

**Testimony to City Council Public Housing Sub-Committee
NYCHA's Centralized Calling Center
December 14, 2007**

My name is Gabriela Dumas and I am the Case Manager at Good Old Lower East Side working with Public Housing Residents Of the Lower East Side, which is a project of GOLES.

As you may know, Public Housing Resident Of the Lower East Side is a membership-led organization of residents working together to increase awareness, participation and opportunities for economic justice and affordable housing within public housing on the Lower East Side since 1998. We accomplish our mission through direct service, comprehensive trainings, leadership development and grassroots organizing.

We welcome this opportunity to testify before the Public Housing Sub-Committee regarding NYCHA's new Centralized Calling Center-CCC and appreciate the leadership of Chair Rosie Mendez.

As we acknowledge the Housing Authority's efforts for implementing the CCC, our goals are to 1) inform your committee about the challenges that we have identified through our work with public housing residents; 2) provide recommendations that we believe will assist NYCHA's toward improving their services for residents.

In April of 2006, NYCHA included the CCC as one of their points in their 7 Point Plan to Preserve Public Housing as a way to implement management and technological improvements to reduce cost and improve services.

Prior to the CCC, when clients needed repairs they went to their management offices, made a ticket with the secretary, the ticket was forward to the respective Housing Assistant, then the resident received either a notice under their door regarding when the repair person would be coming to their building or the repair person would just show up. Most of our clients and members had reported common challenges, including the repairs or work not being completed maintenance workers did not show up; the residents were not or could not be at home when the maintenance worker came; in some cases making the repairs became a multi-day ordeal which could take weeks or months to complete; or the repairs were simply never completed.

The CCC was created to address a lot of those challenges as there is a Customer Service Representative who records the repair issue and then schedule an appointment to asses and complete the repairs. Further, the resident gets contacted by NYCHA the day before the scheduled appointment to confirm and after the repair is completed to obtain feedback. In addition, the Center provides residents with access to maintenance and repairs services 24 hours day and seven day a week, even on holidays.

Unfortunately, through our direct services and grassroots-organizing, residents continue to report common challenges when scheduling appointments and getting the repairs completed. In some cases, residents have reported workers coming to assess the problem but no one actually following up with making the repairs. Also there have been cases where residents wait all day for a scheduled repair which no worker shows up to carry out only to receive a notice on the following day that a worker visited the apartment but no one was home. Sometimes when the worker does show up, they do not have the expertise or proper material which requires the resident to schedule an appointment on another day.

And so far, we have only had one resident report that they had received a call from the CCC to confirm their appointment.

Specifically, we have had cases where repairs take so long to complete that other problems begin to arise. One example includes an elderly resident requesting extermination services, for a mice problem that developed after a hole in the bathroom wall was made to repair a leak, but the hole was never closed.

The CCC was one of the many methods that the Housing Authority used to cut cost because of their growing deficit, which accrued from increased non-discretionary costs, unfunded mandates and the continued disinvestment to public housing from all levels of government.

While we understand that a fiscal crisis compromises NYCHA's delivery of services in general, it is the residents who are adversely impacted. Waiting months for repairs, experiencing aggravated conditions because repairs are not properly completed and losing time from work can be extremely burdensome. Finally NYCHA's staff constantly referring to the deficit as a means of justification only serves to invalidate residents' concerns and experiences.

We recommend the following:

- NYCHA should provide their customer service representatives with field training that would better prepare them to assess the repair complaints and adequately refer to the appropriate maintenance department.
- CCC needs to be more consistent with confirming scheduled appointments for more importantly following up to ensure repairs are adequately completed.
- When there are repairs that require multiple skilled workers to complete different stages of the work, CCC needs to do a better job coordinating between departments to avoid long gaps between the time repairs are started and completed.

We would also like to point out that the customer service experience in general at CCC is pleasant and respectful, which is a refreshing improvement from past interaction between residents and NYCHA staff. In closing we would like to commend NYCHA for making a concerted effort to improve their repair delivery services even in light of diminishing operating subsidies.

OPENING STATEMENT
Subcommittee on Public Housing
Rosie Mendez, Chairwoman

December 14, 2007

"Oversight – NYCHA's Centralized Call Center"

Good morning. I am Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, Chairwoman of the Subcommittee on Public Housing. Today's oversight hearing will be held jointly with the Committee on Technology in Government, chaired by Councilwoman Gale Brewer, and will focus on NYCHA's Centralized Call Center.

