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Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing March 1, 2023

My name is Pilar Moya-Mancera, Executive Director of Housing Help Inc., a small but mighty HUD-certified housing counseling agency that has been servicing the Long Island community for over 50 years. Despite being one of the smallest housing agencies, we provide services to thousands of residents on Long Island. Housing Help provides Foreclosure Prevention, First-Time Homebuyer, Tenant's Rights and Information, and Financial Counseling services to help individuals and families attain and maintain housing.

We are grateful to Governor Hochul for having the courage to address the housing affordability issue in the Long Island region. Long Island needs a wider range of housing types at different price-points and in multiple locations to accommodate the aging population and the young workforce. We understand there is neither a perfect solution nor a one size fits all solution to our current housing crisis. Governor Hochul's Housing Compact Plan is a step in the right direction. Long Islanders cannot wait any longer for affordable housing.

Long Island public officials oppose Governor Hochul's proposal mainly due to the need to preserve local zoning or local control. But look where local-control has gotten us. We are in the worst housing crisis we have seen since the recession in 2008. Based on data collected from the NYS HCR website, in the last 3-5 years, the pupil population in public schools across Long Island has decreased. However, there is a different trend in low-income communities. Most of the affordable multifamily developments built on Long Island are in low-income communities, where more than 50% of the population is economically disadvantaged, increasing the number of students enrolled in districts that are most likely underperforming. There is a limited amount of affordable housing in more affluent areas, thus increasing economic disparity amongst the school districts in Long Island and continuing the history of racial and economic segregation on Long Island. This proposal is an excellent opportunity to usher in a new era on Long Island for desegregation.

That is what local control has done in Long Island. It has overpopulated schools in low-income communities. Local-control has failed the senior citizens, the hard-working poor, and the disabled population. They have had 15 years to solve this problem. The issue is there is no commitment to solving this problem. There is a reason why Long Island continues to be one of the most segregated areas in the country.

This is where we are on Long Island. Despite being one of the smallest housing agencies in Long Island, we service over 1,000 tenants. From 2020 to 2021, our rental clients doubled from 503 to 1,069. In 2022, that number rose to 1,326. In 2021, 68.5% of our rental clientele were at or below 30% of the area median income (AMI). While the demand for affordable housing is great, the supply is low. COVID has only exacerbated the housing crisis on Long Island, and local officials are failing to respond appropriately.

Access to proper affordable housing has been a persistent obstacle in Long Island. It took us over 10-years to pass accessory dwelling unit (ADU) legislation in Huntington. Many residents feel compelled to accept illegal apartment residences, obtain a second or third job, or risk leaving the region entirely for possibly better prospects. All options come with compromises to one's well-being and the individual's status quo.

We urge you to allocate the full funding for Governor Hochul's NYS Housing Compact Plan in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2023-24 Executive Budget. Governor Hochul's proposals may not be perfect, but it is a solution. Housing Help and our partners, including other local housing agencies and advocacy groups, are willing to work with Governor Hochul's office to adjust the Housing Compact Plan to address the specific needs of the Long Island region. As a society, we cannot stand by any longer while New Yorkers are. We believe the Compact Plan tackles the ongoing housing crisis and will allow for the creation of affordable housing for those who need it most. This plan will help keep New Yorkers in New York and help grow our workforce. As a Long Island-based housing advocacy organization, we believe this plan will shed light on how severe this crisis has been for our region especially. We are counting on your leadership to ensure this happens.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.

Sincerely,

Pilar Moya-Mancera
Executive Director