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Public Comment of Sosseh Prom, Housing Justice Director, African Communities Together

**New York State 2024 Joint Legislative Budget Hearings
Assembly Standing Committee on Housing**

Feb. 14, 2024

Thank you for this opportunity to provide public comment. My name is Sosseh Prom, and I am the Housing Justice Director for African Communities Together (ACT). ACT is a national nonprofit dedicated to fighting for civil rights, opportunity, and a better life for immigrants in the U.S., and does so by empowering African immigrants to integrate socially, advance economically, and engage civically. In this effort, we advocate for equity, dignity and respect for all, which is why we request that the New York State Legislature prioritize housing needs in this year's state budget. In particular, we ask that the Legislature consider allocating significant funds towards housing programs and policies that will address the ongoing issues with shelter capacity in New York City, and safely house the immigrant community and other New Yorkers facing homelessness.

The past two years have been trying for asylum seekers in New York. International instability has forced families to flee their home countries, only to be met with anti-immigrant sentiment and being bussed from Texas and Florida as political pawns. To further this already traumatic experience, the immigrant community is now under attack by New York City Mayor, Eric Adams; being falsely blamed for budget shortfalls, and limited in their right to shelter. Currently, immigrants are only allowed to stay in shelters for either 30 days (for single adults) or 60 days (for families with children). New York has always been a place for the immigrant community to thrive, and immigrants have always repaid this hospitality by contributing to the economy and becoming an integral part of society. We must protect our new community members and neighbors and prevent them from experiencing further danger and instability.

For these reasons, we respectfully ask that the Legislature consider:

- **Allocating significant funding in the state budget towards the Migrant Relocation Assistance Program (MRAP) so the program can be expanded to assist more families and have the capacity to reduce restrictive requirements to program participation.**

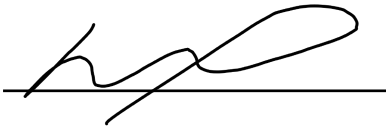
The program was designed to assist 1,250 families; a drop in the bucket considering the number of families entering New York. Additionally, participation in the program is limited due to the requirement that households have at least one adult who has applied for a qualified immigration status and is on the path to obtaining a work permit. With families being shuffled in and out of shelters (a problem exacerbated by Mayor Adams' shelter limits for immigrant families), this requirement has become overly burdensome, as applications for asylum and/or other immigration relief programs are often delayed by missing mail.

- **Allocating significant funding in the state budget to expand the capacity of New York City's rental assistance program, CityFHEPS.** CityFHEPS is primarily used as a tool to help move families out of shelters and into more stable housing. However, current requirements limit asylum seekers from participating in the program. For example, in order to be eligible for the program, applicants must have stayed in an acknowledged shelter for 90 days. This is a difficult requirement to meet for asylum seekers who have been removed from shelters due to Mayor Adams' shelter limits. By expanding CityFHEPS and getting more families out of the shelter and into stable housing, we are opening up space in the shelters, thereby negating Mayor Adams' rationale for limiting shelter stays, and hopefully incentivizing him to cease his attack on the right to shelter.
- **Allocating significant funding into the redevelopment of vacant government-owned properties into safe temporary and permanent housing.** In order to address housing needs, we need to employ holistic methods that work in tandem to provide both short term and long term stable housing for those in need. Redeveloping vacant government properties is one way to provide the housing supply needed to meet this goal.

ACT staff has been working with asylum seekers to help them submit public comments around the issue of housing, and we implore you to read their stories. Thank you for your consideration, and I

hope you will join us in our fight for safe, dignified, affordable housing for all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status.

Sincerely,



Sosseh Prom

She/Her/Hers

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