

Jumaane D. Williams

**STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS
TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND
BUILDINGS
MAY 12, 2023**

Good afternoon,

My name is Jumaane D. Williams, and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. I would like to thank Chair Sanchez and the members of the Committee on Housing and Buildings for holding this hearing. My testimony addresses the FY 24 executive budget proposal, as it relates to the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (hereinafter “HPD”) and the Department of Buildings (“DOB”).

With a deteriorating housing stock and a worsening affordability crisis, preserving and building new income-targeted affordable housing in the city of New York is now more important than ever. Despite this, the Mayor’s executive budget cuts funding to development and preservation efforts in key areas like code enforcement and emergency repairs. These cuts coincide with the loss of tens of thousands of rent-stabilized units in addition to the thousands of units that remain vacant that are being warehoused or are awaiting renovations¹.

Furthermore, the implementation of Local Law 97, as well additional legislation seeking to address issues like green efficiency and fire safety, makes code compliance essential. Enforcement by DOB will not only equip our city’s buildings with the means to weather the impact of climate change, as it pertains to new green energy-efficient initiatives, but it will also ensure the lives and safety of New Yorkers as it relates to fire prevention.

Unlike other city agencies that have been exempted or face reduced cuts, DOB and HPD remain at risk of losing more personnel under the latest proposed cut of 4%. Cutting staffing, amidst a housing crisis, is simply unacceptable and this cut would only further negatively impact the agencies’ work. A recent report by the Comptroller’s Office, tracking agency vacancies as far as October 2022, found HPD and DOB amidst the top ten agencies most affected by high vacancy rates with HPD meeting only a third of its targets and DOB meeting 43% of its total targets².

The removal of housing policy from the state budget is deeply disappointing and a decision far removed from the commitment we need for truly affordable and sustainable housing. In order to continue this work, the state must enact AffordabilityPLUS, modernizing HPD’s lending

¹ The City. “New Data Shows Where Rent-Stabilized Apartments Might Be Disappearing”. May 9, 2023. Available at: <https://www.thecity.nyc/2023/2/15/23600261/rent-stabilized-apartments-disappearing>

² Office of the NYC Comptroller Brad Lander. “Understaffed, Underserved: Impact of Staff Vacancies on Agency Performance.” March 6, 2023. Available at: <https://comptroller.nyc.gov/reports/understaffed-underserved/>

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abilities, and work with the city to amend the Multiple Dwelling Law. The city must invest in efforts to legalize, regulate and ensure the safety of converted accessory dwelling units (“ADUs”) and empty office buildings.

New Yorkers deserve a housing budget that truly reflects our city’s housing needs and in order to meet those needs, our agencies must have the necessary staffing and funding required to carry out this work. Thank you.