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## **Testimony of Will Depoo, Senior Campaign Organizer, ANHD**

### **Before the New York State Senate Standing Committee on Housing, Construction, and Community Development and Senate Standing Committees on Social Services and Aging regarding rental assistance programs in New York.**

February 18, 2025

Thank you to Committee Chairs Kavanagh, Cleare, and Persaud, and to all the committee members, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Will Depoo, and I am a Senior Campaign Organizer at the Association for Neighborhood & Housing Development (ANHD). I am here to discuss the urgent need for residential rental assistance in New York and how we can prevent evictions, homelessness, housing instability, and excessive rent burdens through the proposed Housing Access Voucher Program (HAVP) and other rental subsidies in New York.

#### **About the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD)**

ANHD is one of the City's lead policy, advocacy, technical assistance, and capacity-building organizations. We maintain a membership of 80+ neighborhood-based and city-wide nonprofit organizations that have affordable housing and/or equitable economic development as a central component of their mission. We are an essential citywide voice, bridging the power and impact of our member groups to build community power and ensure the right to affordable housing and thriving, equitable neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. We value justice, equity, and opportunity, and we believe in the importance of movement building that centers marginalized communities in our work. We believe housing justice is economic justice is racial justice.

ANHD's work directly supports the needs of our members who develop, manage, and organize to preserve affordable housing, and who fight to bring equity into low-wealth communities in New York City—especially communities of color. Our groups rely on us for technical assistance and capacity-building resources that allow them to maximize their resources, skills, and impact. The support services, research, analysis, public education, and coalition building we do helps to identify patterns of local neighborhood experiences and uplift citywide priorities and needs. Our work translates into the capacity to win new programs, policies, and systems that ensure the creation and preservation of deeply and permanently affordable housing, and economic justice.

#### **The Affordable Housing Crisis**

New York's affordable housing crisis continues to escalate, leaving thousands of residents struggling to keep up with rising rents and facing the threat of displacement. In early 2024, homelessness saw a [sharp rise](#), reflecting the growing instability among low-income households. At the same time, nearly [four in ten](#) households are rent-burdened, spending over 30% of their income on housing, while about one in five devote more than half of their earnings to rent. Eviction filings have [surged](#), placing even more families at risk. This crisis has left many New Yorkers vulnerable, with escalating housing costs pushing families to the brink and fueling the homelessness epidemic across the state. The need for affordable housing and effective support systems has never been more urgent.

### **The Essential Role of HAVP in Preventing Homelessness and Supporting Affordable Housing**

Given the scale of the housing crisis, immediate action is crucial to ensure that New Yorkers have access to safe and affordable homes. HAVP has and continues to play an important role in ensuring that nonprofit partners are provided with the essential subsidy to support low-to-moderate income tenants. This long-term rental subsidy will not only help reduce homelessness and housing instability, but also provide nonprofit owners with a reliable funding source to manage rising operational and arrears costs.

Modeled after Section 8, HAVP will offer rental assistance to both homeless New Yorkers and those at risk of losing their housing, preventing them from entering the shelter system and further straining resources. Importantly, HAVP will be available to all New Yorkers, regardless of immigration status or criminal record, providing housing opportunities to groups that have long been excluded and are often chronically homeless or housing insecure. **Funding HAVP at \$250 million would help an estimated 20,000 households and 50,000 people avoid homelessness.**<sup>1</sup>

With homelessness escalating—New York City's shelter population has surged from 80,000 two years ago to over 125,000 today<sup>2</sup>—HAVP has become more necessary than ever. This subsidy represents a practical solution to address the housing crisis, benefiting both tenants and nonprofit owners. It's a critical step toward preserving affordable housing and stabilizing the organizations that manage it.

### **Strengthening Community Development Corporations (CDCs): The Need for Rental Assistance to Sustain Affordable Housing**

Many of ANHD's members are mission-driven, nonprofit housing developers (CDCs) that often offer rents below \$1,000. These organizations are essential to New York City's affordable housing ecosystem, providing stable homes for low-income residents who would otherwise struggle to secure housing. However, rising operational costs, coupled with significant arrears from the pandemic, have created severe cash flow challenges, making it increasingly difficult to manage properties effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Cost estimate by Community Service Society

<sup>2</sup> Estimate from Coalition for the Homeless [here](#)

CDCs rely on rental income to cover essential expenses, including mortgage payments, utilities, payroll, and regulatory compliance. However, with surging costs—particularly in utilities and insurance—many are struggling to meet these obligations. Operating on tight margins and with little flexibility to absorb financial losses, CDCs risk deferring critical property maintenance, which can lead to deteriorating housing conditions. In the worst cases, they may be forced to sell properties or shut down operations entirely, displacing tenants and further reducing the city's already scarce affordable housing supply.

Subsidies like HAVP and other state-level rental assistance programs are critical to helping CDCs maintain and preserve deeply affordable housing. These programs help bridge the gap between limited rental income and rising operational costs, providing much-needed financial stability. Without this support, CDCs will struggle to cover expenses, leading to property deterioration and increased displacement of vulnerable tenants. Expanding and strengthening these programs is essential to ensuring CDCs can continue their vital role in providing stable, affordable housing for New Yorkers in need.

### **Advocating for a Housing Access and Preservation Fund to Support CDCs**

To fully support CDCs, rental subsidies like HAVP must be complemented by immediate debt relief and additional operating subsidies to bridge the gap between pandemic-era rent collection levels and rising operational costs. ANHD and its members are advocating for the creation of a dedicated fund within New York State Housing and Community Renewal's (HCR) Low-Income Housing Trust Fund to provide these critical resources. Establishing and funding a Housing Access and Preservation Initiative (HAPI) Fund within this existing Fund, would help stabilize CDC portfolios, sustain affordable housing, prevent displacement, and ensure long-term housing quality for low-income residents.

If New York State does not act now, we risk losing affordable housing units, and many of the state's lowest-income tenants will face displacement and homelessness. Mission-driven providers are doing everything possible to avoid evictions despite significant portfolio debt and negative cash flow, but they are running out of options.

The state must intervene to stabilize our affordable housing stock and prevent further exacerbating the already dire homelessness crisis. We urge the Legislature to include \$250 million in the HAPI Fund for Fiscal Year 2026. This investment is crucial to maintaining safe housing conditions and ensuring that our most vulnerable tenants remain housed.

### **Closing**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and for your commitment to addressing New York's housing crisis. As we have outlined, HAVP, along with expanded rental assistance and additional operating subsidies, are critical tools to prevent evictions, reduce homelessness, and stabilize mission-driven nonprofit housing providers. Without immediate investment, we risk losing deeply affordable housing and forcing thousands of New Yorkers into instability.

Please feel free to contact Will Depoo, Senior Campaign Organizer at ANHD ([will.d@anhd.org](mailto:will.d@anhd.org)) with any follow-up questions.