

*Joint Legislative Hearing on 2025 Executive Budget Proposal: Housing  
February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2025*

Thank you for the opportunity to offer comments at today’s New York State Assembly hearing on the state’s housing needs. Our names are Oksana Mironova, Izhiah Thompson, and Samuel Stein and we are senior policy analysts at the Community Service Society of New York (CSS), a leading nonprofit organization that promotes economic opportunity for New Yorkers. We use research, advocacy, and direct services to champion a more equitable New York and to address the effects of the state’s housing affordability crisis.

CSS is over 175 years old and has been at the forefront of advocacy for better housing conditions since the beginning, from the city’s first tenement laws in the 1800s to contemporary organizing for strong tenants’ rights. From the 2023 New York City Housing Vacancy Survey (HVS), we know that vacancy is essentially non-existent among low-rent units (.39 percent). Between 1993 and 2023, New York City lost over 600,000 units with rents at or below \$1,500 (adjusting for inflation). Meanwhile, we have added 75,000 units with rents over \$5,000.

This heightened crisis demands urgent action from our state government to keep people housed, to house those experiencing homelessness, and to ensure safe conditions for all. The following are some of the most important housing issues CSS has identified for this legislative session.

**Preserve 40,000 Public Housing Units in 5 Years**

From Midland Court in Port Chester to the Commodore Perry site in Buffalo, Wrobel Towers in Niagara Falls to Ocean Bay in the Far Rockaways—public housing in New York is at a pivotal moment. Congress has sent our state’s public housing authorities more than \$1.5 billion less than they need just to maintain developments from 2001-2022, creating a more than \$45 billion backlog in repairs statewide. Help is not coming from the federal government. Ongoing efforts such as conversion to Section 8, demolitions, and sales have reduced the number of residents in public housing, but thousands remain in urgent need. The state must act now and create a capital plan to [preserve](#) 15,000 affordable public housing units in NYC and 25,000 across the rest of the state over the next five years.

**Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) - [S.72](#), [Kavanaugh/A.1704](#), [Rosenthal](#)**

Homelessness and evictions are at crisis levels across New York State. According to the latest federal data, in New York City alone, the number of homeless individuals [increased](#) by 107 percent from 2014 to 2024. Our [latest policy brief](#) shows that the state’s rural and suburban counties—including Tompkins, Wayne, Ontario, Seneca, Yates, Chautauqua, and Madison—saw the biggest increases in homelessness. Meanwhile, eviction rates are rising statewide, with Rensselaer County now [surpassing](#) The Bronx for the county with the highest eviction filings rate (11 percent).

New York State urgently needs a rental assistance program to prevent low-income households from losing their homes and to rehouse those facing homelessness. HAVP would complement Section 8, a critical but underfunded program that currently only reaches roughly one in five

eligible households. At \$250 million in annual funding, HAVP would spare an additional 50,000 New Yorkers from homelessness.

### **Statewide Right to Counsel - [A4669](#), Solages**

According to our soon-to-be-published analysis of public eviction data, eviction filings in New York City have fallen by 49 percent between 2017 and 2024, down to 114,000, a result of the combined impact of Right to Counsel and rent stabilization, which work together to keep tenants in their homes. Outside of New York City, however, tenants facing eviction often cannot afford attorneys to represent them, while landlords are almost always represented by professional counsel. Statewide Right to Counsel would level the playing field and prevent unjust evictions from moving forward. The Right to Counsel coalition estimates that full statewide implementation would cost approximately \$1 billion per year, but they are seeking an initial \$260 million to launch the program.

### **Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) - [S.401](#), Myrie/Assembly TK, Mitaynes**

At the core of New York City's housing crisis, tenants have been paying too much money in rent while having too little control over their homes. The Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) would allow tenants to buy their buildings and convert them into affordable, social housing. When we [polled](#) New Yorkers about TOPA in 2023, the responses were overwhelming: 82% of respondents were in support. With \$250 million in funding, the bill would create a revolving loan fund to finance the acquisition of 6,800 homes.

