

TESTIMONY FOR NYCHA CHAIRMAN JOHN B. RHEA

UPDATE ON NYCHA'S USE OF CITY COUNCIL FUNDING TO INSTALL SECURITY
SYSTEMS IN ITS DEVELOPMENTS

COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING

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CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS

Chairwoman Rosie Mendez, Members of the Committee, and other distinguished Members of the City Council, thank you for this opportunity to discuss the New York City Housing Authority's (NYCHA) comprehensive strategy to enhance the security of our public housing communities. I am John B. Rhea, Chairman of the New York City Housing Authority. Joining me this morning are Executive Vice President for Capital Projects Raymond Ribeiro as well as other members of NYCHA's management team.

When I was appointed Chairman of NYCHA three years ago, Mayor Michael Bloomberg gave me a clear mandate to restore financial stability, maximize economic opportunity and development, and enhance residents' quality of life in our developments. Since then, together with the Administration's steadfast support, one of our critical priorities has been to improve resident safety. For over eight years, NYCHA and the City Council have worked together to further this aim, and it is in this spirit of partnership that I am here today to share our record of progress.

There have been significant strides in reducing criminal activity in New York City public housing communities. In fact, crime has dropped a total of 23 percent in NYCHA properties over the past 10 years. NYCHA's over 400,000 residents are safer than they were a decade ago. However, we know that there is more that can and must be done to make the City's public

housing families feel safer in their homes. To that end, I am here to describe the status of NYCHA's planning and installation of security systems over the next year and our long-term strategic vision to improve safety for our residents.

Setting the Record Straight

Recent media reports have suggested that NYCHA failed to implement measures during the past eight years that would safeguard the homes and lives of our residents and employees. On the contrary, during this period we took decisive, proactive measures and made cost-effective choices to ensure a long-term, sustainable approach to security. I realize that when I made the decision in 2010 to take a step back to evaluate NYCHA's security approach, we could have better managed expectations about the length of time required to evaluate our strategy and engage stakeholders. But when I hear the experiences of Resident Leaders such as Nancy Ortiz of the Lower East Side, who, together with Council Members Mendez and Chin, secured funding for and actively designed systems that will address the security needs at Vladeck Houses, I know that my decision was the right one for the families we serve. As I will describe later in this testimony, this evaluation period ultimately resulted in reduced camera costs, more security options for our residents, and a better value for the expenditures (that is, more security enhancements for the money). Let me now set the record straight on several actions that NYCHA took over the past few years.

- It was reported that \$42 million was designated for security cameras in NYCHA developments over the last eight years, but no cameras were installed. Here's the reality: NYCHA has 6,827 closed-circuit

television (CCTV) cameras of varying scale installed at 538 buildings in 105 developments citywide. We installed more than half of those cameras, a total of 3,497, between 2003 and 2012, to the benefit of over 87,000 residents. Seventy-five percent of the \$42 million in government funding for camera and security enhancements was committed over the past three years. While we did hold off on utilizing new allocations beginning in 2010 in order to develop a comprehensive, standardized security model, we continued to deliver on projects that had already started and the number of cameras in our developments continued to rise citywide.

- It was reported that the price tag for putting security cameras in the City's most dangerous housing developments has gone up even as housing officials sat on the money for that installation. The reality is that in our new security architecture, cameras are now 50 percent cheaper. The average cost for installing CCTV cameras prior to our evaluation period in 2010 was \$165,000 per building. In our new architecture, the average cost per building for cameras is now \$80,000. Economies of scale, competitive bidding, and more technology options account for this significant cost savings; residents get more security from the City Council's investment.
- It was reported that security camera installation would move forward only after it was revealed that \$42 million in funding was sitting unused. The reality is that NYCHA's revised Safety and Security program was initiated in early 2011 to create a universal platform for selection and placement of security enhancements in all NYCHA developments. This comprehensive approach, known as layered access control (LAC), would include modern intercoms, wireless key

fobs, technologically advanced cameras, and vandalism-resistant door hardware. For the past year, we have been—and still are—on track to roll out a uniform, technologically advanced security system at 85 of our developments citywide by the fall of 2013.

History of NYCHA's Safety and Security Efforts

In order to understand where we are and where we are going, I think it is important to recognize where we've been. Our first cameras were installed in 1997. Historically, the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) provided us with over \$35 million annually for drug elimination activities, including the installation of CCTV cameras. But those Federal anti-crime funds were eliminated in 2003, leaving NYCHA no recourse but to rely on financial allocations from elected officials in order to sustain the CCTV program. The effort progressed with camera installations on a development-by-development basis.

Following my appointment in 2009 as Chairman, preliminary feedback on safety issues from staff, residents, and the New York City Police Department (NYPD) indicated that we needed to take a closer look at our security strategy to address systemic and complex issues. The Safety and Security Task Force (SSTF), a partnership among multiple stakeholders, was formed to identify areas of vulnerability, determine how best to utilize allocated funds, and find solutions to improve and strengthen community relationships. Based on the Task Force's preliminary findings, I decided, in 2010, to review and evaluate any new CCTV-related construction that had not yet been initiated so that a quality assessment could be made.

After evaluating the existing system, speaking with residents, consulting security experts, and reviewing public housing best practices, the team identified a number of issues. There was no consistent methodology or technology platform for CCTV across NYCHA developments, which resulted in less efficient and effective use of the equipment. The stand-alone systems were unreliable, antiquated, and incurred high installation costs. Additionally, the procurement process to furnish and install cameras was found to be inefficient and time consuming.

