



Testimony of
Victor Bach, Senior Housing Policy Analyst, Community Service Society
Judith Goldiner, Supervising Attorney, Legal Aid Society
at
Oversight Hearings,
Appointment of a Tenant Representative to the NYCHA Board
New York City Council Committee on Public Housing
May 20th, 2011

In recent months there has been a groundswell of concern among NYCHA resident leaders we work with, about the pending appointment of a public housing resident to membership on 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, copy to the NYCHA Chair John 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 a week ago.

The main points: It recommends that the selection be based on an election process among NYCHA residents to be designed by resident representatives in collaboration with NYCHA and the Mayor's Office. Nominees should have demonstrated leadership experience among public housing residents. It specifies some of the key charges the resident commissioner must carry out. And, since under the law an appointment must be made by July, not enough time for an election, it proposes that any appointment to the NYCHA Board be considered an "interim" appointment until an election process is designed and conducted. To date the letter is endorsed and signed by 15 resident leaders, 6 organizations that regularly work with NYCHA residents (including ours), and 12 elected officials. We are hoping for a prompt response and a requested meeting with the Mayor's Office.

This is a matter of having an effective resident voice on the NYCHA Board. Our position is contained in the letter. But it is clearly an issue on which public housing residents, rather than their advocates and elected officials, must take the lead. We hope this hearing is a step forward in resolving the concerns we have heard from NYCHA resident leaders across the city.

May 13th, 2011

TO: Honorable Michael R. Bloomberg, Mayor, New York City

FROM: Undersigned Organizations and Individuals

RE: Selection of a NYCHA Resident Commissioner

We, the undersigned, are concerned that there has not been adequate discussion on the part of the Office of the Mayor or the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) with public housing residents, their leaders, and their advocates, about the process through which a Resident Commissioner should be designated and charged to serve. Ongoing discussion is needed to create a democratic and inclusive selection process and clarify the duties of the Resident Commissioner. While the application process initiated on April 6th is a first step, one that moves in the direction of open opportunity, there has been little discussion with the NYCHA resident constituency concerning:

- 1) alternative methods of selection that should be considered,
- 2) criteria that should guide the process of naming NYCHA's first Resident Commissioner,
- 3) responsibilities and duties that come with the Commissioner role.

The intent of the federal Housing Act of 1998 was to ensure a resident voice on the governing boards of Public Housing Authorities. The 2010 New York State law intended to extend that right to NYCHA public housing residents. We believe it is incumbent on the Mayor and NYCHA to give due consideration, prior to the naming of a Resident Commissioner, to the following principles and recommendations:

Principles and Recommendations:

- 1) The selection of a NYCHA Resident Commissioner should be through an election process among NYCHA public housing residents.
- 2) Nominations should be limited to residents with demonstrated leadership experience among public housing residents.
- 3) The election process should be designed in collaboration with NYCHA resident leadership and conducted as soon as possible.
- 4) The election process should be held every three years.
- 5) Until such time as an election can be promptly held, any Mayoral appointment of a Resident Commissioner (required by July, 2011) should be designated "an interim appointment" that terminates once a Resident Commissioner is elected.

- 6) Key responsibilities and duties of the Resident Commissioner should be clearly delineated. It is assumed the Commissioner will be precluded from serving as an officer on any Resident Council. As a result, it is necessary that the Commissioner sustain appropriate communications with and accountability to the duly-elected Resident Councils. The Commissioner's responsibilities should include monthly meetings with the Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP), as well as quarterly resident assemblies in each of NYCHA's nine districts.

Additional Concerns

There are additional long-term concerns we wish to register at this time that we believe are critical to the effectiveness of the NYCHA Resident Commissioner.

- 1) The current stipend for the Resident Commissioner allows for only part-time involvement in the deliberations of the NYCHA Board and insufficient presence among the resident constituency, which numbers more than 340 developments and a half-million residents. Part-time is not enough—the Resident Commissioner will have a full-time job and should be compensated at the same rate as other NYCHA Commissioners.
- 2) Consideration should be given in the future to naming two Resident Commissioners to the NYCHA Board, in order to give residents greater leverage in the Board's deliberations.

We, the undersigned, request a prompt meeting with the Mayor's Office to discuss these concerns and the next steps. Thank you, in advance, for your thorough and prompt attention.

c.c. John B. Rhea, Chairman, New York City Housing Authority

(List of Supporters in Formation)

Resident Leaders

Reginald H. Bowman, President, Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP)
Herma Williams, 1st Vice President, Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP)
John Johnson, Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP), District Chair, Bronx South
Ethel Velez, Citywide Council of Presidents (CCOP), District Chair, Manhattan North
Daniel Barber, TA President, Andrew Jackson Houses, Bronx
Maria Forbes, TA President, Clay Avenue Houses, Bronx
Grace Hunter, TA President, Webster-Morrisania Houses, Bronx
Princella Jamerson, TA President, Millbrook Houses, Bronx
Patricia LaMonda, President, Bronxchester Houses, Bronx
Nancy Ortiz, TA President, Vladeck Houses, Manhattan
Keith Ramsey, TA President, Eastchester Houses, Bronx
Daphne Roberts, TA President, Melrose Houses, Bronx

Joanne Smitherman, TA President, Highbridge Gardens, Houses, Bronx
Gloria Tull, TA President, Claremont Parkway Houses, Bronx
Sylvia Velazquez, TA President, DeWitt Clinton Houses, Manhattan

Advocates/Organizers

Community Service Society (CSS)
Community Voices Heard (CVH)
Families United for Racial & Economic Equality (FUREE)
Good Old Lower East Side (GOLES)
Legal Aid Society
Tenants and Neighbors

Concerned Electeds

U.S. Representative Jerrold L. Nadler
U.S. Representative Charles B. Rangel
U.S. Representative Nydia M. Velazquez
NYS Senator Thomas K. Duane
NYS Senator Velmanette Montgomery
NYS Senator Daniel Squadron
NYS Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh
NYS Assemblymember Richard N. Gottfried
NYS Assemblymember Linda B. Rosenthal
NYC Councilmember Margaret Chin
NYC Councilmember Melissa Mark-Viverito
Manhattan Borough President Scott M. Stringer