



Testimony

**New York State
Senate Committee on Housing, Construction & Community Development
Senate Standing Committee on Social Services
Senate Standing Committee on Aging
Joint Public Hearing
Tuesday, February 18, 2025**

**Submitted by:
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Thank you, Senators Cleare, Kavanagh, and Persaud, and members of the Committees for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of Catholic Charities Community Services, New York. I am Beatriz Diaz Taveras, Executive Director of Catholic Charities Community Services.

Catholic Charities Community Service seeks to uphold the dignity of each person as made in the image of God by serving the basic needs of the poor, troubled, frail and oppressed of all religions. We collaborate with parishes, as well as non-Catholic and Catholic partners, to build a compassionate and just society. Catholic Charities delivers, coordinates, and advocates for quality human services and programs touching almost every human need.

Catholic Charities Community Services supports families and individuals residing in New York City and seven counties in the Hudson Valley, who are at imminent risk of homelessness due to loss of employment, unexpected financial hardships, or overwhelming rent burden.

Our agency operates four HomeBase offices in the Bronx and one in Harlem, all funded by the City and the State of New York. Through our HomeBase program, we provide comprehensive eviction prevention services to stabilize households facing financial and housing insecurity caused by unemployment, disability, and other crises. We offer direct financial assistance to cover rental arrears and facilitate access to critical housing subsidies available in New York City.

Without these essential programs, thousands of working-class families and individuals would face devastating housing instability, leading to a surge in homelessness. Catholic Charities Community Services is dedicated to empowering seniors and disabled tenants by helping them maintain their independence, enhance their quality of life, and access essential support services in a timely manner.

Since their establishment in 1970 and 2005, respectively, the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) programs have played a critical role in protecting vulnerable tenants living in rent-controlled, rent-stabilized, rent-regulated hotel units, HDFC cooperative shareholder apartments, and Mitchell-Lama housing from unaffordable rent increases.

However, many eligible seniors and disabled tenants are being unfairly excluded from these programs simply because their income slightly exceeds the qualifying threshold. In addition to this issue, several other barriers continue limiting access to or restricting these vital programs' full benefits. Addressing these challenges is essential to ensuring that all eligible individuals receive the protections they need to remain securely housed and financially stable. Catholic Charities' commitment to proactive intervention and long-term housing stability ensures that vulnerable communities receive the support they need to remain securely housed.

Our agency also holds the unique and vital role as a housing developer, providing safe, affordable housing for New Yorkers in need. Rental vouchers provide financial sustainability for our properties, enabling us to maintain high-quality housing while ensuring that families facing hardship have access to stable, secure homes. By covering a portion of rent for eligible households, vouchers bridge the gap between income and housing costs, empowering tenants to contribute a sustainable portion of their rent while preserving their financial stability and housing security. This structure ensures that rent payments remain consistent, supporting the operational costs of the property, including maintenance, utilities, and essential services. When all residents fulfill their rent obligations, the property can continue functioning at a high standard, benefiting everyone in the community.

Beyond assisting individual tenants, the voucher system is mission-critical to the overall performance of our housing assets. The financial sustainability of a building depends on steady, predictable rent collections to cover costs and reinvest in upkeep, ensuring long-term habitability and quality of life for all residents. A well-functioning ecosystem of rental assistance supports this balance, preventing financial shortfalls that could lead to deferred maintenance, service reductions, or operational challenges. Ultimately, every tenant's ability to pay their share creates a community where neighbors support one another, reinforcing the long-term stability of affordable housing developments.

Catholic Charities Community Services recognizes the critical importance of housing stability for senior and disabled tenants. As such, we strongly support the following proposed expansions of the SCRIE and DRIE programs:

- Adjust the maximum income threshold for eligibility for SCRIE, DRIE, SCHE and DHE by any increase in the consumer price index.
- Allow localities to reduce renters' contributions toward rent to no more than one-third of household income under SCRIE/DRIE.

- Set SCRIE/DRIE rent to the original date of eligibility with an eligible look-back period of up to two years
- Expand eligibility to include the parent or guardian of a person with a disability in the definition of head of household under the disability rent increase program.
- Protect long-term stability by ensuring senior citizens can continue receiving rent increase exemption benefits even after a period of ineligibility.

These measures will enhance housing security, improve affordability, and ensure that vulnerable populations can remain in their homes with dignity.

Catholic Charities Community Services Statement in Support of Expanding Intro 146.

Securing safe, suitable, and affordable housing for families and individuals transitioning out of the shelter system is a critical pillar of Catholic Charities Community Services' homelessness prevention efforts. We recognize the severe challenges facing New York City's working poor—particularly those receiving public assistance—when searching for stable housing.

Currently, NYC-funded housing subsidies fail to keep pace with rising fair market rents, making it nearly impossible for applicants and housing advocates to secure apartments within the allowable rent thresholds. Landlords frequently reject tenants relying on these subsidies due to insufficient rent allowances, while some renters are forced into unofficial “side deals” that jeopardize their financial stability and long-term housing security.

To address this crisis, we strongly support Intro 146, which would:

- Ensure housing subsidies remain viable by allowing their maximum rent levels to increase annually in line with fair market rents set by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.
- Provide long-term housing stability by ensuring that individuals and families receiving rental assistance vouchers—such as LINC, CITYFHEPS, and SEPS—continue receiving support as long as they meet eligibility requirements.

By implementing these reforms, New York City can take meaningful steps toward reducing homelessness, preventing displacement, and ensuring vulnerable households have access to stable, affordable homes.

Conclusion:

On behalf of New York's most vulnerable, thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and thank you for continuing to serve this great City of New York. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need additional information.

