

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

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May 20, 2011
Start: 10:10 am
Recess: 11:59 am

HELD AT: Committee Room
250 Broadway - 14th Fl.

B E F O R E:
ROSIE MENDEZ
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
Erik Martin Dilan
Melissa Mark-Viverito
Margaret S. Chin
James G. Van Bramer
Daniel J. Halloran III

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Victor Bach
Senior Housing Policy Analyst
Community Service Society

Agnes Rivera
Community Voices Heard
Resident of Wagner Houses

Ann Valdez
Community Voices Heard
Resident of Gravesend Houses

Reginald Bowman
President, City-Wide Council of Presidents
New York Housing Authority

Anne Marceline Washington
Community Voices Heard
Resident of Grant Houses

John Derek Norvelle
The United Coalition to Save Public Housing
Resident of Abraham Lincoln Houses

Cassandra Thomas
The United Coalition to Save Public Housing
Resident of Wagner Houses

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Good morning.

This hearing will come to order. I am Rosie Mendez and I am the councilwoman—I was going to say the councilwoman for public housing. I am the councilwoman in District 2 and I chair the Committee on Public Housing.

Today's hearing will explore the appointment of a tenant representative, known as a resident commissioner, to the board of the New York City Housing Authority. In September of 2011, the New York State Legislature enacted Chapter 531 of the Laws of 2010, which requires the mayor of the city of New York to name a tenant to the NYCHA board by June 30th, 2011. According to the law, the tenant must be at least 18 years old, an authorized member of a NYCHA household located in one of the authorities 335—that number keeps getting smaller—federal developments and a tenant in good standing with the Authority. The resident board member will service on a part-time basis at the will of the mayor and collect a monthly stipend of \$250. The state legislature intended for the resident board member to participate in substantive policy decisions made

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2 by the board and not simply provide an advisory
3 role.

4 I would like to thank the sponsors
5 of the state legislation, Assemblyman Vito Lopez
6 and State Senator Martin Dilan for their work on
7 this historic legislation. Today's hearing is a
8 direct result of concerns expressed by NYCHA
9 tenants, advocacy groups and elected officials
10 regarding the mayor's process for choosing the
11 first tenant ever to sit in NYCHA's board.

12 Before we begin hearing testimony,
13 I would like to take the time to explain why I
14 think this hearing is important. Last year the
15 state passed a law creating the part-time position
16 to be appointed by the mayor and although there
17 are some issues with the legislation, I think it
18 is important to discuss these. I like many others
19 agree that the issue of compensation is important,
20 but the legislation set forth certain requirements
21 for the tenant representative position. The
22 current monthly stipend of \$250 a month would be
23 the equivalent of minimum wage for eight hours per
24 week. The proper forum to have raised any
25 complaints about whether the resident board member

1 should be a mayoral appointee or not and/or the
2 issue of compensation is with the state
3 legislature. The state has the ability to amend
4 the law that it created to have a more involved or
5 more adequately compensated position. I will
6 certainly ensure that all the comments that are
7 made here today are taken to our state reps and
8 particularly the sponsors of this legislation, so
9 that they know what issues have been raised here
10 today. If the lack of transparency surrounding
11 the mayor's selection of the first ever NYCHA
12 resident board member bothers anyone, I will
13 remind you that while it would be great to have
14 some transparency in the appointment process, the
15 mayor has no obligation to do so and in fact, has
16 not done so with other mayoral appointees, such as
17 school's chancellor. Just a little thing I was
18 bothered about some months back, but anyway. So
19 the mayor is tasked with identifying an
20 appropriate candidate for the position. He does
21 not have to make anything public or even conduct a
22 public search.
23

24 On April 6 of 2010, the NYCHA
25 Chairman, John Rhea, sent a letter to all NYCHA

1 tenants, encouraging them to apply for the
2 position of tenant representative, if they
3 qualified. The application however with this
4 letter was not included, just a website where they
5 could download the one-page application. I
6 thought that was a missed opportunity to just
7 provide everyone with the application, since he
8 was sending out the letter anyway.

10 There has been no clear explanation
11 from the mayor regarding how much weight will be
12 given to applications emanating from that process.
13 There has also been no discussion of the role that
14 members of the NYCHA administration will play in
15 helping the mayor to select the first
16 representative from the NYCHA tenant community.
17 I've been told it recently that apparently NYCHA
18 will just be collecting whatever applications came
19 in and handing them off to someone at the mayor's
20 office, but I hope we will get clarity on that.

21 Finally, I'd like to state my
22 disappointment that neither NYCHA or anyone from
23 the mayor's office will testify today about this
24 selection process. This Committee believes that
25 communication with the administration regarding

1
2 the selection of the resident board member is of
3 the utmost importance. The position was created
4 to ensure that residents of NYCHA have a strong
5 voice in the policies created and administrative
6 decisions made by the Authority.

7 I'd like to thank everyone who is
8 here today, NYCHA residents, advocates for coming
9 here to testify and I'd like to remind everyone
10 that if you want to testify, or along the process
11 you decide you want to, just go to the sergeant of
12 arms in the back, fill out this white paper and we
13 will have you put your testimony on the record.
14 With that, I will now call the first public
15 members to come and give their testimony--Agnes
16 Rivera from Community Voices Heard and a resident
17 of public housing and Victor Bach from Community
18 Service Society.

19 [background conversation]

20 [long pause]

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So whoever's
22 ready, you can press the button and identify
23 yourself for the record and... Oh, it's on the back.
24 On those, it's on the back. The sergeant will
25 help you.

VICTOR BACH: Okay. Fine. Good morning. Thank you for—I want to thank the Chair, Rosie Mendez, and the Committee for having this hearing on a very important issue. I'm Victor Bach with Community Service Society. This is joint testimony with Judith Goldiner of Legal Aid Society, who was unable to be here this morning.

In recent months, there's been growing concern among NYCHA resident leaders that we work with about the pending appointment of a resident commissioner to the NYCHA board--concerns centered on the process for selecting that individual, largely whether it should be done by election on the criteria to be considered in nominating or selecting the person and on the duties and responsibilities of the resident commissioner once selected.

In response, a letter to the mayor copied to the NYCHA Chair Rhea was prepared as a consensus position on the part of a still growing number of residents, advocates and organizers, as well as concerned elected officials. We attach a copy of the letter, which was sent to the mayor's office with the under signers listed a week ago.

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2 is clearly an issue on which public housing
3 residents, rather than their advocates or their
4 elected officials, must take the lead. We hope
5 this hearing is a step forward in resolving the
6 concerns we have heard from resident leaders
7 across the city. Thank you. And now a resident—

8 AGNES RIVERA: Thank you, Vick. My
9 name is Agnes Rivera. I am with Community Voices
10 Heard and I'm also a resident in Wagner Housing
11 and I'm very proud of that. There are the
12 concerns that Vick has just stated, but I was kind
13 of concerned regarding the requirements of a
14 resident that has to have never been late in
15 paying rent is not really fair because there are
16 situations that do occur--that they have be on
17 time with rent payments and all of that and it's
18 totally unfair. There are times like myself when
19 I went in and I got injured on my job because of
20 my compensation that was not going to go through
21 immediately. It takes a process of nearly eight
22 weeks or so before you even get the checks that
23 you're entitled to, so that would eliminate a lot
24 of people who have either been injured, laid off,
25 or anything of the process and these are

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2 individuals that are very much involved in public
3 housing, like I myself. I think that a
4 requirement of that nature is not really called
5 for. I think it has to be someone who is going to
6 be really dedicated to doing the job and being
7 responsible and reliable not just to NYCHA, but
8 also the tenants because they are the ones that
9 are always being kicked around and not really
10 listened to. If somebody's going to get appointed
11 to that, there should be an election process and
12 it should be that the tenants themselves
13 participate in that process. I think it's unfair
14 that our mayor again is doing something that he
15 feels that he has to rule the thumb on everyone.
16 I think that it is time that we have a due process
17 and it's given back to the people, so the people
18 have a right to choose and a right to voice their
19 opinion. I think that this is a great position
20 for a tenant to be on, but it should be someone
21 that has been really involved and knows the
22 process of NYCHA.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

24 So, I have not read every little detail of the
25 legislation. I understand that the tenant has to

1
2 be in good standing; however, of anyone on the
3 panel, you have read that they never could be
4 late—have ever been late with their rent somewhere
5 in the legislation?

6 AGNES RIVERA: If you're going to
7 be in good standards, you have to be on time with
8 your rent—

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
10 But that doesn't necessarily rise to the level or
11 never ever having been late with your rent, so a
12 tenant in good standing must be current with their
13 rent—doesn't mean they could not have been late
14 with their rent—

15 AGNES RIVERA: Oh really?

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --cannot be
17 involved in an administrative proceeding or some
18 other kind of litigation. That to me is what a
19 tenant in good standing—and so, since I didn't
20 read the entire legislation and all I've been told
21 is good standing. I don't know if you've read it,
22 and I'm asking you if you've read it, so I can see
23 that because it's an extraordinarily high burden
24 because—

25 AGNES RIVERA: [Interposing] The

1 way it's actually worded, it sounds like you have
2 to be really have been in good standards all long
3 and it sounds like if you're going to be in good
4 standards that means that from day 1, you needed
5 to be paying your rent on time - - if you turn in
6 your paperwork, your yearly paperwork, and they
7 may lose it or so, then you're not in good
8 standards because they may have lost it and
9 they're saying that you never turned it in. That
10 has happened 'cause it happened to me. And even
11 though I have made copies, so--those are the things
12 that are on that that would actually put out a lot
13 of people.
14

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. So my
16 wonderful staff here just handed me the
17 legislation, where it just says tenant in good
18 standing and does not mention anything
19 specifically about rent, so we will get clarity,
20 but to me, that does not mean could not have ever
21 during the time of their tenancy have been late.
22 And so for example, rent is supposed to be paid
23 within the first few days of the month; however,
24 if you are on public assistance or SSI or SSD or
25 unemployment, your checks are going to be coming

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2 in at different points and the Housing Authority
3 does take that into consideration, and so
4 sometimes through no fault of your own, the rent
5 payment may be late, so we will certainly get some
6 clarification on that—

7 AGNES RIVERA: [Interposing] Mm-
8 hmm.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --but I think
10 you might be raising it or reading into it a
11 little bit more.

