



BRONX BOROUGH PRESIDENT VANESSA L. GIBSON

Statement from Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson at the June 5, 2023, Bronx Public Hearing of the Rent Guidelines Board

Good evening Chairperson Nestor Davidson and Members of the New York City Rent Guidelines Board, and thank you for convening today's meeting. I appreciate the opportunity to testify here in the South Bronx regarding the proposed rent hikes that the Board is considering.

Access to safe, quality, and affordable housing is a fundamental right. The rent stabilization system is one of the cornerstones of affordable housing in our city. It has proven to be a lifeline to help working- and middle-class families remain in their homes and in their neighborhoods.

Over the past year, our city has faced multiple challenges relating to housing people and helping them stay in their homes. With the end of the COVID-19 emergency, we have seen the resumption of evictions through housing court. As one of the prime sponsors of our city's historic Right to Counsel legislation, I know well the devastation that families experience when they are evicted from their homes. This law has enabled thousands of residents to stay in their homes, and I will continue to work to ensure that it is strengthened and the program is fully implemented and funded.

Additionally, the current increase in asylum seekers coming to our city has put pressure on the shelter system. As our city works to get migrants into permanent housing, we must remain cognizant of the impacts that this will have on the overall housing picture. The overwhelming growth of our shelter population and the need for real and deeply affordable housing is at an all-time high and we simply cannot continue to ignore this issue.

Additionally, inflation has increased the financial stress faced by nearly all families in The Bronx and across our city. Over the past year, prices are up for food, energy, household items, and much more. The Board must take into account the financial pressures facing our working- and middle-class families as you consider any rent hikes.

The potential 2 to 5 percent hike in rents for one-year leases and 4 to 7 percent increase in two-year leases would be devastating for many of our working- and middle-class residents during an unprecedented housing crisis. Let us remember that the 3.25 percent and 5 percent increases for one- and two-year leases last year was the largest in a decade. A similar increase this year would prove to be untenable for many of our most at-risk tenants. Half of rent-stabilized tenants are rent burdened and do not receive any other housing subsidy.

While inflation has also increased costs for landlords, our first priority must be ensuring our residents are able to keep a roof over their heads. Rent-stabilized tenants in The Bronx simply cannot afford to pay exorbitant rent increases, especially when faced with inflation-driven price increases on everything else.

I urge the Rent Guidelines Board to protect vulnerable New Yorkers by rejecting these proposed rent increases. Increasing rent by these levels would force many Bronx tenants out of 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.