

**TESTIMONY OF BARIKA WILLIAMS BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON  
HOUSING AND BUILDINGS REGARDING INTROS 1936-2020 and 1912-2020**

April 28, 2020

Good afternoon, and thank you Speaker Johnson, Chairman Cornegy, and members of the Committee on Housing and Buildings for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Barika Williams and I am the Executive Director of the Association for Neighborhood and Housing Development (ANHD). ANHD is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to build community power to win affordable housing and thriving, equitable neighborhoods for all New Yorkers. Our members include more than 80 neighborhood-based affordable housing and equitable economic development organizations across New York City, and we use capacity-building, organizing, and policy advocacy to advance our mission.

For decades, ANHD has fought against the harassment of tenants across New York City. Throughout the five boroughs, unscrupulous landlords continue to use harassment and other illegal tactics designed to displace tenants, raise rents, and increase their profits. This “cycle of displacement” disproportionately impacts low-income people of color, immigrants, and other marginalized populations who deserve to remain in their communities and their homes.

Ensuring that all tenants are protected against harassment during these challenging and stressful times is incredibly important. Amidst the global pandemic brought on by COVID-19, tenant harassment and displacement persists, and serves to further undermine affordability, exacerbate existing inequalities, and fuel gentrification.

Expanding the definition of harassment to include threats based on a person having been impacted by COVID-19 is absolutely necessary. Whether they’re essential workers laboring tirelessly on the front lines, struggling to make rent after losing their employment, or caring for a loved one impacted by COVID-19, all New Yorkers deserve to feel safe and secure in their homes.

Our Coalition Against Tenant Harassment (CATHnyc) fought hard to expand the legal definition of harassment in 2017, and was proud to work alongside the City Council to make the Certificate of No Harassment (CONH) Pilot Program a reality. We fully support passage of Intro 1936-2020, which builds on this foundation, and would be happy to continue working with the City Council to pass strong anti-harassment policies that protect tenants and prevent displacement.

We also appreciate the intention behind Intro 1912, to use the City’s authority over its own sheriffs and marshalls to prevent evictions beyond the timeline of the current moratorium. However, we do have a few concerns with this bill as drafted. Many of ANHD’s members are non-profit, mission-driven developers who own and manage thousands of units of affordable housing throughout the five boroughs. While tenants in these buildings are often struggling and in need of relief, pushing extended loss of rental income onto non-profit affordable housing developers creates its own problems. Our members operate on thin margins, because their rent levels are already set to be as affordable as possible for tenants. Absent additional subsidy to non-profit developers, extended gaps in collected rents will put them, their buildings, and ultimately the tenants they serve in an untenable position.

Finally, we must emphasize that while extending the time period during which tenants cannot be evicted is a valuable temporary measure, it cannot substitute for meaningful rent relief, which should be an absolute priority at all levels of government.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify, and for your work on this important legislation.