12 AGNES RIVERA: And what about those
13 who have turned in their yearly income
14 verification that they have to do, and they have
15 misplaced it or they sent you another one 'cause I
16 had two situations where they lost it. That's
17 what they said. Luckily, I make copies. Not
18 everybody makes copy of when they're recertifying
19 to public housing and I usually have them stamped.
20 That helped me, but it did not help me when I had
21 to come here for a hearing and sign over and say
22 I'm going to be on probation for two years. What
23 they did was send me somebody else's and I filled
24 it out and turned it in, but luckily, I made
25 copies, but that did not go in favor for me, even

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CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: Well, yeah.

AGNES RIVERA: [Interposing] Mm-

CHAIRPERSON RIVERA: And it was

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2 VICTOR BACH: Well, speaking for
3 myself, I think that's a question to be decided
4 jointly by resident leaders and the Office of the
5 Mayor and possibly NYCHA. I think there had been
6 questions raised since the letter was sent as to
7 whether an election process would preempt the
8 prerogative of the mayor under the legislation to
9 make the appointment. I don't see any reason why
10 it should preempt the mayor's right. Certainly an
11 election process would be a natural way for
12 residents to put forward the names of people they
13 would like to see serve on the board and the mayor
14 can use his or her prerogative to decide whether
15 to appoint that person or one of them or someone
16 else. But I don't see that there's a natural
17 conflict and I'm hoping that the letter gets a
18 positive response in terms of setting up an open
19 meeting with resident leaders at which these
20 issues can be discussed.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And well,
22 before I ask my next question, we've been joined
23 by Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito from
24 Manhattan on my left and with Council Member Jimmy
25 Van Bramer from Queens, who is sitting on my

1 right. I'll ask a follow up question and then,
2 I'll open it up to my colleagues to see if they
3 have questions. In terms of an election, do you
4 see it as under the process that currently is held
5 for tenant presidents and tenant boards, or do you
6 see it bigger, broader as it was done with school
7 board elections and as it's done with other
8 elections where there are machines or paper
9 ballots, but with employees overseeing the
10 process?
11

12 VICTOR BACH: Again, I think it's
13 the residents who should voice how they want an
14 election held. And that should be deliberated and
15 at open meeting of the various parties, but there
16 is some precedent in I believe year 2000—the year
17 of the second NYCHA annual plan. There was
18 established a procedure for electing resident
19 members to the resident advisory board. That
20 procedure lasted for a year and was changed the
21 following year and now the members of the resident
22 advisory board are in fact determined through the
23 district chairs and their executive boards. But
24 that election involved nominations through the
25 established tenant organizations - - developments

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2 and moving those names forward for membership in
3 the RAB [phonetic]. I think there are a number of
4 options. I don't have any particular one in mind
5 and I think that's for residents to decide with
6 the Mayor's Office and other city leaders.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

8 Agnes, any comments on...

9 AGNES RIVERA: I think that having
10 an open discussion and a plan would be really much
11 better of a process because then you're involving
12 the residents, you're having a greater input and
13 maybe you would have more tenants more involved in
14 their communities and plus, fighting back for
15 those things that we really need in public
16 housing.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay, I want
18 to thank this panel for their testimony and the
19 next panel—Diane Blufford from Staten Island
20 Houses and Community Voices Heard, Agnes Martinez
21 from Wagner Houses... Where's the other one? So
22 there's an Agnes Martinez and Agnes Rivera? You're
23 both...

24 [off mic conversation]

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Does the

1
2 alternate you have another testimony you want to
3 give? No. Okay. Cool. Ann Valdez from Coney
4 Island Houses.

5 ANN VALDEZ: Good morning.

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Hold on one
7 second. Diane Blufford?

8 ANN VALDEZ: She hasn't been able
9 to make it yet.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. We'll
11 hold on to that. Pearl Barkley from Jefferson
12 Houses.

13 ANN VALDEZ: She hasn't been able
14 to make it either.

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.
16 Reginald Bowman. I see you here—from SICA
17 [phonetic].

18 [background conversation]

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Whenever
20 you're ready.

21 ANN VALDEZ: Okay, yes. My name is
22 Ann Valdez, but I'm not from Coney Island Houses.
23 I'm in Coney Island. I'm from Gravesend Houses—
24 the first development built in Coney Island. Good
25 morning. As I said, my name is Ann Valdez and I

1
2 am a third generation resident of Gravesend Houses
3 and also a leader at Community Voices Heard. I am
4 here to tell the City Council some recommendations
5 of how the NYCHA resident commissioner should be
6 selected. For beginners, the NYCHA resident
7 commissioner should be selected by an election
8 process of all public housing residents that wish
9 to participate and not appointed by the mayor. In
10 all major cities in the United States of America,
11 the resident commissioner is elected by public
12 housing residents. Public housing residents have
13 the best perspective on all public housing issues
14 because they live there and sometimes work there
15 as well. The mayor does not live or work in
16 public housing, nor has he ever, so he should not
17 be the one choosing the NYCHA resident
18 commissioner. For him, it is simply a decision.
19 For us, it is a life changing experience to have a
20 resident commissioner that can truly represent our
21 voice. Other criteria of the selection of public
22 housing commissioner are—I believe there should be
23 a minimum of five year residency in public housing
24 developments; it can be a mix of developments. It
25 doesn't have to be one particular one. The

1 position should be full-time and receive full pay
2 and have full power of decision-making. The
3 election process should be held every three years
4 until such time as an election can be promptly
5 held. Any mayoral appointment of a resident
6 commissioner, which I know is required by July
7 2011, should be designated an interim appointment
8 that terminates once a resident commissioner is
9 elected. In the future, consideration should be
10 given to naming two resident commissioners to the
11 NYCHA board in order to give residents greater
12 leverage in the board's deliberation, as well as
13 the fact that NYCHA is the largest public housing
14 development in the United States; one person could
15 not do this on their own. Thank you.

16
17 REGINALD BOWMAN: Okay. Are you
18 finished?

19 ANN VALDEZ: Yes.

20 REGINALD BOWMAN: My name is
21 Reginald Bowman and I'm the president of the City-
22 Wide Council of Presidents of the New York City
23 Housing Authority and we're the region-wide
24 council that represents all of the residents of
25 public housing in the city of New York and all

1
2 five boroughs. I was recently re-elected to a
3 second term in this position. Good morning to the
4 Housing Committee Chairman, how are you today--and
5 all of the members of the Committee?

6 I'm here today to talk about the
7 selection of the New York City Housing Authority
8 resident commissioner. I spent the better part of
9 this week--

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
11 Reggie, can you just grab the microphone a little
12 closer to you to make sure it captures all of your
13 testimony on the record?

14 REGINALD BOWMAN: Is there a
15 recording over there going on 'cause you see the
16 needle moving? Okay. Can you hear me?

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Actually, we
18 get the recording in the back, so - - flag it for
19 us.

20 REGINALD BOWMAN: Alright. Let me
21 move up for you. I spent the better part of this
22 week going through volumes and volumes of material
23 on the history of the New York City Housing
24 authority and its resident representation. As
25 many people know, I'm a long time resident of the

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2 Housing Authority and I've been involved in the
3 resident government structure for more than 20
4 years, so I've seen many different forms of
5 resident governance and certainly many different
6 incarnations of the New York City Housing
7 Authority. I would like to commend the Housing
8 Committee for its work that it's been doing with
9 the New York City Housing Authority and its
10 residents and I certainly applaud you for putting
11 together this hearing on the appointment of a
12 resident commissioner to the New York City Housing
13 Authority board, which has been long overdue.

14 As you all know by doing your
15 homework, the law to put the resident on the board
16 and the efforts to do started more than a decade
17 ago, and since that time, the opportunity to do
18 that presented itself last year or the year
19 before. The law that was passed was sort of
20 inadequate because it seemed to be still framed in
21 the same language that it was put in when it was
22 first drafted and put before the assembly and the
23 state legislature. Since that time, the residents
24 have evolved and many of us who are in resident
25 leadership as well as those of us who continue to

live in public housing think that by this time in the 21st Century two things need to occur; number one, there needs to be an open selection process for the residents on the board and commissioners on the board because without there being a democratic process where residents participate in this process, I think that we're leading towards going in the same direction that many institutions that are centered by control in the mayor's office take—we don't have to go into detail about the history of what happens with mayoral appointments. We have a recent one that happened this year and I certainly believe that more democratic control or more democratic process used to select residents leadership for the New York City Housing Authority's Board would certainly set a trend for there being an improvement in the way in which the decisions that affect our lives of the people who live in public housing are made. Simply put, the residents want to control their own destiny. Each year that the public housing policy budget and government issues are decided in Albany, Washington and New York City, with minimal consultation with public housing residents. We

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2 have seen the results of these things. The years
3 of centralized control by non-residents have
4 yielded the NYCHA we have today—a working system
5 that is working well; however, it's tossed back
6 and forth by policy people and politicians and the
7 residents who live in the developments have to
8 live in the conditions that we continue to live
9 in, which have fortunately since the new
10 leadership of the new chair begun to take a new
11 direction and started to stabilize and seem to be
12 going in an improving arc these days, but in some
13 ways, NYCHA is still a patient in the emergency
14 room always waiting for treatment.

