



NEW YORK STATE ASSOCIATION FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING

**NYSFAH Testimony before the New York State Assembly Standing Committee on
Housing and the Assembly Standing Committee on Cities**

Examining Programs Supporting Affordable Housing Development

November 25, 2019

Thank you Chairman Cymbrowitz, Chairman Braunstein and members of the Assembly Committees on Housing and on Cities for the opportunity to participate in today's hearing seeking input on programs and initiatives that will promote affordable housing development. My name is Patrick Boyle, Director of Policy for the New York State Association for Affordable Housing (NYSFAH).

NYSFAH is the trade association for New York's affordable housing industry statewide. Its 375 members include for-profit and nonprofit developers, lenders, investors, attorneys, architects and others active in the financing, construction, and operation of affordable housing. Together, NYSFAH's members are responsible for most of the housing built in New York State with federal, state and local subsidies and incentives.

We would like to applaud your committees for exploring additional ways in which to promote affordable housing. As we seek to address the housing crisis, it is clear that public funding and incentives remains critical, but alone it may not be enough; we also need innovative ideas to address the myriad of issues which limit affordable housing preservation and development.

Efforts at the federal level being promoted by affordable housing advocates are of particular interest. For instance, the proposed Yes In My Backyard Act (YIMBY) (H.R. 4351), would encourage local governments to remove barriers to affordable housing. It would require Community Development Block Grant recipients report how they plan to reform harmful land use policies to spur more and fairer development. However, New York State need not wait for the Federal government to act, it could work with municipalities today to remove antiquated exclusionary policies such as zoning and density restrictions, and to encourage by-right development and faster permitting.

Another proposal would be to require local governments to prioritize affordable housing along existing and proposed transit corridors. Families in affordable housing often require mass transit in order to travel to work, school, grocery stores, and medical services. Housing options that are far removed mass transit impede the ability of low-income families to achieve economic and educational advancement. In a 2016 study entitled, "The Transit Affordability Crisis," issued by the Community Service Society of New York, it found that "a quarter of low-income New Yorkers were often unable to afford the subway or bus in the past year, limiting many New Yorkers' opportunities to get good jobs and affordable housing and, in many cases, forcing them to choose between transit and other necessities." While the focus of the study was the inability of these low-income New Yorkers to afford the fare to use New York's mass transit, the impact is the same to those for whom mass transit is not geographically available. Encouraging municipalities to prioritize the siting of affordable housing along mass transit corridors is a common-sense solution to help overcome disparities in educational and economic success.

Creating more environmentally sustainable, affordable housing is also a growing priority as we battle climate change and seek ways to reduce the energy expenses of affordable housing families. According to a recent report by the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy, low-income families pay twice the share of their income for energy compared to the national median. The Environmental Protection Agency reports that for vulnerable populations living on Social Security, energy costs comprise nearly one-fifth of their annual income, compared to a national average of four percent of income.

Climate change is, of course, an imminent threat to all of us. New York State's efforts have been monumental, especially with the recent enactment into law of the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA) which will seek to implement policies to reduce economy-wide greenhouse emissions over the next two decades. NYSFAFH believes that affordable housing should be a key component of those efforts since: (i) emissions from residential housing will be a significant target for such reductions; (ii) there is already a strong relationship between affordable housing developers and our government partners; (iii) and the low-income households we serve are also a principal focus for financial assistance under the CLCPA. The good news is that New York State and New York City already have established goals and programs to create sustainable affordable housing including through approvals by the Division of Housing and Community Renewal, NYSERDA's Low-Rise Residential New Construction Program, and the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development's Green Housing Preservation Program and Enterprise Green Communities Certification Process.

With additional funding dedicated to creating sustainable affordable housing, New York State can achieve the complementary goals of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving savings from burdensome energy costs for low-income families.

Finally, while removing the aforementioned barriers and being smarter about where we site affordable housing is a growing imperative, a strong continued commitment of public funding remains essential. New York has been a leader in its financial support for affordable housing – and the Assembly has long championed the housing programs that NYSFAFH and other housing organizations use to build and preserve housing for those who need it the most. New York State is entering the final year of its landmark five-year, \$2.5 billion housing plan. The plan has been a success. It has enabled us to significantly confront the housing crisis and offered many New Yorkers a better life. Our work is not done, however, as the housing crisis persists. We will be asking our partners in New York State government to include a new five year housing plan in the 2020-21 enacted budget. This new multiyear commitment of funding is necessary to continue the pipeline of affordable housing projects, which often take two to three years or more of planning and approvals. An interruption in that process will result in fewer housing projects and lost momentum in the progress we have achieved to date. We look forward to your support of this request during the upcoming budget negotiations.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today and for your consideration of NYSFAFH's ideas and thoughts as to how we can assist in the development of much needed affordable housing. We look forward to our continued partnership toward our common objective of providing safe and secure housing for every New Yorker. I welcome any questions or comments you may have.

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