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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

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**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President
Testimony before the NYC Housing Authority
On the FY21 Draft PHA Agency Plan and NYCHA Blueprint for Change**

My name is Gale A. Brewer and I am the Manhattan Borough President. Thank you to Chair Russ and members of the NYCHA Board for the opportunity to testify today.

As in the past several years, the FY21 Draft PHA Plan outlines the continued implementation of NYCHA 2.0, including converting public housing into Section 8 housing under the plan's "PACT to Preserve" strategy. Unique to this year is the timing of the Manhattan PACT bundle, which upon the project's closing in late November 2020 transferred property management, Section 8 conversion, and apartment rehabilitation responsibilities to the PACT Renaissance Collaborative (PRC).

Throughout this process, I got a front row seat witnessing NYCHA and PRC's best efforts to help residents understand PACT/RAD and where many of these efforts fell short.

I commend NYCHA's partnership with the Legal Aid Society to establish a hotline for Manhattan bundle residents to speak with an attorney about the Section 8 lease they needed to sign. I am also aware that NYCHA has incorporated changes to the PACT lease based on feedback received from the Chelsea Working Group, in which residents from Fulton Houses and Elliot-Chelsea engaged in a yearlong process to provide recommendations on the protections they would like to see in a potential PACT lease. The result is NYCHA's revised standardized PACT lease for the Manhattan bundle and for other PACT projects going forward, which contains stronger language on resident protection.

However, lack of clear and consistent communication throughout the Section 8 conversion process has led to confusion among tenants that heightened mistrust of NYCHA and PRC:

- *Virtual town halls were not accessible to all.* Due to the pandemic, PRC held its information sessions about the Section 8 lease virtually. Ahead of the meetings, Wise Towers TA President Ernesto Carrera informed my staff that many seniors did not have the ability to connect to a Zoom meeting. I offered to work with Goddard Riverside to schedule a series of small, socially distanced in-person meetings outdoors to reach the senior population, but NYCHA and PRC were unwilling to accommodate them.
- *There was a disconnect between formal notification and interaction with residents.* NYCHA resident Ms. O reached out to my office after inspectors showed

up at her door on September 18. She was asked to sign a document. She mentioned that her neighbors also had unscheduled inspections and were confused and upset. My staff later found out that PRC had reached out the week of September 4 to confirm unit access for necessary repairs, and that the document Ms. O was asked to sign was a COVID-19 form. Clearly there was a disconnect between PRC's communication and what was stated to Ms. O by the people who showed up at her door.

- *Coordinated communication between NYCHA and PRC on management matters was lacking.* On November 30, Cynthia Tibbs, TA President of WSURA Brownstones, was inundated with calls from Wise Towers tenants with questions about how to get rent stub collection dates, how to obtain lease renewal forms, and who they should call after they were told by NYCHA that they must now "go to a new office to get help." Signs were finally put up on December 1 announcing the management change. NYCHA and PRC had known for months that there would be a transition to new management and that tenants would likely have questions. Had the notices been posted in a timely way, many problems would have been avoided.

With thousands more units still to undergo PACT/RAD conversion, I urge NYCHA leadership to learn from the communication gaps of the Manhattan bundle and ensure residents are fully engaged, informed well in advance of all management and compliance changes, and protected going forward.

New to this year's PHA Agency Plan is NYCHA's *A Blueprint for Change* proposal, which would leverage federally allocated Tenant Protection Vouchers (TPVs) for funding toward capital repairs of 110,000 NYCHA units. This funding would be held in a Public Housing Preservation Trust to be created via New York State legislation, allowing NYCHA to leverage additional funding to conduct the repairs while maintaining public control of all NYCHA developments designated to receive TPVs.

Along with the Community Service Society of New York (CSS) and the Legal Aid Society (LAS), I support the concept of *A Blueprint for Change* and its potential to secure funding for NYCHA developments while maintaining full public ownership. Yet I also share the concerns raised by CSS and LAS, particularly those that involve resident rights and protections:

- TPVs will be obtained through Section 18 disposition. While TPVs bring in higher subsidies, it is not clear whether, and how, tenant rights and protections will be different.
- The Trust will bear an enormous responsibility to administer Section 18 dispositions and to finance public housing capital repairs. Mechanisms to ensure transparency and the Trust's accountability to NYCHA residents must be set clearly and fully in place at the onset, including a transparent and effective structure for sustained, productive engagement between the Trust's board and staff, NYCHA representatives, and resident leadership.

I am optimistic about *A Blueprint for Change* and look forward to working with NYCHA leadership to ensure residents will receive timely and high-quality repairs to their units.