

**TESTIMONY OF MALIKA CONNER BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON
HOUSING AND BUILDINGS REGARDING TENANT SAFETY AND BUILDING SANITATION IN THE
TIME OF COVID-19**

June 29, 2020

Good afternoon, and thank you Chair Ampry-Samuel, Chair Cornegy and members of the Committees on Public Housing and Housing and Buildings for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Malika Conner and I am the Senior Organizer for Anti-Displacement at 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.

Under the warrant of habitability, tenants throughout New York City have a right to a safe, sanitary, and liveable apartment. This standard also applies to the public areas of residential buildings. However, we know anecdotally, that many landlords have used the COVID-19 pandemic as an excuse to let buildings slip into disrepair at a time when making sure buildings are clean and secure, and that tenants are protected from hazardous conditions, is more important than ever before.

Landlords have long subjected tenants across New York City to unsanitary and unsafe conditions. This is inhumane and has always been unacceptable. And when we add the public health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic to the equation, the risk that these conditions pose to tenants' health and safety is only heightened.

As we highlight in ANHD's 2020 Risk Chart, "How is Affordable Housing Threatened in Your Neighborhood", since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in New York City, decades of systemic inequities have only intensified. The pandemic immediately began to ravage communities of color, resulting in a death rate due to COVID-19 that is [twice as high](#) for Latinx and Black New Yorkers compared to whites. Communities of color also make up the majority of our essential workers who have had to continue to take subways and buses — exposing themselves to the virus at its peak while [simultaneously facing economic precarity and overcrowding](#), and exacerbating the disease's spread.

New Yorkers, especially essential workers on the frontlines of the pandemic who put their lives at risk to keep New York City running, should not have to face unclean and unsafe conditions at every corner — during their commutes, while at work, and in their homes. The health risks they face every day could be mitigated by making sure their buildings, the place they go to rest, rejuvenate, and take care of their families, are safe, sanitary, and livable. They deserve more.

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