



Richard Lee, Commissioner

ANNUAL REPORT

**The SCRIE and DRIE Ombudspersons
New York City Rent Freeze Program**

The NYC Office of the Taxpayer Advocate

October 1, 2026

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New York City Office of the Taxpayer Advocate

The SCRIE and DRIE Ombudspersons Fiscal Year 2026 Annual Report (Reporting Period: July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

Executive Summary

The Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) ombudsperson and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) ombudsperson positions were created by the New York City Council in 2015 to investigate and address issues concerning the Rent Freeze Program.¹ The ombudspersons are situated within the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate (OTA) in the Department of Finance (DOF). As part of their duties, the ombudspersons provide data regarding their work at the end of each fiscal year and make annual recommendations to the commissioner of DOF regarding Rent Freeze Program policies and operations. The following pages comprise the SCRIE and DRIE ombudspersons' ninth annual report on the New York City Rent Freeze Program and cover the period beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026.²

In the ombudspersons' view, the concept behind the Rent Freeze Program—preserving the housing security of vulnerable tenants while still making landlords whole—has for decades shown the City at its best: innovative,³ farsighted, and most of all, humane in a way that benefits all New Yorkers, whether directly or indirectly. This year, our state legislators have taken a crucial step in improving the program by increasing New York State's income eligibility limit to \$75,000.⁴ The New York City Council is considering a local law that would allow the proposed income limit to take effect in the City's Rent Freeze Program.⁵

DOF should implement targeted operational improvements and policy clarifications to ensure that as many people as possible benefit from the proposed increase in the income ceiling. The improvements and clarifications enumerated in this report address two key priorities: first,

¹ The Rent Freeze Program comprises both SCRIE and DRIE.

² The twelve-month period beginning July 1, 2025, and ending June 30, 2026, is both the ombudspersons' reporting period and DOF's fiscal year 2026. This period may be referred to in this report as the "2025-26 reporting period," "fiscal year 2026," etc.

³ To date, the Rent Freeze Program is the only one of its kind in the United States. In November 2025, a Los Angeles-based nonprofit organization released a report proposing a rent increase exemption program in Los Angeles and noting the NYC Rent Freeze Program as a point of reference (see *Los Angeles Proposed Rent Increase Exemption Program: Protecting Older Adults and People with Disabilities from Homelessness* at <https://www.saje.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/SAJE-RIEDR-RIESR-Rent-Increase-Exemption-Nov-25.pdf>, accessed Sep. 1, 2026).

⁴ New York Real Property Tax Law § 467-b(3)(a) and (b).

⁵ Int. No. 0978 2026.

helping tenants understand and access the benefits of the Rent Freeze Program, and second, the timely and accurate processing of a potentially significant increase in application volume. The ombudspersons' recommendations also reintroduce legislative changes that continue to be necessary to achieve the program's most basic purposes. All recommendations align with DOF's ongoing commitment to ensuring that the Rent Freeze Program remains a fair and reliable resource for qualifying New Yorkers.

The ombudspersons put forward this fiscal year's recommendations to the DOF commissioner in Part II of this report, focusing on the following key areas:

- Household members' benefit continuity
- Confirmation of landlord notices
- Responses to tax abatement credit adjustment requests
- Modifications to the application processing notice cycle
- Changing ownership information
- Self-help tools for program participants
- Automated processes in program operations
- Multi-unit training for DOF personnel
- Automatic reminders for incomplete online applications
- Alignment of the "one-third rule" with program goals
- Improving the efficacy of benefit succession

In Part III of this report, in light of the potential expansion of the Rent Freeze Program's reach under the proposed higher income limit, the ombudspersons have also reintroduced recommendations from prior years that may be relevant to possible challenges resulting from the change. These recommendations from the ombudspersons' prior reports center on the following issues, some of which are also raised in this year's recommendations: improving functionality in the Tenant Access Portal, increasing program participants' access to benefit details, and expansion of outreach.

As in previous reporting periods, the ombudspersons performed their duties with an eye toward DOF's larger mission to administer the tax and revenue laws of the City fairly, efficiently, and transparently to instill public confidence and encourage compliance while providing exceptional customer service.

Further information about the Rent Freeze Program is available at www.nyc.gov/rentfreeze. Previous annual reports can be accessed through the site's [How to Get Help](#) page. Information about the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate is available at www.nyc.gov/taxpayeradvocate.

Part I: Introduction

A. Rent Freeze Program Overview⁶

The Rent Freeze Program’s objective is to help seniors and people with disabilities to remain in their homes by “freezing” the dollar amount of their monthly out-of-pocket rent. Any increases in rent beyond the “frozen” amount are covered by a tax credit that is applied as a reduction to the building’s property taxes.

