

## **Testimony for Housing Joint Legislative Budget Hearing 2/5/20**

Witness: Phara Souffrant Forrest (Housing Justice for All Member)

### Introduction

My name is Phara Souffrant Forrest and I am a 31 year resident of Assembly District 57. I am also a member of Democratic Socialist of America, Crown Heights Tenants Union and Housing Justice for All Coalition.

### Rental Supplement - Home Stability Support

I urge elected officials to support Assembly Bill 1620 Senate Bill 2375 which would create the “Home Stability Support” program, a form of rental assistance for people leaving the homeless shelter system or who are at risk of homelessness. The people of AD57 desperately need a safety net because many of us are at risk for homelessness. 40% of us are rent burdened and we are living paycheck. This proposal directs rental assistance to the people who need it most, and provides mandated relief to local governments that are struggling with limited resources. It addresses homelessness by doing what most present-day housing programs do not do – enable people with incomes near or below the poverty line to afford rent.

### Good Cause Eviction

During the 2019 session, great strides were made to strengthen rent stabilization laws. Thank you. However it's now time to extend protections to all New York tenants. The Good Cause Eviction bill (S2892A/A5030), would bring about universal rent control not just in the city but the entire state. Currently, there are no protections for market-rate tenants when it comes to lease renewal. A landlord can decide not to renew and there's little you can do about it. This bill aims to correct that. Assembly District 57 tenants living in market rate apartments would be able to live fearlessly knowing that they were safe from unconscionable eviction.

### Eliminating Major Capital Improvements

It is the experience of many tenants living in District 57 to witness landlords seeking all ends to increase profit margins. As a rent stabilized tenant living in a condominium conversion, major capital improvements are an ever present threat. Eliminating major capital improvements (MCIs) (S3693/A6322) must be made a priority. MCIs allow landlords to pass the cost of building repairs on to renters, which leads to unaffordable rent increases and forces tenants to choose between safe living conditions and necessary building improvements. And in too many cases, landlords use MCIs to harass people out of their homes. Improvements are a landlords' responsibility, and the reason tenants pay rent.

### New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)

State funding is critically needed to contribute to NYCHA's efforts to improve resident living conditions. NYCHA residents in District 57 and others cannot wait any longer for their right to safe and accessible housing. Governor Cuomo states that the budget is short. It is the belief of many in Assembly District 57 that the wealth in New York State needs to be redistributed and the rich pay their fair share. We demand increased revenue to improve NYCHA be generated through an ultra millionaires tax, a stock transfer tax, mortgage recording tax (S7231/A9041), eliminating 421a tax abatement program for developers, removing tax brakes for high-end condos and coops (S5267), and a pied-a-terre tax (S44/A4540). We firmly believe the exploitation of the working class must end now. And the wealth class must pay their share of taxes to house the poor.

### Conclusion

There is a great call in Assembly District 57 for greater transparency. No longer will constituents accept the politics of NY be ruled by three men in a room. Through the budget, we call for more democratic process that puts the need of the working class first and the completely eliminates overinflated demands of private interests.