

*Joint Legislative Hearing on 2024 Executive Budget Proposal: Housing
February 14th, 2024*

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments at today’s New York State Assembly hearing on the state’s housing needs. Our names are Oksana Mironova, Iziah Thompson, and Samuel Stein and we are senior policy analysts at the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), a leading nonprofit organization that promotes economic opportunity for New Yorkers. We use research, advocacy, and direct services to champion a more equitable New York and to address the effects of the state’s housing affordability crisis.

We have been tracking New York’s housing trends for decades. Our 2023 Unheard Third Survey—the longest running survey of low-income people in the US—[shows that](#) affordable housing is the top priority for New Yorkers struggling to get ahead economically, irrespective of income levels. From the 2021 New York City Housing Vacancy Survey, we know that most New Yorkers—55 percent or 1,196,100 households—[were rent burdened](#). A third of New York renter households, overwhelmingly low-income tenants, are severely rent burdened.

This heightened crisis demands urgent action from our state government to keep people housed, to house those experiencing homelessness, and to ensure safe conditions for all. The following are some of the most important housing issues and legislation CSS has identified for the upcoming legislative session.

Prevent Evictions and Protect Tenants Rights

It is paramount for Albany to protect the changes made to the state’s rent laws in 2019, despite attacks based on noisy data and anecdotal evidence. Our [analysis](#) of the 2021 HVS shows rent regulation’s continued importance for low-income households and people of color in New York City, who make up the majority of rent regulated tenants. The data shows that the 2019 Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act (HSTPA) has stabilized runaway rents within the rent regulated sector, helping stem the loss of low-rent apartments in New York City.

Statewide Right to Counsel legislation (S2721/A1493) paired with \$260M in implementation funding, would ensure that every tenant in New York State has the right to a lawyer when facing an eviction. In late 2017, New York became the first city in the country to implement a Right to Counsel (RTC) law. RTC proved to be effective from the onset, and 84 percent of tenants with access to counsel in eviction cases were able to stay in their homes. The state RTC bill would build upon the success of the narrowly-targeted city law.

2024 is the year that New York State must pass Good Cause eviction protections (S305 Salazar/A4454 Hunter). Good Cause would complement the statewide Right to Counsel law, by providing tenants with a baseline right to remain in their homes by prohibiting lease non-renewals and evictions without good cause. It would [protect](#) 1.6M households, or nearly 50 percent of tenants statewide, from housing instability.

End and Prevent Homelessness

An easy-to-access rental assistance program is the quickest path to stability for homeless households. The Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP Kavanagh S568 / Rosenthal A4021) would both immediately rehouse the homeless and prevent more homelessness in the future. HAVP would create a state-funded voucher that would operate much like the federal Section 8 program. Half the new vouchers would go toward rehousing people experiencing homelessness, and half would go to low-income tenants (including those who cannot access Section 8 vouchers) to help them remain housed despite declining incomes and rising costs. A commitment of \$250 million toward this program would have a transformative impact, aiding over 20,000 families or individuals in exiting or preventing homelessness.

Invest in Social Housing

New York State has a rich social housing history, with developments like Co-op City providing safe, well-maintained, and affordable housing to tens of thousands of New Yorkers. Social housing includes three key features: deep affordability; insulation from speculative investment; and democratic management. Legacy examples of New York State's social housing include its early and robust public housing program, Mitchell-Lama, and low-income cooperative development through HPD's Department of Alternative Management.

The state can build on this legacy by passing and funding the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (S221 Myrie/A3353 Mitaynes). Under TOPA, when rental buildings go up for sale, tenants would have the right of first refusal to either buy the building themselves and turn it into a limited-equity cooperative or designate a preferred buyer. This would prevent high-speed flipping of rental buildings for extreme profit and would give tenants a stronger hand in determining their housing futures. We also strongly support the new Social Housing Development Authority bill (A9088 Gallagher/S8494 Cleare), which would promote the production of social housing through development and acquisition across the state.

Preserve and Protect Public Housing

The single largest and most important social housing program in New York – public housing – deserves much more support and attention. As the first developments in New York City vote on the state-created Preservation Trust, Albany must take additional steps to address the capital backlog faced by both NYCHA and other public housing authorities in the state. We call on the state to advance the PHIX New York Plan (Public Housing Infrastructure & Expansion for New York). This plan for consistent and predictable capital funding would preserve 15,000 NYCHA units and 25,000 public housing units outside of New York City. Further, it would add an additional 8,000 public housing units that are allowable under the state's Faircloth cap.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer our comments. For more information or if you have any questions, please contact Oksana Mironova at omironova@cssny.org.