



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Andrew Gounardes

Senator Gounardes Joins Faith Leaders and Advocates to Rally for the Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act

ANDREW GOUNARDES March 5, 2024

| ISSUE: **AFFORDABLE HOUSING**



The bill aims to empower houses of worship to help address the housing crisis.

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ALBANY, NY — **New York State Senator Andrew Gounardes** joined faith leaders, housing advocates, and a diverse group of elected officials at the New York State Capitol in Albany

today in support of the **Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act (S7791/A8386)**. The event drew more than 100 New Yorkers from across the State. Introduced by Senator Gounardes and Assemblymember Brian Cunningham, the act aims to address New York's acute housing crisis by enabling faith-based organizations (FBOs) to more easily develop affordable housing on their land.

The rally, which drew a diverse, interfaith crowd, from every corner of the state, highlighted the broad coalition of faith leaders and organizations driving advocacy for the bill—including over fifty organizations and religious leaders.

“New York has a severe affordable housing crisis, and our houses of worship are uniquely positioned to help,” said **State Senator Andrew Gounardes**. “The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act is our commitment to meeting the urgent need to address New York’s housing crisis while respecting the unique character of communities across the state. By enabling religious institutions to develop affordable housing, we're empowering them to serve New York's most vulnerable while ensuring their own financial stability, too.”

“At the root of all great faith traditions is the call to stand with those in need, and in a civilized society there is no greater need than a decent and affordable home,” said **Marc Greenberg, Executive Director of the Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing**. “The Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing joins with people of faith and good will across New York State in affirming that with so many of our neighbors in desperate need of housing, faith communities should be supported in living their values to use their resources to provide housing for families to live and thrive. We call on the New York State Legislature to pass, and Governor Kathy Hochul to sign, The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act, so that New York can welcome more of God's people to their own home.”

A recent study from Pew Charitable Trust shows that **75% of New Yorkers support homes on faith owned land**. This strong support is reflected in the geographic and ideological diversity in the bill's cosponsorship

"Once a haven for middle-class families, Flatbush and Crown Heights now see one-bedroom apartments priced at \$3,000 a month," said **Assemblymember Brian A. Cunningham**. "We desperately need to create a new dynamic in the housing market. We need affordable housing stock to meet demand and keep our neighbors in our community. The FBAHA offers a sustainable, long-term solution by leveraging the trust and reach of our religious institutions to build the vital housing our community needs."

New Yorkers across the state are contending with the high costs of housing. A recent report from the New York State Comptroller's office showed these impacts are not shared equally, with half of Black, Asian, and Hispanic-led New York households facing housing insecurity compared to 31% of White-led households.

"One in five New Yorkers are spending more than half their income on housing. Our communities of faith and worship want to be part of the solution," said **State Senator Pete Harckham**. "The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act will allow new housing to be built on land owned by religious organizations and put us on the path to a more affordable and fair New York."

"The Faith Based Affordable Housing Act is a sweeping, innovative and practical solution that will allow our houses of faith to help alleviate New York City and State's acute housing crisis," said **Democratic Assembly Majority Whip Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn**. "I'm proud to co-sponsor this vital legislation to assist religious institutions while furthering their ability to serve as community cornerstones for our most vulnerable constituents through much-needed affordable housing."

The land owned by faith communities is largely unavailable for homes because of onerous administrative and financial challenges to building.

"New York State is facing a crisis where we are not building enough affordable homes to address the needs of 50% of New York residents who pay more than 30% of their income on housing," said **Rev. Peter Cook, Executive Director of the New York State Council of Churches.**

"Congregations across the state own a lot of property which could be used to address this crisis but we make zoning so difficult that faith communities give up trying. The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act helps to ease some restrictions to make it easier for congregations to repurpose their property to serve their communities."

Rather than providing incentives like many other housing bills, the Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act takes aim at administrative and structural barriers to building affordable housing on FBO-owned land by:

- Creating a comprehensive training program for religious institutions on housing development.
- Allowing housing to be built, as of right, on land owned by faith-based organizations as of the passage of the bill.
- Mandating affordable housing in all projects utilizing new zoning.

