



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

Statement from Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson at the June 15, 2022, Bronx Public Hearing of the Rent Guidelines Board

Good Evening Chairperson David Reiss, and Members of the New York City Rent Guidelines Board for convening today's meeting. We appreciate the opportunity today to testify in the Bronx and the recognition of the importance of allowing our voices to be heard.

Access to affordable, quality, and safe housing in our City is a fundamental human right. It is a part of the very fabric of our democracy that creates opportunities for New Yorkers to live in decent housing.

As one of the prime sponsors of the historic Right to Counsel legislation passed by the City Council in 2017, I have seen firsthand the impact of providing legal representation to tenants facing eviction on balancing the scales of justice and leveling the playing field. Since the passage of this law, we have seen a significant decrease in evictions in our borough and throughout New York City.

COVID-19 has exacerbated the need for safe permanent housing and too many of our families have felt the burden of being pushed and priced out of their communities. We have seen one in every four Bronxites lose their income as a result of the pandemic, fall behind in rent and struggle for basic necessities.

The overwhelming growth of our shelter population and the true need for real and deeply affordable housing is at an all-time high and we simply cannot continue to ignore this issue. A potential 2 to 4 percent hike in rents for one-year leases and 4 to 6 percent increase in two-year leases would be devastating for many of our working and middle-class residents during an unprecedented housing crisis in our city. Even as we attempt to recover from the financial impact COVID-19 had on our communities, many tenants are still struggling to stay afloat and are on the verge of entering our shelter system or becoming street homeless.

Stabilizing families should be our collective priority along with ensuring our residents have a solid roof over their heads. More than half of our working families in the Bronx are rent-burdened spending more than 30% of their income on rent and they simply cannot afford to pay any more than what is already expected of them.

I urge the Rent Guidelines Board to take immediate action to protect vulnerable New Yorkers by initiating a rent freeze that will save many tenants from forcibly having to leave their homes. At this critical time, we cannot and should not support any rent increase that will punish our tenants and have lasting consequences on our city.