Between 2016 and 2019, the number of Rent Freeze households in New York City increased each year, from 72,299 in 2016 to a high of 75,515 in 2019. In 2020, the total number decreased by 5.1% to a total of 71,665 households, 59,862 of which received SCRIE benefits and 11,803 of which received DRIE benefits. By 2024, the total number of Rent Freeze households had declined to 67,677, comprising 56,665 SCRIE and 11,012 DRIE recipients. For 2023, the most recent year for which eligibility estimates are available, an estimated 158,214 total households were eligible for the Rent Freeze Program.

The average age of benefit recipients in 2024 was 77 for SCRIE and 64 for DRIE, and average household size was 1.5 persons for both SCRIE and DRIE. The average number of years that recipients stayed in the program ranged from 8.2 years in Staten Island to 9.6 years in the Bronx and between 10.2 and 10.9 years in Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens. A higher number of years in the program correlated with a higher average monthly benefit amount.

B. Establishment of Ombudsperson Positions and Reporting Requirements

Section 11-137 of the New York City Administrative Code establishes the SCRIE and DRIE ombudsperson positions within DOF. This section also states that the ombudspersons’ duties will include:

- (i) establishing a system for such ombudspersons to receive complaints with respect to each such rent increase exemption program;*
- (ii) investigating and responding to complaints received [pursuant to (i), above]; and*
- (iii) making recommendations to the commissioner of finance regarding the administration of each such rent increase exemption program, which may include recommendations for training appropriate department of finance staff members.⁷*

The ombudsperson positions are within the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate, which reports directly to the DOF commissioner.

⁶ The figures in Part IA were reported in DOF’s 2025 *Report on the New York City Rent Freeze Program*. The 2025 report contains the most recent Rent Freeze statistics published by DOF.

⁷ New York City Administrative Code § 11-137(a)(1).

In addition to establishing the ombudsperson positions, New York City Administrative Code Section 11-137 requires DOF to submit an annual report to the New York City Council:

No later than October first of each year, the department of finance shall submit a report to the council for the prior fiscal year, indicating:

- (i) the number and nature of inquiries received by the department of finance and the 311 citizen service center regarding the rent increase exemption programs;*
- (ii) the number, nature, and resolution of comments and complaints received by the ombudspersons ... regarding the rent increase exemption programs; and*
- (iii) any recommendations made by any such ombudsperson to the commissioner of finance regarding the administration of such rent increase exemption programs.⁸*

C. Operations of the Rent Freeze Program Ombudspersons

The ombudspersons primarily assist tenants with applying for, maintaining, or reinstating Rent Freeze Program benefits when they have been unable to resolve their issues through regular DOF channels. As required by the New York City Administrative Code, the ombudspersons' contact information is included on certain SCRIE and DRIE forms and notices, including those related to the denial of an application or its ensuing appeal, the revocation or termination of benefits, and the denial of a tenant's application to take over an existing benefit. The ombudspersons also monitor cases and input from program participants and community-based organizations to identify larger issues affecting the efficacy of the program with respect to its intended goals.

For fiscal year 2026, the total estimated dollar impact of the ombudspersons' casework was \$1,768,476 in benefits received.⁹ The ombudspersons' casework comprised matters involving tenants residing in each of the city's 51 council districts. More information on dollar impact by district is available in Part IV and Appendix I of this report.

⁸ New York City Administrative Code § 11-137 (a)(3).

⁹ See Appendix I.

Part II: Recommendations from the Current Reporting Period, Fiscal Year 2026

Recommendations in sections A and B in this part of the report describe matters to be undertaken internally by DOF, whether via rulemaking or policy change. Section C reintroduces pivotal recommendations from prior years that require lawmaking by the New York State Legislature.

A. Access to Benefits and Program Awareness

During the current fiscal year, the ombudspersons saw a marked increase in cases involving approved households that were not receiving the full benefits of the Rent Freeze Program. These issues were often caused by procedural problems, lack of information, or landlord non-compliance. In anticipation of a likely increase in program participants in the coming fiscal year, the ombudspersons make the following recommendations to ensure that new and existing participants understand and receive the full benefits of the Rent Freeze Program.

1. Household Member Benefit Takeovers

Recommendation: DOF should amend or adopt rules, seek State legislative change where necessary, and create internal processes to allow, upon the death or permanent relocation of the prior tenant, certain other tenants in the same household who are otherwise eligible for the Rent Freeze Program to continue the existing benefit based on information previously provided to DOF.