"Under existing law, developing affordable housing tested the administrative and financial capacity of our ministry," added **Bishop Dr. R.C. Hugh Nelson, Senior Pastor, Ebenezer Urban Ministry Center.** "In the end with the help of our development partners, we managed to build a new ministry center and 530 affordable apartments. I am confident that this legislation will make it possible for more religious organizations from Brooklyn to Buffalo to provide homes for their communities."

This widely-supported bill aims to address the challenges of housing scarcity, ballooning maintenance costs and shrinking congregations for many faith organizations. Its approach addresses both the housing needs of individual communities as well as statewide.

"The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act will help houses of faith overcome many of the obstacles that stand in the way of faith-based organization providing housing for their communities while fortifying their futures." said **Kate Toth, Executive Director of Bricks and Mortals**. "This is a narrow, practical bill, which has the broadest legislative support for a housing bill in recent memory. With this bill, faith organizations are empowered to play a vital role in ensuring that every New Yorker has a safe, quality, home they can afford - let's get this passed!"

"The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act represents an opportunity for New Yorkers to come together to provide housing for those who need it most, while also allowing our houses of worship to fulfill a new service for their communities," said **Annemarie Gray, Executive Director of Open New York**. "This bill has the potential to transform the role of faith institutions in our communities, while providing climate-friendly homes for New Yorkers from Long Island to Buffalo."

"As our state grapples with the multiple crises of homelessness, evictions, housing insecurity, and crushing rent burdens, it is reassuring that our friends in the faith-based community stand ready to help," said **State Senator Brian Kavanagh, Chair of the Senate Housing Committee**. "The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act is a crucial step towards addressing these pressing issues. By accelerating construction timelines and reducing bureaucratic hurdles, this bill would empower houses of worship to play a significant role in providing affordable housing for their communities. I commend Senator Andrew Gounardes and Assemblymember Brian Cunningham for introducing this bill. I look forward to working with my colleagues in government and the many supporters of this effort to get it enacted."

"When faith-based organizations are attempting to assist in solving our housing crisis, they should be given the opportunity to do so," said **State Senator Rachel May**. "I am proud to endorse this bill as a crucial component of the solution to our housing needs. I am eager to collaborate with Senator Gounardes to ensure its passage."

"New York's housing crisis demands bold solutions that honor both our past and future," said **State Senator Robert Jackson**. "The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act acknowledges the vital role of houses of worship as community anchors and empowers them to address our pressing affordability challenges. By cutting through red tape and enabling the development of much-needed affordable housing, we're not just building homes; we're nurturing communities, honoring traditions, and forging a future where affordability isn't a luxury, but a fundamental right."

"Brooklyn is facing an affordable housing crisis, and we need an all-hands-on-deck approach to solving it," said **State Senator Zellnor Myrie**. "The FBAHA leverages some of our greatest allies in the faith community, and ensures they have the resources and flexibility they need to support New Yorkers seeking affordable housing. I'm proud to support this bill and look forward to addressing the housing crisis this year."

"It's no secret that we have a housing crisis in New York. In order to address it we need to seek out creative solutions," said **State Senator Brad Hoylman**. "That's exactly what we have the opportunity to do with the Faith Based Affordable Housing Act. Despite their differences, Faith Leaders across the religious spectrum are united in their desire to help combat the housing crisis. Unfortunately, as of now, too many obstacles exist that prevent faith based organizations from building affordable housing developments on their land. With this law we have the opportunity to remove those barriers to make it easier for faith based organizations to build affordable housing units and provide training for them to do so. This is the exact type of out-of-the-box measure that we need to bring New Yorkers together

and address our housing crisis."

"Standing in solidarity with the other sponsors of the Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act, I am proud to support and champion this transformative bill," said **Assemblymember Fred W. Thiele, Jr.** "The Faith-Based Housing Act not only provides much-needed housing options for Long Island residents but also fosters a unique approach by empowering faith-based organizations to utilize unused land for sustainable development. By blending market-rate and affordable housing, we are paving the way for a more inclusive and environmentally conscious housing landscape in our community."

For more information on The Faith-Based Affordable Housing Act, visit nyfaithhousing.org

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