15 Now we respect and value the
16 tremendous efforts of our supporters in government
17 and advocacy groups and all of the people who are
18 here to lend support to the New York City Housing
19 Authority residents, especially during this time
20 of transition and since this month marks the
21 second anniversary of the new chairman and the new
22 direction that the Housing Authority has taken.
23 We as residents now feel that it's time to truly
24 transform as well as preserve the New York City
25 Housing Authority. We know that there's a

1 movement and an effort to preserve NYCHA, but we
2 feel that in the 21st Century with the modern
3 techniques of management and strategic planning,
4 we have to do more than just preserve NYCHA; we
5 need to transform NYCHA. We don't mean by the
6 backroom deals for token representation on the
7 NYCHA board. We really know because now the
8 resident leadership and the residents are a lot
9 more politically sophisticated than people give us
10 credit for—we know that the deal that got cut to
11 pass this bill was not really participated in by
12 the NYCHA residents and the people who are going
13 to be impacted by that decision, so we feel that
14 it's time now to begin a dialogue between the
15 residents that live in public housing, the city
16 government officials, both in assembly and the
17 state senate and the city council and the mayor's
18 office to stop trying to put people in office that
19 are going to serve at the pleasure of the mayor
20 and let us work to elect someone who is going to
21 serve at the pleasure of the residents that live
22 in public housing. We now have over 600,000
23 people that live in public housing and for the
24 last two decades, many of the decisions that
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2 impact the 600,000 people that live in public
3 housing weren't really made by the people that
4 live in public housing. A lot of that is the
5 fault of the people who live in public housing and
6 I will tell my residents publicly and on the
7 record, that we need to mobilize ourselves and use
8 the power of the 600,000 people that we have
9 politically, but that's another story.

10 In the meantime in the last two or
11 three weeks, a coalition of residents and advocacy
12 groups have developed a position paper, which the
13 City-Wide Council of Presidents have endorsed and
14 I'm certain that if you don't already have a copy
15 of it in the Housing Committee, Madam Chairperson,
16 I'm sure that we can make sure that you receive a
17 copy of it. I'm sure that many of the elements of
18 this have already been discussed by previous
19 speakers, so I'm not going to read from it or add
20 anything else to it except the following: We
21 certainly endorse and support the position of the
22 people who have signed off on this document. We
23 think that it's high time for there to be an open
24 dialogue with the people that live in public
25 housing, so that we can certainly decide who

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2 represents us on NYCHA's board. I would like to
3 take it a step further. I think that in the
4 transformation of public housing as we move
5 forward, we need to be--in the next legislative
6 cycle in the assembly, start discussing the idea
7 of resident management and maybe the possibility
8 of the NYCHA residents actually becoming like
9 other boards in the city that control their
10 housing and put all residents on the NYCHA board,
11 but that's another discussion. Right now, we feel
12 that as a large group of representatives--elected
13 officials have signed off on this. We had a
14 meeting with Vito Lopez yesterday and NYCHA and
15 Vito Lopez is supporting there being a dialogue
16 between the elected officials and the Mayor's
17 Office and NYCHA. We think that it's high time
18 now for this dialogue to start. We certainly
19 understand that it's our political responsibility
20 to be in the room when these decisions are made,
21 but all of that taken into consideration, it's
22 never too late to begin a constructive dialogue so
23 that 600,000 people can have a voice that truly
24 represents them and certainly has the power on
25 this board to be able to effect the direction and

1
2 destiny where they're going.

3 So we have outlined some principles
4 and recommendations that we certainly endorse. We
5 know that this is the beginning of a process, but
6 we want to be very clear. We're looking forward
7 to this process really happening. As I said at
8 the beginning of my remarks, I spent a week going
9 through almost 20 years' worth of material on
10 public housing and the folders and the meetings
11 that I've been through in my capacity that I've
12 held over a number of years. I certainly have a
13 sense of urgency now as the representative of all
14 of these residents in the city of New York.

15 We would like to see this dialogue
16 begin to take place. I don't think that the
17 Mayor's Office is opposed to it, not the NYCHA
18 executive department and the chair are opposed to
19 it. We look forward to your support in opening up
20 this dialogue so that we can get true
21 representation on this board that has the voice of
22 the residents not only there as a token
23 representative, but also has someone there that
24 actually has the power to represent the voices of
25 the 600,000 people that live in public housing.

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Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

We've been joined by Council Member Dan Halloran from Queens and Council Member Melissa Mark-Viverito has some questions to be followed by Council Member Halloran.

COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:

Thank you, Madam Chair and thank you all for being here today and thank you for your staunch advocacy on these issues and I apologize that I was late, so I have a couple of questions and then a comment and if we need Victor to get back at the table, we're welcome to, but I was not aware actually—I know that the issue—I signed on to the statement as other colleagues have or the letter that was issued about wanting this to become an election, but I was not aware that this was enacted out of state law and I'm very surprised to hear, and I guess I just want to verify whether or not this is true whether as that legislation was being crafted whether there was any communication had, whether with advocates, public housing residents, any of the advocacy organizations, was there any conversations that were had? Did DCSS [phonetic]

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2 have any conversations with anybody that was
3 crafting this legislation?

4 REGINALD BOWMAN: Well, to my
5 knowledge—

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:
7 [Interposing] Who was the prime sponsor in each—

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council
9 Member, in my opening statement, Assemblyman Vito
10 Lopez, who is the chair of housing for the state
11 and Senator Martin Dilan is the Senate sponsor,
12 and I'm not—at least to this Committee, no
13 comments were made about this previously that I
14 could take it up to the prime sponsors of the bill
15 until after the legislation was passed, but this
16 is a bill that has sat around in various sessions
17 and in the last session was able to get the
18 support and be passed.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:
20 Well, I mean I just—it just boggles the mind—

21 REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing] Can
22 I give you a part of the answer?

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO:
24 Sure.

25 REGINALD BOWMAN: Part of the

1 history of this--and this is why I did a whole lot
2 of research on this--years ago in Brooklyn, back in
3 the 70s, one of the things that was going on in
4 public housing leadership was the effort to put a
5 representative on the NYCHA board, so this isn't
6 something that just started. It was started years
7 ago, and I believe that Vito Lopez and Senator
8 Dilan have been in on this, but it started back in
9 the 70s. Many of us had participated in that
10 process back then, but during the period of time
11 where this present bill was being - - back and
12 forth, I know for a fact that the City-Wide
13 Council of Presidents and the resident leadership,
14 we were not really consulted in the final analysis
15 and the forwarding of the bill through the
16 assembly and the senate. We didn't really
17 participate in the passing of the bill because it
18 was attached to a lot of other things as you all
19 know what happens in Albany and so we were really
20 conscious of the fact that they were putting it on
21 the floor and making that happen. Some of that is
22 our fault--

23
24 [crosstalk]

25 COUNCIL MEMBER MARK-VIVERITO: I

1 think if there is room to obviously amend and make
2 our position know that's important. The reality
3 though—and I think that there is a flaw here—is
4 that I know that this legislative body, I think
5 we're very deliberate that when we craft
6 legislation—I know I do when I'm sponsoring
7 legislation that I reach to those that I would
8 consider my allies in those areas to ensure that
9 we're taking into account the concerns, making
10 sure that it's crafted responsibly and that it's
11 addressing the issues, so the fact that that did
12 not happen in this case, I think is flawed and I
13 think it's irresponsible. That's my position, but
14 there is always room to amend it because I think
15 it goes without saying that at minimum there
16 should be a level of representation of residents
17 on the Public Housing Authority board. I find it
18 further insulting that they consider it to be a
19 stipend position of \$250. It's very insulting, I
20 think, that that is what is being presented. It
21 does not indicate in any way that there is any
22 serious consideration of the individual that is
23 going to be there that they are to be considered
24 at equal with the other resident commissioners, so
25

1 that obviously needs to be changed as well. I
2 know that the memo that was sent indicates all
3 that and I definitely stand strongly in support of
4 it. I think that we have to really advocate
5 strongly to see what changes can be implemented.
6 I thank our Chair for her advocacy. I thank you
7 all. I apologize that I have to leave a little
8 early, but thank you very much.

9
10 REGINALD BOWMAN: Thank you for
11 your support.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Just to remind
13 everyone, we are in executive budget hearing, so
14 you will see people coming in and out, so it's not
15 a reflection of the importance of any of the
16 issues. It's just that we have to multi-task and
17 try to be everywhere. Council Member Halloran?

18 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Thank
19 you, Madam Chair. Believe it or not, I share the
20 concern that there is a lack of representation
21 from within the community on the board that
22 governs it. I would suggest to you however
23 though—you indicated in your testimony that you
24 would like to see a board composed completely of
25 residents like it is with other buildings. The

1
2 difference is other buildings' cooperatives are
3 owned by those individuals and they pay money to
4 own those buildings. There is a very different
5 structure when the federal government, state
6 government are creating entities and giving the
7 money. It's a slightly different situation, but
8 I—

9 REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing]
10 That can be negotiated, but go ahead.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: I
12 understand that, but what I'm very concerned about
13 in the manner in which legislation has basically
14 disempowered this body that actually has to wind
15 up supervising NYCHA in a way; we're disconnected
16 completely from the legislation which created
17 NYCHA in 1934. As you probably are well aware,
18 the state is not an entity that moves very fast in
19 any regard, is not responsive and directly, does
20 not actually touch or supervise this agency. So I
21 would suggest that this is an opportunity for us
22 to discuss a home rule component of that
23 legislation that perhaps, the Chair would find
24 some means to look at legislation, which would be
25 a home rule request, so that we could have some

1
2 input in that process as the legislation is being
3 drafted or re-drafted and it's something that
4 perhaps we could use to empower a little bit more
5 our ability to assist you 'cause right now the way
6 the statue is run, that is not possible. My
7 questions are as follows: the first, have you had
8 opportunities to discuss with state legislators
9 the state of the Section 8 law and the related
10 laws that have created NYCHA, and if so, what
11 legislators in particular would you tell us we
12 should be talking with in that regard to try to
13 find a home rule compromise that might give us a
14 little bit more ability to work with you?

