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February 14, 2024

**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing
Testimony of Barbara Williams, Public Housing Resident
Hearing Room B, 2nd Floor, Albany, NY, 12247**

Senate Finance Committee Chair Liz Krueger and Assembly Ways and Means Committee Chair Helene E. Weinstein:

Good Afternoon,

My name is Barbara Williams, I am a member of Community Voices Heard, and I live in public housing in Washington Heights.

I've lived in public housing for 33 years. I've also been the President of my Resident Association for two terms. I'm here today because of the living conditions that I've seen in public housing. I've been in apartments with no kitchens. I've been in apartments with no walls. I've looked into closets where you can't see the ceiling because of the black mold. I've smelled mold and mildew so strong that I almost passed out. I've opened kitchen cabinets infested with roaches. I've seen bathroom ceilings fall on my neighbors. And we have been going through these same issues for three decades. No one should have to live like that.

The development where I live, the Polo Grounds, was constructed in 1968. In 56 years, the piping has never been updated. Just band-aid fixes. And while all of this is going on, 800 people in Polo Grounds are likely to be evicted for rent arrears because public housing residents were not covered by pandemic aid.

But this isn't just an issue in the Polo Grounds or in NYCHA. Lack of repairs and evictions are a problem statewide. CVH members living in Newburgh public housing face the same issues. Their buildings are falling apart.

Nearly 600,000 people live in public housing across the State. Public housing is one of the largest sources of affordable housing. In the middle of a statewide housing crisis, the State can't afford to lose more public housing because of disinvestment.

We depend on the state to protect us and provide us with healthy homes. We voted you into office because we felt you would do the right thing for people in public housing.

I am here on behalf of Community Voices Heard members from across the state to ask you to commit **\$4.5 billion for public housing capital repairs to preserve 40,000 public housing units**, including:

- \$3.55 billion for NYCHA, which preserves 15,000 units of affordable housing in NYC, and

- \$950 million for public housing in the rest of the State, which preserves 10,000 units of affordable housing and would fix all of the backlogged repairs.

You can also prevent evictions of thousands of families with **\$500 million in rent arrears for public housing residents** across New York State, including:

- \$335 million for NYCHA families struggling to make ends meet as the cost of everyday goods continues to rise, and
- \$165 million for public housing in the rest of New York State.

Thank you for hearing my testimony.