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9th Annual NYIC City Advocacy Day and March for Immigrant New York

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2009 CITY BUDGET & LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Issue Backgrounder: HOUSING

PROMOTE AFFORDABLE HOUSING & ACCESS TO HOUSING SERVICES

New York City continues to face a severe shortage of quality affordable housing. The loss of affordable units coupled with rising rents and falling incomes, is creating a housing crisis for millions of New Yorkers. As the stock of subsidized and rent regulated housing declines, more City residents are experiencing housing hardships.

Loss of Affordable Housing Units

New York City lost more than 205,000 affordable, private residential housing units between 2002 and 2005. During the same period, rent costs rose faster than incomes. The median monthly rent for unsubsidized apartments rose by 8.3 percent, while the citywide median income fell by 6.3 percent (Furman Center for Real Estate and Urban Policy).

Immigrant communities are particularly hard hit by the lack of affordable housing. While immigrants are more likely to be employed than the general population, they disproportionately work in low-wage jobs, and are less likely to live in government-subsidized housing. The growing shortage of affordable housing leaves many New Yorkers, including low-income immigrant families, with huge rent burdens and few good housing options.

Consequently, nearly 82% of low-income immigrants pay more than 30% of their income on rent. Immigrants have helped revitalize communities throughout the city, boosting community investment and property values. Immigrants have reversed the tide of decline and abandonment in many New York neighborhoods. Without immigrants, the city would have faced population decline, housing abandonment and a far harsher economic climate. We therefore urge the City to help build and maintain affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers in all five boroughs.

Need to Improve Access to Housing Services

For some immigrants, communication obstacles at City agencies further complicate the problem. Many immigrant families endure deplorable and dangerous housing conditions because their landlords refuse to make the necessary repairs. More than two million residents of New York City are limited English proficient, and due to language barriers many immigrant renters are unable to communicate with the housing inspectors who have the power to force negligent landlords to make repairs. As a result, immigrants are more likely to live in substandard housing conditions, and many are unable to seek assistance from the very agencies that could protect them. We are pleased about the enactment of Executive Order 120, which requires all City agencies to provide language access. We urge Mayor Bloomberg, the City Council, and the city's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) to improve language access in city housing services.

More needs to be done to ensure that immigrant New Yorkers are able to live in safe and affordable housing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

We urge the City to shape its responses to the current economic crisis in a fashion that creates permanent affordable housing for low- and moderate-income New Yorkers.

Ensure equitable and affordable housing development in Queens.

Enact Intro 750, the Asthma Free Housing Act, to decrease indoor asthma triggers.

(Lead sponsors: Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and CM Rosie Mendez.)

Pass Intro 923 (lead sponsors: CM Sara Gonzalez and Speaker Christine Quinn) Renews NYC's rent stabilization laws.

Pass Resolution No. 1815 (lead sponsors: CM Melissa Mark-Viverito and Speaker Christine Quinn) Renews NYC's rent control laws.

Establish a right to counsel for low-income seniors in the Housing Courts of New York City.



Detailed Recommendations:

Enact Intro 750, the Asthma Free Housing Act, to decrease indoor asthma triggers. This legislation would require landlords to remove asthma and allergy triggers from dwellings. It would codify the current mold remediation guidelines into enforceable regulations; require stronger enforcement from HPD in cases of mold and pest infestation; require better training for inspectors, landlords, and property managers; and expand outreach to tenants. (Lead sponsors: Public Advocate Betsy Gotbaum and Councilmember Rosie Mendez.)

Ensure equitable and affordable housing development in Queens. Affordable housing is a major problem for many residents in Queens, the city's fastest-growing borough and the one with the largest immigrant population. Queens has seen relatively few low-income units developed. There is a tremendous need in Queens for more publicly funded, affordable housing for low-income residents.

Pass Intro 923 (lead sponsors: CM Sara Gonzalez and Speaker Christine Quinn) **and Resolution No. 1815** (lead sponsors: CM Melissa Mark-Viverito and Speaker Christine Quinn) which renew New York City's rent stabilization and rent control laws. These rent regulations are the most significant sources of affordable housing and offer the most secure and comprehensive protections for tenants' rights in New York.

We urge the City to shape its responses to the current economic crisis in a fashion that create permanent affordable housing low- and moderate-income New Yorkers. This includes the use of federal stimulus funding and other government funding and proposed programs to purchase unsold units with City funds.

Establish a right to counsel for low-income seniors in the Housing Courts of New York City. We urge the City to pass legislation to meet the legal needs of one of the most vulnerable segments of the community, low-income older people. It is estimated that about 90% of tenants face eviction alone, while about 98% of landlords have lawyers. Unrepresented tenants are far more likely to experience an unfavorable outcome than those who have lawyers. Most tenants cannot afford to hire an attorney and the available free legal services for those with the lowest incomes do not come close to matching the need.

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