



Assemblyman

# Keith L.T. Wright

Reports to the People

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## INFILL PLAN AND THE NYCHA REAL PROPERTY PUBLIC REVIEW ACT

Recently, the New York City Housing Authority revealed a weak and unjust plan that will greatly affect many of the Authority's residents. Under the direction of Mayor Bloomberg and Chairman John Rhea, NYCHA plans to lease fourteen parcels of infill land in eight developments to private developers for the construction of new high-rise apartment towers. Eighty percent of those units would be market rate. Despite regulations put in place by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, NYCHA sought little to no input on the project from residents, elected officials, neighboring businesses or other members of the public.

Of course, it is hard-felt in Harlem and in communities across this City that the Authority is strapped for cash. Residents of these developments feel it every day, from dodging exposed wires in their units to being mindful of missing smoke detectors, nonworking elevators and damaged mailboxes. The City and NYCHA should absolutely be working to create revenue so that residents of public housing are not forced to live in substandard conditions. The Bloomberg Administration believes that NYCHA Infill could possibly alleviate this problem. However, NYCHA put out this proposal with little to no input from its residents living in the public housing projects targeted for development. This attempt to sidestep the inclusion of resident critique and concerns required under HUD regulations evidences an administration too far removed from the needs of those it serves.

It's hard to ignore the difference in outcome of real estate development plans based on a neighborhood's affluence. Some years ago when the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey raised the idea of developing luxury towers just south of the Brooklyn Bridge, Brooklyn Heights residents spoke out against the proposal, which would block their highly-prized view of New York Harbor. Residents successfully shut down the project, and bargained for a 1.3 mile waterfront park.

Another concern for NYCHA residents is the Authority's poor track record. Many

recall when, in 2000, 1,500 tenants were uprooted from their homes in the Prospect Plaza Houses in Brownsville, Brooklyn, under the guise that by 2005 they would return to their choice of renovated and improved units. Today, only one building has been torn down, while the others are boarded up and one-time residents are scattered among developments across New York City. Most recently, NYCHA changed these plans and, upon conclusion, the project will include less than 100 public housing units. The rest will be considered "affordable housing," the monthly rent of which will be too expensive for the original tenants.

While NYCHA's failure to adequately incorporate residents and the public is a huge concern and reason enough to urge them to go back to the drawing board, there are fundamental problems with building luxury apartments steps away from buildings that have been neglected by the City and house many of our most vulnerable residents. It's no surprise that public housing residents grasp tightly to the sense of community that is fostered in these developments. While NYCHA is holding their plan out as the white horse that will save public housing,

tenants and others have good reason to believe that it will only effectively showcase and contribute to the economic segregation that plagues our city.

The Assembly recently passed legislation sponsored by Assemblyman Wright, called the NYCHA Real Property Public Review Act to help curb the lack of transparency that the Authority has thus far exhibited. The bill simply holds NYCHA to the same standards that city agencies are held to. Mayor Bloomberg and Chairman Rhea's attempt to sidestep the needs and opinions of the people they serve will not be tolerated. The NYCHA Real Property Public Review Act ensures that residents will have a say in the future of their homes and of their community, and brings us one step closer to the Authority coming to its senses and abandoning a plan that is clearly penny wise and pound foolish!

City Hall and NYCHA must listen to the concerns of tenant leaders, neighboring business improvement districts and local community groups, and make sure that they are given the same opportunity to be heard as residents in more affluent New York City zip codes are given.



Chairman Wright conducts a public hearing for the Assembly Housing Committee.

## JUSTICE SHEILA ABDUS-SALAAM MAKES HISTORY!

This past April the New York State Senate unanimously confirmed Sheila Abdus-Salaam, an Associate Justice of the Appellate Division of the New York State Supreme Court, to serve on the New York State Court of Appeals. Justice Abdus-Salaam is the first African-American woman to serve on the Court of Appeals — the highest court in the Empire State, marking a truly proud moment for both the state and its African-American community.