15 REGINALD BOWMAN: Well, at this
16 point, my recommendation would be as follows
17 since, again, you pointed out so clearly that the
18 state law and the way that the New York City
19 Housing Authority is governed is all controlled by
20 the state--I would suggest that the meetings that
21 needed to take place would be as follows: the
22 governor would need to be involved, the speaker of
23 the state senate, the speaker of the assembly, the
24 chairpersons of the Republican and Democratic
25 housing committees in both houses, the New York

1 City Housing Authority executive department, this
2 committee and also, the resident leadership of the
3 New York City Housing Authority across the board.
4 I think that by reaching out to all of the
5 branches and the Mayor's Office, of course, since
6 the mayor has been given such centralized
7 appointment authority over so many different
8 things, he of course would have to be included.
9 We need to have that dialogue, and we certainly
10 should initiate that dialogue as quickly as
11 possible. As I pointed out in my testimony, we
12 started the dialogue yesterday with Assemblyman
13 Vito Lopez, who has been the prime sponsor and
14 he's expressed in our meeting yesterday--because
15 that primarily was the purpose of that meeting--he
16 expressed in that meeting yesterday something
17 similar to what you just said, which is that we
18 need to start a dialogue with all of the boards
19 and the committees involved, so that we can create
20 a process that's going to lend to there being some
21 modern day supervision of this enormous
22 institution that seems to only have one control.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Again I
24 also will quite frankly tell you that I do share
25

1
2 an additional concern, which you just now voiced—
3 is that because the Mayor's Office has such a
4 unilateral and unequivocal control over this, it
5 almost makes it impossible for this body, the
6 Council, to actually even exercise the kind of
7 supervisory authority we do with other city
8 agencies. There are several places in the City
9 Charter where there are holes, as you probably
10 know. The fact is we can't supervise the
11 Department of Education as we would like because
12 it is a creature of the state in first instance as
13 NYCHA is as well, and so we get stymied by those
14 legislative quirks that created these entities.
15 It concerns me greatly that the mayor gets to make
16 three appointments to this board for five-year
17 terms and that that is not even on advice or
18 consent of either the state or the City Council.
19 That is the problem that was most evident with the
20 chancellor's appointment in education, as your
21 doubtless aware. I think it's important that we
22 look to creative alternatives in this regard. Do
23 you know in terms of the board itself, which for
24 some reason has five members, but only speaks to
25 the appointment of the mayor on three of them, how

1
2 the other two come to be on the board? That would
3 be—

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
5 Excuse me, Council Member Halloran. Five members
6 for?

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Well,
8 there are technically five members of the board
9 because there's a secretary and a general manager,
10 who—

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: But they're
12 not part of the board. The board is actually a
13 three-member board, which is the chair, the vice
14 chair and the board member who is called the
15 commissioner. Now we would be adding a fourth
16 member.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Well, my
18 understanding—

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
20 If I could just for—so Public Housing Authority is
21 a very multi-faceted creature because it is
22 actually created by the feds and there is a lot of
23 federal regulation. What is not specified in the
24 federal rules, then is up to the state and they
25 create their local public housing authorities. In

1
2 our case, there are many public housing
3 authorities throughout the state of New York and
4 New York City has grant--in the New York City
5 Housing Authority, the mayor was granted the power
6 to appoint everyone who is on that board.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: And
8 that's not always the case with other...

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: They're not
10 and one of the things I want to look into is the
11 differences of other public housing authorities
12 and the differences with other resident members.
13 It's unclear how many are full-time positions, how
14 many are part-time, how many get a stipend, how
15 many get a full-time pay, what that full-time pay
16 may be--I guess will differ also from city to city,
17 but just to see what kind of structures there are
18 as opposed to the one that is now here in New York
19 City.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: I
21 appreciate that, Madam Chair. Thank you. When I
22 refer to the five of course, I'm talking about--and
23 you're nodding your head 'cause you know--there is
24 a secretary to that board and a general manager,
25 who are all but in name board members and are

1 participatory in all of the dialogue that goes on
2 and the relationship that they have with Albany
3 and the federal government, of course, and part of
4 the problem I think that we're getting through all
5 of this is that there are a myriad of questions
6 that would need to be raised to appoint someone to
7 that board, and I don't think it's a bad idea. I
8 think it's a good one. But there are questions.
9 For example, right now the three-member board,
10 it's almost impossible to have a tie on an issue,
11 right? With a four-member board, that's very
12 possible, so that's something we will need to
13 consider. If you're paying someone a salary to
14 sit on that board, they'll no longer be eligible
15 for Section 8 housing, so if we had somebody at
16 the commissioner's level, and it was any other
17 commissioner, they would be making a salary
18 somewhere in the neighborhood of \$100,000—

19
20 REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing] Six
21 figures.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Right,
23 exactly, which would make them immediately
24 ineligible to be residents of NYCHA, so I mean
25 that creates a bit of conundrum.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: You would not be ineligible. You would just have to pay 30%--
[crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --which NYCHA could use right now, so.

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: So we would be paying ourselves back, but there are some things we would need to work through, so what I would suggest and what I think is a good approach is as you begin to look at some of the other developments around the country and how their boards are constructed, let's look to these potential problems that will pop up and have answers because the one thing that we've learned about this administration is they will always have ways to shoot down creative ideas if we don't have an answer for every one of their potential concerns.

REGINALD BOWMAN: Well, I'd like to just address two of the things that you're talking about. One of them is the structure of the board and the other is the necessity to be able to put something into place that is going to start to move faster than the already existing process.

1
2 Yes, the New York City Housing Authority does have
3 a very interesting composition of the board and
4 how it operates. It's what I referred to earlier
5 in my remarks about and I certainly believe that
6 that structure can only be modified by a process
7 that has already been put into place because
8 unless there is dialogue between all of these
9 committees and the legislature and the state
10 government, then we're just going to have a bunch
11 of advocates and residents throwing noise at each
12 other and there won't be any kind of movement in
13 changing the policy and the structure of the
14 institution.

15 I think it's important that soon--I
16 know that this legislative session in the City
17 Council and the Assembly and the Senate are almost
18 over--I would say that starting in the fall, we
19 need to consciously make an effort, and I know I
20 will be reaching out as the City-Wide Council
21 chair along with the advocacy groups. We need to
22 start reaching out to start this dialogue, so that
23 we can have a constructive, unified way to put
24 something into place while the institution is
25 being managed. We don't want to disrupt what's

1
2 going on because the housing authorities had
3 enough disruption.

4 I think the other thing that we
5 need to take into consideration has already been
6 answered by the Chairperson. You can pay the
7 person on the board anything you want as long as
8 they pay 30% of their income to the New York City
9 Housing Authority, but all in all, I think that
10 your suggestions are basically the same that we're
11 trying to reach as resident leaders. We want an
12 opportunity to be able to start this dialogue with
13 as little friction between the parties and the
14 politicians and the residents as possible, so that
15 we can make sure that we put something into place
16 that's going to give us a governing voice and not
17 disrupt the operation of the institution that
18 badly needs not to be interfered with at this
19 time.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Thank you
21 very much. I'm going to yield back, but I will
22 offer my assistance with regards to the Republican
23 chair of the Senate Committee on Cities, Greg
24 Boyle, who is a friend and someone I have worked
25 with—

1

2

REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing]

3

Greg?

4

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: Boyle.

5

REGINALD BOWMAN: Okay.

6

COUNCIL MEMBER HALLORAN: And I

7

would be happy to also speak to Senator Skelos,

8

the majority leader in the Senate, on your behalf

9

to explain what our concerns are in New York City

10

because as you doubtless know, people upstate just

11

don't have an understanding, a comprehension of

12

the complexity of this and very frequently they

13

don't get it, so if there's anything I can do in

14

that regard, I give you my assistance.

15

REGINALD BOWMAN: I look forward to

16

the dialogue and I will certainly be reaching out

17

to you because our strategic plan is to do just

18

that, so that we can work together to make

19

something happen that's going to yield us having a

20

greater voice. Thank you.

21

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

22

Before I hand it over to Council Member Jimmy Van

23

Bramer, I just want to clarify, so public housing

24

residents have to pay 30% of their income toward

25

rent; however, there are individuals who have

1 ceiling rents, so there are many individuals who
2 have not been paying the 30%; they've been paying
3 less and the ceiling rents are based on your
4 apartment size and through the last few years, the
5 Housing Authority has been increasing the amount
6 of the ceiling rents. That's always something
7 that's up for grab, but in no case can anyone ever
8 pay more than 30% toward rent. So with that
9 clarification, Jimmy Van Bramer.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VAN BRAMER: Thank
12 you very much, Madam Chair. As the Queens council
13 member, who represents more public housing
14 residents than any other in Queens, I am very
15 proud to represent Queensbridge, Ravenswood and
16 the Woodside Houses. I want to give a little
17 shout out to Ms. Jeanette Battle, who is in the
18 front row there from Queensbridge Houses, whose
19 very apartment I have been in and it is a lovely
20 apartment, so always good to see folks from the
21 district here and thank you for being here. I
22 just want to say very quickly before I do go on to
23 another hearing that providing the NYCHA residents
24 a seat at the table is a terrific idea, but we
25 want a real true meaningful seat at the table, not

1 just something that's close to the table.
2
3 Something that's really right up onto the table,
4 so NYCHA residents truly have a voice and I want
5 to lend my support to this letter to the mayor. I
6 think it's very reasonable and much needed. I
7 want to thank both of you for your testimony and
8 for your advocacy, especially Ms. Battle from
9 Queensbridge, so thank you very much.