SSTF Recommendations

Chief among the Task Force's recommendations was that a three-tier approach to better secure building entrances would more effectively deter criminal activity than cameras alone. Equipment will be uniform agency-wide, and capital costs for the initial camera installation, as well as maintenance, will be reduced. And the new system will offer greater value due to technological enhancements like fiber optics, smart cameras, and the use of network communication hubs known as security operations centers. Also, system standardization and a proactive contracting delivery method implemented by NYCHA will significantly shorten the procurement process.

As a result of this innovative, comprehensive approach, NYCHA was awarded a national competitive grant of \$250,000 from HUD for layered access control improvements in 2010. With that award, together with additional funding from Council Member Maria del Carmen Arroyo and

NYCHA's Capital Program, Mott Haven Houses in the Bronx became the pilot location for layered access control.

2010 to the Present

Contrary to the notion that we have been “sitting on our hands” for the last two years, NYCHA, acting as a responsible steward of tax dollars, took proactive steps to ensure the long-term viability of the City Council's financial investment while ensuring community support. Over the past decade, NYCHA received a total of \$75 million in Federal, State, and City funds and has spent \$33 million to date on CCTV cameras. Forty-two million dollars remain to provide security enhancements for the 85 earmarked developments. With a limited budget, it became clear that we needed to develop a new process to maximize cost-efficiencies and minimize implementation delays. After presenting the new security system options to City Council Members, we sought and obtained buy-in for the use of allocated funds per development. We have been engaging residents in the planning and design phase of the process, believing that their participation is crucial for improving security over the long term, and expect to complete these meetings by this fall. We are leveraging their knowledge of their communities, giving them a voice in prioritizing security enhancements and identifying camera locations. NYCHA has conducted over 130 meetings with elected officials, resident leadership, and the NYPD since 2010. I, along with NYCHA senior staff in Capital Projects, Operations, and Intergovernmental, discussed security program options, scope of work, and the technical needs at individual developments. In addition, NYCHA provided testimony to the City Council about our security enhancement

plans on several occasions. Most recently, on June 5th of this year, I testified before the Committees on Finance and Public Housing that we planned to complete all of the City Capital-funded CCTV/layered access projects by the fall of 2013, and that schedule remains largely unchanged. Most critically, we developed detailed technical specifications for all of the components of the new layered access concept, which allowed us to begin the procurement of several job order contracts in the summer of 2011. NYCHA proactively pursued these contracts, which allow up to \$65 million worth of work to be performed in anticipation of any future funding. This strategy has already paid off, as we were awarded an additional \$10 million in Fiscal Year 2013 funds this past July from elected officials that allowed us to implement safety enhancements without a lengthy new bidding process. The contracts also gave us detailed cost information so that residents and elected officials can clearly understand installation options, including cost, at each development.

And now I'd like to introduce Mr. Ribeiro, the Executive Vice President for Capital Projects, who will outline the other important milestones of our process and the overall status to date.

As Mr. Ribeiro described, the administrative challenges associated with such an effort are complex, time consuming, and sometimes beyond our immediate control. There is always room for improvement, and we are invested in identifying and addressing areas where we can accelerate our timelines. That said, we remain completely committed to this holistic approach and are on schedule for all funded work at the 85 properties to be completed by 2013. Four projects are currently underway and I am also

pleased to report that all planned phases of construction at Bayview Houses in Canarsie, Brooklyn, have been completed.

Moving Forward

While crime has fallen significantly in NYCHA communities, we can and must do more to ensure residents feel safe in their own homes. As outlined in *PlanNYCHA*, our comprehensive plan to make public housing developments safer goes beyond security cameras and layered access. Together with the NYPD, we're rolling out a series of security enhancement pilot programs to further drive down crime in NYCHA communities. These efforts increase NYPD patrol presence in 12 high-crime-risk properties and create new "Impact Zones" at the Soundview and Castle Hill developments. We are also expanding Operation CLEARs (Community-Law Enforcement Approach to Restoring Security), a community/NYPD/NYCHA partnership to tackle crime that has already delivered results in seven developments; this includes NYCHA staff performing building inspections, monitoring internal and external lights, and providing 24-hour emergency services to address NYPD-identified building repairs. CLEARs also involves the NYPD's expanded use of Skywatch, command post vehicles, and the roll out of youth engagement programs. We will also continue our successful partnership with all five District Attorneys to optimize lease enforcement.

As part of our comprehensive approach to safety, NYCHA will co-sponsor a gun buyback program on the 18th of August. We also recently received a \$110,000 grant through the New York Community Trust to improve our anti-gang programming, and we are in the process of implementing the

“Operation SNUG” anti-gang/anti-gun program at select developments. It is our hope that these efforts will alleviate acts of violence in our communities.

Conclusion

Ensuring that our communities remain safe is a collective responsibility. We—NYCHA employees, elected officials, advocates, residents, and the NYPD— all play a vital role in making neighborhoods safer.

We know that investing in new technology and creating enhanced security measures will take us only so far without the trust and cooperation of NYCHA’s residents, as well as the financial support and advocacy of the City Council. To address our chronic lack of programmatic funding, we have actively engaged many stakeholders to collaborate with us on improving the safety of NYCHA families by leveraging their financial resources and security expertise. But NYCHA cannot do this essential and urgent work alone. Improving the safety of our 334 developments, 2,600 buildings, and over 3,000 elevators is no small feat. Installing just cameras would require a \$200 million investment. And a comprehensive layered access control implementation is estimated to cost the Authority more than \$500 million. This new plan offers the opportunity to re-evaluate our funding strategy in order to take a more holistic approach, examining and prioritizing our entire portfolio of properties instead of allocating funding by district. We hope to work with the Council to establish an annual programmatic funding stream that would promote the most appropriate allocation of funds. Thank you, and we welcome any questions that you may have at this time.