Justice Abdus-Salaam is a devout public servant who has, and will surely continue, to serve New Yorkers with an unrivaled vigor for justice. Having graduated from Columbia Law School, Justice Abdus-Salaam has contributed greatly to the upper Manhattan community. Before her recent confirmation, Ms. Abdus-Salaam served as an Associate Justice of the Appellate Division; Supreme Court Justice of New York State; and Civil Court Judge for New York City. A testament to her commitment to public service, Justice Abdus-Salaam began her law career helping communities in need for Brooklyn Legal Services.

Though it took nearly 170 years, there is now an African-American woman on the bench of New York's highest court. In order to be successful in its goal of justice, the court system must be as diverse as our great state. The confirmation of the Honorable Abdus-Salaam is a step in that direction.



Following unanimous confirmation by the New York State Senate, Assemblymember Wright stands proudly with Justice Sheila Abdus-Salaam. The Honorable Abdus-Salaam is the first African-American woman to serve on the Court of Appeals.

## ASSEMBLYMAN WRIGHT HELPS CELEBRATE THE 20<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF RIVERBANK STATE PARK

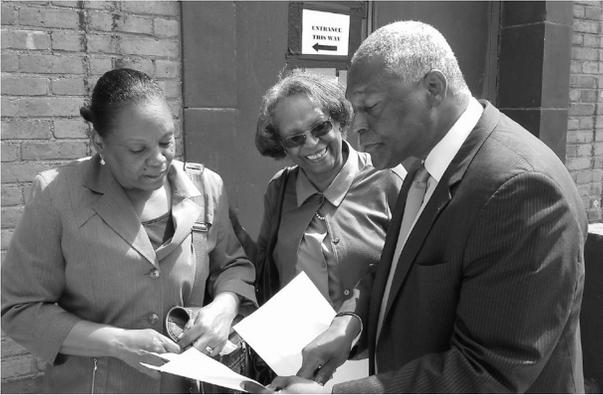
The only state park within Manhattan, Riverbank is a vital asset and anchor in the West Harlem community. On May 18th, Assemblyman Wright joined with Governor Andrew Cuomo, former Governor Mario Cuomo, and other elected officials, community leaders and park supporters to celebrate Riverbank's 20th year. Having played a key role in negotiations for the park's initial construction in 1993, it was a joyous celebration for Assemblyman Wright and all who frequent Riverbank.

Honorees at the ceremony included former Governor Mario Cuomo, who worked closely with Assemblyman Wright and others in the community to secure the necessary funding to build Riverbank. The celebration included a parade kick-off, tennis and basketball tournaments, musical performances and various cultural programs.

Harlem's very own park offers so much to the residents of Northern Manhattan. From its state-of-the-art recreational facilities, to its stunning views of the Hudson River, Riverbank State Park has something to offer everyone!



Members of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Legislative Caucus conduct a press conference to shed light on discriminatory stop-and-frisk tactics used by the NYPD.



Assemblyman Wright greets job seekers outside of the Harlem Armory during the June Job and Career Fair.



Assemblyman Wright defends his legislation to increase the minimum wage in New York State.

## STATE ASSEMBLY FIGHTS FOR REFORM OF NEW YORK'S MARIJUANA POSSESSION LAWS

In May of this year, the Assembly passed progressive legislation to adjust the charge for public possession of less than half an ounce of marijuana from a misdemeanor to a violation, the same penalty as for private possession. The existing law is outdated, racially biased and needlessly expensive.

There are stark racial disparities in low-level marijuana arrests across New York State, and especially in the City. Statewide, African-Americans are 4.5 times more likely than white people to be arrested for marijuana possession. While studies show that young white people use marijuana at higher rates, the black arrest rate far exceeds that of whites. In New York County, for example, a black person is 9.4 times more likely to be arrested for marijuana than a white person.

Such harsh penalties for a minor offense stifle and suppress Communities of Color. Unfair charges incurred from stop-and-frisk policing tactics permanently damage one's life by limiting their eligibility for public housing, student financial aid, employment opportunities and immigration status among other things. Having an unreasonable penalty for a minor marijuana offense turns too many of our young people into criminals while also perpetuating a sense of distrust between police and the communities they serve.

