



My name is Brahvan Ranga, and I am the Political Director at For the Many, a member organization of the Housing Justice for All Coalition. I submit this testimony to urge the State Legislature to pass the Rent Emergency Stability for Tenants (REST) Act (S04659/A04877) and include the Housing Access Voucher Program (S72/A1704) in the state budget.

Background

[For the Many](#) is a grassroots social justice organization based in the Hudson Valley. We organize in rural, suburban, and small-city upstate New York. We're building a movement of everyday people - across race, age, and language - to fight for laws and win elections that bring us closer to a New York that works for all of us, not just the greedy few. We organize the multiracial working class and conduct our work in English and Spanish, and fight to win laws and elections both locally and statewide. Our organization started in 2012 as an all-volunteer group of everyday people meeting in a church basement to fight against evictions and foreclosures. Ever since then, housing has been one of our core focuses. We joined [the Housing Justice for All](#) coalition, a statewide movement of tenants and homeless New Yorkers united in our fight for housing as a human right, in order to work with other grassroots groups across New York to push for transformative statewide legislation.

The past several years, we have [helped lead the statewide fight for Good Cause Eviction](#), along with our partner organizations in the Housing Justice for All coalition and tenants across the state. Our fight is a response to the scale of the housing crisis in the Hudson Valley - According to American Community Survey Data - 57% of renters in the Mid-Hudson Valley are rent-burdened, meaning they pay more than a third of their income in rent. This issue is particularly pronounced among Black and Brown people, immigrants, and other marginalized groups - who are disproportionately in renting households. What's more, the tenants in Upstate NY have virtually no eviction protections whatsoever, along with 1.6 million households statewide - roughly half of the state's renters. We ultimately succeeded in winning a statewide version of Good Cause Eviction last year that allowed upstate municipalities to opt-in.



[Since then, For the Many and other organizations within Housing Justice for All have organized to win Good Cause Eviction opt-ins in a dozen cities](#) - including the Hudson Valley cities Poughkeepsie, Newburgh, Beacon, Hudson, the Village of New Paltz, and the Town of Fishkill. These successful campaigns demonstrate that when the state gives localities tools to address the housing crisis by protecting tenant rights and limiting rent increases, municipalities will take action to address the housing crisis according to their local needs.

Why Rent Stabilization Reform Is Needed

Good Cause Eviction, however, is only one step needed to address the housing crisis in Upstate New York. Rent stabilization offers an additional layer of protection for tenants, prevents unreasonable rent increases on the front end by creating a public board to oversee rent adjustments, gives tenants additional recourse to address quality of life and repair issues, and gives tenants, landlords, and members of the public an opportunity to collaboratively give input on rent adjustments through a public process.

In 2019, after much advocacy from Housing Justice for All, New York State passed the Housing Stability Tenant Protection Act (HSTPA) which, among other important changes, granted all NYS localities the ability to opt-in to the Emergency Tenant Protection Act (ETPA) of 1974 by conducting a vacancy study and demonstrating a housing emergency. For the Many has since fought for rent stabilization opt-ins in multiple Upstate cities. We led the first successful opt-in into rent stabilization outside of New York City and its surrounding counties in the City of Kingston in 2022. We also helped pass rent stabilization in the Hudson Valley cities of Poughkeepsie and Newburgh, although these laws were struck down in court on technical grounds. In all three of these cases, landlords pursued bad faith lawsuits to challenge the city's vacancy studies, and succeeded in striking down rent stabilization in Newburgh and Poughkeepsie. Kingston's law has been upheld by multiple lower courts, with the case pending before the Court of Appeals as of February 2025. For the Many is a party in that lawsuit. These bad faith lawsuits undermine the democratic process, and serve to scare other localities away from passing rent stabilization.



The process to opt in to ETPA is costly, time-consuming, and unnecessarily complicated.

