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**TESTIMONY OF RED YOUNG, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER ON BEHALF OF HOUSING
CONSERVATION COORDINATORS
BEFORE THE NEW YORK STATE SENATE HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION, AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE AND THE NEW YORK STATE ASSEMBLY
HOUSING COMMITTEE**

**JOINT LEGISLATIVE BUDGET HEARING ON HOUSING AND THE FISCAL YEAR (FY)
2025-6 EXECUTIVE BUDGET PROPOSAL**

February 27, 2025

Thank you, Chairs Kavanagh and Rosenthal and Members of the Joint Legislative Housing Committees, for the opportunity to submit testimony at today's hearing on behalf of Housing Conservation Coordinators. Supporting Hell's Kitchen with free legal services and tenant resources, HCC is the lifeblood of the renting class on the West Side. HCC has been fighting for tenants rights since the 1970's and currently aims to create affordable, community-based housing through TOPA. With several dozens of buildings and tenant associations eligible for TOPA benefits, Hell's Kitchen is the model neighborhood for this revolutionary legislation.

We urge you to pass the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) in the state budget, along with an annual appropriation of \$250 million to support TOPA building acquisitions and technical assistance. TOPA (S.401) would give tenants a first opportunity to collectively buy their building when a landlord sells, in order to stabilize and preserve their homes as permanently affordable rentals or shared equity cooperatives. Modeled on policies that have preserved tens of thousands of homes in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and other jurisdictions, New York's TOPA bill would empower tenants and expand the supply of urgently needed affordable housing – in high-cost and distressed parts of the state alike.

Real estate speculation is driving up home prices, eroding New York's affordable housing stock, and fueling displacement of low-income and Black and brown New Yorkers. Across the state, one in five households are severely rent burdened, paying more than 50% of their incomes in rent. Evictions tripled in 2022, and the state's rate of homelessness is twice the national average.¹ [Dozens of Hell's Kitchen tenants live in unlivable conditions. The need for affordable and community-based housing is evident.](#) The Clinton Housing Development Company (CHDC) has been instrumental in addressing this need, developing over 1,000 units of affordable

¹ *New Yorkers in Need: The Housing Insecurity Crisis* (Feb 2024), Office of NYS Comptroller, available at: www.osc.ny.gov/reports/new-yorkers-need-housing-insecurity-crisis

housing and 55 commercial spaces in the neighborhood since 1973. [Additionally, projects like The Lirio are underway, aiming to provide 112 units of permanently affordable housing, including 67 units designated for formerly homeless individuals.](#)

This year's budget presents an opportunity to make urgently needed investments in social housing, to interrupt predatory real estate practices and expand community control of land and housing. Enacting TOPA, along with an annual appropriation of \$250 million, would result in the creation of thousands of permanently affordable rentals and shared equity co-ops across the state over the next five years. TOPA is broadly supported by 82% of New Yorkers – including a strong majority across all political affiliations – according to a poll by the Community Service Society.

A comprehensive study of Washington, D.C.'s TOPA statute, enacted in 1980, found that TOPA successfully developed or preserved 16,224 affordable homes between 2006 and 2020, and enabled the formation of more than 425 tenant associations to give tenants an organized, democratic voice in the management of their buildings.² Additionally, most of the district's 4,400 cooperative homes were created through TOPA. A similar policy enacted by San Francisco has preserved hundreds of affordable homes since its adoption in 2019.³ At least a dozen other cities and states have enacted or are pursuing TOPA policies.⁴

TOPA is a proven, transformational tool that gives tenants a seat at the table when their buildings are being sold. TOPA creates a process and reasonable timeline for tenants to collectively purchase their buildings. Tenants may also assign their purchase rights to community land trusts and non-profit developers that can work with tenants to preserve affordable rental housing or convert buildings to shared (or limited) equity cooperatives. New York has a robust and growing network of CLTs and nonprofit housing providers, as well as legal and technical assistance organizations, that support TOPA and are ready partners to ensure its effective implementation. Several groups have recently completed building purchases from neglectful landlords – examples that TOPA would help multiply across the state.⁵

As soon as TOPA passes, my TA would be eligible to purchase our building. Maguire Capital, the firm currently possessing the building, has expressed plans to sell the building as soon as city-mandated repairs are completed. TOPA would allow us to intercept the building from another remote landlord without our interests in mind. A consensus of tenants have expressed a desire to purchase their units and support community management of the building. We are prepared in all dimensions to claim and manage our units and the whole of the property. With

² *Sustaining Affordability: The Role of TOPA in DC Housing* (Nov 2023), Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development, available at:

thecoalitiondc.org/news/cnhed-releases-comprehensive-analysis-of-dcs-tenant-opportunity-to-purchase-act-topa/

³ *Stable Homes and Resident Empowerment* (Oct 2023), Local Initiatives Support Coalition (LISC), available at:

www.lisc.org/our-resources/resource/stable-homes-and-resident-empowerment/

⁴ *Tenant and Community Opportunity to Purchase Policies are Gaining Traction* (Nov 2024), PolicyLink, available at:

www.policylink.org/topa-copa-map

⁵ See, e.g., "Want to own your NYC apartment? This nonprofit is helping renters buy their units." *City Limits* (March 18, 2024), at: gothamist.com/news/want-to-own-your-nyc-apartment-this-nonprofit-is-helping-renters-buy-their-units; and "A Landlord Underestimated His Tenants. Now They Could Own the Building." *New York Times* (May 6, 2022), at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/06/realestate/tenants-eviction-port-morris-bronx.html>

the budget allowance, we could complete renovations and maintenance ourselves, along with help from CLTs and community-development orgs. TOPA is the legislation that could give us the 30-year-overdue life our community deserves.

New York's punishing affordability crisis requires bold solutions that address root causes of housing insecurity. We urge you to pass and fund TOPA at \$250 million per year in the state budget.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.