



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

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**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Public Housing
Preliminary Budget Hearing, March 8, 2022**

Good afternoon, and thank you to the City Council and Chair Alexa Avilés for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I am Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso, and I'm here on behalf of Brooklyn's 118,000 public housing residents to advocate for immediate attention to the deteriorating conditions that they face in their homes.

NYCHA's capital budget shortfall is estimated at \$40 billion. Last year, thanks to advocacy from Senator Chuck Schumer and champions like Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, it looked like our public housing residents might finally get a reprieve from our federal government, with a \$65 billion allocation for public housing written into the Build Back Better proposal. However, for the time being, politics has won out over the moral imperative of correcting decades of government disinvestment, as Senator Joe Manchin called Build Back Better "dead."

As local government representatives, our responsibility now is not to wait for the federal government to save us. As we continue our advocacy to the Biden administration to invest in public housing, we also must do everything we can to ensure that public housing residents have safe, healthy, and stable homes. I want to echo advocates' ask that the City and State allocate \$2 billion per year each to fund NYCHA's capital repair needs, and encourage the Mayor to work with the Governor to find new sources of tax revenue to dedicate specifically to NYCHA repairs. I also feel strongly that resident voices need to be at the table in a way that is proactive, rather than simply consultative, in the development of any proposal for public housing's future.

I want to stress that finding solutions to fixing the current state of our public housing is a moral imperative. NYCHA residents were nearly twice as likely to die from COVID-19 as other New Yorkers. NYCHA must prioritize repairs that affect health, such as mold, lead, heat, and hot water, and ensure that repairs address underlying conditions so that the same problems don't happen over and over again. Residents also deserve transparency in the repairs process. They should be able to utilize the 311 system so that complaints and repairs are tracked and publicly accessible.

We must also think beyond just meeting basic needs and start planning to provide services that will improve residents' lives. What would NYCHA campuses look like with green infrastructure (such as urban farms that employ local residents and improve health outcomes), with accessible health clinics and affordable childcare on-site, with sustainable waste management practices, and stores that sell healthy food? So many common areas in and around NYCHA buildings are underutilized, and we as a city can do better.

So again I call on our City and State governments to step up to the plate as we continue to put pressure on our federal partners to fund public housing. We need to ensure funding from all levels of government is allocated now and accessed quickly and efficiently. NYCHA residents are working people, and many of them are essential workers. The city relies on them everyday, and it's long past time to do our part to support them. Thank you.