



New York State Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing

Testimony of Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing & Policy, Neighbors Together February 25, 2026

I would like to thank the Assembly Housing Committee Chair, Assemblymember Rosenthal, and the Ways and Means Committee Chair, Assemblymember Pretlow, as well as Senate Housing Committee Chair Senator Kavanagh, and the Senate Finance Committee Chair, Senator Kruger for the opportunity to submit testimony. Thank you to the members of the committees and staff for your time and attention to the critical matter of housing in New York State.

My name is Amy Blumsack, and I am the Director of Organizing & Policy at Neighbors Together, a community based organization located in central Brooklyn. Neighbors Together provides hot meals five days per week in our Community Café, offers a range of one-on-one stabilizing services in our Empowerment Program, and engages members in community organizing, policy advocacy and leadership development in our Community Action Program. We serve approximately 120,000 meals to over 12,000 individuals per year. Over the last five years, the number of meals we serve daily has increased fourfold. Our members come to us from across the five boroughs of New York City, with the majority living in central Brooklyn. Over 80% of our Community Action Program members have a rental assistance voucher, and have experienced homelessness.

Over the last decade, our members increasingly report that homelessness and lack of affordable housing options are their primary concern. In our recent 2025 Community Action Program survey, over 85% of respondents said that housing is the main source of their instability. Our data backs the anecdotal evidence we see and hear from our members daily: an increasing number of our members are either living in shelter with vouchers for years at a time, ineligible for a voucher, or unable to find permanent housing due to rampant source of income discrimination and a vacancy rate of under 1% for affordable housing units in New York City.¹ The intense need for housing that is affordable for low-income and extremely low-income New Yorkers was clearly illustrated by the extremely high number of applications for the Section 8 waitlist. When the waitlist reopened for the first time in nearly fifteen years in 2024, over 633,000 applications were

¹<https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/news/007-24/new-york-city-s-vacancy-rate-reaches-historic-low-1-4-percent-demanding-urgent-action-new#/0>



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submitted in less than a week.² Of the more than 633,000 applications, only 200,000 were added to the waitlist, and NYCHA is capped at 115,346 active vouchers.

The housing and homelessness crisis that Neighbors Together members are experiencing is due to a confluence of short-sighted policy and inadequate financial investment by New York State. According to a recent report by the New York State Comptroller, Thomas DiNapoli, in the last four years, homelessness in New York has doubled. From January 2022 to January 2024, homelessness increased by 53%, a rate four times higher than the rest of the nation. And while many would like to misconstrue this as a downstate or New York City problem, the fact is that homelessness has risen across New York State. Three out of the top four Continuum of Care regions with the highest increases in homelessness are in areas outside of New York City.³

Although inflation and the cost of living has increased significantly over the last few years, the shelter allowance has remained essentially flat over the last few decades, leaving more and more low income New Yorkers with either unsafe or unacceptable options for a roof over their heads. Currently, the vouchers that are available to people living in New York City are not meeting the need for a multitude of reasons. With the extremely low vacancy rate, the majority of voucher holders are concentrated in just a few of New York City's neighborhoods in the Bronx and Brooklyn,⁴ forcing people who need rental assistance to move to far flung areas away from their support systems, jobs, healthcare, and schools, while increasing their transportation costs. The few apartments they can access with their vouchers are kept in substandard conditions and are not appropriately maintained.

Time and again we have seen people fall back into homelessness because although they may have been one of the lucky few to find housing with a voucher, their lease wasn't renewed or their rent was raised beyond their voucher payment standards. In some cases, the conditions in their apartments were so bad, or the harassment from their landlord was so intense, that they were forced to self-evict. The Good Cause Eviction Law, passed in April 2024, provides critical tenant protections for people living in unregulated apartments. Unfortunately, the version of the law that passed was watered down, and excluded nearly 600,000 households in New York City, and left localities outside of New York City responsible for passing their own versions of Good Cause. Since the passage of Good Cause Eviction, it is clear that there is an overwhelming desire for tenant protections across New York State; 19 municipalities have already adopted local

²<https://nychajournal.nyc/new-nycha-section-8-waitlist-established/#:~:text=In%20total%2C%20NYCHA%20received%20633%2C808,by%20the%20June%2028%20deadline.>

³ <https://www.osc.ny.gov/files/reports/pdf/new-yorkers-in-need-homelessness-nys.pdf>

⁴<https://citylimits.org/2025/02/05/nyc-voucher-households-are-concentrated-in-a-handful-of-neighborhoods-data-shows/>



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Good Cause Laws, and more municipalities are organizing to opt-in. New Yorkers who aren't covered by Good Cause protections are subject to becoming homeless with little notice and no recourse. In addition to lack of tenant protections, voucher program design leaves much to be desired, with some vouchers creating an untenable benefits cliff for its recipients. For example, FHEPS vouchers, while a lifeline for families in dangerous situations or at risk of eviction, have such a low income limit that recipients are forced to choose between working and advancing in their career, or keeping their housing voucher and a roof over their head.

