



Homes and Community Renewal

KATHY HOCHUL
Governor

RUTHANNE VISNAUSKAS
Commissioner/CEO

**Testimony of RuthAnne Visnauskas
Commissioner/CEO
New York State Homes and Community Renewal**

**Joint Budget Hearing of the Legislative Fiscal Committees
on the 2022-2023 Executive Budget Proposal**

Good afternoon Chairs Krueger, Weinstein, Kavanaugh, Cymbrowitz, and distinguished members of the Legislature.

My name is RuthAnne Visnauskas and I'm Commissioner and CEO of New York State Homes and Community Renewal. I'm honored to testify before you today on the housing portion of Governor Kathy Hochul's Executive Budget proposal for the 2022-2023 State Fiscal Year.

The Executive Budget lays out a comprehensive and thoughtful blueprint for addressing New York's housing and homelessness crisis. It recognizes housing access as critical to the State's economic recovery efforts and commitment to social justice. It addresses longstanding systemic inequities, and it also brings us closer to our goals of achieving a cleaner, greener climate and closing the gap in digital connectivity for lower-income families.

The centerpiece of the Governor's budget for housing is a new \$25 billion five-year Housing Plan designed to build on our current plan with the preservation or construction of another 100,000 affordable homes including 10,000 supportive apartments. The new Plan will serve low- and moderate-income renters and homeowners; it will preserve and protect the existing housing stock; it will support individuals, families, seniors and people with special needs; it will invest in manufactures homes and parks across the state; and it will assist those experiencing homelessness and housing insecurity.

We are at the finish line of the State's first affordable Housing Plan – and as we close out this fiscal year in March, we are confident that we will meet that first goal. This is a shared success, and I could not be prouder of my team and all our partners.

As we look ahead, the elements of the new Housing Plan will be shaped by our accomplishments as well as the many conversations we have had with our partners across the state this past summer and fall. To be sure, the path to another 100,000 affordable homes will be guided by the events and lessons of the last two years.

More specifically, our aim will be to address the community health disparities exposed during the pandemic; to erase the red lines that still block people of color from homeownership and housing choice; to expand housing access and supply in historically underinvested areas; to support statewide goals for clean energy and green jobs; and to bridge the digital divide.

The new Housing Plan expands resources for electrification and weatherization that benefit our health, safety and environment, helping us achieve the State's essential climate goals. We have also included a pilot program to spur innovation in affordable housing governance and construction methods.

To accomplish all of this, we will once again rely on your support and partnership to help us cement New York's reputation as an innovative leader in compassionate, thoughtful, and purpose-driven affordable housing and community development.

But these investments alone cannot address the root cause of our housing shortage. Governor Hochul's Executive Budget includes several proposals to help the state boost its overall housing supply and affordable housing supply by easing or removing restrictive land use regulations that are barriers to housing production. To this end, we are proposing some strong, common-sense changes.

The Governor's budget will encourage increasing our housing supply by:

- Requiring localities to allow accessory dwelling units – called ADUs – in single-family neighborhoods;
- Requiring localities to allow multifamily development opportunities in transit-rich areas;
- Removing the State's cap on residential density in high-density neighborhoods in New York City; and
- Easing restrictions on the conversion of hotels and commercial buildings into housing.

But these actions are not enough. Providing equal and fair access to housing is just as important as building new homes and apartments.

As part of our mission to reduce housing insecurity, our social justice agenda will help improve access to housing for people who have been involved in the criminal justice system or have negative credit histories. We will combat housing discrimination statewide by expanding the State's fair housing testing program, particularly in counties not previously served by local fair housing organizations but where suspected systemic discrimination exists.

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And we will seek to reduce unjust evictions by making free legal counsel available to low- and middle-income tenants in eviction proceedings. This proposal – the Eviction Prevention Legal Assistance Program – will provide renters a measure of protection from the economic, physical and emotional harm that comes from being displaced. With proper access to legal representation, we know that more than 80 percent of tenants are able to remain in their homes.

We believe that our plan and proposals offer rational alternatives to the status quo. They are rooted in justice and fairness, and most important, compassion for all New Yorkers, whatever their income, ability or history. We are excited for the opportunity to continue to create high-quality affordable housing opportunities that build strong, healthy communities.

On behalf of the New Yorkers we serve, I am truly grateful for the Legislature’s support and I ask for your continued commitment to securing the resources and advancing the legislation we need to make a real difference in peoples’ lives and to meet the needs of our diverse communities.

Thank you.

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