Per DOF policy, surviving or remaining spouses and registered domestic partners may be eligible to take over an existing Rent Freeze Program benefit without submitting a benefit takeover application if the original program beneficiary has died or permanently relocated. However, for any other household members, including those siblings, children, and unmarried partners who may have cohabitated with the prior tenant and benefited from the same frozen rent, DOF requires the submission of a benefit takeover application to name a new benefit holder. This results in a process that creates uncertainty and puts the onus on cohabitating family members or companions—who may still be dealing with the effects of a death or illness in the household—to provide additional documentation of their eligibility for the benefit takeover or risk losing the benefit.

The ombudspersons recommend that DOF pursue State legislative change that would allow eligible household members, in cases where the named program beneficiary dies or permanently relocates, to continue the benefit without need for a benefit takeover application, regardless of their relationship to the prior tenant. If, for example, there are two eligible tenants living in the same apartment who have, as part of past applications, submitted information that shows that both are eligible for the program, the death or permanent relocation of one of those persons would not necessitate a new application from the remaining household member. The benefit would simply continue, but with the prior household member no longer listed as a beneficiary. Additionally, by rulemaking processes, DOF should expand the category of persons who are not required to submit a benefit takeover application.

2. Confirmation of Landlord Notices

Recommendation: DOF should create an automated report that lists previously sent landlord notices and their respective dates of mailing. The report should state that the information therein contains exactly the same details as the issued exemption order and should be interchangeable with that order for purposes of confirming the benefit.

Participation in the Rent Freeze Program is not optional for landlords, nor do they have any authority to determine whether a tenant can participate in the program. Nevertheless, the ombudspersons this year saw a 42% increase in cases¹⁰ where tenants already approved by the program contacted the ombudspersons because they were charged higher rent amounts by landlords claiming that the tenant had not proven their eligibility to pay the frozen rent. In most cases, the tenant provided the landlord with a copy of the approval letter or other documentation of their benefit. A large portion of these tenants reported that they would pay the amount demanded by the landlord, despite having been approved for the program.

Tenants are not required to notify landlords of their benefit status; landlords already receive multiple communications regarding their tenants' Rent Freeze Program benefits, including approval letters and monthly statements showing their credit amounts. In addition, landlords can access important Rent Freeze documents and information via the online Landlord Express Access Portal (LEAP). Still, many tenants incorrectly believe that they bear the burden of proving the benefit to their landlords and go to great lengths to obtain, for example, additional copies of letters previously mailed to the landlord or detailed tax abatement credit (TAC) reports that landlords could obtain themselves online.

The ombudspersons recommend that DOF provide tenants with documentation confirming that they can pay their frozen rent amount with or without the cooperation of their landlords. This documentation could include the dates of past notices from DOF to the landlord and an explanation that the landlord plays no part in determining the tenant's eligibility for benefits.

3. Responses to Tax Abatement Credit Adjustment Requests

Recommendation: DOF should respond in writing to all adjustment requests. Responses should acknowledge that DOF received a request and note the applicant's stated reason for the request (as marked on the original form). Ideally, in cases where DOF does not approve the request, a reason for the decision would be provided.

In order to request a change or correction to DOF's frozen rent and TAC calculations, tenants or landlords can submit a tax abatement credit adjustment application with supporting documentation. These requests are often made in connection with a special rent change that is approved by the New York State Division of Homes and Community Renewal (DHCR), such as a rent increase based on major capital improvements. If the requested adjustment is made, the parties will receive a confirmation of the change in the benefit amounts. If DOF determines that

¹⁰ As stated in Part III.C. of this report, the number of cases in this category rose from 74 in FY 2025 to 96 in FY 2026.

the adjustment should not be made, the application is still considered to have been processed, but no response or notice of any kind is sent to the applicant.

Applicants have called the ombudspersons to verify whether an adjustment application has been received, only to find that the application has long since been processed and that the request has not been granted. In addition to receiving a confirmation of their request, applicants should be informed when DOF determines not to approve a requested adjustment. Otherwise, households attempting to obtain the correct benefit amount risk being left in an administrative limbo, unable to pursue other options for redress that might be available to them.

4. Modifications to Notice Cycle

Recommendation: The schedule for notices sent to applicants requesting additional documentation should be adjusted in cases where an applicant's benefit may otherwise be erroneously revoked.

The current schedule for requesting additional application materials usually begins when the first document for an application is processed. Notices are then sent automatically at preset intervals that cannot be manually changed. This process can result in two systemic processing errors.

First, an applicant's notice cycle and their grace period may become misaligned in a way that can result in the applicant's benefits being revoked for an incomplete application even though there is still time remaining to complete their renewal. Second, when DOF processing takes longer than usual, delays in the notice cycle can result in benefits being temporarily revoked even though the applicant submitted materials on time. DOF should ensure that benefits are not revoked before timely received application materials are processed, and tenants should not receive revocation notices when they still have time to complete their applications.

