

NEW YORK DOCTORS COALITION

TESTIMONY FOR NY SENATE BUDGET HEARING IN SUPPORT OF HOUSING RELIEF AND RECOVERY FOR ALL (S4050/A2617), HOUSING ACCESS VOUCHER PROGRAM (S2804/A3701) and GOOD CAUSE EVICTION (S3082) FEBRUARY 9th, 2021

Housing is a human right.

This should not be a contested statement. It should not be controversial to affirm that every person has the fundamental right to a safe, stable place to live. And yet, as a result of colonial displacement, decades of discriminatory housing policy, and the rise of a predatory real estate industry, stable, high-quality housing is far from a right, but rather a coveted privilege.

The ramifications of this are deadly. As healthcare workers, we knew that to be true long before the emergence of COVID-19. When our patients cannot afford their medication because of their rising rent, when a child's asthma is worsened by displacement to a shelter, we see firsthand the role of housing in maintaining health. The medical literature also bears this out. When the people we care for lose their homes, they are more likely to be victims of violence, to die of drug overdose, and to experience long-term mental and physical illness. The impact of eviction on a family can be profound and permanent, causing depression that lasts years, worsening health for a lifetime, and compromising the quality of life for future generations.

In the midst of a pandemic, with no end in sight, the link between unstable housing and public health is too obvious to ignore. Eviction during the pandemic accounted for an estimated 433,700 excess COVID-19 cases and 10,700 excess deaths from COVID-19 nationwide, from March to September 2020 alone. On a personal level, our patients who are unhoused have no safe option: should they sleep out in the cold and experience hypothermia, violence, and worsening of their health conditions, or should they go into a crowded shelter, where they risk contracting the COVID-19 virus and perpetuating transmission among all New Yorkers? Put simply, ending the COVID-19 pandemic requires keeping people housed.

The temporary protections, including eviction moratoria, put in place to prevent eviction and support tenants are a necessary reprieve, but they are not long-term solutions. We need to fundamentally restructure the way we create housing and how we support our neighbors who are facing housing instability. We need measures to protect tenants from the practices of predatory landlords and developers; we need more units of safe, stable, affordable housing; and we need sustainable, equitable mechanisms to fund these actions into the future.

The platform put forward by Housing Justice for All and the Upstate-Downstate Housing Alliance is a step toward realizing this vision. Together, the COVID-19 Housing Relief and Recovery for All bill (S4050/A2617), the Housing Access Voucher Program (S2804/A3701), and the Good Cause Eviction bill (S3082) present concrete tenant protections, as well as mechanisms to shift our housing landscape from one that prioritizes the profit of developers and landowners to one that centers the health and wellbeing of tenants and homeowners. They

provide a foundation upon which to build a future where all New Yorkers are safely and stably housed.

We must pass these bills and create a budget that ensures adequate housing for all. The lives of New Yorkers depend on it.