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Council Member
11 Margaret Chin from Manhattan.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you,
13 Chair. Yes, I also wanted to thank you for your
14 advocacy. And on this issue, I'm happy to be one
15 of the supporters that I have signed on to the
16 letter. It just bothers me that on such an
17 important issue that—like when I remember a tenant
18 talking about getting a letter and everybody was
19 saying, "what is this all about? How do we apply?
20 What does it really mean?" If it was really
21 meaningful representation, then we really have to
22 have a true democratic process to select the
23 representative that can really represent all the
24 public housing tenants throughout the city, and I
25 have a lot of developments in my district, and I

1 know we have a lot of active tenant leaders that
2 probably could represent us adequately on the
3 board and represent us with their ability and
4 their commitment and passion on the board, but we
5 really need the mayor to know that he has to make
6 sure that he just doesn't appoint anybody and the
7 process has to be really transparent, so I hope we
8 will be able to stop this process and make sure he
9 doesn't do anything because the deadline is July.
10 Right, Madam Chair? Yeah, so hopefully we can all
11 raise our voices and also get more supporters to
12 stop him in his tracks and let's get a meaningful
13 process going.

14
15 REGINALD BOWMAN: Well, I just
16 would like to add this to respond to what you're
17 saying—in the interest of there being a dialogue
18 because we all know what happens in this city when
19 we start confronting each other with power issues.
20 We don't want to engage the mayor in a battle over
21 power. We know that from past experience that he
22 follows the letter of the law and since the
23 legislation has been passed, rather than get into
24 a litigious battle with the mayor, I have put a
25 phone call into his office to ask that they did

1 receive this letter, which they have. They're in
2 the process of reviewing it. I think that we made
3 it quite clear that if the process is going to
4 continue, we'd like to see it be interim, but we
5 certainly don't want to give up the appointment at
6 the expense of there being a political battle
7 within the constituencies of both the branches of
8 government and the residents. We certainly
9 understand what it is that you're saying and how
10 we need to make an effort to bring this process to
11 a certain level, but our current strategy is the
12 make sure that we engage the Mayor's Office, the
13 City Council, the advocacy groups, the resident
14 leadership and the residents in a dialogue, so
15 that we can go forward with the process of
16 appointing someone, but put protections into place
17 that are going to make sure that this person
18 actually has the power while they're there and
19 then, we go forward with a continuing dialogue to
20 put into place a structure that's going to give us
21 the opportunity as residents to elect our own
22 leadership and select our own leadership, so we
23 don't want to make the mayor feel that we're
24 jumping on him. Some of us have different tactics
25

1 and I know this is New York. Trust me, if people
2 know me, my history, I've shut down New York
3 several times in my past life when I was in the
4 '60s and had more hair, but most of the people who
5 are in government now are the product of that era,
6 so they don't really respond well to
7 demonstrations and being picked on, but they
8 certainly respond well to there being an
9 intelligent presentation of an alternative. I
10 think that we have an opportunity here to present
11 an intelligent alternative to let people know that
12 the people of public housing are not—we don't just
13 want power for the sake of power, but we want to
14 be involved in this process as any other civically
15 minded individual who wants the right to be able
16 to select our leadership for this vast institution
17 that we all live. I agree with you. I think
18 there must be changes, but I certainly believe
19 that we can do this without getting into a
20 political confrontation with a mayor that has
21 technically—he's in his last term, so he's not
22 going to respond well adversarial attacks and
23 stuff like that, so...

24
25 COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: Thank you for

1
2 your insight. I know 'cause right now we're going
3 through the budget process. We do not want to
4 engage the mayor on every front, but thank you for
5 your thoughtful insight.

6 REGINALD BOWMAN: Sometimes you can
7 catch more flies with honey than you will with
8 vinegar.

9 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So, I just
10 want to acknowledge that while no one came here to
11 give testimony from NYCHA or the Mayor's Office,
12 there are representatives out in the crowd and
13 they've been here since the beginning listening to
14 testimony, so thank you—Yolanda McBride from the
15 Mayor's Office and Brian Honan from NYCHA. You've
16 gotten the letters, and so take that back to your
17 bosses up the pecking order.

18 I just want to say something in
19 terms of the state legislation. I speak with
20 Assemblyman Vito Lopez on a regular basis about
21 public housing issues, and he will call me I will
22 call him when I hear complaints on city-wide
23 stuff, so I will call him when I hear complaints
24 about developments in other boroughs and I've
25 called NYCHA about it as well, and we constantly

1
2 ask each other about feedback and what we're
3 hearing, and so this is not something he's
4 mentioned to me, so I don't know if anyone prior
5 to yesterday's meeting had raised the issues about
6 the legislation as written. It's certainly
7 something I did not raise with him because no one
8 raised it with me. I look forward to talking to
9 him, and I'm glad that some people did meet with
10 him yesterday. I look forward to that being a
11 fruitful conversation. I don't know sometimes
12 what goes on. I do know this—that when this was
13 passed, there was a leadership change in the
14 senate and that's a bilateral legislature, so you
15 have to pass it in both houses—

16 REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing]

17 There was a stampede of legislation.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And that
19 sometimes there's a certain amount of negotiations
20 and so I can't tell you since this legislation has
21 been through many legislative sessions, I don't
22 know the different renderings of the legislation
23 until it got passed, but that's something that the
24 prime sponsor Chair Lopez would know, and I
25 encourage you to--

REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing]

Well, yesterday—

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --and I

encourage people to meet with him as I will and to discuss that, so I will give a quick comment, but I have some questions and then, we have seven other people who want to testify, so what I want to ask this panel is, do you know of anyone who has applied to be on the board? Do you know of anyone who hasn't applied thinking that they may not meet the criteria? If you do know of people who've applied, do you have any sense of numbers of residents that have applied for this position?

REGINALD BOWMAN: Yesterday we asked the... No, today the memo is going out to ask the chairperson because the process was set up so that the New York City Housing Authority's Executive Department would be handling the receiving of the applications, so we won't have that data until today.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Well, that is one of the process. I don't know if that's the only process, and since we didn't have testimony from anyone other—

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REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing]

That's what I am trying to tell you. We had a meeting with the Housing Authority before the process began. The City-Wide Council of Presidents met with the Executive Department of the New York City Housing Authority and they explained the process to us in detail.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So, let me ask you since it was explained in detail, let me just get to the crux of it—did the housing authority tell you that the only people who would be considered are those that submitted applications through the Housing Authority through their advertisement and letter sent out to the residents? Yes or No?

REGINALD BOWMAN: That is our understanding. Yes.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay, so I think we may have heard different on that count, so—

REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing]
Well, this is New York politics so... [laugh]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: No, because that they collect means that that's not the only

1
2 way they're collecting, but that it was never told
3 to us—they told you that the only people who would
4 be considered would be the people who submitted to
5 NYCHA—

6 REGINALD BOWMAN: [Interposing] It
7 was our understanding in that conversation that
8 the process that was set up was going to be the
9 way in which the people were going to be selected
10 to be submitted to the Mayor's Office for review.
11 That's our understanding from that conversation,
12 which is why—again, I've alluded to the fact that
13 I understand how New York politics works, so in
14 the beginning of this process when the City-Wide
15 Council met with the New York City Housing
16 Authority, we made it clear that we wanted to be
17 informed along the way about the status of this
18 process and who applied, so we have a request into
19 NYCHA's office and to the Mayor's Office, of
20 course, to see who these people are and how many
21 have applied.

22 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: In this
23 meeting, did they tell you about how many
24 applications they received through this process?

25 REGINALD BOWMAN: No, the first

1 meeting was to tell us of the process. We haven't
2 had a secondary meeting to know how many people
3 there are. We won't know that until today.

4 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

5 REGINALD BOWMAN: I think the
6 process closed on the 16th or something. Yeah.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I think
8 that's it for this panel. Thank you very much.

9 ANN VALDEZ: I have one question.
10 Now that you're talking about the application. In
11 my development, we have no management office and
12 no community center, so information doesn't go
13 around very well. I didn't even know that there
14 was an—I know that you said that letters were sent
15 out to download the application. I didn't receive
16 even a letter talking about the position.

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Do you know of
18 anyone in your development that did?

19 ANN VALDEZ: No, actually I don't.
20 There's a lot of information in my development
21 that doesn't get passed around. Some people there
22 don't know half of what's going on, unless they
23 spoke to me, and it's something I know about.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.
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ANN VALDEZ: And that's my involvement with Community Voices Heard.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: That's Gravesend Houses. Do you know about any other developments near your area that did not get the letter as well?

ANN VALDEZ: No, I haven't actually talked around in my neighborhood, but that is one thing I'm going to go back and find out—

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
And your management office would be?

ANN VALDEZ: O'Dwyer.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: O'Dwyer.
Okay, and you don't know of anyone in O'Dwyer who got the applications?

ANN VALDEZ: I really don't know.
I know who my TA president is. I haven't spoken to her in awhile, and you know, she's a lovely woman, but sometimes, like I said, information doesn't go around. I don't know how the information concerning applying for this position—I don't know if it was supposed to be mailed out or if it was supposed to be posted. I mean 'cause if it's posted, it's possible someone ripped it

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down.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: We were told that—my staff was told that it was mailed.