It was recently reported that New York State has the highest marijuana possession arrest rate of any state in the nation. We are wasting our precious resources — police force and capital — by pursuing these “crimes.” In 2010, the estimated annual fiscal cost of marijuana possession enforcement in New York (police, judicial and legal, and corrections) was almost \$700 million. This is not where taxpayers' dollars should be spent, plain and simple.

## HOUSING CHAIRMANSHIP AND LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

As many of you know, there is an affordable housing crisis in all of New York City and especially here in Harlem. With the vacancy rate in the city and the surrounding areas consistently less than five percent, finding affordable housing is impossible. A debt-ridden government is reducing and even cutting funding for essential rental assistance programs that many in our community rely on, such as Section 8 and Mitchell-Lama housing. Tenants are being taken advantage of, lied to, and aggressively pushed out of their homes so that the space can be rented for thousands more. Assemblyman Wright firmly believes in the importance of having safe, clean and affordable housing and he's taken that belief with him to Albany.

Much of the legislation that the Housing Committee is taking up was written to help protect tenants and to improve their quality of life. This session, the Assembly passed legislation that Assemblyman Wright sponsors that would greatly reduce the amount that a landlord is allowed to increase the rent when a rent stabilized unit becomes vacant. This would lower the cost of many apartments in Harlem and in neighborhoods throughout the city, helping to stabilize the housing market, while also discouraging tenant harassment. By not rewarding landlords for tenant turnover, landlords are less likely to try and drive tenants out of their units. In order to protect rent regulated tenants, Assemblyman Wright has written a bill that would limit a landlord's ability to use rent regulated units for personal use and prohibit them from recovering a unit from a tenant that has lived there for 15 years or more. He is also working to disallow landlords' ability to increase rent when a new lease is signed. Only if a tenant willingly vacates

the unit can a landlord increase the rent for the next tenant. All too often tenants become displaced when they cannot afford new rental prices. Because housing accommodations in buildings occupied in 1974 or later are not subject to rent stabilization, Assemblyman Wright supports legislation to allow them to be covered, which would provide more affordable housing options at a time when it is so greatly needed.

Assemblyman Wright is fighting to allow tenant groups to use common areas in housing authority developments for free. Residents should be able to use these areas for meetings and gatherings without paying a fee. Many Mitchell-Lama housing companies are opting to “buy-out” of the program so that they can make more money. To discourage this, there is legislation that offers incentives to companies to remain in the program. As Chairman, Assemblyman Wright is also working very hard to strengthen succession rights for NYCHA tenants. Current tenants deserve stronger rights and a louder voice! Every week our district office is filled with people who are unable to leave their children or their spouse the rights to their long-term apartment, rendering folks homeless. It's not right and leaves tenants out in the cold. There is aggressive work being done to change the current process.

Far too often, the Harlem office is visited by folks looking for assistance with a housing issue. The problems are real and widespread, and it's time they are addressed. As Chairman, Assemblyman Wright is in the unique position to close the loopholes and improve housing laws so that they work for and protect the people!

## IN EFFORT SPEARHEADED BY ASSEMBLYMAN WRIGHT, NEW YORK FINALLY SEES MINIMUM WAGE INCREASE

A minimum wage for American workers was first imposed across the United States in 1938, following the devastation of the Great Depression. It was created to help our citizens regain footing and to institute fiscal justice throughout the country. Today, we in New York especially, are fighting our way through the worst recession since then.

New York State's minimum wage had increased only ten cents since 2007. It's been proven that during times of fiscal crisis, raising the minimum wage is good for business. Our state's workforce and its economy stand to gain from an increase, as this money will be spent right back into our local communities.

During the 2013 legislative session, the New York State Assembly responded to the needs of New Yorkers and created a law that will raise the wage to \$9.00 an hour by 2016. As the progressive capital of this nation, New York must maintain its commitment to its residents and ensure that they receive their fair share as the divide between rich and poor grows wider. Just as measures like these helped raise our country out of the Great Depression, this increase in the minimum wage will help struggling New Yorkers stuck in the perpetual cycle of poverty that is all too real for far too many. It is a strong step forward in the fight for economic fairness.



Assemblyman Wright talks to Harlem students outside of the Assembly Chamber in the New York State Capitol building.



Assemblyman Wright discusses the legislative process that takes place in Albany with students from the district.