

TRINITY CHURCH WALL STREET

03.15.23 - Trinity Church Testimony - Housing & Buildings Committee - FY24 Preliminary Budget

Wednesday, March 15, 2023 | **Subject:** FY23 Preliminary Budget Priorities - Housing & Buildings

To Chair Sanchez and Members of the Housing & Buildings Committee.

My name is Bea De La Torre and I am the Managing Director for Housing and Homelessness at Trinity Church Wall Street. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony for the Committee's preliminary budget hearing for Fiscal Year 2024. Below, I offer an overview of some of the investments and policies necessary to meet the housing needs of New Yorkers.

Trinity Church Wall Street is an Episcopal Church in Lower Manhattan with a congregation of more than 1,600 parishioners who represent all five boroughs and form an ethnically, racially, and economically diverse congregation. In addition to our ministry, we carry out our mission of faith and social justice through direct services, grantmaking, and advocacy. In 2022, Trinity provided over \$30 million in grants and mission investments to support affordable housing development and address homelessness.

Trinity Church is deeply concerned about the housing crisis and its acute impact on our most vulnerable residents. Over half of all renter households in New York City are rent burdened, and nearly a third of renters spend more than 50% of their income on rent. Median rents have reached [historic highs](#), as the supply of affordable units available for median and low-income households has reached a 30-year low. According to the City's [vacancy survey](#) released last year, less than 1% of all New York City apartments priced at \$1,500 a month or less were available for rent.

This tight housing market is further compounded by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the eviction moratorium expiring more than a year ago, recent [reporting](#) shows that landlords filed over 100,000 eviction notices in Housing Court citywide in 2022 alone. With the future funding of the State's Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) uncertain, residents who have been unable to repay their rental arrears now face the very real threat of eviction and homelessness.

As the number of families and individuals residing in New York City shelters continues to rise at an alarming pace, our elected leaders must ensure solutions are put in place to expand the supply of safe and affordable housing, as well as protect New York City's most vulnerable families and individuals from homelessness.

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We encourage the Administration and City Council to make the following commitments in the FY24 budget to prevent more people from entering the shelter system, help those already in it to leave it faster, and ensure that all New Yorkers have access to safe and affordable housing:

1. Expand and enhance New York City's supply of supportive housing units by:

- **Ensuring the City upholds its commitment under NYC 15/15 to create 15,000 units of supportive housing by 2030.** This should include attention to scatter site units by increasing the service rate to \$17,500 per unit to match the congregate care rate
- **Enabling thousands of people returning from jail or prison to access 15/15 supportive housing by allowing stays in jail and prison of *more* than 90 days to count toward time “homelessness”**
- **Investing [\\$57.8M in expense funding for supportive housing](#) for people who are currently cycling in and out of the City's jail system (\$12.8 million for Justice-Involved Supportive Housing and \$45 million to support rental subsidy increases and higher service rates for supportive housing)**
- **Allocating \$152 million for the development, preservation, and rehabilitation of congregate supportive housing units**

2. Increase the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) budget to address source-of-income (SOI) discrimination. Although New York City's strict laws bar landlords from refusing tenants with housing vouchers or related subsidies, SOI discrimination remains far too common. We urge the Mayor and City Council to allocate more funding to CHR so it can expand outreach and education on SOI discrimination, as well as increase enforcement against landlords who reject prospective tenants because of their housing vouchers. In addition, the Council should determine if the Law Department's affirmative litigation unit has sufficient staffing to support CHR's work.

3. Allocate more resources to the Department of Housing Preservation & Development (HPD) to help resolve the agency's staffing shortage. Ever since New York City implemented a hiring freeze amid the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, HPD has remained significantly understaffed. This staffing shortage has especially affected the agency's development office, which manages the production of the City's affordable housing projects. In order to achieve the housing goals Mayor Adams outlined in his “Get Stuff Built” blueprint, the Administration and City Council need to provide HPD with more

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resources so it can offer competitive salaries, provide staff with more opportunities for promotions and merit-based raises, and improve the agency's overall recruitment practices.

Additionally, we urge the City Council and the Mayor to enact the following pieces of legislation in tandem with the FY24 budget to help New Yorkers gain access to more permanent housing and achieve long-term savings on shelter costs and related expenses:

- 1. Fair Chance for Housing Act, [Intro 632-2022](#).** For far too long, New Yorkers with a criminal record (11% of the City's adult population) have been denied access to permanent and affordable housing long after their arrest or incarceration. Conviction-based housing discrimination frequently forces individuals returning from jail or prison with few options for housing except the shelter system or the streets, driving a vicious cycle of homelessness and incarceration. The passage of the Fair Chance for Housing Act would unlock new opportunities for New Yorkers with a criminal record to access permanent housing and likely reduce the overall length of shelter stays for individuals reentering society.
- 2. Legislation to End the CityFHEPS '90-Day' Eligibility Rule, [Intro 878-2023](#).** Before becoming eligible for CityFHEPS vouchers, households must reside in a shelter for 90 days to qualify for the program. This rule unnecessarily delays the process of finding permanent housing and leads to extremely long and harmful lengths of stay in shelter. As New York City's shelter system experiences unprecedented strain from the influx of asylum seekers and the looming wave of evictions, we urge the Council to pass this legislation and reduce the amount of time that families and individuals spend in shelter.