



**Testimony of United Neighborhood Houses
Before the New York State Senate
Joint Hearing of the Senate Judiciary and
Housing, Construction, and Community Development Committees
Topic: Good Cause Eviction Legislation (S.3082/A.5573)**

**Senate Committee on Judiciary, Senator Brad Hoylman, Chair
Senate Committee on Housing, Construction,
and Community Development, Senator Brian Kavanagh, Chair**

Friday, January 7, 2022

Thank you Senators Hoylman and Kavanagh for this opportunity to testify on the Good Cause Eviction Legislation (S. 3082 (Salazar)/A.5573 (Hunter)). United Neighborhood Houses (UNH) is a policy and social change organization representing 45 neighborhood settlement houses across New York State that reach 765,000 New Yorkers from all walks of life.

UNH's settlement house members have served New York's low- and moderate-income communities for more than 100 years. As a progressive leader, we mobilize our members and their communities to advocate for good public policies and promote strong organizations and practices that keep neighborhoods resilient and thriving for all New Yorkers. UNH leads advocacy and partners with our members on a broad range of issues including civic and community engagement, neighborhood affordability, healthy aging, early childhood education, adult literacy, and youth development.

Good Cause

UNH is supportive of S.3082/A.5573 and urges the New York State Senate to advance this legislation quickly. New York State is in the middle of a housing crisis, with rents outpacing wages for the last six decades.¹ This housing crisis has been particularly harmful to low- and moderate-income renters. According to research from the Community Service Society, more than 70% of low-income households spend at least half their income on rent in New York City.² Further, Coalition for the Homeless data show that more New Yorkers are homeless today than at any point in recorded history, including tens of thousands of children.³

¹ <https://ny.curbed.com/2016/6/28/12051870/nyc-rent-income-growth-charts>

² <https://www.cssny.org/publications/entry/tenants-at-the-edge>

³ <https://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>

On top of the existing crisis, the pandemic has posed additional challenges for low- and moderate-income renters. COVID-19 has wrought havoc on our economy, with particular impacts to low-income communities of color.⁴ Unemployment rates are rising, and adult workers are exiting the workforce in droves—the result of low wages, rising childcare costs, and concerns about safety in the workplace. Experts warn that eviction moratoriums that were enacted at the Federal and State level in response to the pandemic are the only thing staving off a pending flood of evictions,⁵ and some estimate this flood might double the homeless population in New York State.⁶ While the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) helped some New York renters recover, despite significant investment from the State and Federal governments who allocated \$250 million and \$2.5 billion respectively, the program has run out of funding and new applications have been paused as of November, 2021. Most recently, it was revealed that New York’s \$1 billion request to the federal government for additional support has been ignored, and the state is set to receive only \$27 million in 2022,⁷ even though there is at least \$1 billion of unpaid rent left across the state.⁸

Given these compounding crises, and with the eviction moratorium set to expire this month, New York State must take bold, immediate action to maintain affordable housing. Social housing supply—such as public housing, subsidized co-ops, and Mitchell Llama housing programs—does not meet demand, and while expansions to these programs are also necessary, they will take too long to implement to be counted on as a short-term solution. If passed and signed into law, S.3082/A.5573 would help to immediately address the pending eviction crisis and stave off an explosive increase to homelessness in New York.

While critics have attempted to call Good Cause legislation radical and have warned of potential unintended consequences, the fundamentals of Good Cause have already been proven through New York’s history. New York enacted universal rent regulation in the 1930s in response to similarly dire economic conditions, and more than 1,000,000 New York City apartments continue to be covered by rent regulations. Almost one century later, the buildings covered by rent regulation continue to stand, the courts help to protect landlords facing problematic tenants, and the scales of power between lessor and lessee are well balanced. Good Cause goes even further than rent regulation laws to protect the financial interests of landlords, allowing for rental increases that keep pace with inflation and offering a broad array of potential scenarios that would be sufficient to move forward with eviction proceedings.

⁴ SUNY University at Albany, Differential Impacts of COVID-19 in New York State: Understanding and eliminating minority health disparities in a 21st-century pandemic

⁵ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/06/business/economy/housing-insecurity.html>

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<https://commercialobserver.com/2021/11/what-does-the-future-look-like-for-new-yorks-eviction-moratorium/>

⁷ <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/01/04/nyregion/new-york-rent-relief-pandemic.html>

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<https://www.thecity.nyc/2021/11/22/22797580/tenants-landlords-want-hochul-to-reopen-rent-relief-applications>

Protecting tenants is the most effective means for ensuring that neighborhoods retain their character and low-income New Yorkers are not pushed out as the City changes; according to data from the Furman Center, roughly two-thirds of New Yorkers rent their homes—and that percentage has increased over the last decade as homeownership has decreased.⁹ Protecting tenants is therefore good for the economy. Furthermore, tenant protections have been proven to be effective public health measures—eviction and homelessness is one of the single most devastating possible life events, often leading to job loss, health complications, school interruptions for school-age youth, and exposure to the criminal justice system.¹⁰ A housed state is a healthy state, and after two years when, at various points, we have all been told to shelter at home to protect ourselves and others from COVID-19, we are particularly primed to accept that housing is a human right.

COVID-19 has ravaged New York's safety net and has underscored the significant racial and economic disparities that have impacted New York State for decades. Just as they did through other crises that our state has faced, settlement houses have been on the front lines of the COVID-19 emergency response by continuing to deliver essential services to New Yorkers—services like housing assistance, mental health services, home care, workforce development, early childhood education, food assistance, youth programming, and case management. In a short period of time, settlement houses have started new programs, pivoted existing ones, and carried out significant emergency relief programs in their neighborhoods.

UNH's members have seen just how difficult the pandemic has been on New York's low- and moderate-income communities, and have worked hard to support tenants who, as the clock runs out on the eviction moratorium, are terrified of adding their homes to the long list of losses from the last two years. Good Cause would provide relief to these renters, helping to preserve New York's vibrant communities. In addition to the renters served by our members, many settlement house workers would benefit from Good Cause as well. Settlement house workers tend to hail from the communities they serve, meaning that their neighbors' struggles are their struggles as well. UNH supports Good Cause because it will protect both our constituency and our workforce from the challenges that come with an unregulated rental market, helping both groups to stay in the communities they call home.

We urge this committee to do everything you can to protect New York's struggling communities so that we can come out of this pandemic stronger and more resilient than ever before. Passing Good Cause would be a tremendous step forward towards this goal.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We are happy to answer any questions and can be reached at jfalcone@unhny.org.

⁹ <https://furmancenter.org/stateofthecity/view/state-of-renters-and-their-homes>

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<https://www.publicsource.org/eviction-collateral-impact-displacement-employment-transit-school-mental-health/>