



**Homes and
Community Renewal**

**Testimony of RuthAnne Visnauskas
Commissioner/CEO of New York State Homes and
Community Renewal
Joint Budget Hearing of the Legislative Fiscal Committees
on the Housing Budget for Fiscal Year 2017-18**

Good morning Chairpersons Young, Farrell, Cymbrowitz, Little, and distinguished members of the Legislature.

My name is RuthAnne Visnauskas, and I'm Executive Deputy Commissioner of New York State Homes and Community Renewal.

It's an honor to be here today to testify on the housing portion of Governor Andrew Cuomo's Executive Budget proposal for State Fiscal Year 2017-18.

Since I've not had the pleasure of appearing before you in this role before, I'd like to start by offering some insight into my background and expertise.

I've been serving as HCR's Executive Deputy under Commissioner Rubin since 2015, where I'm responsible for strategic leadership and oversight of a myriad of programs including our multi-family finance programs, SONYMA, which provides mortgages to first time homebuyer, the Office of Community Renewal, among others.

Before joining HCR I was Managing Director of the Housing Advisory Board for the Robin Hood Foundation, New York's largest poverty-fighting organization.

Prior to that, I held several key positions at the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development, including serving Deputy Commissioner for Development as well as Commissioner.

Like Governor Cuomo, I have a deep commitment to increasing access to safe, decent homes for people and families across New York State.

I'm proud to have been charged with leading HCR and thrilled that the Governor has—once again—made housing and community renewal a priority in his Executive Budget proposal.

Governor Cuomo knows, as you and I do, that access to quality, affordable homes makes life better, communities stronger, and opportunities greater for everyone.

As always, we are thankful for the Legislature's partnership as we've worked to address New York's housing needs, and I ask for your continued support building on this proposal.

Before I note highlights of the Executive Budget, I want to give you some examples of what we've achieved this past year on behalf of New York families with the resources you have helped us secure.

In 2016 New York State Homes and Community Renewal made significant progress increasing access to affordable housing and securing the futures of families and individuals across the state.

The agency set a record again this past year, financing the creation or preservation of more than 17,000 affordable homes and apartments.

And we were the number one housing bond issuer in the nation with \$2.8 billion issued.

Our Unified Funding housing round awarded more than \$122 million for affordable housing in urban, suburban, and rural areas of New York. The awards will build or preserve nearly 2,000 affordable apartments and leverage more than \$450 million in public and private resources.

We also continue to make great progress transforming 8,600 aging Mitchell- Lama apartments in critical need of repairs and upgrades into quality, safe homes. This year, we preserved another 1,360 Mitchell Lama apartments, bringing the total to 6,660 in 26 locations and keeping this crucial stock of housing for middle-income New Yorkers affordable for another 40 years.

And because good homes and strong communities go hand in hand, HCR's New York Main Street program awarded more than \$6 million in 2016 for the renovation of 77 residential units and 85 commercial spaces in downtowns and mixed-use business districts throughout the state.

These awards will leverage more than \$10 million dollars in additional investment and stimulate reinvestment in properties located within mixed-use commercial districts and adjacent neighborhoods, with a focus on sustainable downtown revitalization.

The agency has also put a major emphasis on fighting housing discrimination, with the 2016 launch of HCR's Fair Housing Enforcement Program to uncover discrimination in home rental and sale transactions and ensure compliance with state, federal and local fair housing laws.

And most recently, we introduced the Affordable New York Housing Program, which expands the production of affordable housing and provides fair wages for the workers who build them.

This is just a sample of what we've achieved in the past year, and while I'm proud of the work we've done, there remains a long road ahead.

The successes we've had are due in large part to programs and funding sources that were time-limited or temporary. We've been resourceful in our use of these funds, and it's critical to New York families that we maintain our record-breaking production numbers and provide our partners in the affordable housing community a multi-year funding plan to continue its work.

That's why the Governor's Executive Budget continues funding support for his unprecedented \$20 billion five-year Affordable and Homeless Housing Plan.

We have the potential with this budget—and with your help—to address our affordable housing crisis and do more for New Yorkers facing housing insecurity and homelessness than ever before.

The plan will address New York’s affordable, supportive and homeless housing crisis by building or preserving more than 100,000 housing units across the state over five years.

The proposal includes a \$2 billion re-appropriation of capital and \$526 million in new appropriations.

The Housing Plan will leverage HCR’s proven programs to do even more to address the diverse housing needs across the state and create new opportunities for low and moderate-income households.

The plan will include 50,000 units of new construction and the preservation of 50,000 existing units desperately in need of rehabilitation, the majority of which will be targeted to low- and very low-income households.

The need is there. The plan is in place. And I am confident that with your support we can have a substantial impact on meeting the housing demand in our state.

In closing, the Executive Budget housing proposal builds on the Governor's commitment to moving New York families and individuals forward. It joins other bold initiatives—like increasing the minimum wage—to establish New York as a national leader and provide struggling families and individuals with the stability they need to succeed.

Your partnership has been instrumental in all that we've been able to achieve so far.

I'm asking for your help again as we move forward on our path to assuring all New Yorkers have access to decent affordable homes and the opportunity to thrive.

Thank you. I'm happy to address your questions.