I would like to thank Chairwoman Brewer for the opportunity to hold this hearing on this important issue.

The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) provides a needed home for poor and working class New Yorkers to be able to live in this great city.

That being said we must ensure that the agency responsible for providing this much needed, affordable housing is able to make the best use of technology that is available in order to assist and serve the residents of public housing and others who interact with NYCHA.

Today, we are interested in learning about the progress NYCHA is making towards improving its technology with regards to the Centralized Call Center. In an effort to improve customer service and response times to residents in need of repairs, in 2005, NYCHA implemented a new customer service initiative known as the Centralized Call Center or CCC. The CCC is intended to modernize NYCHA's systems by standardizing the entry of work requests, eliminating duplication of work tickets and ensuring that needed repairs are made in a timely manner.

Some NYCHA residents have already experienced complications with NYCHA's Centralized Call Center and the Council would like NYCHA to

ensure that these problems are taken care of as the CCC is expanded. The Council is concerned that NYCHA may not have the staff or may not have taken other necessary measures to keep hold times to a minimum, that NYCHA is not intending to share information collected with the residents and community to provide for transparency and oversight, and that requests for repairs are deemed "closed" or "completed" if a resident is not home the first time staff attempts to inspect and repair a reported problem.

I would like to thank NYCHA, residents, elected officials, and advocates for testifying today and I look forward to a productive hearing on this important issue.

New York City Housing Authority
Testimony Regarding the Centralized Call Center
By Brian Clarke, Assistant Deputy General Manager of Operations for
Support Services
Council Member Rosie Mendez, Chair Public Housing Subcommittee
Friday, December 14, 2007, 10 A.M., 250 Broadway, 14th Floor

Chair Mendez, members of the Committee, good morning. I am Brian Clarke, Assistant Deputy General Manager of Operations for Support Services for the New York City Housing Authority. Joining me today is Gloria Finkelman, Assistant Deputy General Manager of Operations for Management. I am pleased to be here to provide you with an overview of the Housing Authority's Centralized Call Center.

The Centralized Call Center

The New York City Housing Authority receives over two million maintenance requests per year. In order to respond most effectively to this high volume of requests, NYCHA created the Centralized Call Center, or CCC, housed in our Long Island City facility, which allows residents of all five boroughs to call a single telephone number at a single location, to request apartment repairs and to schedule maintenance appointments. The CCC is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The CCC program was first implemented in Staten Island and Queens in 2005, followed by Manhattan in 2006. Brooklyn and the Bronx came on-line this year.

The Procedure

When residents call the CCC, they are connected to one of 92 Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) who process and enter the request into NYCHA's Work Ticket System. It is worth noting that 41 CSRs are also NYCHA residents.

The CSR records information which identifies the maintenance issue, and the resident receives a work ticket number and an appointment for service. Maintenance emergencies, including heat and hot water complaints are routed for priority service. Emergency calls for service result in immediate dispatch. All CCC telephone conversations are recorded.

Customer Service Representative Training

CSRs undergo six weeks of training which includes four weeks of classroom training and two weeks of live training with an experienced CSR who has the ability to listen in on calls. CSRs are trained in Customer Service, Telephone Etiquette, Telephone Systems, the Computer Work Ticket System and Basic Maintenance.

Quality Assurance

The CCC has a Quality Assurance Unit, with a staff of eight CSRs who are responsible for confirming appointments and conducting quality assurance surveys on completed work tickets as well as the performance of CSRs at the Call Center. Quality Assurance CSRs target approximately 25% of the completed work tickets for follow-up surveys which are usually done within one week of completion of the work ticket.

Success Rate

The ability to make a specific appointment by time and date has resulted in scheduled appointments being kept 83% of the time. Most of the remaining 17% of appointments are either cancelled or rescheduled by residents. A small percentage are missed by NYCHA staff. Seventy-seven percent of the time, repairs are completed after one call, on the first visit.

Before the CCC existed, NYCHA did not schedule appointments for maintenance repairs. Staff in the development's management office would create a work ticket, and the work would be performed at the Authority's convenience.

