



North Country

RURAL DEVELOPMENT COALITION

Dear Chairperson Krueger and Chairperson Pretlow,

My name is Nicole Justice Green. I serve as President and CEO of the North Country Rural Development Coalition and the Essex County Land Bank, and as Chair of the Government Affairs Committee for the Rural Housing Coalition. Through these roles, **I work across Essex, Warren, Washington, Clinton, and Hamilton counties, directly supporting 46 towns throughout the Adirondack Park and the broader North Country region.**

The majority of my service area is fully enclosed within the Adirondack Park. These are some of the most rural, remote, and economically constrained communities in New York State, with limited infrastructure, higher construction and transportation costs, and fewer local resources than much of the state. At the same time, this region is one of New York's most treasured assets. It is where millions of New Yorkers and visitors come to vacation, recreate, and experience the natural environment year-round. **Our communities keep that economy running.** We staff the resorts, hospitals, schools, main street businesses, public safety departments, and municipal services that make the Adirondacks work. If our workers cannot find housing, the entire system strains and begins to break.

I am also a mother of five and a proud New Yorker who relocated to this state to raise my family. Housing is not an abstract policy issue to me. It is the difference between a young family staying or leaving, between a senior aging safely at home or being displaced, between a volunteer fire department having enough members or not, between a school staying open or closing. In today's environment, where families everywhere are feeling the pressure of rising costs, uncertainty, and division, housing is one of the most direct ways we can protect stability and dignity. **Rural New York cannot be treated as an afterthought in that effort.**

I want to begin by thanking the Governor and the Legislature for prioritizing housing and for investing in programs that are delivering real results. I support many of the Administration's initiatives and appreciate the direction being set. At the same time, I want to note that reductions proposed in certain areas and the continued lack of clarity within the Aid to Localities portion of the budget create challenges for rural housing providers who rely on predictability and continuity to plan and execute projects.

I want to start with **SEQRA revisions**, because process determines feasibility. I strongly support the Governor's proposed changes to make the SEQRA process clearer, more delineated, and less



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burdened by unnecessary red tape. In the Adirondack region, **the majority of housing development we are pursuing is happening within existing hamlets and developed areas, not on protected park lands themselves.** These are places with existing infrastructure and long-established settlement patterns, where housing is needed for the people who live and work there.

Yet **SEQRA-related delays, duplicative reviews, and unclear thresholds often place disproportionate burdens on small rural developers, nonprofit organizations, and municipalities.** That burden translates into real dollars. Rural construction costs in our region are routinely 20 to 30 percent higher than the rest of New York State due to distance, logistics, labor constraints, and limited contractor availability. Demolition costs are also uniquely inflated. In Essex County, demolition debris must be hauled out of the county because, due to our location within the Adirondack Park, we do not have a landfill. When those elevated baseline costs are compounded by extended review timelines and soft-cost escalation, projects become infeasible. This is why SEQRA reform matters. Streamlining and clarifying the process for housing projects in already-developed areas will help deliver housing while maintaining appropriate environmental safeguards.

Second, I want to speak clearly about land bank funding. I strongly support the Governor's proposal to increase the cap on the number of land banks from 35 to 45, because more communities should have access to this tool. But expansion must be paired with replenished funding. **While the Budget references significant prior-year capital commitments for land banks, the reality on the ground is that these funds are already largely obligated.** This is not a sign of slow performance. It is a sign that the need is large and that land banks are actively doing the work the State is asking us to do.

In rural areas, land banks are essential infrastructure. We acquire abandoned properties, demolish unsafe structures, stabilize buildings, assemble sites, and prepare shovel-ready opportunities for housing in places with limited municipal capacity. In the Adirondack region, land banks often serve as the only entity with the tools and staff capacity to take on these complex properties and move them toward productive use. **If we want land banks to keep producing units and clearing blight, funding must be replenished rather than treated as "still available" simply because it was appropriated in prior years.**



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I also strongly support the continuation of funding for **Vacant Apartment Repairs**. This is some of the most effective and impactful housing investment we see in the North Country and Adirondack Park region because it brings existing units back online quickly using existing infrastructure. In rural communities, where new construction is expensive and slow, getting vacant units repaired and occupied is one of the fastest ways to stabilize the housing market. The reason these funds appear “used” is because they work. If the State wants this program to continue delivering units, the funding must be replenished.

I strongly support the Governor’s investment in Innovative Approaches to Building Homes, including the additional \$100 million in State capital for the MOVE-IN NY homes program. Modular and factory-built technologies are especially important for rural regions like mine, where labor shortages, distance, and logistics drive costs upward and delay project schedules. We are proud to be one of the MOVE-IN NY pilot communities through the Town of Newcomb, and we view this program as a real opportunity to build attainable and workforce housing in places where the market is not meeting demand.

I also want to highlight the importance of the **New York Main Street Program**. For hamlets and small village centers in rural New York, NYMS is one of the most practical tools we have to support mixed-use buildings, stabilize downtowns, and create or rehabilitate apartments above storefronts. These projects are not large enough for some of the State’s marquee programs, but they are exactly the kinds of projects that keep rural communities alive. Demand for NYMS consistently exceeds available funding, and sustained investment in this program is critical to maintaining housing and economic vitality in the smallest municipalities.

Finally, I support efforts to make it easier to transfer decommissioned prisons, state-owned homes, and other state-owned properties into productive use for housing and community development purposes. In rural regions, these properties can represent rare, strategic opportunities. But the current process is often slow and burdened with unnecessary procedural barriers. Streamlining transfers and reducing red tape would allow communities to move faster on projects that align directly with the State’s housing goals.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I submit this testimony as someone who is responsible for delivering housing outcomes in real communities with real constraints, and as a mother raising a family in New York. Rural New York, including the Adirondack Park region, is a place the State depends on. *The people who live here should be able to afford to stay here.* With clear SEQRA



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reforms, replenished funding for land banks and vacant unit repair programs, continued investment in MOVE-IN NY, and strong support for NY Main Street, New York can make meaningful progress in the places that too often get overlooked.

Respectfully submitted,

Mrs, Nicole Justice Green

President and CEO, North Country Rural Development Coalition

President and CEO, Essex County Land Bank

Chair, Government Affairs Committee, Rural Housing Coalition