

**TESTIMONY OF THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY
ON PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUES IN PUBLIC HOUSING DEVELOPMENTS**

New York City Council
Committee on Public Safety
Subcommittee on Public Housing

November 2, 2006

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.

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

We are concerned that at a time of grave deficits in public housing that NYCHA is paying \$73 million dollars to the NYPD allegedly for "special" services. Many NYCHA resident leaders believe they do not receive special services from the police---such as special/vertical patrols---to justify special NYCHA and resident support of the Department. The Police

Department provides the same services provided to all New Yorkers. Residential properties owned by nonprofit organizations or churches are exempt from property taxes, but they receive police services. NYCHA is not exempt, it makes "payments in lieu of taxes (PILOTs)" to the City. Why should it also pay for Police services? Moreover, private landlords do not pay for police services, it is provided as part of the services in New York City. We do not believe that NYCHA should pay for this government service.

The only "special" service seems to be a direct informational link from NYPD to NYCHA so that NYCHA learns of any arrest, no matter how minor, of a public housing resident. NYCHA then uses this information to commence termination of tenancy proceedings against the entire family. We believe this to be a poor use of resources on NYCHA's part as well as a huge expense. We recommend that NYCHA be more judicious in the cases it brings and evaluate the seriousness of the crime before bringing an eviction case. We see victims of domestic violence who fear to report their batterers because a police report will result in a termination of tenancy proceeding as well as family members who fear other family members or guests but cannot report them to the police because a police report will result in a termination of tenancy proceeding. Unlike private landlords, the only way NYCHA will proceed if there is a police report is to try to terminate the tenancy. This must stop.

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 and NYPD to address the concerns outlined above.

Respectfully Submitted:

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