

**Testimony of Brendan Cheney, New York Housing Conference**

**New York City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings**

**April 29, 2025**

Good afternoon. My name is Brendan Cheney. I am Director of Policy and Operations at the New York Housing Conference (NYHC). I would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to testify about Housing Connect and the City's affordable housing lottery process.

New York Housing Conference is a nonprofit affordable housing policy and advocacy organization. As a broad-based coalition, our mission is to advance City, State and Federal policies and funding to support the development and preservation of decent and affordable housing for all New Yorkers.

We greatly appreciate Chair Sanchez for leading this hearing and bringing attention to this issue. Your advocacy for affordable housing generally, and today on improving Housing Connect, is helping countless New Yorkers.

We support a single portal for all affordable housing rental and homeownership opportunities with functionality that allows for automatic notifications. We believe this should be complemented by a robust Housing Ambassador program, especially targeted to aid populations that may not easily navigate a web application system. However, while we support the intent behind the bills being discussed today (Intros 1264, 1265, and 1266) to improve fair access to housing, we do not support their adoption. We do not recommend codifying new requirements until changes to Housing Connect, underway by HPD, would support these improvements and we are concerned about federal policy and budget changes that may impact HPD staffing or budget for core functions for the agency.

At its best, Housing Connect provides transparency and access to the City's publicly subsidized affordable housing. Allowing New Yorkers to view affordable housing apartment listings and apply to rent units in a simple process is vital. However, the functionality offered in Housing Connect is inadequate to meet the needs of renters and building owner and the system's limitations contribute to delays of rental and re-rental of affordable housing. There are also many significant bureaucratic challenges that should be improved in the City's marketing rules for the lottery -- from scheduling a marketing kick-off meeting with HPD, all the way through to tenant selection. We understand HPD is tackling both processing reforms and upgrading the housing portal's technological specifications within a year and they have been meeting with stakeholders for input.

Last week, HPD announced a temporary waiver for re-rentals, while they improve their system. We are supportive of this waiver to move renters into housing more quickly and end lengthy vacancies the "mini lottery" process was creating for owners.

In addition to our February policy brief focused on Housing Connect Re-Rental Vacancy Problems, we also convened stakeholders to make recommendations on a broader set of improvements to the marketing process. These recommendations included system notifications, which we understand is not possible at present given the limitations of the Housing Connect platform. In addition to notifications for applicants, notifications for marketing managers are also

required to eliminate manual lookups for some processing stages. We also identified several processing rules that should be changed such as special postal service requirements, zoom monitoring requirement for mail applications and amending the lottery ad template.

Related to Intro. 1264, which would require re-rental of affordable units to be posted on Housing Connect, neither HPD staffing, process requirements nor the Housing Connect platform are currently able to support centralized re-rental lease ups. Until Housing Connect is improved enough to create a re-rental process that is efficient, we do not support codifying new requirements.

Starting May 1, HPD will grant exceptions for re-rentals through a waiver application. Until additional functionality is provided in Housing Connect, we strongly support re-rentals being managed by owners through their own lists. To address concerns about access and transparency, owners will need to publicly post re-rental opportunities and share the listings with HPD.

Over the next year, HPD is planning to look for a long-term solution for re-rentals. We request that any solution prioritize speedy and efficient re-rentals, both so that affordable housing owners are not unnecessarily losing rental income and tenants are not unnecessarily delayed in moving into affordable housing.

With respect to Intros 1265 and 1266, we generally support the purpose of these bills, but we do not think they should be done through legislation. We are concerned about the impact of unfunded mandates, especially when there is the threat of significant federal funding cuts.

We are grateful for the advocacy and support for these needed changes and call on HPD to work to make these changes without legislation.

Thank you again to Chair Sanchez for your leadership. We are happy to answer any questions.