### **Social Housing Development Authority (SHDA) - bill number TK, Cleare/Gallagher**

The SHDA bill would create a new, statewide public authority that could finance social housing acquisitions, purchase land and buildings for future development, and build new affordable rentals and cooperatives. Its board would include not only political appointees but also residents, laborers, and planning experts.

With an initial capitalization of \$5 billion, the Authority could develop 26,000 affordable, green, and union-built homes. According to analysis of our 2024 survey data, 73 percent of respondents from around New York State want the state government to get back in the business of building social housing.

### **New York State Green New Deal for Public Housing - [A.2076](#), Rosenthal**

NY has invested billions of dollars in projects to tackle the climate crisis, with a goal of sending 40 percent of these funds to disadvantaged communities. As defined, these disadvantaged communities align perfectly with the locations of public housing, yet funds are not reaching the communities that need them most as the climate-related housing crisis worsens. [A.2076](#) addresses both issues by promoting energy-efficient solutions to save money on public housing repairs and save our planet. This legislation proposes studying gaps in the market for energy efficient appliances, construction materials, and other components,

developing a mass-purchase plan, and providing them to public housing authorities. We need a bold, comprehensive approach to shift resources toward bridging the gap between where we are and the deep energy retrofits that will transform public housing into the housing of the future, cementing New York as a leader in sustainability.

### **Universal RAD Vote - [A.2208, Rosenthal](#)**

At its height in the early 1990s, New York State had over 225,000 public housing units. Since then, we estimate that 10,374 units (4.6 percent) were demolished or sold in New York and another 21,805 units (9.7 percent) were converted to Section 8 project-based vouchers. The process behind these drastic changes and their impact on public housing residents has varied. [A.2208](#) seeks to ensure every resident is given proper notice and information, and a vote before any demolition, sale, or transfer out of traditional public housing. Additionally, housing authorities would be required to report these actions to a public database, ensuring transparency and accountability.

### **Public Housing Procurement Modernization - [A.3965, Rosenthal](#)**

The perennial questions and concerns about how public housing agencies spend money allocated to them, as well as the lengthy timelines for project completion, have caused frustration for both residents and lawmakers alike. However, the rules for how agencies procure large construction contracts and services are set by state law, which includes a requirement that creates a fragmented process often resulting in projects that take five years to “break ground.” [A.3965](#) addresses this inefficiency by allowing authorities to work with firms capable of doing planning, design, and construction work.

Crucially, the bill also requires authorities to provide clear, understandable reports detailing how much money they received in a year, from what sources, what it was spent on, and how much remains from each funding source.

### **Protect HSTPA and Good Cause**

Over the past five years, tenants across the state have successfully fought to expand their rights. In 2019, the New York State legislature passed the landmark [Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act](#), which, among other provisions, allows municipalities around the state to opt in to rent stabilization. In 2024, the state passed the [Good Cause eviction protection](#) law, a measure to protect against rent gouging that allows municipalities to opt in to broader protections for market-rate tenants. Together, these laws present a significant opportunity for localities to empower tenants and combat rising rents.

In our inaugural statewide 2024 Annual Survey of Housing and Economic Security, we [asked respondents](#) in areas without Good Cause or rent stabilization if they knew about these programs and whether they would support them. We found that 81 percent of respondents across the state supported the adoption of rent stabilization in their communities, while 78 percent supported the adoption of Good Cause.

Good Cause and rent stabilization are politically popular and [empirically effective](#) at protecting tenants against rent gouging and unjust displacement. As the current federal administration shreds the vestiges of housing protections, it should be the New York State legislature's top priority to protect these two laws.

**Rent Emergency Stabilization for Tenants Act (REST Act) - [S.4659, Rosenthal/A.4877, Shrestha](#)**

Tenants across the state need the protections offered by rent stabilization, but when many municipalities opted in to the Emergency Tenant Protection Act over the past five years, the real estate industry filed technical lawsuits to block their progress. The REST Act will simplify the process for opting in to rent stabilization, ensuring true home rule on one of the most serious issues facing families around the state.

Thank you again for the opportunity to offer our comments. For more information or if you have any questions, please contact Oksana Mironova at [omironova@cssny.org](mailto:omironova@cssny.org).