



Good afternoon and thank you to the committee for allowing me to testify. My name is Jennifer Hernandez and I am a member at Make the Road New York; a 25 year old organization building the power of immigrant and working class communities.

New York State faces an out-of-control housing and affordability crisis. Rents and the cost of food and basic necessities have risen dramatically in recent years, and wages and support from the state government have not kept pace. Meanwhile, millions of New Yorkers remain unjustly excluded from tenant protections and key safety net programs like health insurance and unemployment.

The result; families are pushed out of their homes and neighborhoods, leading to rampant displacement and the highest homelessness levels in New York State since the Great Depression.

Our families are living the consequences of decades of inaction to ensure safe, affordable housing for all. For the past two years, the state's response to the continued housing crisis has been woefully inadequate.

Time and time again, the Governor caters to the whims of real estate tycoons who see our homes as ATMs, trying to squeeze as much money out of us as possible – raising rents, refusing to make basic repairs, and turning communities into playgrounds for the wealthy.

While the Governor has no plan - or desire - to address this housing crisis, we do.

**We believe** that no matter where you live, when you arrived here, or where you're from, every New Yorker deserves an affordable, comfortable, and safe home.

**We know** homes are for rest, family, and community. It's where we watch our kids take their first steps. It's where our loved ones gather around the kitchen table to share meals and to celebrate. It's where we unwind after a long, hard day of work.

**We deserve** homes where we have the freedom to stay and neighborhoods where we have the freedom to thrive. Good-paying jobs. Great public schools. A strong safety net available to all.

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To achieve this, we need a State Legislature willing to stand up to Governor Hochul to prioritize the needs of Black, Brown and Immigrant families who call New York home.

- **We must** give unregulated renters protections against unreasonable rent hikes and retaliatory or discriminatory evictions by passing a Statewide Good Cause Eviction rule as introduced by Senator Salazar and Assemblywoman Hunter.
- **We must** create a statewide section 8 like program that provides low income New Yorkers who are homeless or at risk of homelessness with money to pay their rent. We can do this by passing the Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) as introduced by Senator Kavanagh and Assemblywoman Rosenthal.
- **We must** invest in the future of all New Yorkers, not freeze agency budgets and deliver fewer services to the same communities already squeezed by our housing crisis. We can do this by enacting the Invest In Our NY tax proposal to raise tens of billions of new public dollars by ensuring millionaires, billionaires, and highly profitable corporations pay what they owe in taxes.

It is more critical than ever that the State take bold steps to address the affordable housing crisis afflicting immigrant and working class New Yorkers. The good news is that there are concrete policy steps you can take this year to ensure that every tenant in New York, no matter where they live, gains the same basic protections. But you must stand up to the Governor, and her real estate friends. Without action now, more and more families will find themselves on the streets or unable to live in our state.

In addition to measures to address the affordable housing crisis, we urge the state to enact the following critical measures in the budget:

- **Ensure Immigrant Healthcare Access (Coverage4All)** (Rivera S2237B | Gonzalez-Rojas A3020B): The state should expand the Essential Plan to all income-eligible New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status. Roughly 255,000 New Yorkers remain uninsured because of their immigration status. The Coverage4All bill would open the Essential Plan to cover New Yorkers earning up to 250% of the federal poverty level with health insurance regardless of immigration status. This would occur through a federal section 1332 waiver, which could secure federal funding for the entirety of this coverage extension, while allowing the Commissioner of Health to set guardrails for the expansion.

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- Passing Coverage4All is a critical step towards achieving universal coverage which we support through the New York Health Act.
- **Create the Unemployment Bridge Program** (Ramos S3192 | Reyes A4821): New York should pass S8165|A9037 to establish a permanent unemployment insurance program that can be accessed by excluded workers who currently contribute to social safety net programs, but are excluded from unemployment insurance. \$500 million will create the Unemployment Bridge Program, which will provide up to \$1200/month in economic support to workers ineligible for unemployment. Prime beneficiaries will be immigrant workers without authorization, cash economy workers, freelancers and people in re-entry. This program can serve up to 50,000 people per month. This program will be funded through an innovative revenue source - a Digital Ad Tax (DATA), which anticipates close to \$1 billion in annual revenue.
- **Maintain 100% of Foundation Aid to all districts and prevent any funding gap created by the expiration of Federal Aid:** New York needs to update the Foundation Aid Formula to fully capture the current cost of educating students. State leaders must provide the State Education Department with the resources to engage with education finance experts to evaluate and revise the Foundation Aid formula, while maintaining the principles of equity and engaging parents, students, teachers and community members. With substantial federal aid ending, the state must also keep districts whole, with the resources needed for all students to thrive.
- **Increase ALE funding to \$27.9 million:** There are 3.9 million adult New Yorkers with limited English proficiency or without a high school diploma, and less than 2 percent are able to access state-funded adult literacy classes each year. And thousands of the newest New Yorkers need English language support to transition into the workforce. To expand and improve vital adult literacy programs, the state should renew current Adult Literacy Education funding (ALE) at \$9.3 million to keep programs whole; invest an additional \$9.3 million in FY25 for the ALE Stabilization and Enhancement Fund to begin to stabilize and enhance ALE programs by increasing the rate per student and allowing providers to better serve the 6,600 New Yorkers enrolled; and invest an additional \$9.3 million in FY25 to reach and serve an additional 3,300 students at an increased rate per student.

Thank you for your time. If you would like additional information or would like to discuss these matters further, please contact [jose.lopez@maketheroadny.org](mailto:jose.lopez@maketheroadny.org).