

**Testimony of the New York Housing Conference  
New York City Water Board  
June 2, 2026**

Good morning. 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 Water Board for the opportunity to testify about the proposed water rates.

NYHC 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 are testifying today asking the board to consider lower water rates and to expand the Multifamily Water Assistance Program.

Affordable housing in New York City is facing rising costs on many fronts, causing significant distress in many buildings – with costs greater than income. A recent study by Enterprise Community Partners and LISC found that more than half of the 428 affordable housing projects in their portfolios (totaling 37,130 units) have negative cash flow with costs greater than income. There are multiple causes of the growing distress, and one of them is large increases in water rates. Affordable housing buildings are drowning in high water bills.

One solution to help affordable housing in distress is to control increases in water rates. Over the past five years, water rates have increased by nearly 5 percent per year on average, including an 8.5 percent increase in 2025.

The current plan calls for an increase of 6 percent this year and 8.5 percent year over year for the next several years. According to UNHP, who has been leading advocacy efforts about water rates for affordable housing for the past 30 years, estimates that without a change in policy, water payments will be \$1,800 per unit per year by 2030, leaving affordable housing buildings over their head in water costs. These rate increases are too high. We implore the board to find a way to keep rate increases lower.

In addition, we ask the Board to work with the City administration to increase funding for the Multifamily Water Assistance Program. We applaud and support the Water Board's proposal to increase funding for the MWAP to \$18.75 million, an increase of \$2.5 million. It will allow you to include more buildings in the program this year. This program is a lifesaver for many. We also applaud the creation of a \$1 million fund to help HDFCs catch up with water bills.

While these are helpful steps, these programs need more funding. MWAP is typically over-subscribed and eligible properties are turned away. We therefore call on the Water Board to increase the Multifamily Water Assistance Program in two ways:

- First, increase the program budget to \$100 million to serve a total of 200,000 apartments in the program.
- Second, increase the apartment credit to \$500. The current \$250 credit has not increased since the start of the program over 10 years ago despite rising costs.

By expanding the program, the City can help protect affordable housing and protect New Yorkers.