5. Ownership Change Process

Recommendation: The Property, Finance Information Technology (FIT), and Land Records divisions should create a process by which changes to ownership that are recorded by the Land Records Division trigger a corresponding update in the Rent Increase Exemption (RIE) database, either automatically or through an internal notification protocol. The Rent Freeze Program should also issue a response to tenant requests for changes to the program's ownership records. The response should inform tenants that these records can only be changed by landlords and that tax abatement credits continue to be issued to the correct building and apartment regardless of ownership contact information.

Information in the RIE database regarding building ownership reflects exactly what is stated in the public record, and changes to ownership information cannot be made directly to a Rent Freeze Program participant's account. In fact, changes to ownership information in the Rent Freeze Program database are not possible by any means. Because the RIE database is not connected with the Land Records Division or Automated City Register Information System (ACRIS), even if the public record changes as a result of an ownership transfer, the information in the RIE database remains the same, resulting in incorrect ownership information.

A change in ownership does not affect whether the tax abatement credits are properly transferred. The credits are associated with the property's borough-block-lot number, which does not change even if the owner changes. The owner of the property will receive the tax abatement credit, regardless of the name on the account.

Despite this, the ombudspersons handled multiple cases this year in which new landlords refused to bill a tenant the frozen rent amount because the Rent Freeze Program had not changed the ownership information connected with the tenant's benefit. Tenants were told by landlords that the incorrect ownership information prevented the tax abatement credits from being transferred correctly. Usually, the landlord put the onus on the tenant to update the ownership information; until the change was made, the tenant might be billed the full lease amount.

A tenant who made such a request would not be aware that, because the Rent Freeze Program's processors cannot change ownership information, they generally do not take any action if notified by a program participant that ownership has changed, although the applicant is never informed that this is the case. Aside from the problem of applicants being unaware that their request will not result in any change, landlords may continue to claim that the benefit is being incorrectly administered and is therefore invalid until the correction is made. Correct owner information is therefore crucial to the tenant's ability to benefit from the Rent Freeze Program.

6. Self-Help Tools

6(a). Access to Application and Benefit Information via the Tenant Access Portal (TAP)

Recommendation: Via TAP accounts, which can be accessed online by program participants, DOF should publish submission receipts and upload dates that are currently available internally.

Each year, requests for submission status and confirmation of benefit history make up a large portion of the ombudspersons' cases and inquiries. The outcome of an application submission can determine whether a family can afford to remain in their home; tenants and landlords alike are understandably anxious to know where submissions are in the process and whether those submissions have been deemed sufficient. While general submission status inquiries arise from a wide range of circumstances, benefit history reports are most often requested in the context of landlord-tenant disputes. Most of this year's benefit history report requests originated with pro bono legal organizations representing tenants in housing court.

This year, requests for information regarding submission status or benefit history reports comprised the largest percentage of matters to date, at almost a third of the ombudspersons' casework.¹¹ Notably, these types of cases should not be handled by the ombudspersons—they are generally straightforward requests that can easily be addressed by 311 or DOF customer service and therefore do not fit within the ombudspersons' role within the agency. The ombudspersons do regularly take on these matters, however, precisely because of their importance to program

¹¹ As reflected in Part III.C. of this report, the ombudspersons handled 501 matters involving submission status and requests for TAC reports in FY 2026.

participants and the extreme difficulty of obtaining the desired information through the normal channels. For tenants who try to request this information by phone, the average hold time currently exceeds one hour, and those who submit the request via the Rent Freeze portal may wait several weeks or longer for a response.

Most of this information is internally available in a simple, accessible format, albeit across two separate platforms.¹² This same information, without changing format or content, would satisfy the vast majority of requests for application status or benefit history details. Having direct access to this information would allow program participants to easily obtain benefit details in the way that, for example, DOF's Property Tax Public Access web portal gives taxpayers access to their property tax accounts. It is difficult to overstate the potential benefits to the agency in giving tenants this direct access, from drastically reducing the number of customer service requests, and in turn cutting down hold times and email response times, to preventing duplicate submissions and eliminating the need to generate and send benefit histories in response to each individual request. Concerns about protecting tenants' information may be alleviated by making the information available via individual TAP accounts, which are already configured to be accessible only to the relevant applicant.

6(b). Short Video Tutorials

Recommendation: DOF should produce short videos informing viewers of important information regarding the Rent Freeze Program.

Many important aspects of the Rent Freeze Program are relatively unknown to tenants and only conveyed, if at all, after a problem arises. For example, applicants often ask what they can submit as income documentation if they are submitting prior to having filed their taxes. While the answer to this question can be found on the Rent Freeze Program's website, short video content may be more helpful than static text in addressing such inquiries. DOF may already have data that would help identify potential video topics.