One particularly damning statistic from Comptroller Napoli's report is that child homelessness in New York State has more than doubled, up from "20,299 in 2022 to 50,773 in 2024. Almost one in three of New York's homeless are children, one of the highest shares in the nation."⁵ Governor Hochul created the Childhood Poverty Reduction Advisory Council (CPRAC) as an acknowledgement of the increasing poverty levels in families with children, and tasked CPRAC with finding recommendations for ways to reduce childhood poverty. In each of its proposed packages of policy solutions, CPRAC highlighted the need for rental assistance, saying "Data indicates that housing assistance to help renters afford apartments at Fair Market Rent level also plays an important role in alleviating high cost of living and reducing poverty in New York," and acknowledges that the current level of assistance that is available is "not sufficient to meet the need."⁶

To meet the need created by the housing crisis across New York State and the narrow eligibility requirements of existing voucher programs, the New York State legislature should double down on the successful passage of the **Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP)** pilot in April 2025, and push for full funding for the program in the fiscal year 2027 budget. The Housing Access Voucher Program is a statewide rental subsidy for low-income families and individuals facing eviction, currently homeless, or facing loss of housing due to domestic violence or hazardous living conditions, that would pay 100% of fair market rent. It would be targeted to both people on Social Security and public assistance, and 50% of the program would be dedicated to families experiencing homelessness.

While the HAVP pilot program's initial funding at \$50 million was an important start, it remains woefully insufficient to meet the need across the state. The Housing Access Voucher Program was funded at \$50 million for fiscal year 2026, which funds approximately 1,900 vouchers. Vouchers are allocated based on the proportion of residents in each county (or New York City) that are severely rent burdened, paying more than 50% of their income towards their rent. The fiscal year 2026 funding will create the following number of vouchers in each region:

⁵ <https://www.osc.ny.gov/press/releases/2025/01/dinapoli-numbers-homeless-population-doubled-new-york>

⁶ <https://otda.ny.gov/cprac/reports/CPRAC-2024-Recommendations-and-Progress-Report.pdf>



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| <u>Region</u> | <u># of Housing Access Vouchers Allocated</u> |
|------------------|---|
| Western Region | 176 total |
| Central Region | 145 total |
| Eastern Region | 185 total |
| Downstate Region | 185 total |
| New York City | 1200 total |

Under the \$50 million allocated for HAVP in FY26, Albany county will receive 29 vouchers. In the city of Albany alone, there are approximately 300 known homeless individuals. \$250 million in funding was advocates' original ask, but the Governor refused to fund the program at the original ask.

Under the current federal administration, many affordable housing programs are at risk due to budget cuts and potential programmatic eligibility changes. Congress recently passed a budget that excluded most of the initially proposed severe cuts to HUD funded housing programs. However, threats still loom in terms of future policy changes that could revoke eligibility for mixed status families receiving Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers, as well as future budget negotiations for fiscal year 2028.

Given the current homelessness crisis in New York State, ongoing instability at the federal level, and HAVP's strong support in the state legislature, it is critical that the Housing Access Voucher Program be fully funded at \$250 million in the fiscal year 2027 budget, and be made permanent to help meet the need.

In addition to the Housing Access Voucher Program, there are key pieces of legislation that must be passed in this year's budget to help protect tenants and mitigate New York State's increasing housing affordability crisis. They are as follows:

The Rent Emergency Stabilization for Tenants Act (REST Act) (S4659/A4877), would make it easier for municipalities to opt-in to rent stabilization and create permanent affordable housing with strong tenant protections. The REST Act would modernize the Emergency Tenant Protection Act (ETPA) by allowing municipalities to use publicly available data to declare a housing



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emergency, and by letting them adjust the size of buildings that are covered. It would also allow municipalities to bring newer buildings under rent-stabilization. Together, these changes will help hundreds of thousands of tenants living outside of New York City access and remain in affordable housing.

The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) (S401/A6100), would give tenant associations and qualified nonprofits a first opportunity to purchase multifamily buildings when landlords sell. TOPA is modeled on similar policies that have created and preserved thousands of affordable homes in Washington, D.C., San Francisco, and other jurisdictions. Paired with acquisition funding and technical assistance, TOPA creates pathways to truly affordable housing and resident control. TOPA prevents speculation by big real estate and predatory vulture funds, and will help stem the community displacement due to rising rents. The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act must be passed this year, and fully funded at \$250 million annually to help support acquisitions and technical assistance.

In the same vein of protecting working class and low-income New Yorkers from predatory real estate speculation, the **Social Housing Development Authority (S5674/A6365)** would allow New York State to build and/or preserve housing that would be permanently affordable for the middle class to those with low or no income. Tenants in SHDA-financed buildings would pay just 25% of their income in rent, transforming a broken affordability system that has kept many low-income New Yorkers in poverty. Governed by tenants, labor unions, and technical assistance providers, the SHDA could also acquire and rehabilitate housing in disrepair, enhancing the code enforcement efforts of cash-strapped municipalities.

The bills listed above are critical to ensuring that New Yorkers are able to become and/or remain stably housed. However, the State Legislature must remain vigilant against the erosion of the gains won by the **Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019**. Renters make up nearly 69% of New York City's population, and approximately half of those are rent-stabilized tenants. In order to meaningfully address the housing affordability and homelessness crisis across the state, the legislature must continue to guard tenant protections as it works to pass further legislation to stabilize communities' housing stock.

Neighbors Together is grateful to the New York State Assembly and Senate Housing Committees and the Ways and Means Committee and Finance Committee for holding this joint hearing. In order to address the unprecedented housing and homelessness crisis that New York State is facing, the state legislature must take action to both lift people out homelessness and to stop the flow of people into homelessness.



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The legislature can do exactly that by:

- Fully funding the Housing Access Voucher Program at \$250 million in fiscal year 2027, and making it a permanent program
- Passing and fully funding the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (S401/A6100)
- Passing and fully funding the Social Housing Development Authority bill (S5674/A6365)
- Passing and fully funding the Rent Emergency Stabilization for Tenants Act (S4659/A4877)
- Protecting the Home Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019

Thank you for your time and consideration. For further questions regarding this testimony, please contact Amy Blumsack, Director of Organizing and Policy at Neighbors Together at amy@neighborstogether.org.