



OFFICE OF THE BROOKLYN BOROUGH PRESIDENT

**Testimony of Brooklyn Borough President Eric L. Adams  
New York City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings  
Brooklyn Borough Hall  
February 29, 2016**

Good morning Chair Williams, and the members of the New York City Council Committee on Housing and Buildings. Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's oversight hearing on Mitchell-Lama housing in New York City. Welcome to Brooklyn Borough Hall! I am pleased to have partnered with Brooklyn's own Council Member Jumaane Williams to bring the first New York City Council hearing on Mitchell-Lama housing in nearly seven years. This oversight hearing is timely given the challenges facing Mitchell-Lama residents as well as their boards to ensure that one of the greatest middle class housing success stories will endure. I thank Chair Williams for calling this important oversight hearing.

Brooklyn is home to 35 Mitchell-Lama developments, with more than 18,000 units of housing, and one of the, if not the most, active Mitchell-Lama Task Force in New York City. I thank the members of this task force for their dedication and time to advocate for the protection of affordable housing in our borough as well as their tenacity in advocating for this hearing today.

New York City, and Brooklyn in particular, is facing an affordable housing crisis. Mayor de Blasio has set an ambitious agenda of creating and preserving affordable housing in New York City and there is no better place to focus on the preservation of these precious units than in our Mitchell-Lama complexes.

Unfortunately, the opposite is occurring. According to Tenants & Neighbors, since 2005, New York City has lost nearly 33,000 of its Mitchell-Lama rental stock and since 1990, eight developments in Brooklyn alone, totaling almost 4,300 units of affordable housing, have left the Mitchell-Lama program. While many of those units entered into rent stabilization, more than 1,000 apartments entered into programs that provided vouchers but no stabilization.

These attacks on our affordable housing stock are unacceptable and New York City's Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) and New York State's Division of Housing and Community Renewal (DHCR) must do more to support these developments and protect the affordability for current and future residents, and not throw roadblocks to affordability through policy changes. For example, HPD continues to downsize former rental tenants who were given vouchers to pay landlords the market rates they left the program to

receive. HPD must stop revising family size requirement, forcing them into smaller spaces, and leaving the vacated apartments to revert to market rate apartments.

For too long, the Mitchell-Lama portfolio has lacked funds for regular maintenance and oversight, which has led to elevators that frequently break down, rat infestations, leaks, as well as boards that have run amok — playing by their own rules. Instead of safeguarding the integrity of their programs, HPD and DHCR have allowed housing companies to defy the rules regarding apartment allocation, financial reporting, and contracting.

Furthermore, government must do more to recapture those lost units from the past 10 years.

Moving forward, there are tangible steps that must be taken to hold HPD and DHCR more accountable to protecting affordability:

- **Hold regular oversight hearings.** The New York City Council must hold regular oversight hearings on Mitchell-Lama developments. HPD has, for too long, not been held accountable by the New York City Council for their lack of effort to protect this important, affordable housing stock.
- **Better training for boards.** HPD must provide better management training and education for board members. These board members are generally volunteers with busy lives, so educating them on how to best protect affordability is imperative.
- **Preservation through better financing.** New York City Housing Development Corporation (HDC) is able to provide low-cost financing for capital improvements to Mitchell-Lama developments, but DHCR does not. DHCR must also take an active role in supporting low-cost financing to protect development residents from increases in rent and/or maintenance charges.
- **Support for aging-in-place.** There are an estimated 400,000 people over the age of 60 living in Brooklyn, or about 16 percent of the borough's population. About 277,000 of those people are over the age of 65. It is estimated that Brooklynites over 65 will exceed 350,000 by 2020. Continuing to live in one's apartment as they age is preferable and less expensive than a nursing home. The New York City Council should provide visiting nurse support services for Mitchell-Lamas that have a certain population of residents over the age of 65.

There are a number of innovative ideas that we must pursue to shore up this important source of affordable housing. I urge the New York City Council to partner with my office, stakeholders, HPD, and DHCR to find a sustainable solution to the crisis facing Mitchell-Lama developments.