B. Efficiencies in Application Processing

This year, average processing times increased for a number of reasons, resulting in significantly higher numbers of customer service requests (regarding premature revocations, late landlord credit transfers, etc.). The increase in volume per processor may also have contributed to the 35.3% increase in the number of cases involving processor error. Any further increase in application volume, particularly on the scale anticipated in connection with the increase in the income limit, calls for DOF to maximize application processing efficiency without compromising accuracy of review.¹³ The recommendations in this section focus on this goal.

¹² One is a document repository that can show all submissions that have been received for a given application, as well as the date on which a submission was uploaded into the Rent Freeze document queue. The other is a tool used by DOF as well as tenant support units in other agencies to verify current application status and benefit history details.

¹³ Related recommendations from prior years can be found in Part III.A.

1. Automated Operational Processes

Recommendation: DOF should invest in implementing automated processes to maximize processing efficiency and data utilization in the Rent Freeze Program.

Given the relatively uniform nature of application documentation and reporting requirements in the Rent Freeze Program, automated processes could substantially reduce processing times while optimizing data collection and sorting capabilities. The increase in application volume anticipated as a result of the change in the income eligibility limit makes this an especially important moment for DOF to move forward in its use of automated technology.

DOF is currently working on automated application processing for short form renewal applications, but there are numerous other areas where automation could lead to increased efficiency, faster processing times, and more accurate identification of areas for improvement. For example, automated response systems could enhance customer service by taking over certain basic inquiries, thereby giving specialists more time to tackle complicated issues and provide more nuanced and effective assistance. Widely used technologies such as optical character recognition (OCR) could be employed to read and record application data, greatly reducing the time it takes for an application to move from submission to approval. At the same time, OCR and other automated data collection tools could identify possibilities for future program refinements and help in the design of more customized support and services, increasing both participation and retention rates for eligible residents.

To take full advantage of automation, DOF personnel with expertise in technology, customer service, and program management should explore the possibilities of automated processes for the Rent Freeze Program. DOF should implement automation immediately in areas involving processing times, while also developing a long-term strategy for improvements in customer interaction and internal operations.

2. Multi-Unit Training

Recommendation: DOF should conduct comprehensive and in-depth Rent Freeze Program training for key program personnel.

Rent Freeze Program application processing needs to be both accurate and efficient. A mistake in processing may lead to the delay or denial of benefits to eligible applicants. Such errors, even when corrected, expend additional time and strain DOF's processing resources. The ombudspersons' cases for this year showed an increase in processing errors and the provision of inaccurate information to customers, despite certain aspects of processing having been simplified.¹⁴ The nature and frequency of certain errors suggest areas for significant improvement in the training of Rent Freeze personnel. DOF should ensure that staff have the tools, resources, and training they need to process applications and respond to inquiries quickly and correctly.

¹⁴ See discussion of the "Processor Error" category for this fiscal year in Part IV.C.

3. Automatic Reminders for Incomplete Online Applications

Recommendation: Applicants who submit a partial application via TAP should receive an electronic reminder notice prior to the deadline.

DOF has encouraged program participants, whether initial applicants or renewing tenants, to submit their applications and documentation via TAP. The ombudspersons have encountered cases where the applicant has started an application in TAP but failed to finish it in time. In one case, the applicant had merely neglected to click “Submit.” In such cases, a simple reminder could make the difference in an applicant’s benefit start date or ability to join and remain in the program at all.

C. Legislative Priorities

In this section, two sets of legislative recommendations, regarding the so-called “one-third rule” and the benefit takeover processing rules, address the changes most urgently needed to help the Rent Freeze Program achieve its intended purpose.

1. “One-Third Rule” Alignment

1(a). Frozen Rent Proportionality

Recommendation: Application of the one-third rule should result in the tenant paying at least one-third of *current* application income, whether higher or lower than the prior frozen rent, so long as the frozen rent does not fall below the original frozen rent amount approved with the initial application. If necessary, DOF should pursue State legislative changes to effect this recommendation.

According to SCRIE’s eligibility rules, an applicant’s rent must be greater than one-third of their monthly income (the “one-third rule”). As a result, at the time of the initial application and at each renewal, an applicant whose existing frozen rent is less than one-third of monthly income will have their frozen rent increased to equal one-third of their monthly income. For a tenant whose frozen rent is increased under the one-third rule, the increase becomes permanent, regardless of whether the tenant’s income subsequently decreases.¹⁵ In contrast, the tenant whose benefit is revoked for exceeding the income limit can restart during the following calendar year at the prior frozen rent, with no increase (the so-called “income spike rule”), assuming eligibility requirements are met at the time of reapplication. Under current practice, a renewing Rent Freeze tenant with a significant, one-time increase in income can face different possible outcomes without any justification for the disparity. More importantly, the outcome may arbitrarily hinder the program’s ability to preserve affordability for certain tenants.

