

March 26, 2021

The Honorable Andrew M. Cuomo
Governor of New York State
NYS Capitol Building
Albany, NY 12224

Senator Andrea Stewart-Cousins
Senate Majority Leader
LOB 907
Albany, NY 12224

Assemblymember Carl E. Heastie
Assembly Speaker
LOB 932
Albany, NY 12224

Senator Brian Kavanagh
Chair, Senate Committee on Housing,
Construction and Community Development
LOB 512
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblymember Steven Cymbrowitz
Chair, Assembly Committee on Housing
LOB 943
Albany, NY 12248

Senator Roxanne J. Persaud
Chair, Senate Committee on Social Services
LOB 409
Albany, NY 12247

Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal
Chair, Assembly Committee on Social
Services
LOB 844
Albany, NY 12248

Commissioner Michael P. Hein
New York State Office of Temporary and
Disability Assistance
40 North Pearl Street
Albany, NY 12243

Commissioner RuthAnne Visnaukas
New York State Division of Homes and
Community Renewal
38-40 State Street
Albany, NY 12207

Dear Governor Cuomo, Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins, Speaker Heastie, Senator Kavanagh, Senator Persaud, Assemblymember Cymbrowitz, Assemblymember Rosenthal, Commissioner Hein, and Commissioner Visnaukas:

On behalf of a coalition of housing advocates, tenant representatives, legal services providers, faith leaders, property owners and developers, and shelter providers from across the state, we thank you for your continued leadership to prioritize housing stability during this unprecedented time. However, we are extremely concerned that, as thousands of families face mounting rental arrears, this funding has still not been disbursed.

New York State received \$1.3 billion in federal rent relief in December and another \$1 billion was allocated to New York State in the American Rescue Plan Act for emergency rental assistance. It is critical that these federal funds be deployed as soon as possible given the impending end of the state's eviction moratorium on May 1st as well as federal spending guidelines. As the final details of this program are determined as part of the state budget, we

collectively agree on the following priorities to ensure the program is effective as possible and gets money out the door as soon as possible:

1. Tenants should have the ability to self-attest their eligibility for the new program, without having to prove eligibility through documentation. This is especially critical for undocumented households who have yet to receive any pandemic aid and must be able to access this program.
2. The program must also allow tenants to receive funds directly, in cases where property owners refuse to cooperate. Failing to do so will potentially put thousands of tenants at-risk of eviction. According to both HCR's experience administering the \$100 million Rent Relief Program and a recent Wall Street Journal [article](#), this could be a widespread issue. We strongly encourage establishing a tenant attestation option for tenants to receive direct funds and attest to rent payment.
3. Once the program application portal opens, it should be open to all eligible renters. While the State must do targeted outreach to certain populations to ensure they know about the program and are able to apply, staggered application periods for different groups of tenants or building owners will only slow down and complicate the process. We strongly oppose any phased roll out.
4. Any federal relief funds left over from HCR's Rent Relief Program should be reallocated for this program, or other programs that directly address housing needs. These funds were allocated for housing and should be spent accordingly.
5. Rental assistance should not be contingent on a property owner not having open code violations. While we agree that housing quality should be prioritized, getting repairs done during the pandemic is difficult, and tying assistance to the absence of violations will not necessarily encourage repairs, and may obstruct tenants from receiving the assistance they need. We strongly oppose any code violations contingencies tied to this funding.
6. Ensure the budget legislation requires OTDA to report on applications received; applications approved and funds spent on a monthly basis in a publicly available report on their website. It is essential that these emergency funds are deployed quickly and that progress is monitored. We believe public reporting is essential to the success of funds deployment.
7. Given that the rent relief program will not be accepting applications until the end of April at the earliest, the state's eviction moratorium should be extended to ensure that protections do not lapse before tenants are able to access relief.

8. The State budget should include improvements to existing rental assistance programs to prevent the unnecessary trauma of eviction and address growing economic need.

Specifically, the budget should:

- Waive the requirement of a housing court proceeding or eviction filing to qualify for assistance.
- Waive the requirement to repay one-time rental assistance during and after the state of emergency.
- Waive the future ability to repay requirement for one-time rental assistance payments known as 'One Shot Deals' to further reduce the barrier to entry.
- Raise the rent ceiling on the FHEPS voucher to Fair Market Rent as determined by HUD, to align the voucher with market conditions in New York City.

It is a moral and public health imperative that we provide robust rent relief to struggling tenants and prevent a surge of evictions and homelessness. Thank you for your continued work to ensure that New Yorkers who are struggling due to the pandemic receive the assistance they need. As always, our organizations are a resource to you, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations further.

Sincerely,

ANHD

The Arker Companies

Benchmark Title Agency, LLC

Citizen Action of New York

Citizens' Committee for Children NY (co-convener of the Family Homelessness Coalition)

Citizens Housing and Planning Council

CNY Fair Housing

Coalition for the Homeless

Community Service Society of New York

Corporation for Supportive Housing (CSH)

Curtis + Ginsberg Architects

Cypress Hills Local Development Corporation

Designing the WE

Douglaston Development

Enterprise Community Partners (co-convener of the Family Homelessness Coalition)

ERASE Racism

Fordham Bedford Housing Corporation

FPWA

Habitat for Humanity New York City

Gateway Housing

Homeless Services United

Housing Justice for All/Upstate Downstate Housing Alliance

Housing Opportunities Made Equal

Housing Rights Initiative

IMPACCT Brooklyn

The Hudson Companies
LeadingAge New York
The Legal Aid Society
Long Island Housing Services, Inc.
Low Income Investment Fund
M Lappin & Associates, LLC
MBD Community Housing Corporation
Mount Vernon United Tenants (MVUT)
Neighborhood Restore HDFC
Neighbors Together
New Destiny Housing (co-convenor of the Family Homelessness Coalition)
New York Housing Conference
New York State Association for Affordable Housing (NYSFAH)
New York State Council of Churches
New York State Public Housing Authorities Directors Association (NYSPHADA)
New York State Rural Advocates
NYSPHADA
NYC Housing Partnership
Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition
Phipps Houses
Riseboro Community Partnership
Safe Horizon
SKA Marin
St. Nicks Alliance
Supportive Housing Network of New York
Tenants Political Action Fund
University Neighborhood Housing Program
Westchester Residential Opportunities, Inc.
WIN
Youth Action Programs and Homes, Inc.