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As New York City Comptroller, I strongly support Good Cause Eviction (S3082/A5573). The stability of our neighborhoods is vital to the economic health and recovery of our City.

Long before the pandemic, New York City and State was facing a growing housing affordability crisis. There were nearly 17,000 evictions in New York City in the 2019 fiscal year -- that is nearly 50 families every single day who were forced out of their homes. Temporary solutions, including eviction moratoria and emergency rental assistance funds, have limited the most disastrous outcomes for tenants over the past 20 months. But the underlying crisis remains and has only been exacerbated by COVID-19.

There are nearly 224,000 eviction cases pending in Housing Court that will progress if the eviction moratorium is not extended past January 15th. Furthermore, even with Emergency Rental Assistance, nearly 600,000 households across the state are behind on rent, the vast majority being households of color -- in the same neighborhoods that were most severely impacted by COVID-19.

We cannot continue to rely on temporary eviction moratoriums to address this growing crisis. It is time for permanent solutions. As the city recovers from the pandemic, we must confront the structural features of our housing markets that displace tenants and destabilize communities. A just recovery for New York State must prioritize keeping people in their homes over the profits of speculative real estate. New York State can do this by passing (S3082/A5573), thereby guaranteeing the right to a lease renewal to nearly 1.6M households, including over 750,000 families in New York City.

In addition to lease renewals, Good Cause Eviction would protect tenants from unconscionable and unlimited rent hikes in non-stabilized units. The lack of affordable housing is a key driver of homelessness in New York City, and we must protect the stock we currently have.

In the aftermath of the 2008 mortgage crisis, private equity and corporate landlords consolidated their hold on the New York City housing market. The Federal Reserve found those corporate landlords to be twice as likely to file evictions in their region compared to small-scale landlords.

New Yorkers have been fighting back, but for non-rent regulated tenants, the lack of a renewal lease makes organizing difficult. Tenants in New York State have the legal right to organize, but without this additional protection, landlords can simply choose not to renew a tenant's lease or raise the rent to an unconscionable level. Good cause eviction protections simply level the playing field between tenants and landlords. Allowing tenant associations to fight back against unfair rent increases, persistent lack of repairs, and various forms of harassment -- all conditions that tenants have increasingly had to live through.

For example, private equity firm Greenbrook Partners has bought over 100 buildings across Brooklyn throughout the pandemic and has been systematically displacing likely hundreds of tenants. Greenbrook's fundamental business model is premised on uprooting tenants: illegally harassing them, conducting hazardous renovations, and imposing outlandish rent hikes, sometimes as high as 50% in one year. Greenbrook sent tenants notices of non-renewal on their lease, often giving families just 90 days to leave their homes, regardless of how long they've lived in their building. Good Cause Eviction legislation would prevent this from being a viable business strategy and would allow these tenants, and countless others, to stay in their homes and continue to contribute to the health and economic recovery of their communities.

Tenants also need the assurance against retaliation for advocating for repairs in their buildings – whether for heat, mold, or the many other potential issues that our city's agencies receive hundreds of thousands of complaints for because their landlord isn't being responsive. Good Cause would ensure that tenants advocating for safe, livable conditions isn't a viable reason for eviction.

It is also worth noting what Good Cause eviction does not do. Importantly, property owners who can demonstrate an increase in cost to operate their buildings may be allowed to raise rents above the limited annual increases dictated in the bill and landlords still retain their right to initiate an eviction proceeding against any tenant who breaks the terms of their lease. Additionally, owner-occupied buildings with fewer than 4 units are fully exempt from the bill. Good Cause legislation is in fact good for homeowners, particularly first-time homeowners. By slowing speculation, many who have been excluded from this opportunity, may be able to finally compete in the market.

Under Senator Salazar's bill, New York State has the opportunity to stop cycles of displacement across 1.6 unregulated units. Given the social and economic ramifications for New York City, and the eviction moratorium's looming expiration, I urge the State to pass Good Cause Eviction as soon as possible.