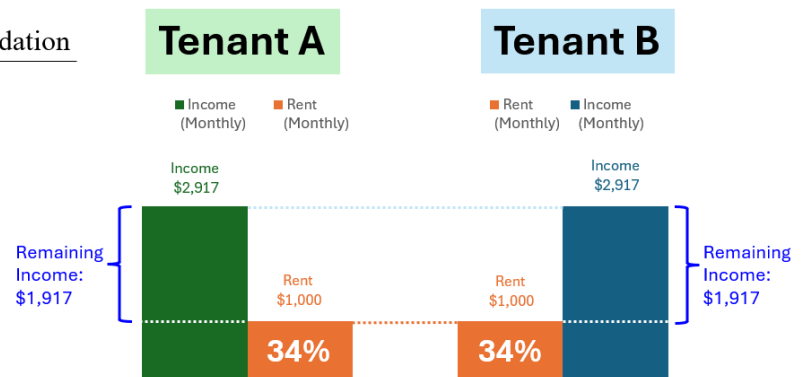
¹⁵ While this is DOF’s current practice, OTA found no indication in its research on the applicable statutes that the frozen rent, once increased, was required to remain at that level, as opposed to being returned to its previous level in subsequent income years so long as the tenant still paid at least one-third of income toward rent. On this and any other questions of legislative permissibility regarding the recommendations in this report, however, DOF’s official position would be determined by its Legal Affairs Division.

The tenants in the following example are hypothetical but reflect actual tenants in substantially the same position. Prior to 2022, Tenants A and B both had annual household incomes of \$35,000, the same frozen rent (\$1,000), and the same legal rent (\$1,500). In 2022, special pandemic unemployment payments raised Tenant A's income to \$50,100 and Tenant B's income to \$49,500. As a result, Tenant A's benefit was revoked, while Tenant B's frozen rent increased to \$1,375. The following year, both tenants' incomes returned to their normal level. Tenant A reapplied and, under the income spike rule, continued in the program at the original frozen rent. Despite Tenant B's income also returning to its prior level, Tenant B's monthly frozen rent at renewal remains at \$1,375. As a result, Tenant B will pay \$4,500 more in rent each year in perpetuity compared to Tenant A, even if Tenant B's income continues to diminish.

Example of "1/3 Rule" Without Recommendation

2022

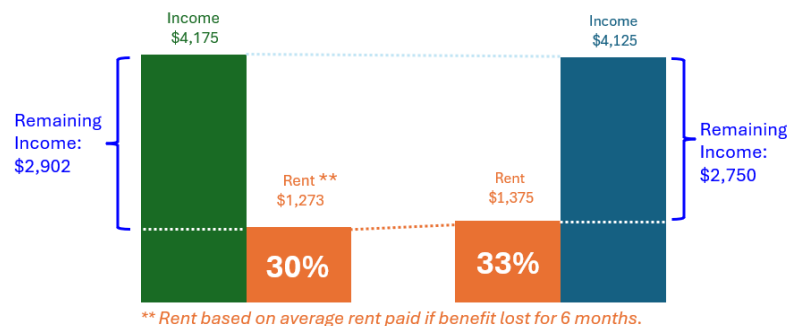
- Both have same annual income (\$35,000)
- Both have same monthly legal rent (\$1,500)
- Both have same monthly frozen rent (**\$1,000**)



2023

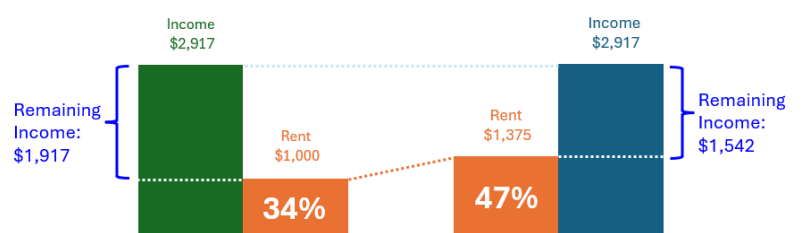
- Same legal rent per RGB increases
- Special Pandemic Unemployment raises annual income to:
 - Tenant A: \$50,100 → **BENEFIT REVOKED***
 - Tenant B: \$49,500 → **MONTHLY FROZEN RENT INCREASES TO \$1,375**

* Tenant A will lose between 1 and 12 months of benefit depending on the timing of lease and application.



