

Reyna Tellez

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Hello, my name is Reyna Tellez, I am a single mother of two kids ages 5 and 7, I am also a tenant who lives in a small house in Jackson Heights and a member of Make the Road NY. I decided to share my testimony with legislators today because many people I know have similar issues and we need to speak up to be heard. The last couple of years have not been great and COVID has brought a lot of personal struggle for me.

Due to COVID I lost my jobs as a domestic cleaner, and when my kids transitioned to remote learning I could not afford to pay for childcare to go out to work. I started to accrue a debt with my landlord that went over 25,000. The moratorium ended and with this most of my protections to not become homeless as well, I am in constant fear that I will be taken to court and I will lose my home, I don't know where my kids and I will end up if this happens. I applied to ERAP and thankfully was able to get some of my debt paid but we are going on 2 years of this pandemic and even ERAP will not help with all that I owe. I am trying my best to pay back the rent that I owe and come up with a payment plan but that's almost impossible to do when I have to stay up to date on rent and try to pay back what I owe, the money I earn with jobs still on pause is simply not enough.

ERAP has given me certain protections that have been instrumental, but the COVID relief does not and should not finish with ERAP because in a few months, I will not have the protections that ERAP gives me as a tenant in a small home to limit rent increases and to be able to stay in this unit, the COVID crisis has simply lasted more than we expected and we need additional solutions and steps. I am afraid that I will face retaliation from my landlord and will soon see the increase in rent prices that many tenants are suffering post covid relief in small homes.

Two essential bills that would help my situation and that of thousands of people in the state are the Good Cause Eviction which will help me fight against retaliation for not being able to stay afloat during COVID and will protect me against an unfair rent increase. I am working on being back on track with payments, but I cannot do that if my rent is unexpectedly raised by too much. The way I see it this bill is an investment in our stability as a state since our homeless population will skyrocket and with that costs to our state if we don't have the necessary protections as tenants. The other legislation would be the Housing Access Voucher Program, which would allocate one billion dollars to help tenants stay in the homes by helping us cover part of our rent going forward and while we get back on our feet. These two programs will be life-saving for so many families like mine that are closer to a court hearing and an eviction each day. I ask that you please add both of these two bills as a priority in this budget. Thank you for your attention.