

**Testimony to the Joint Budget Hearing of the Senate  
Finance Committee and Assembly Ways and Means Committee**

**February 27, 2017**

The Cooper Square Committee, located on Manhattan's Lower East Side, is a NPP funded organization that has sponsored the renovation and development of over 600 units of low income housing over the past several decades. In addition to developing affordable housing, our organizing staff has educated thousands of tenants about their rights, formed countless tenant associations and prevented the displacement of well over 1,000 tenants, preventing the deregulation of at least as many apartments as we have developed. We would not have been able to achieve these success stories without ongoing funding from the NPP Program. It has provided us with the staffing capacity to advance the state's affordable housing preservation and development mission.

We are encouraged by Governor's ambitious 5 year, \$2.5 billion affordable housing plan, to address the affordable housing crisis in NY State by funding the creation of more than 100,000 affordable and supportive housing units over the next 5 years. The NPP funded groups throughout NY State are willing and able to make a significant contribution towards reaching this target. We are leaders in community revitalization, and know our housing and economic development staff and community leaders know our communities better than anyone. We are able to identify and build upon our community's strengths. We bring stakeholders together to promote responsible development that meets the needs of our communities, and we typically leverage at least \$25 in public and private investment for every \$1 we receive in funding.

For example, in the past decade, Cooper Square Committee completed the following projects:

- Co-developed a 54 unit, \$10.3 million supportive housing project at 29 E. 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.
- Currently co-developing a \$3.3 million transitional housing facility, known as the Bea Arthur Residence for homeless LGBT youth at 222 East 13<sup>th</sup> Street. It will open in May, 2017.
- Enrolled 18 HDfCs buildings, comprising 252 units, in the Weatherization Assistance Program (WAP) to make them more energy efficient. The WAP funds totaled over \$640,000 and leveraged over \$400,000 in private funds by the owners.
- Utilized two rounds of NY State Main Street funds totaling \$250,000 to do façade restorations of 5 cultural buildings and 3 multifamily buildings, as well as interior renovations of two anchor buildings and streetscape improvements in the East 4<sup>th</sup> Street Cultural District, leveraging over \$200,000 in private investment.
- Utilized \$180,000 in Urban Initiatives funds to contribute to the renovation of the basement of the La MaMa ETC annex building at 66-68 East 4<sup>th</sup> Street to create the Downstairs Theater, a project that leveraged nearly \$800,000 in private investment.

- Our tenant organizing staff has assisted dozens of Tenant Associations with tenant-landlord negotiations and bringing HP actions to obtain repairs and rent abatements valued at several million dollars in housing reinvestment into our community.

### **Recommendations:**

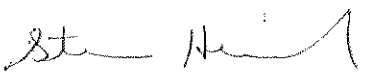
We are pleased that the NPP and RPP proposed program funding for this budget year has remained consistent with the funding appropriated last year, which is at \$8.479 million for the NPP Program. We are glad that the JP Morgan Chase settlement funds are again included in the proposed budget to support the activities of the NPP/RPP groups. Last year, the Legislature added \$500,000 to the NPP enacted budget, and \$200,000 to the RPP budget, for which we are thankful. We ask that a similar amount be added again this year so that the groups don't suffer a budget cut of several thousand dollars each this fiscal year.

Cooper Square Committee believes that Access to Home, and HOPE RESTORE each merit funding increases. Access to Home is a program that pays back to the state by enabling disabled people to live more independently at home by retrofitting their homes, thereby avoiding costly institutional care. Similarly HOPE RESTORE funds emergency repairs to the homes of elderly people, as well as paying for installation of ramps and grab bars to reduce the risks of falls, which are common among seniors. Again, by reducing the incidence of costly hospitalizations and institutional care, the program saves NY State money.

We would further ask the legislature to make a \$9 million sub-allocation from the Community Investment Fund (CIF) into the NYSHCR Office of Community Renewal to ensure that not-for-profit community driven developers can be competitive within the CIF program. At present, CIF is generally allocated to groups that are awarded LIHC and SLIHC funds, and non-profits that are under-subscribed for these programs. When Urban Initiatives was funded, NPP groups typically received between 30%-40% of the awarded funds. CSC received Urban Initiatives funding several years ago (as noted above), and would welcome the chance to apply again for this funding since we have several project ideas that would be well suited for it.

Finally, we ask the Legislature to consider requesting that NYSHCR develop a five-year Community Plan to ensure that the more than \$2 billion in capital funds being earmarked for its five year capital plan be spent. If NPP and RPP groups lose significant HCR funding due to the spending down of JP Morgan Chase settlement funds this year, we will lose significant capacity to contribute to NY State's ambitious housing development goals. We are a vital partner in the state's affordable housing agenda, responsible for the majority of affordable housing developed and preserved in the state, and the funding of NPP and RPP groups needs to recognize our role in implementing the state's strategic plan.

Thank you for considering our testimony as you finalize the housing budget.

  
Executive Director