

AARP New York Testimony

Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction & Community Development, Social Services, and Aging Joint Public Hearing on Rental Assistance — February 18, 2025

Good afternoon, Chairs Kavanagh, Persaud, and Cleare, and members of the Senate Standing Committees on Housing, Construction & Community Development, Social Services, and Aging.

My name is Beth Finkel and I am State Director at AARP New York. I am here today to advocate on behalf of all older adults living across the state. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

New York is facing a housing affordability crisis that affects all residents, but it is particularly severe for older adults. Many older adults live on fixed incomes and are among the hardest hit by rising rents, making it difficult for them to stay in their homes. They are concerned that they will be priced out of the communities they have called home for years. We cannot afford to ignore this problem any longer.

A recent report from the Center for an Urban Future reveals that the number of older adults age 65 and older living in poverty has increased by nearly 50 percent over the past decade. This troubling rise in poverty among older adults is especially concerning, considering that the overall population of older adults is also growing, with nearly one in five New Yorkers now age 65 or older.

Older adults want to live independently and remain in their homes. We need to embrace housing alternatives that will allow older New Yorkers to age in place. The Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) program, and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) program are essential options for older adults and people with disabilities in New York who are having difficulty paying rent. Yet, the SCRIE program is underpromoted and underutilized. Currently, only 43 percent of eligible New Yorkers are enrolled in SCRIE due to lack of access, not need. We must ensure all eligible New Yorkers have access to this benefit.

We urge the Legislature to pass reforms to strengthen these essential programs, including bills S561 (Krueger) and S2534 (Sanders). These reforms will modernize SCRIE and DRIE, making them more accessible and effective in reducing housing instability among older adults and people with disabilities.

Still, more must be done to fix the affordable housing crisis for our city's older adults, including:

- Increase funding for the Senior Affordable Rental Apartments program.
- Expand eligibility for SCRIE and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) to qualifying tenants in non-rent-regulated buildings to support more aging and disabled tenants while providing greater security for owners and landlords.
- Continue to expand the city's outreach and educational programming on SCRIE and DRIE to qualified residents.
- Pass legislation to simplify the SCRIE renewal process.

- Require the Department of Finance (DOF) to establish a citywide online system for tenants to apply for and renew their benefits for SCRIE and DRIE and for the DOF to conduct outreach efforts via phone or email for any notice related to these programs.
- Require the DOF to specify what events would constitute a permanent decrease in income that would trigger a rent redetermination for SCRIE and DRIE beneficiaries.
- Standardize and streamline the processes for adults age 50 and older to apply for senior affordable housing offered through city portals and programs.

New York has an obligation to support its aging population by providing real solutions to the housing crisis. Strengthening and expanding SCRIE and DRIE will protect older adults from displacement and financial hardship.

Older New Yorkers helped build our city and make it great, and they deserve to age in place in the communities they love.

Thank you.