

**TESTIMONY OF THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY AND  
LEGAL SERVICES OF NEW YORK  
ON NYCHA'S SECTION 8 VOLUNTARY TRANSITION PLAN**

New York City Council  
Subcommittee on Public Housing

January 10, 2007

The Legal Aid Society is one of the oldest and largest providers of legal assistance to the poor in the United States. The Society's Civil Practice operates 14 neighborhood offices and city-wide units serving residents of all five boroughs of New York City providing comprehensive legal assistance in housing, public assistance, and other civil areas of primary concern to the poor. The Society is counsel on numerous class-action cases concerning the rights of public housing residents and is counsel to the New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance. We work closely with the Community Service Society on public housing issues. The New York City Public Housing Resident Alliance seeks to inform and network with residents, so that they can have a strong and effective voice and secure greater accountability in local, state and federal policy decisions that affect public housing in New York City.

LSNY is an umbrella organization for the provision of free legal assistance in civil matters to low-income households in New York City. The seventeen neighborhood offices of LSNY in diverse communities throughout the city represent thousands of low-income tenants annually in disputes involving tenants' rights to remain in their homes.

We very much appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Public Housing Subcommittee.

On October 18, 2006 the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) submitted a proposal to HUD for the Section 8 Voluntary Transition Program. The proposal would allocate 8,400 federal Section 8 vouchers over the next three years to residents who live in NYCHA public housing originally developed by New York City and State without federal contributions or operating subsidies. HUD must decide the application by January 18, 2006.

The proposal gives 8,400 Section 8 vouchers to residents occupying city/state public housing units. As a result, these vouchers will be no longer be available to the 128,000 families now on the NYCHA Section 8 waiting list. Congress originally intended that Section 8 vouchers be used for rent assistance to very-low and low-income families seeking decent housing in the open rental market, not for operational support of existing public housing. In our offices, we are constantly confronted by families who are on the Section 8 waiting list and are in desperate need of Section 8 to preserve their current housing. These families will not receive Section 8 as a result of NYCHA's plan.

NYCHA received additional funds this year from the City and from raising fees and rents. NYCHA does not need to use the 8,400 Section 8 vouchers this year. In early February, Governor Spitzer will present the state budget. NYCHA should wait and see if Governor Spitzer funds state public housing for the first time since 1998 as he has committed to do. In the meantime, NYCHA should use the vouchers it is stockpiling for the growing Section 8 waiting list. In addition, we call on the Mayor and the New York City Council to include in the City budget funding for the operating costs of the city developments. We support the resolution sponsored by Councilmember Dilan and Councilmember Mendez calling on New York State to fund the operating costs of State public housing.

**Conclusion**

\_\_\_\_\_ We appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Council today and hope that the Council will do all that is within its power to compel NYCHA to address the concerns outlined above. In addition, we urge the Council to pass the resolution proposed by Councilmembers Dilan and Mendez and to include in the City budget funding for the City public housing developments.

Respectfully Submitted:

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