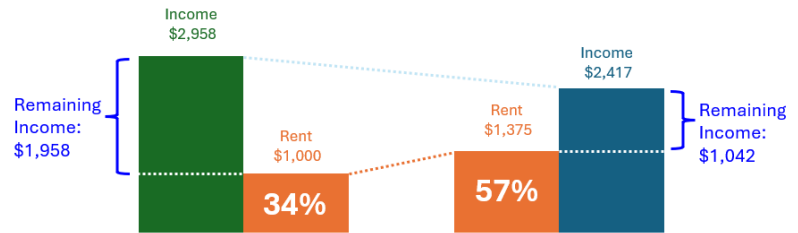
2024

- Same legal rent per RGB increases
- Same annual income (returns to \$35,000)
- **Frozen Rent Disparity**
 - Tenant A: **MONTHLY FROZEN RENT RETURNS to \$1,000** through "income spike" provision
 - Tenant B: **MONTHLY FROZEN RENT CONTINUES at \$1,375**



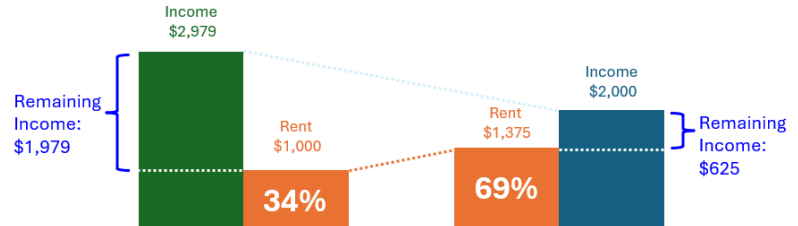
2025

- Same legal rent per RGB increases
- Tenant A annual income **increases** to \$35,500
→ Monthly frozen rent is **\$1,000**
- Tenant B annual income **decreases** to \$29,000
→ Monthly frozen rent continues at **\$1,375**



2026

- Same legal rent per RGB increases
- Tenant A annual income **increases** to \$35,750
→ Monthly frozen rent is **\$1,000**
- Tenant B's annual income **decreases** to \$24,000
→ Monthly frozen rent continues at **\$1,375**



Aside from the outcome being inequitable on its face, the existence of the income spike rule suggests that the difference in outcomes is unintentional. The income spike rule exists for the express reason of allowing tenants to have one anomalous income year (up to three separate times) without having to start again at a higher frozen rent that would not be affordable under their normal income. All tenants should have this same opportunity, rather than excluding some tenants based on a superficial distinction.

Under our recommendation, the outcome for Tenant B in the example above would change as follows, with Tenant A and Tenant B both continuing at a frozen rent of \$1,000:

	2022		2023 *		2024		2025		2026	
	Income	Frozen Rent	Income	Frozen Rent	Income	Frozen Rent	Income	Frozen Rent	Income	Frozen Rent
Tenant A	35,000	1,000	50,100	1,273**	35,000	1,000	35,500	1,000	35,750	1,000
Tenant B	35,000	1,000	49,500	1,375	35,000	1,000	29,000	1,000	24,000	1,000

* In 2023, Tenant A loses between 1 and 12 months of benefit reapproval as income spike.

** Tenant A's 2023 rent figure is the average rent paid if revoked for 6 months before re-entering program.

1(b). Safeguards for Households Near Poverty Level

Recommendation: DOF should pursue State legislative changes to ensure that households with an income of 150% or less of the federal poverty guideline are not subject to the one-third rule.¹⁶

In accordance with a legislative change in 2015, the Rent Freeze Program requires that participating tenants pay at least one-third of their income toward their rent. For applicants at the lowest income levels, the one-third rule can result in a harsh penalty, either in the form of program exclusion or higher frozen rent. For example, if a couple living on less than \$1,800 per month is fortunate enough to find an apartment for \$500 per month, they will not be able to

¹⁶ The percentage is based on *The New York City Government Poverty Measure 2020 Report*, issued by the Mayor's Office for Economic Opportunity in May 2023, which estimated a New York City poverty threshold approximately 46% higher than the U.S. poverty threshold.

freeze their rent at that amount. They will continue to pay their rent increases until their rent reaches at least \$600 per month, at which point they will become income-eligible for Rent Freeze. For this couple, whose income is below the U.S. poverty guideline,¹⁷ the one-third rule has both delayed their entry into the program and ensured that they will pay an additional \$1,200 in rent per year than they otherwise would have. Moreover, if, for example, their extended family offers them an additional \$150 per month for living expenses, the one-third rule may either cause their frozen rent to increase or exclude them from the program entirely.

To require that households living close to the poverty line pay more in rent before becoming eligible for the program seems contrary to the program's intent of preserving affordability and housing security for low-income seniors and disabled persons.

