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**Gale A. Brewer, Borough President**

**May 22, 2018**

**Gale A. Brewer, Manhattan Borough President  
Testimony before New York City Housing Authority  
On the Draft Public Housing Agency Plan for FY2019**

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

If recent budgetary movements at the federal level have taught us anything, it is that funding for public housing is volatile. Trump's proposed FY2019 budget seeks to eliminate all capital funding for public housing and deeply slashes public housing operating funds. Yet the FY2018 omnibus spending bill passed by Congress in March *increased* public housing capital and operations funding by 15% compared to 2017 levels. With Trump's obvious disregard for public housing pitted against Congress's recognition that more resources are needed to support the country's public housing, local public housing agencies (PHAs) are left with operating based on budgetary projections that can change significantly from one fiscal year to the next.

In light of the precariousness of PHA funding that directly impacts how NYCHA operates, I commend past and present NYCHA Chairs and NYCHA's staff for reinforcing New York City's public housing against potential budget shortfall. On the broader policy level, NYCHA under the NextGen NYCHA and NextGen Sustainability plans are leveraging multiple revenue streams from RAD to nonprofit contributions via the Fund for Public Housing to meet as much capital and operating needs as possible. This long-term perspective has enabled NYCHA to achieve operating surplus in the last three years.

Yet NYCHA's policy initiatives are not without their problems. Every year, I join the NYC Alliance to Preserve Public Housing in its calls for more transparency, communication, resident engagement, and consideration for potential impacts that the many NextGen initiatives may have on tenants. This year, I again support the Alliance's recommendations and urge NYCHA to address the concerns raised in regards to the FY2019 PHA Plan.

On the day-to-day level, I and staff from my office are seeing a very different picture than the accomplishments listed in the FY2019 PHA Plan. Since I began my tenure as Manhattan Borough President, I have sent over 500 letters to NYCHA on a range of issues. Members of my staff attend every TA meeting and Family Day at Manhattan NYCHA developments. Beginning 2014, my office has assisted hundreds of tenants across all NYCHA developments in Manhattan — along with the occasional Bronx or Brooklyn tenants — with issues specific to their buildings and apartments: no heat, no hot water, broken door, no lighting, gas outage, broken sidewalks,

rats, mold, overflowing dumpsters... just to list some of the most common concerns. TAs are underfunded and often stuck with handling things that management should be doing.

Specifically, the community center at Harborview Terrace was in complete disarray when I did a walkthrough at the development a few months ago. The space is large with bathrooms, a kitchen, an art room in the center, and many other rooms that can be rented out to community organizations or nonprofits. NYCHA claims it has looked at the space, but to this day the center sits vacant and messy. The lack of transparency is not only frustrating, it also deprives Harborview residents of the cultural, social, health, and educational benefits that a vibrant community center can bring to the families who live there.

In another walkthrough at Corsi Houses in East Harlem, the bathroom at its community center has been broken for two years. A bathroom can be fixed quickly if NYCHA has the will to make it happen. It is unacceptable that tenants are inconvenienced for NYCHA's inaction.

In addressing these and other concerns, my office facilitates correspondence between tenants and NYCHA until issues are resolved. To NYCHA's credit, when Councilmember Mark Levine and I brought up Grant Houses' need for a laundry, NYCHA was prompt to discuss this with us. I am happy to announce that our efforts resulted in \$1.1 million of funding awarded by the Councilmember for the laundry.

However, when this winter's heat and hot water outages put a spotlight on the dire need to replace boilers in a majority of NYCHA developments, it became clear that no amount of facilitation is sufficient if NYCHA operates out of a reactionary mindset. Rather than reacting to issues that arise, NYCHA must become proactive in its actions and communication with tenants. For the outages, this means directing more resources toward meeting NextGen Sustainability's goals — something I have called on NYCHA to do for years — since these goals truly address the root problem of aging infrastructure and will move NYCHA away from relying solely on non-sustainable fuel sources.

To move away from a piecemeal approach to fixing boiler issues, my office is looking into the age, capacity, rating, service load, and other vital information about boilers in every Manhattan development. I am a firm believer in data and its ability to improve our city. NYCHA must utilize its extensive data to ensure they are working smarter with the limited resources they have.

Another way to weatherproof a building is to properly insulate windows. Tenants of PS 139 Conversion, a 125-unit converted school with large windows not designed for residential purposes, have endured chilling winters for years from drafts seeping through ill-fitting windows. TA President Audrey Clemmons have been calling for window replacements for years. To add to the residents' hardship, PS 139's boiler broke this winter and repair was delayed. I am hopeful that procurement for windows will be expedited after bringing this issue to NYCHA's attention for over a year, most recently in a meeting with General Manager Vito Mustaciuolo. What is the status for window replacement at PS 139?

On the communication front, one of the most common complaints among tenants is the lack of it. While NYCHA has held numerous resident engagement meetings on topics such as infill development, the reality is that NYCHA tenants want, but do not believe they receive, proactive communication.

When my staff attends TA meetings, monthly MBPO packets with updates pertinent to NYCHA residents are distributed in hard copies and then emailed to Manhattan CCOP leaders for distribution to the larger tenant body. For example, NYCHA has yet to communicate with tenants about the potential impact on rent payments and work requirements that Trump's proposed HUD plan will have on public housing residents. Proactive communication doesn't mean having all the answers or knowing exactly what will happen. Rather than leaving tenants in the dark, in my May 2018 monthly packet I included a letter to NYCHA tenants explaining the key provisions in Trump's plan. The letter clearly states that the plan is a proposal and that Congressional approval is needed. By proactively supplying information, I empower tenants to grasp what is at stake so they can gain the necessary foundational knowledge to understand any policy change that NYCHA might enact in the future if what is proposed becomes law.

In summary, I urge NYCHA to clearly communicate with tenants on what the agency is doing well — maintaining operating surplus and leveraging diverse funding sources to meet NYCHA's capital needs — and on the challenges that it is facing. I look forward to continue working with NYCHA staff at all levels to ensure New York City's 400,000 public housing residents can live in homes that are affordable and in good condition.