Vacancy studies cost tens of thousands of dollars, rendering them unaffordable to cash-strapped upstate municipalities. When vacancy studies are conducted, there is no guarantee they will yield a vacancy rate of below 5%. Even if a municipality does find that it qualifies for rent stabilization, the threat of landlord lawsuit is still present.

Of the eight vacancy studies conducted north of New York City and its surrounding counties since 2019, half have failed to meet the arbitrarily determined vacancy requirement of '5% or less'; a metric easily muddled in smaller municipalities where dozens of units can make the difference of whether a locality opts in to ETPA. Of the remaining four municipalities that have declared emergencies, all were sued or threatened to be sued by real estate interests. Of those four, two emergency declarations have been overturned by courts, one was rescinded by its legislative body, and only one has been upheld (the City of Kingston). In total, seven of the eight attempts at adopting rent stabilization have been thwarted on the technical basis of the vacancy rate requirement despite overwhelming, often unanimous, political support.

Additionally, even when a locality succeeds in clearing these hurdles and opts-in to rent stabilization via ETPA, only a small fraction of the housing stock is covered. The ETPA was written in 1974 with New York City in mind, and stipulates that only buildings built before 1974 with 6 or more units are covered by the law. In Upstate New York, tenants tend to live in smaller buildings ranging from 1 to 5 units. Furthermore, the stipulation that only buildings built before 1974 are covered is arbitrary and does not reflect the current housing stock, fifty years later. In the City of Kingston, for example, only 20% of the residential housing stock is covered by the ETPA.

In summary, there are two problems impacting localities interested in opting-in to ETPA: Those covered by rent stabilization represent a significant minority of the existing housing stock, and the vacancy study is a costly, complicated, and time-consuming task. The current statewide framework for opting into rent stabilization is therefore inadequate at giving municipalities a viable option to enact the policy, and thus must be reformed.



The REST Act

The Rent Emergency Stability for Tenants (REST) Act (S04659/A04877) would address these concerns.

Firstly, where municipalities have opted-in, it would bring buildings constructed 15 years ago into rent stabilization on a rolling basis. When the ETPA was passed in 1974, the law included all the eligible buildings that had been constructed at that point—built on or before January 1, 1974. This change would reflect the ETPA’s original intent.

Second, it would give municipalities local control to adjust the size of buildings that are covered. ETPA currently extends rent stabilization to buildings with 6 or more units, common for buildings in high-density New York City, but an unsuitable threshold for housing in other parts of the state that tends to be smaller. Similar to what has already been enacted through Good Cause Eviction, this would provide localities the option to set a lower building size threshold for rent stabilization coverage, to account for local housing needs.

Third, it grants localities the right to use publicly accessible data to demonstrate the existence of a housing emergency. This would no longer be limited to a vacancy study, and could include data such as housing supply statistics, rent burdens, the local homelessness rate, and other local conditions which demonstrate the need to opt-in to ETPA. This removes the costly and legally precarious process of mandated vacancy studies from the equation - which have, until now, been the primary legal target to prevent localities from stabilizing rents.

Housing Access Voucher Program

Furthermore, the state must include the Housing Access Voucher Program (S72/A1704) in the state budget, to address homelessness in our state. This is especially relevant as the Trump administration threatens the funding and very existence of housing service providers and programs like Section 8. Homelessness has skyrocketed in the state in recent years, and in places like the Hudson Valley where there is no Right to Shelter, that means people living and dying in the streets. We urge the state to allocate \$250 million



in the state budget to fully fund this program to support both actively homeless families, and those at risk of homelessness.

Conclusion

By passing both the Rent Emergency Stability for Tenants (REST) Act and the Housing Access Voucher Program, the state can broaden the tools localities can use to address the housing affordability crisis, keep people in their homes, lower the rent burden for working families, and address our homelessness crisis by providing support to those most vulnerable. Especially given the inaction of our federal government, the responsibility to address this crisis lies with the state - we urge the state legislature to act, and ensure that New York can remain a place where all of our residents can thrive.