

Red Hook Initiative

Testimony: New York State Assembly Housing Committee Hearing
Monday, January 31st, 2022

Good afternoon Assembly Members and Chair Cymbrowitz and our Assemblymember Marcela Mitaynes thank you for allowing me to provide testimony today. My name is Karen Blondel and I am a resident and organizer of Public Housing residents. I am also the Resident Association President for the Red Hook West Houses.

Today I speak on behalf of myself and my community.

In our community we have community partners. Our Community Relations Manager Michel'le Thomas at the Red Hook Initiative (RHI) has given us first hand accounts of how the exemption of NYCHA residents from the ERAP is affecting our community. RHI is a community organization in Red Hook Brooklyn serving about 6,500 residents a year through youth development, community building, and community hiring. Red Hook is home to the largest public housing development in Brooklyn and the second largest in NYC.

I am here today to speak specifically about challenges we have been facing relating to the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) for NYCHA residents. My team and I have supported over 100 ERAP applications for Red Hook residents.

Red Hook Houses residents have been impacted particularly hard by the pandemic especially in regard to what academia would call residual expenses after rent, like food, cleaning product cost, transportation cost and other things that doubled and tripled in price during the pandemic. Our residents are continuing to struggle with the health and economic impacts of this pandemic.

ERAP presented hope for many families throughout this great State of New York including residents of public housing who fell behind on rent during the pandemic.

Last week, residents began coming to RHI in tears with letters from ERAP that their applications are pending due to the legal requirement that subsidized housing residents be served last. The same week, residents received notices from NYCHA that the eviction moratorium was ending and they should pay all rent owed. The letter directed residents to file One Shot Deals through HRA, but HRA will not allow anyone to file a One Shot Deal until their ERAP has been denied. This is leaving all Red Hook NYCHA residents who applied for ERAP in a limbo and in fear that they may lose their home.

I am here on behalf of RHI and the residents we serve to ask you, the State, to address this critical need for NYCHA residents who have been left out of the ERAP benefit.

One Shot Deals are not a backup plan - as often those payments need to be paid back and are not guaranteed.

The ERAP program gave people a sense of relief at a time that was overwhelming and felt hopeless and now that relief has been turned into stress and fear. People right now are struggling; many don't know where their next meal is coming from. For us on the ground supporting these community members it has been extremely challenging to provide assurance to residents with these worries.

Thank you again for allowing this space to speak today. In closing, the ERAP program is meant to prevent eviction and serve low and moderate income families who have suffered due to the pandemic. We urge you to act to ensure that NYCHA residents are not left behind.

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