



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Michael Gianaris

Senate Deputy Leader Gianaris, Housing Advocates Press For Housing Our Neighbors With Dignity Act In State Budget

MICHAEL GIANARIS March 24, 2021

| ISSUE: **HOUSING OUR NEIGHBORS WITH DIGNITY ACT**, **HOTEL CONVERSIONS**, **HOMELESSNESS**, **HOUSING**, **TENANTS**



NEW YORK – Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris, along with housing advocates, are calling for a proposal to convert distressed hotels and commercial properties to be included in the final state budget. The proposal, Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act, was introduced earlier this month by Senator Gianaris, and included in the state Senate’s budget plan along with a financial commitment of \$250 million.

“New York has seen a decades-long affordable housing crunch exacerbated by the covid-19 pandemic and ensuing economic devastation,” said **Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris**. “This legislation is a good way to tackle the dual problems of distressed properties and lack of affordable housing. I am glad my colleagues agreed this proposal should be included in the Senate’s budget resolution. Now we need to continue the hard work to ensure it is included in the final state budget.”

The Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act allows owners of financially-distressed hotels and commercial properties to sell them to the state to create permanent affordable housing for homeless and housing-vulnerable New Yorkers. The properties could then be operated by non-profit housing providers. It would cost over \$2.2 billion, paid for mostly with dollars included in the federal American Rescue Act. New York City currently has more than 50,000 people living in homeless shelters and countless others who are housing stressed.

Senator Gianaris’ legislation is supported by a wide variety of experts in the housing field, including advocacy groups like VOCAL-NY, the Community Service Society of New York, non-profit housing developer HousingWorks, a Strong Economy for All coalition, Neighbors Together, and other organizations.

“The pandemic has made evident how dire New York’s housing crisis is. Weak rent moratoriums and insufficient rent relief programs have not gone far enough for most New Yorkers in need as the number of evictions grows in low-income neighborhoods of color. The

conversion of office units and distressed hotel properties into housing units would greatly bolster the number of beds available to New Yorkers in need, as well as assist businesses that are getting back on their feet,” said **Assembly Member Karines Reyes**, who carries the legislation in the state Assembly.

“Our State should not stand by while thousands of hotels sit empty and while so many of us have suffered in the shelters and on the streets this year I am thankful for Senator Gianaris' leadership and for introducing the Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act (HONDA). Our State must pass HONDA and put resources towards putting people into permanent and affordable homes, and every empty hotel must be considered potential housing for our people,” said **Sandra Isaac, a leader of VOCAL-NY and homeless New Yorker**.

“The Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act epitomizes the potential for New York to recover in a way that makes us stronger, fairer, and more resilient than we were before. We must seize every opportunity afforded to us to end the homelessness and unaffordability epidemics that plagued our city long before the current pandemic. Converting hotels to affordable housing is a crucial step toward that goal,” said **David R. Jones, President and Chief Executive Officer, Community Service Society of New York**.

“Simply put, increased opportunities for supportive and affordable housing in New York City will protect our most vulnerable communities and ensure greater public health and safety. For decades, we have called upon our state legislature to recognize that housing is healthcare. Now, the COVID-19 pandemic has made it terribly clear to the broader public that we need to transform the way we treat homeless people. We are grateful to Senator Gianaris for his allyship and leadership, especially the midst of this pandemic. The Senator's plan will make great use of the city's commercial vacancies while guaranteeing available

space goes to those who need it most and not yet more unnecessary luxury units,” said **Charles King, CEO and Co-founder, Housing Works.**

“Our clients and all New Yorkers are in critical need of more affordable housing. The pandemic has exacerbated that need and fueled a crisis that was already untenable. By taking financially distressed hotels and commercial properties and selling them to the state to create permanent affordable housing, The Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act is a common-sense solution to the growing crisis. We thank Senate Deputy Leader Michael Gianaris for his leadership on this issue,” said **Judith Goldiner, Attorney-in-Charge, Civil Law Reform Unit, The Legal Aid Society.**

“A mark of visionary leadership in government is understanding how to quickly and effectively respond to changing conditions to help people in need -- Senator Gianaris and the Senate Democratic Conference have demonstrated that vision and that leadership with this measure. The HONDA structure will provide lasting benefits to New Yorkers who need a safe, affordable place to live, and it will help our communities, our neighborhoods and our economy recover from both the COVID crisis and the crisis of extreme inequality,” said **Michael Kink, Executive Director, Strong Economy For All Coalition.**

“Senator Gianaris’ Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act has the potential to be a great move for the State of New York. With homeless single adults being undercounted or left out of many programs for the homeless, the HONDA bill could address a significant need for our unhoused neighbors and seize an opportunity we may never see again. The HONDA bill creates a chance to convert distressed hotels into permanent affordable housing for homeless New Yorkers. Turning distressed properties into units that feel like home and have the dignity of a home will reduce the rotating doors of homelessness and create a more caring New York State,” said **Lourdes Melo, Neighbors Together leader and Organizing**

Apprentice.

“Quickly converting distressed hotels into permanent housing that is affordable to New Yorkers experiencing homelessness is a once-in-a-generation opportunity we need to respond to now. Thank you to Deputy Leader Gianaris and the State Senate for proposing to provide substantial state dollars for this purpose through HONDA. We look forward to working with the Legislature, the administration and other stakeholders to make HONDA an effective new tool for creating desperately needed new housing,” said **Ted Houghton, President, Gateway Housing.**

Right now, we have the opportunity to create thousands of units of housing out of distressed hotels -- housing that is permanently affordable to homeless and low-income New Yorkers. We cannot squander this once-in-a-generation opportunity to make a substantial and permanent debt in our homelessness crisis. Rather than allow these hotels and office buildings to sit vacant and/or converted to luxury housing we should seize the opportunity and pass the Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity Act right now,” said **Cea Weaver, Campaign Coordinator, Housing Justice for All.**

“New York State needs programs that prioritize public dollars and public resources towards housing development initiatives that benefit people with the highest need and least options. The creative solution proposed would begin to address the need for deep affordability through community-based solutions, including not-for-profit development and supportive housing services. This approach insures a more equitable approach to affordable housing today and in perpetuity. For far too long New York City has relied on a market-based, trickle-

down, transactional approach towards affordable housing that has clearly not worked to resolve the ever-increasing need for affordable housing that has now resulted in a homeless and housing affordability crisis of epidemic proportions. Focusing resources based on need and in partnership with not-for-profit developers and community residents is the right approach and long overdue,” said **Ismene Speliotis, Executive Director, MHANY Management, Inc.** (a mutual housing association).

RELATED LEGISLATION

2021-S5257

- Introduced

- ◦ In Committee Assembly
 - In Committee Senate

- ◦ On Floor Calendar Assembly
 - On Floor Calendar Senate

- ◦ Passed Assembly
 - Passed Senate

- Delivered to Governor

- Signed By Governor

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Enacts the "Housing Our Neighbors with Dignity act"

March 01, 2021

Signed by Governor

Sponsored by **Michael Gianaris**

Do you support this bill?