



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Ruben Diaz

There's No Place Like Home

RUBEN DIAZ March 10, 2014

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WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

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You should know that on March 3, 2014, New York Daily News columnist Greg B. Smith wrote a column titled: “Cuts in federal rent aid may force hundreds of senior citizens to move into smaller apartments or pay higher rent.” He wrote: “To make up for federal cuts, the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development has begun going after “overhoused” tenants — those living in units considered too big for their household. Many are senior citizens on fixed incomes who’ve received letters telling them they must move from their tidy one-bedrooms into “zero bedrooms” — studios.”

You should know that it is no surprise that this cruel effort to punish the poor began under former Mayor Michael Bloomberg's Administration. In those days, New York City offered tax incentives to some of the wealthiest developers and land owners, and at the same time, New York City quietly sent letters to people who live in subsidized one-bedroom apartments to move from their homes into a studio apartment. (I'd like to believe that "tale of two cities" is in the past, and those practices will no longer exist.)

According to the facts presented by Mr. Smith: "Some 42% of these tenants are disabled and one-third are senior citizens." And: "Tenants targeted for "downsizing" are among 32,200 lower-income households who get federal rent aid in private buildings that were once part of the subsidized Mitchell-Lama program."

It is a disgrace that New York's City's Members of Congress have failed to secure the necessary federal money to adequately house the poor and needy members of our city – especially our senior citizens and disabled. These are not temporary homeless shelters – these are their homes! It is outrageous that New York City's tax breaks for wealthy developers outweigh the federal budget cuts, and it is even worse that senior citizens and disabled neighbors are still expected to make personal housing sacrifices. To add insult to injury, the City of New York is offering a \$350 allowance for moving. (Do you know anyone who has been able to move all their furniture and possessions for \$350?)

My dear reader, can you imagine the consequences for senior citizens or disabled persons who will be forced to move away from their neighbors and support networks? Can you imagine the hardship of any disabled person who is forced to move from his or her one-bedroom apartment to live where he or she will have to open a murphy-bed or pull-out sofa each night? Can you imagine the personal sorrow of any senior citizen who is forced to sacrifice his or her one-bedroom apartment and get rid of family treasures in order to live in a studio apartment?

I call upon my colleagues to join me in support for the immediate moratorium on downsizing, and to support exceptions for the elderly and disabled.

It is encouraging to see the efforts of Manhattan Borough President Gale Brewer to unite Manhattan's fellow Democrats in support for Section 8 residents (see attachment), and I applaud Greg B. Smith for his dedication to reporting about New York's housing crisis.

Ladies and gentlemen, there is an old saying: "A society is measured by the way it treats its weakest members." We must not punish the poor - it is our duty to help them - and it should not even be an option to push our senior citizens and disabled neighbors into smaller homes.

This is Senator Rev Rubén Díaz, and this is what you should know.