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Gale A. Brewer, Borough President

April 7, 2020

Hon. Andrew Cuomo
The Executive Chamber
New York, NY 12224

Re: Assistance to Renters Impacted by COVID-19

Dear Governor Cuomo,

All New Yorkers are grateful for your leadership in combating the Covid-19 and setting a national standard for public officials. The actions that you are taking will not only save lives, but they reassure New Yorkers that the management of this crisis is in sound hands.

I write because I fear that without additional state action, we will see a devastating loss of affordable housing when this crisis is over. An unprecedented number of New Yorkers lost their ability to meet their rent obligations when their employment was lost. While their landlords cannot now, thanks to your Executive Order, sue to evict them for their inability to pay rent, any arrears will continue to accrue. When the crisis passes and the suspension of court proceedings is lifted, many tenants will be faced with unpayable arrears, and they will be in grave danger of eviction.

Tenant advocates and state representatives have offered proposals to address these concerns. Legislation introduced by Senate Housing Committee Chair Kavanagh would establish a rental assistance voucher program administered by the New York State Housing Trust Fund. It would provide direct rental payments to building owners on behalf of eligible tenants impacted by Covid-19. This approach would utilize government resources to support both tenants and owners while requiring renters who can still meet their rent obligations to continue to do so. This legislation also provides help for tenants in meeting utility arrears.

I believe this offers carefully targeted protections for all parties during the crisis. I ask that you act in the matters outlined above with the compassion you have shown throughout this crisis.

Sincerely,

Gale A. Brewer
Manhattan Borough President