

TAKEROOT JUSTICE

Testimony to NYCHA *FY21 Draft Annual Plan*

December 8, 2020

My name is Paula Segal. I am speaking today as Senior Attorney in the Equitable Neighborhoods practice of TakeRoot Justice. TakeRoot works with grassroots groups, neighborhood organizations and community coalitions to help make sure that people of color, immigrants, and other low-income residents who have built our city are not pushed out in the name of “progress.” We work together with our partners and clients to ensure that residents in historically under-resourced areas have stable housing they can afford, places where they can connect and organize, jobs to make a good living, and other opportunities that allow people to thrive.

The Public Housing Preservation Trust Must Not Go Forward During the COVID-19 Pandemic

The Annual Plan includes a summary of the proposed “Blueprint for Change” and “Public Housing Preservation Trust” (Trust) in its executive summary. While we do not consider this to be a part of the actual Annual Plan—no detail is provided, and therefore its inclusion in the plan does not satisfy any of NYCHA’s regulatory requirements—we do want to take the opportunity to explain our opposition to the proposal.

Fundamentally, the Trust proposal represents an attempt to radically change the structure of NYCHA under cover of a national emergency. No public hearings are being held in person and no residents have the opportunity to testify in person, consult their neighbors in-person, or do any of the public-engagement activities that require close contact. Many public-housing residents will necessarily be excluded from the public debate over whether to move forward with the Trust. For this reason alone, NYCHA should not be taking any action to advance the Trust.

NYCHA Must Not Advance the Privatization of New York City Public Housing Without Resident Control

This year’s draft Annual Plan continues NYCHA’s steady march toward privatizing New York City’s public housing, without adequate opportunity for NYCHA residents to participate in and influence the process. As discussed above, *any* attempts at engagement during a pandemic will necessarily be insufficient. But even outside of a public-health emergency, NYCHA’s approach is insufficient. The Authority should not allow

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privatization, under any name, to move forward without the consultation and consent of the affected residents. NYCHA's practice of beginning resident consultation only after NYCHA has determined where the development or disposition will occur does not allow for resident control and should be eliminated.

NYCHA's choice to repeatedly proclaim that the Trust or RAD is not a process of privatization is a form of gaslighting. Our clients and colleagues clearly see that the transfer of management and/or ownership to private entities is a form of taking public housing out of the realm of public provision of public good and services.

Further, the draft plan clearly states that HUD is "considering" NYCHA's applications for Section 8 conversion of yet, earlier this year, NYCHA already announced that these campuses would be converted, and named the developers it would be working with.¹ This undermines the spirit of HUD oversight. This lack of alignment with the federal law, and the seeking of permission for something that NYCHA proclaims is a done deal, makes the prospect of putting faith into the NYCHA community engagement process untenable.

Expanding RAD pipeline while marketing Blueprint is confusing. NYCHA's Draft FY21 Annual Plan includes twenty campuses that are newly slated for transfer to private management and conversion to Section 8, announced for the first time in the draft, just as NYCHA is also for the first time introducing the Blueprint. Both are sweeping changes targeted at thousands of residents who are being asked to respond to specific plans for their specific campuses, while NYCHA purporting to invite their input on both. This is a situation that can only lead to confusion.

In the past few years, residents have been subjected to an alphabet soup of proposed interventions: RAD/PACT, Build to Preserve, NYCHA 2.0, the Blueprint, etc. The sequential and at times simultaneous release of multiple public housing proposals makes it difficult for residents to understand the variety of public interventions that may affect their housing security.

¹ See NYCHA Press Release, February 13, 2020, *NYCHA DESIGNATES DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS TO REPAIR AND PRESERVE OVER 5,900 AFFORDABLE APARTMENTS IN MANHATTAN AND BROOKLYN*, available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/nycha/about/press/pr-2020/pr-20200213-1.page>.

