New Yorkers - two of the biggest being housing affordability and adequate employment. In 2020 at the start of the pandemic, thousands of New Yorkers lost their jobs, struggled to make ends meet, and as a result, faced losing their homes. Thanks to the swift action of the legislature and our state's leadership, an extended eviction moratorium and other support services allowed many to stay in their homes and weather the storm of job loss and housing insecurity. But as things have returned to pre-pandemic normalcy, these policies have ended and laid bare just how dire the need for affordable housing is not just in New York City, but throughout the entire state.

***To address these needs, Governor Hochul has put forth the bold Housing Compact proposal that will create 800,000 new homes. The Governor's proposal is a massive undertaking that will expedite construction and approval processes, increase density, and convert thousands of unused offices into housing in New York City, but unfortunately without any enforceable wage, labor, or responsible contractor standards.***

Laborers Local 79 firmly believes housing is a human right, but not one that should come at the expense or exploitation of a human life. Affordable housing construction is one of the most unsafe and exploited sectors of our industry for workers. Construction workers routinely lose their lives, have wages stolen, are misclassified, and put in unsafe work situations on affordable



housing projects. In December 2022, for example, three workers lost their lives while working on projects in New York City.<sup>1</sup> Additionally, these jobs often prey on vulnerable New Yorkers like formerly incarcerated and immigrant workers that can't speak out or advocate for themselves on the job.

The construction and preservation of this housing will create thousands of jobs and without defined prevailing wage, labor, and responsible contracting standards it will be built at the expense of local workers - but it doesn't have to be. Together, we have the power to make the Housing Compact a visionary plan that will build the affordable housing needed and put people to work in good, union jobs at the same time. By adding prevailing wage, responsible contractor, project labor agreement, and other standards, we can ensure the jobs created aren't short-term, minimum wage jobs but rather good, union careers with strong wages, healthcare, and retirement security.

These standards are also vital to ensuring the New York City community hiring policy included with the Compact creates the highest quality jobs. Without the addition of wage and labor standards, these jobs will be akin to what we already see in the affordable housing industry and lead to further exploitation. It's also vital to have these standards in place as the state authorizes New York City to implement local hire standards through the community hiring policy. These standards will also help us welcome New Yorkers from communities into our union and other unions that have historically been unable to access and disenfranchised from these unionized construction opportunities.

The Housing Compact is a groundbreaking plan that if properly crafted can uplift New Yorkers with both affordable housing and good jobs. On behalf of the hardworking members of Laborers Local 79 and the Mason Tenders District Council, we urge you to support the New York City community hiring plan and add labor standards to the Housing Compact policy. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony today.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://gothamist.com/news/construction-worker-deaths-reach-5-year-high-as-lawmakers-seek-to-hold-companies-responsible>