

Statement of RuthAnne Visnauskas
Commissioner/CEO
New York State Homes and Community Renewal

Senate Standing Committees on Judiciary, and Housing, Construction, and Community Development
Public Hearing on Good Cause Eviction

I want to thank Chair Kavanagh, Chair Hoylman, and the distinguished members of the Senate for the opportunity to submit testimony to your public hearing on Good Cause Eviction. New York State Homes and Community Renewal is committed to advancing safe, secure, and sustainable affordable housing for all New Yorkers.

As you well know, New Yorkers are currently facing a shortage of affordable housing that has reached critical levels, and which is most acutely impacting New York's 3.4 million renter households. Families that are displaced or evicted from their homes face significant economic, physical and emotional harm. Evictions not only put a strain on the individuals and families that were forced from their homes, but also on the general well-being of all New Yorkers that must shoulder the economic and social costs of housing instability and homelessness.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left tenants uniquely vulnerable. HCR was honored to administer the New York State COVID Rent Relief Program, funded by the federal CARES Act, which delivered nearly \$48 million to assist more than 18,300 households. The Office of Temporary Disability Assistance Emergency Rental Assistance Program funded through the American Rescue Plan has distributed or obligated over \$2.1 billion in additional rental assistance payments to 165,000 households.

Governor Hochul, recognizing the impact evictions or the threat of evictions have on people was proud that among her first acts in office was to sign the extension of the Eviction Moratorium and expansion of COVID Rent Relief. This took extraordinary action by the Houses to come back into session in response to what was, and remains, incredible need. In addition, she also signed legislation and appropriated \$100 million that increased the shelter allowance for public assistance recipients to help people leave the shelter system and remain secure in their homes.

The Governor recognizes the pressure that the need for affordable housing puts on New Yorkers. During her State of the State address, she put forth an important proposal to reduce unjust evictions statewide by making free legal counsel available to low- and moderate-income tenants to defend against eviction proceedings. If enacted, the Eviction Prevention Legal Assistance Program would provide free legal assistance to upstate renters who currently cannot afford counsel in eviction proceedings. The funding would apply to renters facing eviction with incomes at or below 200 percent of the federal poverty line and would be provided by local legal service providers.

As we enter the 2022 legislative session, there is clearly an opportunity for the Legislature and Executive to work in partnership to determine how to best provide, preserve, and protect affordable housing throughout the state, and to advance policies that promote a more equitable New York. Governor Hochul has already outlined several common-sense strategies and policy changes that will help in the fight against homelessness and housing insecurity – this includes proposals to drive affordability in New York City's rental market; permit the conversion of commercial buildings such as hotels and offices into residential units; improve access to housing for individuals who have been involved in the criminal justice system; and, importantly, to build on HCR's successful housing plan with a new \$25 billion investment to create and preserve 100,000 affordable homes, including 10,000 with support services.

Looking ahead, the Governor and HCR will continue to pursue and implement innovative solutions to provide, preserve, and protect affordable homes throughout the state and explore additional tools to protect renters and address our ongoing housing crisis.