

**New York City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings with Subcommittee on
Public Housing Joint Public Hearing on NYCHA Fee Increases**

**Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Marty Markowitz
April 10, 2006**

I WANT TO THANK CHAIRMAN DILAN, CHAIRWOMAN MENDEZ, AND MEMBERS OF THE HOUSING AND BUILDINGS COMMITTEES FOR HOLDING TODAY'S PUBLIC HEARING, AND I APPRECIATE THE OPPORTUNITY TO SPEAK WITH YOU ABOUT AN ISSUE OF SUCH VITAL IMPORTANCE TO SO MANY BROOKLYN AND NEW YORK CITY RESIDENTS.

I WANT TO BEGIN BY STATING A PERSONAL BELIEF THAT I AM CONFIDENT MANY OF US IN THIS ROOM SHARE AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS.

EVERYTHING I DO AS BOROUGH PRESIDENT HAS THE SAME OBJECTIVE — AND THAT IS FULFILLING GOVERNMENT'S CORE DUTIES OF PROVIDING — FOR EVERY AMERICAN — QUALITY HEALTH CARE, PUBLIC SAFETY, A SOUND EDUCATION — AND A ROOF OVER EVERYONE'S HEAD THAT THEY CAN AFFORD.

IT IS THIS LAST COMPONENT THAT BRINGS US TOGETHER TODAY, AND WHEN THE CHIPS ARE DOWN, I BELIEVE THAT NO PROGRAM IS MORE WORTHY OF OUR PROTECTION THAN PUBLIC HOUSING.

OF COURSE, OUR SO-CALLED LEADERSHIP IN WASHINGTON HAS ESSENTIALLY ABANDONED OUR NATION'S COMPACT TO PROVIDE A SAFE, AFFORDABLE HOME FOR ALL RESIDENTS BY SLASHING HOUSING BUDGETS FOR POLITICAL GAIN OVER THE LAST QUARTER CENTURY.

OF COURSE, THAT HAS PUT NYCHA IN YET ANOTHER DEFICIT HOLE OUT OF WHICH IT MUST DIG ITSELF.

AND OF COURSE, THOSE WHO HAVE LESS ARE LEAST ABLE TO ABSORB THE ADDITIONAL COSTS PROPOSED TO HELP FILL THAT BUDGET GAP.

THOSE ARE THE GIVENS IN THIS DIALOGUE.

IT IS ALSO A GIVEN THAT NEW YORK CITY IS THE GREATEST PLACE IN THE WORLD TO LIVE, IT IS THE MOST ETHNICALLY AND INCOME DIVERSE CITY ANYWHERE — AND IT IS CERTAINLY ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE CITIES, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO HOUSING.

THAT'S WHY NYCHA'S FUNDAMENTAL MANDATE OF PROVIDING AFFORDABLE HOMES TO THOSE WHO CAN'T PAY MARKET-RATE RENTS IS

CRITICAL TO PRESERVING THIS CITY'S DIVERSITY — LITERALLY, MAINTAINING THE MIX THAT DEFINES US.

I WANT TO STATE UNEQUIVOCALLY THAT NYCHA SHOULD NOT AND CAN NOT BALANCE ITS BUDGET ON THE BACKS OF PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS.

UNTIL WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT NYCHA HAS LOOKED AT EVERY ITEM IN ITS BUDGET, SCRUTINIZED EVERY NICKEL AND DIME THAT EVERY DEPARTMENT SPENDS, AND IMPLEMENTED EVERY POSSIBLE EFFICIENCY AND ELIMINATED EVERY REDUNDANCY TO PLUG THIS GAP —

WE CAN NOT PLACE ANOTHER BARRIER IN THE PATH OF PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS TRYING TO ACHIEVE THEIR DREAMS BY INCREASING FEES.

FOR ONE, IT'S BAD ECONOMIC POLICY.

THE FUNDS GENERATED BY THE PROPOSED INCREASE IN FEES WOULD NOT EVEN EQUAL 10% OF NYCHA'S DEFICIT.

FOR WHAT AMOUNTS TO A DROP IN THE BUDGET BUCKET, WHAT'S THE POINT IN BURDENING RESIDENTS WHO ALREADY STRUGGLE TO MAKE ENDS MEET?

NEARLY DOUBLING THE PRICE OF A NEW DOOR TO \$620?

