

I would like to thank the Finance Chair of the NY Senate and the Ways & Means Chair of the NY Assembly for holding this hearing.

My name is Ann Stenson, and I am a coordinator of the Rector Square Affordable Housing Group in Battery Park City at 225 Rector Pl, New York, NY 10280. 225 Rector Place was built in 1986, with 20% of the apartments set aside as affordable housing under the 421a program. The tax abatements expired in 2005, but in 2001, our neighborhood was dramatically impacted by the 9/11 attack at the nearby WTC. Many residents moved out of the neighborhood, and Related Management, which built and managed the building, offered to extend affordable housing rent stabilization to Nov 2019 for those who stayed through the rebuilding of the neighborhood. The last leases actually expired in April 2020, by which time the pandemic had made it all but impossible to move. In addition to the problem of affordability, many of the approximately 20 remaining affordable housing tenants were Seniors and therefore at increased risk of contracting COVID, some had serious health problems that exacerbated this risk (some a result of 9/11,) and all of the younger affordable housing tenants lost jobs or had hours reduced and were not in a financial position to sign a lease with a new landlord.

I applaud new proposals for making affordable housing permanent under state sponsored programs. I would like to call attention, however, to the fact that our building is the first of many in lower Manhattan with 421a affordable housing expiration dates that will leave vulnerable tenants, some seniors, without a home. Our situation illustrates the problems that these tenants will encounter: the challenge, especially for seniors, of finding new affordable housing and being uprooted from the many neighborhood connections that one establishes over 15, 25, or even 35 years, as is the case for some seniors, such as myself, who were original tenants in our building.

Based on our experience, I implore you to support bills that expand tenant protections that prevent eviction and displacement. Our landlord filed eviction cases in Housing Court regardless of the eviction moratorium! Fortunately, our City Council representative, Margaret Chin, and her staff helped us get connected with Cooper Square Committee, a tenant advocate organization that continues to assist us, and Mobilization for Justice, an organization that is still providing us with the protection of legal resources. I don't know where we would be without this support! As COVID has abated, most of the tenants in our group have qualified for other affordable housing, some through state and city programs; only 3 of us remain and are still looking. Two tenants qualified for ERAP and will not be followed by the threat of unpaid rent. The state must fulfill the ERAP promise to aid tenants and prevent evictions and the long-term consequences of rent debt.

This experience has sensitized me to the affordable housing issue. I have been shocked to learn how much tax revenue is forfeited through the 421a program and that this expenditure dwarfs the budgets of more productive affordable housing programs. In addition to expanding tenant protections that prevent eviction and displacement, state and city investment should be improving NYCHA housing, and high quality HAVP and HONDA programs should be funded. Private developers will always be focused on their own profit, and the 421a program has been a bonanza for them through a time when they no longer need government incentives to convince them that building NY housing is a profitable business.

Thank you for this opportunity to participate in this hearing. I will be happy to respond to questions during or after the hearing.

Yours truly,

Ann Stenson