Because no appointments were made and residents were not told when to expect a maintenance worker, residents were not home 20% of the time. Since implementation of the CCC, Tenant Not Home tickets for regular maintenance services have been reduced by 25%. Tickets for repairs which require more complex skilled trade work have been reduced by a dramatic 50% for this same time period.

Resident Satisfaction

In a recent survey of nearly 55,000 residents, 99.7% rated the CCC service as "Excellent" or "Good." Since the October addition of Bronx developments, the CCC has averaged more than 8,200 calls per day. By mid-October (prior to the Bronx being added) 1,419,980 calls had been received and a total of 429,945 appointments had been made.

A Larger Customer Service Initiative

The CCC is the first step in a larger customer service initiative that NYCHA is currently undertaking which will streamline processes throughout the Agency, providing employees with instant access to documents, work tickets, schedules and more. The initiative's goal is to allow NYCHA employees to resolve customer inquiries on the first call and to increase the quality of service, even in this time of diminished resources.

At this point I will conclude my testimony. I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

Hon. Rosie Mendez, Chairwoman

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT

Hon. Gale Brewer, Chairwoman

December 14, 2007

Oversight – NYCHA's Centralized Call Center

Questions

Background

1. When was the Centralized Call Center implemented?
2. What was the purpose of or reasoning behind the implementation of the CCC?
3. Since the CCC was first implemented in only two boroughs (Staten Island and Queens), what, if anything, did NYCHA learn about its operation before expanding it to the other boroughs?
4. If any unexpected problems arose when NYCHA first began operating the CCC, a) what were those problems, and b) what did NYCHA do to avoid them in the future? (Residents report that responses to and completion of repairs take more time than before the CCC was implemented.)
5. What are the future plans for the Centralized Call Center (CCC)?
6. Is the CCC under the purview of the Deputy General Manager for Operations?
7. What is the difference between the emergency repair crews and the other repair crews?

Repair Procedure

8. What should tenants do if they need to make a request for repairs?

9. Does the CCC handle all tenant repair requests?
10. Where do people call if there is a weekend problem?
11. Do the tenants receive a confirmation number when they call CCC? If so, do they also receive an appointment time?
12. Do residents ever receive anything in writing confirming the complaint? If not, how do residents know what is actually logged as a complaint? (For example, if a tenant complains of a broken sink and toilet, will the complaint be logged as such, or as something more general like "bathroom repair"?)
13. What is the communication between the CCC and the management office at the individual developments? Do the individual development managers receive records of complaints? Is the communication computerized?
14. How often does a repairperson show up for an appointment and the tenant is not home? If this occurs, what happens to the complaint? Is it deemed closed?
15. If repairs are not made to the tenant's satisfaction, what procedure should the tenant follow to request additional repairs? Is there any complaint procedure outside of the CCC to lodge complaints about the CCC, or to request repairs that the CCC repeatedly fails to provide?

CCC Operators

16. How many customer services representatives does NYCHA employ? How many of them are NYCHA residents? How are the operators selected?
17. What type of training do the CCC operators receive?
18. Do the operators speak languages other than English? If so, which ones?
19. What, if anything, are the operators supposed to do to troubleshoot repair problems? Are operators capable and/or successful at troubleshooting?
20. What happens if an operator records the incorrect information or makes a mistake on the complaint?

21. How are CCC operators monitored for quality assurance? Are calls recorded for record keeping, or evaluation purposes? Are callers notified that their calls may be recorded?

CCC and 311

22. What is the relationship between the CCC and 311? Is there any communication between the two?
23. What happens when a tenant complains of a repair issue to 311 instead of CCC?

Statistics and Reporting of Complaints

1. How does NYCHA record the requests for repairs that come in through CCC?
2. How many requests for repairs have been recorded to date? Of these, how many were closed as a result of no access to the apartment?
3. Are statistics and any other information collected available to the public like the stats collected by 311? If not, are they available to residents or the local Community Boards?
4. Why did NYCHA not join 311 instead of making its own call center?

Funding

1. Who pays for the repairs?
2. When is a tenant responsible for paying for the repairs?
3. Does the money come from the capital or expense budgets?

Online Access

1. Can the call center statistics be available online?

2. Are there plans to allow tenants to file a complaint with the CCC online?