ANN VALDEZ: I didn't receive anything of it.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So, it's certainly something—I see them taking notes and we'll follow up with it.

ANN VALDEZ: [Interposing] That's an issue I have when it comes to Gravesend Houses because we're cut off.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Well, it's not just Gravesend. These are issues that have happened from time to time with postings or mailing, such as with the pet policy and when the increased the fees for parking and other fees, so—

ANN VALDEZ: [Interposing] Even the postings for Section 3 jobs I don't see.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: There are discrepancies that sometimes happen within a development or within a community and the Housing Authority has gone back to try to rectify those, so we will certainly bring it—it's been brought to their attention and we can sort of do a follow-up

1
2 to see what happened. Okay. Thank you SO MUCH.

3 ANN VALDEZ: Thank you all for
4 taking the concerns.

5 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Thank you.

6 REGINALD BOWMAN: Thank you.

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: So, Pearl
8 Barkley from Jefferson Houses. Are you here?

9 [background conversation]

10 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: She still
11 didn't come? Okay. Diane Blufford from Staten
12 Island Houses. She hasn't made it yet? Okay.
13 I'll do another call later. Anne Marceline
14 Washington [phonetic]? Okay. Christian Baxter
15 [phonetic]? And, okay, I'm going to do these in
16 panels of two, so the next panel will be Dr. John
17 Norvelle [phonetic] and Sandra Thomas [phonetic].
18 That will be the next panel. Whenever you're
19 ready and if anyone has written testimony that
20 they'd like to submit to the Committee, we gladly
21 would take it. Whenever you're ready...

22 ANN MARCELINE WASHINGTON: Hi
23 everyone. My name is Anne Marceline Washington.
24 I live in Grant Housing in Harlem and I have been
25 a resident of Grant Housing since 1978, so I've

1
2 been there a long time. My kids grew up in that
3 neighborhood. I love my neighborhood and I
4 basically really want to see things improve in my
5 neighborhood. It had been a frustration for me
6 for a very long time, even before I—I'm also a
7 member of Community Voices Heard. I would like
8 you to know. So I'm here for myself and also
9 other members of Community Voices Heard. So
10 before I even went to Community Voices Heard, I
11 have had so many concerns and I didn't really know
12 exactly how to address them.

13 Now since I heard about it and
14 actually the only way I heard about this process,
15 about getting on the board of—being a member of
16 the resident board with NYCHA—I just heard about
17 this I think maybe it might have been a few months
18 ago, and then, I got a letter stating that
19 basically that the tenant resident person actually
20 is there under the control basically of the mayor.
21 It bothers me a lot about that because I want to
22 know really why should the mayor have control
23 about who sits on the board? That makes no sense
24 to me actually. I'm going to put on my glasses
25 because I wrote down some notes here. I'm going

1
2 to put on my questions and I'm going to just—if
3 you need to ask me anything, you can and the
4 residents really should truly have the authority
5 to really represent the residents. No one who is
6 not a resident of public housing whether you're
7 the mayor, the chair, or whoever it is, does not
8 know what it is to be in public housing, unless
9 you are a resident and a resident who gets on the
10 board really should represent the tenants. The
11 mayor really shouldn't have that much control over
12 the resident member, and I have really real
13 concerns that the resident that is appointed
14 according to the letter that I got—it's on a part-
15 time basis and the resident is not really on a
16 full-time basis. It's really unfair.

17 I was listening to Melissa Mark-
18 Viverito and she was saying it is really an insult
19 and I feel insulted really, and I feel the people
20 in my development and all public housing should be
21 insulted because it's almost like you're saying
22 that we don't have the brain capacity or anything
23 to really know what it is to do on a board, right?
24 The person who is there really should be able to
25 voice the real concerns of the tenants and should

1
2 be independent enough to be able to go back to
3 tenants and say, well, look, this is what is going
4 on, and this is the issues. How do you feel? And
5 then come back with the concerns of the tenants.
6 This really is a very unfair process. I know you
7 all spoke of so many different legislative reasons
8 why it should be happening or why it is happening,
9 but I disagree. But basically what I wrote down
10 here and I really want to say I think in order for
11 real positive change to happen in public housing,
12 the tenant or whoever it is that represents
13 themselves on the board should be able to be able
14 to have that much control so they can appreciate
15 and be able to have that self-worth saying I'm a
16 member and I represent the tenants and this is
17 what the issues are. If you all have any
18 questions or anything else, you can ask me. I'm
19 ready.

20 CHRISTIAN BAXTER: Hi, my name is
21 Christian Baxter. I'm a New York City Brooklyn 35
22 District resident. I've been going to a number of
23 the budget hearings and - - sitting down in this
24 hearing, and it came to the point that I was—my
25 initial idea is just to sit and write and listen

1
2 to a lot of the testimony—a lot of what people are
3 talking about and doing, but one thing that I
4 understand on the Council's side I saw them every
5 day this week and I see them chew out and
6 basically break down every single thing on the
7 budget, so to see them from their side and
8 actually do what they do and how aggressive they
9 are in doing and stepping forward and advocating,
10 I speak out and say, yes, I thank you.

11 On the other side with the
12 residents, being that I have a grandmother who
13 lives in public housing and I also have
14 grandparents who own their own houses, I get to
15 see a different side of how things are working
16 from both ends of the spectrum. One of the things
17 I find where in some instances, they're right.
18 They don't get that information spread and the
19 letters don't come, but on the other side, you
20 find that you have a lot of the residents who just
21 don't spread it at all. They'll find out and then
22 it just stops with them. So one of the things
23 that I thought was amazing, but it forces you guys
24 to step up more is those who are in those
25 advocating positions. You just have to be the

ones to say, "Listen. We're going to be the ones that pick who the mayor wants to pick out" because the residents--I can say most of the residents will not--barely come to meetings or if they try to come to meetings, they're so confused that it's still--you have to bring them up to speed and then you move forward, so if you're not the ones to say, "Listen, this is what we're going to do," then, the residents are just going to be like whatever and they move on. Speaking from a grandmother who she'll see the paperwork, okay, and then put it in the letter and then put it under the table versus there's council members like you guys who are out there saying, "No, we need to push this." If you're not pushing it, then no one else does, and it's unfortunate to say that, but I'm one coming from--I do a lot of things with health and make a lot of health initiatives and letting people know different ways of making things more inexpensive for life, and yet, it's a wash. They don't care, so when you find that you're speaking out and saying you want a council member, you want a committee to do this, that and a third, but if you're not going to take the time

1
2 and just do it, just run it through, it's going to
3 take another decade. I'm amazed and I'm happy
4 that the mayor actually said, "Listen. I'm going
5 to appoint somebody." Now you can jump on it
6 because now there's something out there to jump
7 on, but before all the other mayors would push it
8 aside; it wouldn't pass. You don't hear about it,
9 so now the opportunity is not that necessarily for
10 dialogue more. It's now saying, "Okay. These are
11 the people." Put it through as quick as possible
12 on your end, so it is at his paper, at his
13 doorstep, so now that the Council - - Council has
14 to say is, "We have the names. Who did you pick?
15 Fine. Three names. Good."

16 We need fast, quick and speed,
17 people, because one of the things with the budget
18 hearings is the Department of Education is the
19 worst ones. I believe Mr. I forget his name, but
20 he was saying that it takes—I think it was Mr.
21 Greenfield, who said it takes an extra five to ten
22 years on top of whatever everybody says. So if
23 you're saying we're going to talk about it or
24 debate about it, that's an extra decade, rather
25 than just saying, "Here it is. Boom." Now the

1
2 only thing you have to wait on is maybe that five
3 years attached to that, but you already have it
4 already out there. Even if he appoints somebody,
5 the job is already troubleshooting. You can see
6 what they are or are not doing and therefore,
7 there's something more to talk about, so I would
8 say if anything if we can't put it on a time - -
9 appoint it, so it's out there, but then you can
10 now bang on the doors and say, "Listen. You've
11 got a person out there. We need this to happen as
12 well." So it's almost where we're taking at-what
13 I'm saying is, we have to begin to be proactive
14 more than usual and just stop just saying, "Let's
15 talk about it" because "let's talk about it" is
16 where we are now, and that's why the mayor has to
17 appoint somebody because he's like "You're just
18 going to be talking for decades upon decades."
19 Another thing I saw about disabled versus
20 overworked-I know for myself at the end of
21 yesterday's hearing, which went over two hours and
22 mindset was just a mess-normally, I walk over the
23 Brooklyn Bridge-

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]

25 Can I ask you to bring it back to the resident

1
2 commissioner? 'Cause I still have another panel
3 coming up for testimony.

4 CHRISTIAN BAXTER: Yes. What I was
5 going to most likely maybe the if anything the
6 disabled workers would be more likely to take the
7 job. Why? It's interesting. Because they can, if
8 the City would allow, they can be at more of the
9 meetings because they're normally at a location
10 where they don't have to be too many places at too
11 many times, and this will allow for them to always
12 be always in the know of what's going on and
13 possibilities. Now the next step would be how do
14 you allow for that information to travel
15 throughout them? As long as they can get in
16 contact with the Councils, such as the Community
17 Voice—as long as they can get in contact with
18 Community Voice's specific councils, that will
19 allow for them to be at as many meetings as
20 possible and get the information out--

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
22 Can I just 'cause you weren't here when I gave my
23 opening statement, so just to reiterate—this is an
24 appointment by the mayor, serves at the will of
25 the mayor, he has to appoint someone according to

1
2 the legislation by June 30th, and after he appoints
3 someone, he can reappoint someone else 'cause it's
4 at his discretion—

5 [crosstalk]

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: The
7 legislation says—that is the state legislation—
8 states that this is a part-time position to be
9 paid \$250 stipend. That means this individual can
10 go to as many meetings as they want or go to no
11 meetings or some meetings, probably will have to
12 go to the NYCHA board meetings that take place
13 every other Wednesday. That would be I think the
14 minimum qualification, and as I stated, the
15 stipend at minimum wage would be about 8 hours a
16 week, so—and it's 20 hours a month; that's what it
17 would come out to, so certainly someone could do
18 more than that; they could do less. It is a part-
19 time position, just like mine is technically
20 written up as a part-time position, but I don't
21 know many of us who do this part-time. They do
22 this full-time and some other people may do
23 another job in addition to that full-time as well.
24 So I just wanted to state this because you were
25 not here.

