



**Testimony Submitted by Red Hook Initiative to
New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing: Housing
February 14, 2024**

Dear Chair Rosenthal and Members of the Committee on Housing:

First and foremost, thank you for your time, dedication, and advocacy on behalf of New Yorkers who live in public housing. We are Kara Smith and Tevina Willis – employees of the [Red Hook Initiative](#), a community-based organization serving the ~10,000 public housing residents in Red Hook, Brooklyn each year through youth development, community building, and local hiring programs.

Our testimony will focus on the omission of public housing from the Governors’ stated budget priorities and the impact of this neglect on the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). We will focus on the impact of chronic neglect on tenants’ health and how this shows up for those we serve in Red Hook Houses, Brooklyn’s largest public housing development. We also want to highlight support of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic, and Asian Legislative Caucus’ (BPHA) ask for the State to include \$10 billion in the budget for emergency capital improvements and operating expenses at NYCHA developments.

It’s estimated that between 360,000 and a million New York City residents live in public housing. On the high end, this means **1 in 8 New Yorkers live in public housing, making the New York City Housing Authority the largest landlord in the United States of America.** In the 2024 State of the State outline, Governor Hochul makes it clear that she’s interested in expanding access to affordable housing by way of building new units, enacting a tax abatement for new rental and affordable housing, providing incentives for below-market housing in office conversions, and standing up for tenants. **Nowhere in the 2024 State of the State housing priorities does Governor Hochul mention NYCHA tenants, who continue to look towards the NY State government for support.**

The housing authority’s [2023 physical needs assessment](#) (PNA) report breaks down the capital needs for NYCHA and reveals that ***Red Hook East and West developments need roughly 1.48 billion dollars to address the chronic infrastructure issues.*** NYCHA estimates a total of 78.34 billion dollars is needed over the next twenty years to remedy its entire portfolio. These dollars are essential to ensure tenants occupy safe, healthy housing yet the NY State government continues to dismiss this priority. We support the BPHA Caucus’ request for \$10 billion to be included in the budget with a baseline of \$3.4 billion in funding included annually thereafter. These funds would sufficiently address the needs of Red Hook East and West buildings. The \$95

million in financial relief for public housing tenants in the form of ERAP in last year's budget certainly aided tenants who had outstanding rental payments, but is by no means a remedy for this large funding need. NY State must provide consistent funding for NYCHA capital and operating costs that address systemic infrastructure issues.

For years public housing residents have experienced dire housing conditions which contribute negatively to their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. Despite rampant infrastructure issues which have been well documented by the housing authority, we continue to see the NY State government turn a blind eye and refuse sustained investment to support low-income, BIPOC New Yorkers who deserve to live in housing that is not substandard. In Red Hook, this disinvestment shows up for the youth and families we serve in the form of daily emergencies that deeply impact quality of life and the ability to thrive. For families here in Red Hook this looks like weeks and months without basic services such as a sink or functioning toilet, chronic mold thickening the air and making it hard for people to breathe, and prolonged wait time for basic repairs, leaving many tenants in housing court to get basic services.

The need for funding from the state for NYCHA is directly linked to the health of families and individuals living here. Without sustained investment, we can expect to see more of the conditions above. In Red Hook Houses 1 in 4 tenants report having asthma. Studies have shown asthma is clearly linked to indoor environments where mold and pests are present. [In a 2023 report on mold](#) published by NYCHA, the Authority reported that in January 2023, there were **71,114 open mold and leak work orders**. The majority of mold conditions in NYCHA apartments can be attributed to stack leaks in pipes that are original to the buildings and are in need of replacement.

Recently our case management team worked with a resident who had extensive mold in her apartment unit that led her to be hospitalized. **Despite the resident flagging the mold issue to NYCHA, the condition remained without repair for so long that the mold spores spread from her walls and windowsills to her bedsheets and personal items (see photos below).** With the support of her case manager, we escalated her case with the Housing Authority and the resident was moved out of her apartment while repairs were made. These stories and situations are unfortunately not uncommon to hear and we know that without comprehensive funding for infrastructure repairs these issues will persist.

Residents across NYCHA's developments are no stranger to constant gas, elevator, compactor, heat, and hot water outages. As of February 13, 2024 the housing authority's [Service Interruption Overview dashboard](#) reveals numerous buildings are without essential utilities. **Nearly 18,000 residents citywide are impacted by elevator outages, both planned and unplanned this week.** In Red Hook, gas outages are exacerbated by invasive construction. A [recent](#) construction error in late January left over 200 families living in the Red Hook Houses without gas and **those families are still without gas today. It is expected residents will be without kitchen gas for months** – something that is not unfamiliar to most residents. Due to insufficient funds for comprehensive repairs, these gas outages are often prolonged. We've learned through our case management work and advocacy in recent years that gas outages are directly linked to aging infrastructure and investment would greatly improve the issue of gas outages throughout the development.

Public housing is the only truly affordable housing option left for New Yorkers to access and is an incredible asset to the Red Hook community. Red Hook East and West deserve investment and prioritization from the State to preserve these units and keep public housing accessible and safe. We hope that our testimony highlights the need for this investment in Red Hook Houses and the need for recognition and prioritization of public housing in the state's budget planning.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your commitment to public housing residents. If you have any questions or comments regarding our testimony you can contact us below.

Sincerely,

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