

Senate Standing Committee on Housing - Joint Public Hearing on Rental Assistance conducted by the Aging, Housing, and Social Services Committees on February 18, 2025.

My name is Valentina Gojcaj and I serve on the Board of SPONY (Small Property Owners of NY). For over 40 years, SPONY has been dedicated to advocating for and supporting small rental housing providers. As an all-volunteer organization, we offer valuable resources to small landlords who actively manage housing across a broad reach in New York, of which encompass nearly 6,000 housing units. This extensive coverage reflects SPONY's understanding of housing in NYC. Many of our members are multi-generational owners, with some members operating housing for decades. Our members are immigrants and the children and grandchildren of immigrants who are dedicated to the neighborhoods where they are providing housing and are offering stability in those neighborhoods.

I would like to thank the Housing Committee for inviting SPONY to testify today at the Joint Public Hearing on Rental Assistance, specifically the SCRIE and DRIE program. The SCRIE and DRIE program is a well intentioned program that is working under archaic procedures. Under its current construct, the program is failing at risk and vulnerable tenants and housing providers that would like to offer this benefit to their tenants. Evaluating existing bottlenecks, establishing new procedures and expanding the application would result in an efficient and effective program. SPONY submits the following recommendations for your consideration:

Expand the Program: SCRIE & DRIE is only available to tenants who will reside or currently reside in Rent stabilized apartments. We have many tenants in need that do not reside in RS apartments, and therefore do not qualify for the benefit.

Automate the Process: Allow an Owner to submit leases and other pertinent documents to facilitate the process (i.e. S8 program): Currently, a tenant is required to submit leasing information. If this information is not submitted the tenant's account is not updated, resulting in an arrears issue forcing the owner to take the tenant to Housing Court. Which unfortunately has become the only available option for any tenant to obtain financial assistance. Due to this, I have been forced to take the elderly and disabled to physically navigate the agency. As well as the paperwork, which is an issue for the elderly and illiterate, and frankly many who just can't comprehend the formal structure of the paper work.

Rental Assistance: I have many tenants on the program who are not receiving the full financial benefit they are entitled to. Many on the program are only receiving a benefit less than 10% of their income. Well below the standard rule of 30%.

Our elected officials are tasked with creating a system that works for both the housing provider and the tenant. The current SCRIE and DRIE system is not doing that. The inefficiencies are putting financial hardships on small property owners like me and causing instability and housing anxiety to my tenants. My financial stability directly impacts the senior and disabled residents I house.