1
2 CHRISTIAN BAXTER: I do understand
3 that the residents that we're talking about though
4 because a lot of times, we just put that out there
5 just to say part-time. Most of the time, you
6 don't go, "Okay. One meeting. Maybe two." And
7 then you don't see them ever again, so what I'm
8 giving is saying specific residents who are more
9 likely to just be there just to be involved in
10 everything would be those that are almost—they
11 live for this—the elderly is another good example,
12 where their life—once they start on one meeting,
13 they're like, "Oh, I'm going every day," just
14 because they want to see and do things, so we
15 don't want to put it in such a way especially for
16 the residents' concern that they're just, "Okay.
17 I'll just go to a meeting" because then, on their
18 part, they don't focus and on the part of the
19 City, they're not going to force them to do
20 anything, unless you get a member who is willing
21 to say, "I'm going to be there. I'm going to do
22 it." So what I'm trying to do or trying to say is
23 is basically you're looking to find specific
24 people who are more likely to be there just
25 because. If it's whether they can't do it all the

1
2 time, but they're knowing, "I have to go to this
3 meeting. I have to be there. I have to do this,"
4 and therefore, you cut out on a lot of the other—
5 whether they feel it's important or not. They're
6 there because they know that this in - - they're
7 going to be there.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I want
9 to thank this panel for their testimony. We were
10 joined by Council Member Erik Dilan, who is the
11 chair of Housing and Buildings for the City
12 Council. Council Member Chin, do you have any
13 questions? Okay. Thank you. Well, let me just
14 ask this panel, do you know of anyone who has
15 applied, who sent their application in? Or do you
16 know of anyone who didn't get the letter to their
17 home as we were told this notification from the
18 chairman went out? Anyone on the panel?

19 ANNE MARCELINE WASHINGTON: No,
20 personally, I really don't know anyone that
21 applied and I can't speak for everyone about
22 whether they received it. I just know—

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
24 Did you receive it?

25 ANNE MARCELINE WASHINGTON: I

received not the application. I don't really
remember receiving—

[crosstalk]

ANNE MARCELINE WASHINGTON: I
received the letter stating about the resident
person being - - I was very flabbergasted about—

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
Did you receive it in the mail or...?

ANNE MARCELINE WASHINGTON: I
received it in the mail.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Thank
you. Sir, do you know of anyone, who received it
or who has applied?

CHRISTIAN BAXTER: My grandmother
has not received it, but if she has—

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
And she lives where?

CHRISTIAN BAXTER: Farragut
Housing.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Farrgut.
Okay.

ANNE MARCELINE WASHINGTON: And to
just to be honest, I can't really speak for
everyone else in the building, but I didn't hear

1 anyone else in my building or my development speak
2 to me about it, and I know just like he mentioned
3 before, sometimes people get letters and they put
4 - - , but it's not always posted up. There was
5 not postings, nothing. So I can't really speak
6 for everyone.
7

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay.

9 Alright. Thank you very much. Alright. John D.
10 Norvelle and Sandra Thomas, both from The United
11 Coalition to Save Public Housing, and I'm just
12 going to do one last shout out for Pearl Barkley
13 and Diane Blufford. Okay. They have not showed
14 up yet. Okay. Derek?

15 [background conversation]

16 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: I am John
17 Derek Norvelle and I live in Abraham Lincoln
18 Houses. I just want to read a testimony here.

19 We, The United Coalition to Save
20 Public Housing, demand that an intro be presented
21 by this body, the City Council. The City Council
22 under their charter obligation to represent the
23 people of the city of New York, including the
24 600,000+ public housing residents equivalent to
25 the whole population of the District of Columbia,

1
2 has the power and jurisdiction to pass such
3 legislation overriding the mayor's veto and
4 establish a law granting public housing residents
5 the democratic right to vote for the public
6 housing resident to sit on the NYCHA board as
7 commissioner.

8 The draft of such an intro was
9 presented two Fridays ago to the honorable Melissa
10 Mark-Viverito and states as follows, "Be it so
11 enacted that all residents of public housing
12 consisting of the five boroughs, which comprise
13 the entire municipality of the city of New York
14 will have the democratic right to directly elect
15 through public ballot the resident commissioner
16 and all other added resident commissioners in
17 future to the New York City Public Housing
18 Authority executive board. The democratic process
19 of enfranchisement concerning public housing
20 inhabitants as stated above in this regard shall
21 take effect immediately upon passage of this
22 legislation into city law. Neither shall the
23 mayor or any appointed agent in New York be
24 empowered to select any interim resident
25 commissioner until this legislation becomes

1 statute for the entire municipality that is the
2 city of New York. The resident commissioner so
3 elected will have equal standing with all other
4 appointed commissioners in the New York City
5 Housing Authority (NYCHA) board. There are
6 reasons both statewide and national, as well as
7 legal, in addition to American democratic values
8 for supporting this intro. Other cities in the
9 state of New York have elected resident
10 commissioners, such as Buffalo. The former
11 Buffalo resident commissioner has sent e-mails
12 stating that Buffalo public housing residents are
13 up in arms that their rights to vote might be
14 eroded. They fear that City Council members might
15 take their voting rights away from them and
16 negatively politicize this process. I will send
17 you the e-mails. These fears were not entertained
18 until Mayor Bloomberg's insistence on choosing a
19 NYCHA resident commissioner downstate. Bloomberg
20 and Rhea know that President Obama intends on
21 selecting certain cities nationally to demonstrate
22 a project based upon the supposed voluntary
23 conversion of all HUD funding streams into one for
24 all HUD subsidizes housing. The template for this
25

1 demonstration is Representative Ellison's H.R.
2 6468. The President wants to implement this
3 rental assistance demonstration by the latter half
4 of this year 2011. What is required is that all
5 participating cities much have a resident
6 commissioner—
7

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
9 Derek, I don't know if you're going to read the
10 whole thing, but it's pretty lengthy, so can just
11 ask you to summarize?

12 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: Okay. In
13 summary, the resident commissioner position is not
14 an empty suit and neither is it a ceremony
15 position. We found out from a visit in Washington
16 D.C. to the National Income Housing conference
17 that the resident commissioner will have the power
18 to stop any default of public housing development
19 sale or transfer and that to any for profit owner,
20 we have limited private ownership of public
21 housing in the Public Housing Authorities around
22 the country and New York City is no exception.
23 Under NYCHA's demand for mayoral privilege that
24 information is not given to the residents. It's
25 not given to the City Hall Library, but the

1
2 resident commissioner has the power--as we found
3 at San Francisco, and I can give you all the
4 information from Matthew Schwartz [phonetic]—has
5 the power to stop the sale or transfer of any
6 development that goes into default. I have the
7 bill of H.R. 6468. Under that bill that requires
8 a resident commissioner, the HUD secretary will
9 not stand in the way of any development that is
10 sold or transferred to a private for profit
11 because of tax credits, so that job is very
12 sensitive. Plus there are also resident
13 commissioners—we are part of the Resident
14 Engagement Group nationally—and they're resident
15 commissioners who have detailed positions and
16 duties. I can send you that information—

17 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]

18 Okay. This discussion here we haven't even gotten
19 to and I assume that the resident commissioner
20 will have all the powers of the current sitting
21 board members. The only issue is that they're
22 only going to be compensated 250 a month,
23 irrespective of how much time they put in.
24 They're only be required to put in 20 hours a
25 month. Is that correct? That's correct. And so,

1 the resident commissioner will have all the powers
2 with that time restriction if their schedule is
3 restricted and would have more time to do more
4 stuff, but not be compensated for it, and at issue
5 has been how this resident commissioner is going
6 to be chosen, so I have not heard anything about
7 the responsibilities that there are any less
8 responsibilities. The legislation as this is not
9 City Council legislation, we do not have the
10 authority to tell the mayor to appoint or not to
11 appoint and take that over. It is state
12 legislation. The state has the authority and on
13 other matters, this City Council has gone up to
14 the state when we wanted for example, to have
15 NYCHA receive the same amount of money as private
16 landlords were receiving for public housing
17 recipients. There was a time when there was an
18 inequity and NYCHA was receiving less than private
19 landlords. We had to go to the state to get that
20 changed, so any changes how many hours, how much
21 compensation, whether the mayor appoints or not
22 appoints, has to be done at the state level and
23 they have to pass legislation through a bi-lateral
24 legislature.
25

1
2 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: Right, right.
3 I understand that. In fact, I was going to
4 mention the state bills, including the state
5 senate bill S 8350, because we have the language
6 of that. The language was written in a loose
7 manner. It says that the mayor may appoint, but
8 it's not in an imperative type of legal wording
9 that states that the mayor must or has to appoint
10 or will appoint, and we've also been talking to
11 lawyers about it, including Norman Seagal
12 [phonetic] about that information. I have the S
13 350 here, but anyway—

14 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
15 the legislation Chapter 531 of the 2010 states as
16 it's in front of me that the mayor shall, which is
17 must—shall.

18 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: Okay,
19 depending on interpretation, but anyway, we talked
20 to—

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I think
22 interpretation in the City and in the State about
23 shall has been very clear.