JACKING UP THE COST OF REFRIGERATOR KNOBS AND SHOWERHEADS — ITEMS SUBJECT TO NORMAL WEAR AND TEAR?

THIS IS NO WAY TO BALANCE A BUDGET.

IF INCREASING FEES FOR MORE THAN 400,000 TENANTS WILL ONLY RAISE \$12 MILLION, WILL NYCHA GO ON RECORD TODAY AND LAY OUT DOLLAR FOR DOLLAR HOW IT PLANS TO CLOSE THE OTHER \$156 MILLION OF ITS BUDGET SHORTFALL?

UNTIL WE HEAR THAT PLAN, THESE PROPOSED INCREASES WILL APPEAR MORE PUNITIVE THAN PRUDENT.

THESE FEES ARE ALSO IMMORAL.

FOR THOSE SCRAPING BY ON \$18,000 A YEAR IN INCOME, THE EXTRA MONEY FOR FEES IS EXTRA MONEY THEY DON'T HAVE —

AND IT WON'T COME OUT OF A SAVINGS ACCOUNT, IT WILL COME IN THE FORM OF LESS FOOD, LESS MEDICINE, LESS CHILD CARE, LESS CLOTHING.

WHEN TENANTS SPEND MORE ON HOUSING THAT THEY DON'T HAVE, OTHER CITY AGENCIES WHICH ARE ALREADY STRETCHED PAST CAPACITY — ARE FORCED TO PICK UP THE SLACK.

IF NYCHA GETS ITS MONEY, WE WILL END UP ADDING TO THE ROLLS AT HOMELESS SERVICES, CHILD SERVICES, FOOD BANKS AND SOUP KITCHENS, OUR WELFARE SYSTEM, AND MEDICAID.

THERE IS NO "THEY" WHEN IT COMES TO PUBLIC HOUSING — ONLY "US."

WHETHER YOU LIVE IN CARROLL GARDENS OR THE UPPER EAST SIDE OR VIRTUALLY ANYWHERE IN NEW YORK, PUBLIC HOUSING TENANTS ARE OUR NEIGHBORS, OUR COMMUNITY.

IN FACT, I GREW UP IN POVERTY MYSELF, IN A RENT-CONTROLLED APARTMENT AND THEN IN PUBLIC HOUSING.

THE KINGS COUNTY HOSPITAL EMERGENCY ROOM WAS OUR DOCTOR, HAND-ME-DOWNS FROM NEIGHBORS WERE AT TIMES OUR WARDROBE, AND SURPLUS FOOD BANKS WERE SOMETIMES OUR KITCHEN.

AFTER MY FATHER DIED WHEN I WAS 9, I WORKED AFTER SCHOOL TO HELP SUPPORT MY MOTHER AND TWO SISTERS, AND I ATTENDED EVENING SESSION AT BROOKLYN COLLEGE FOR NINE YEARS TO EARN MY DEGREE.

NOW, I MAY NOT LOOK UNDER-NOURISHED TODAY — BUT THOSE DAYS WILL BE WITH ME FOREVER.

AND I THINK WE CAN ALL AGREE THAT IT IS EVEN HARDER TODAY TO LIVE IN POVERTY, AND THAT THERE IS STILL SO MUCH WORK TO DO TO OVERCOME THOSE STRUGGLES —

WHICH IS WHY I BELIEVE AS STRONGLY AS EVER THAT AS PUBLIC OFFICIALS, IF WE DON'T STAND UP FOR THOSE WHO ARE LESS FORTUNATE, WHO RELY ON THE GOVERNMENT TO PROVIDE AN AFFORDABLE HOME, THEN REALLY, WHAT DO WE STAND FOR?

IF WE CAN'T PREVENT BUDGET DEFICITS FROM BEING PILED ONTO THE BACKS OF THOSE ALREADY BURDENED WITH A HEAVY LOAD, THEN WHO WILL?

AND IF WASHINGTON CAN PASS OFF AS SOUND FISCAL POLICY CUTTING TAXES FOR THE RICH WHILE NICKEL AND DIMING THOSE WITH LESS, DON'T WE OWE TO IT TO THE MILLIONS OF BROOKLYNITES AND NEW YORKERS ON THE SHORT END OF THAT STICK TO PUT UP A FIGHT?

WE DEMAND BETTER — AND WE DESERVE BETTER.