24 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: But Keith
25 Wright—we talked to Keith Wright last Friday and

1
2 he's not at all pleased. He's very upset that the
3 mayor would have the powers to appoint under these
4 conditions and he said that the bill can be
5 amended. It can be amended; that's what he does.
6 It's a legislature. What we suggest—

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
8 But certainly Assemblyman Wright is a part of that
9 body, so he should also go back to his Assembly
10 members and the chair to try to effect such change
11 and then try to get it passed by the Senate.

12 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: Right. What
13 we suggest is that there be a series of hearings,
14 the City Council and the State and that they work
15 out the language, work out an approachment
16 [phonetic] of these different issues, to put this
17 to unite in a more harmonious bill, but also to
18 talk about the whole process of the election
19 process, the process of payment to the resident
20 commissioner because just think about it
21 practically, a \$250 stipend—they won't be able to
22 do their job with that amount of money. If for
23 instance just to go from 250 Broadway to where
24 they live, unless they live in Alfred E. Smith
25 Houses, they're going to have to pay car fare

1 every day or let's say—they go every day. That's
2 going to be carfare about hundred dollars. Don't
3 ask them then to go then to Staten Island to South
4 Beach Houses. They got to take a ferry. They got
5 to take a train what have you. My goodness,
6 they'll be owing money just to go to the different
7 meetings that they have to go to, so they need
8 more money just to do their job. So we ask that
9 there be a series of hearings and that Bloomberg
10 be delayed from picking this person July 1st. In
11 fact, the delaying tactic might be a very very
12 good good tactic and in the light of this Obama
13 demonstration program—because the city is not
14 ready for primetime with this program and tell you
15 the truth, neither is H.R. 6468 ready. We have
16 copies of the bill. We're working on the bill
17 with Ellison now for changes.
18

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Ms.
20 Thomas?

21 CASSANDRA THOMAS: Yes, hi. My name
22 is Cassandra Thomas. I also represent The United
23 Coalition to Save Public Housing. I'm from Wagner
24 Housing.

25 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Can you pull

1
2 the mic a little closer to you, so it can get
3 captured please? You can pull it closer or you can
4 get cl--either way; you can pull it even more.

5 CASSANDRA THOMAS: Yes. I don't
6 want to reiterate what has already been said,
7 which everyone made really good points, but I
8 would like to say that I did receive a letter in
9 the mail and that it stated that you could pick up
10 a form from management office. It also stated in
11 the letter that it had to be mailed and post-
12 marked no later than May 16th, so I was one of the
13 residents that did receive it, so I would assume
14 that in my housing development that a good number--

15 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
16 You live in--

17 CASSANDRA THOMAS: Wagner Housing.

18 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Which one?

19 CASSANDRA THOMAS: Robert F. Wagner
20 Houses.

21 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Wagner. Okay.

22 CASSANDRA THOMAS: One of my
23 concerns about this is that it should go further
24 that--'because New York City has the largest public
25 housing - - in the nation--that each borough should

1
2 be represented by a resident commissioner, so that
3 would be my take on it, and I'm quite sure a good
4 number of people, if that was possible, would feel
5 the same.

6 Also in the letter it states that
7 the resident should be in good standing, which
8 good standing most of the time or as we know it
9 means that they're paying their rent on time and
10 they're good housing residents; they abide by the
11 rules and regulations. I find that an
12 intimidating tactic that was stated in the letter
13 to say that residents who would participate in
14 this process should or would be investigated for
15 reasons that were not stated. So I would say that
16 a lot of residents who received the letter and
17 looked at that part of the statement—it might have
18 been a turn off, so—

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
20 But that's part of the requirement for any
21 appointment whether you're receiving a stipend or
22 not, so for appointments as commissioners for any
23 city agencies, for appointments on the CCRB board—
24 the Civilian Complaint Review board, which does
25 pay a stipend, all those individuals have to be

1
2 investigated to determine if there are any
3 conflicts or any issues, so that is just—

4 CASSANDRA THOMAS: [Interposing]

5 Such as?

6 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Well, such as—
7 I can tell you for the Civilian Complaint Review
8 Board, right—you cannot have a city appointment or
9 any other kind of appointment, so if you work for
10 the city or if you were let's say for example,
11 elected a male or female district leader or a
12 county leader, that would disqualify you from
13 being on the Civilian Complaint Review Board. The
14 legislation here as drafted says that the tenant
15 must be someone in good standing, which means that
16 they would investigate and look at your record and
17 your tenancy to see how long you've lived in
18 public housing, to make sure you're on the lease,
19 to make sure that you're not involved in an
20 administrative hearing or any other kind of
21 hearing that might jeopardize your tenancy, so how
22 extensive that investigation would be—whatever
23 goes into making sure you're a tenant in good
24 standing, that's what it would be as has been done
25 with other recommendations for appointments or

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2 appointees that are done outright by the mayor.
3 There is a certain amount of investigation that
4 just takes place.

5 CASSANDRA THOMAS: So it should
6 only then be based on basically conflict of
7 interest in good standing.

8 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: It will be
9 based to ensure—let me see what I had in my
10 opening statement. They will have to determine
11 that you're 18 years of age. They will have to
12 determine that you're an authorized member of the
13 NYCHA household, so some individuals are living in
14 a resident apartment, and are not part of the
15 lease and are not authorized to be on the lease or
16 are trying to get on the lease. That would not
17 make you an authorized member. They would then
18 need to make sure that you are in good standing
19 with the Authority, which could mean a lot of
20 things, but including whether you're involved in
21 an administrative hearing or any other hearing,
22 like any other criminal or civil proceeding that
23 might jeopardize your tenancy in the Housing
24 Authority.

25 CASSANDRA THOMAS: Okay. Thank

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you.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Sure. I want to ask this panel—I know you both—you live in Lincoln Houses and—

CASSANDRA THOMAS: [Interposing]
Wagner.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And Ms. Thomas, you live in Wagner Houses, so Wagner Houses has received the notifications through the mail. Mr. Norvelle, Dr. Norvelle, did you or other people at Lincoln Houses receive the notification about the resident commissioner?

JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: We've received the letter. In fact, I received the letter after I came back from Washington about a week later. As for the applications, you had to go to the management office to get the application. I got an application—

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: [Interposing]
You were not able to get it online? There was a website.

JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: Yeah, - - at first I thought I didn't get the letter 'cause other people had gotten the letter from other

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2 developments and I didn't, so I was a little irate
3 about that, and I tried to get it online, and for
4 some reason, trying to download that attachment it
5 almost made my computer go bablooeey [phonetic] and
6 I said, "Oh, no, no, no, no."

7 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Do you know of
8 any other individuals who had that same experience
9 trying to download the application?

10 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: No, I don't.

11 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: And do you
12 know of anyone who has applied to be the resident
13 commissioner?

14 JOHN DEREK NORVELLE: No, I don't.
15 I toyed with the idea, and then I just felt that
16 it was—and I looked at the requirements. I looked
17 at what they were asking for and just the whole
18 premise of it, and I just felt it was so bogus
19 that I felt that we should deal with hearings.

20 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Ms. Thomas, do
21 you know of anyone who has applied for the
22 position of resident commissioner?

23 CASSANDRA THOMAS: No, I do not.

24 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. I want
25 to—Margaret, do you have any questions? Okay, I

1 want to thank this panel for their testimony. I
2 want to recall Vick Bach to the stand. He gave
3 testimony early on, and just ask him a couple more
4 questions. Thank you. Vick, you work at
5 Community Services Society. You gave your
6 testimony earlier that was submitted jointly with
7 Legal Aid Society. I'd just like to know, do you
8 know of anyone who has applied for this position
9 for resident commissioner?
10

11 VICTOR BACH: No, I don't.

12 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Have you heard
13 from anyone that they were having trouble
14 downloading the application from the website?

15 VICTOR BACH: No.

16 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Did you try to
17 download the application yourself?

18 VICTOR BACH: No.

19 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. And has
20 anyone complained to you that they did not receive
21 the letter in the mail--

22 VICTOR BACH: [Interposing] No.

23 CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: --besides the
24 testimony that you heard here today?

25 VICTOR BACH: No, I haven't.

[background conversation]

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Since you work very closely with a lot of residents, can you tell me what your understanding of a tenant in good standing is and what might be other individuals that you have worked with who are residents, what they might understand that to be?

VICTOR BACH: I wish I were qualified to really offer a definition, but I think since the term is used often for screening tenants for one reason or another—and I don't deal with hearings at which these things are determined or with legal proceedings at which they're decided, I think it would be best to ask one of the Legal Aid Attorneys, and I wish Judith Goldiner were here. I do believe that anyone in - - would be considered not in good standing at that time.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Margaret, do you have any questions.

COUNCIL MEMBER CHIN: No, just a comment. I mean if a lot of people have not heard anybody apply, Madam Chair, can we ask NYCHA to find out how many people have applied for this

position?

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: I will be asking and see if I—and I'll be asking the Mayor's Office as well. Let me just ask you one last question, Vick. Has anyone contacted you or contacted any other organization that you know of who has been working with public housing residents and is part of the alliance to get people to nominate or to get people to apply for this resident commissioner job?

VICTOR BACH: No, I know of no efforts to get people to apply or be nominated, no.

CHAIRPERSON MENDEZ: Okay. Alright. Well, this hearing will come to a close. As I mentioned earlier, I will make sure that this testimony gets to the prime sponsors of the legislation, the senate and assembly sponsor. I want to thank everyone for their testimony today. It's been very helpful. I want to thank NYCHA and the Mayor's Office for staying for all of the public testimony. This hearing is adjourned.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Kimberley Uhlig certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.

Signature Kimberley Uhlig

Date June 1, 2011