2. Benefit Takeover Improvements

2(a). Grace Period for Surviving/Remaining Tenants

Recommendation: DOF should pursue amendments to State legislation that would allow tenants who reach age or disability benefit eligibility within the six months provided for submitting the benefit takeover application or sometime before the end of the same calendar year (whichever provides more time) to take over a program benefit if all other eligibility criteria are met. The tenant's household would not receive the benefit until the month of actual eligibility, but they would be eligible to apply and then restart the existing benefit as of the month of eligibility.

Benefit takeover applications can coincide with extremely difficult circumstances for tenants, as they often follow the death or permanent hospitalization of a household member. In addition to the other hardships associated with these types of events, landlords may pressure remaining household members to relinquish the apartment once the prior tenant is gone.

Under the current rules, successor tenants may take up to six months to submit a benefit takeover application, but they are required to be eligible immediately upon the death or permanent relocation of the prior tenant. This means that if a successor tenant turns 62 or finally begins receiving disability benefits just a few days after the prior tenant's departure, that household loses the frozen rent and must start the application process again as if it never had the benefit. For some successor tenants who are just shy of 62, or who have only recently applied for disability benefits in response to the loss of the prior tenant's income, the household's frozen rent may have been in place for years, and it is extremely unlikely that their income will increase at all, much less enough to cover a much higher frozen rent.

To protect the affordability of rent for these households, successor tenants should be provided with a grace period for eligibility for the program that extends at least through the six months provided for submitting the application or the remainder of that calendar year, whichever allows them more time. Although they would not actually receive the benefit until the month that they fulfilled the eligibility criteria, the additional six months to a year provided to the successor

¹⁷ 2026 Poverty Guidelines, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, <https://aspe.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/documents/b1bfa16b20ae9b89d525bc35de7c1643/detailed-guidelines-2026.pdf>, accessed October 1, 2026.

tenant would provide for a more reasonable transition period for households that are already relying on the program for housing security and include a tenant who will shortly be able to take the place of the prior tenant.

2(b). Elimination of Redetermination Delay

Recommendation: Redeterminations based on an income loss caused by the death or permanent relocation of an applicant should become effective concurrently with the corresponding benefit takeover rather than being tied to the timing of the application submission.

If a tenant experiences a permanent income loss of 20% or more, the tenant may be eligible for a redetermination that could lower the frozen rent. If an event, such as the death or permanent move of the primary tenant, provides the basis of both a benefit takeover and a redetermination, the applicant can apply for both via a single application. But even when a benefit takeover and redetermination are submitted and approved simultaneously, the effective date of one almost never occurs at the same time as the other. A benefit takeover becomes effective immediately after the prior benefit is revoked, even retroactively if necessary, so that there is no break in the benefit. The redetermination, however, is only effective starting with the month following DOF's receipt of the application.

In an example from a previous reporting year, a SCRIE tenant died in July 2023, leaving his widow as his successor tenant. The household income had been declining steadily due to the illness leading up to his death, and by the time he passed away, his widow was struggling to pay for basic necessities. She applied for a SCRIE benefit takeover as soon as she was able to obtain a copy of the death certificate, which was not until August 27, 2023. She mailed the benefit takeover and redetermination application on that date, and the application entered SCRIE's records on September 1. By SCRIE's calculations, the loss of her husband's income entitled the tenant to pay \$969 less than the frozen rent before the redetermination. While the widow technically took over the prior benefit as of August 1, 2023, the redetermination's effective date was not until October 1, 2023, based on the date that SCRIE deemed to have received the application. As a result, she paid nearly \$2,000 in additional rent during the first two months after her husband had passed away.

Given the time that it can take to complete a benefit takeover application (which can be delayed by elements out of the applicant's control, such as waiting for a death certificate or a nursing home letter to be issued), the tenant may not get the relief that the redetermination is meant to provide until several months have passed. These months may be extremely difficult financially for the redetermination applicant as, by definition, they must adjust to the loss of a substantial amount of income despite their rent obligation remaining the same. In other words, if an event resulting in immediate income loss requires that a successor tenant take over a program benefit, the tenant's need for alleviation of the corresponding hardship will be just as immediate. The effective dates of redeterminations that coincide with benefit takeovers should reflect this dynamic.

Part III: Renewed Recommendations for Processing and Outreach

As mentioned previously in this report, the ombudspersons believe that any recommendations involving the application and benefit management processes or increased enrollment are made particularly significant by the potential expansion in the program's reach following the expected increase in the income limit. In this regard, this section highlights the ombudspersons' recommendations from prior years that specifically address issues of processing efficiency and increased outreach. Because processing delays are often caused by gaps in tenants' information regarding their own application status, many of these recommendations focus on improvements in a tenant's ability to identify where they are in the application process and what is required to move forward. Other recommendations suggest opportunities for more targeted outreach.

A. Improving TAP Functionality

1. Centralized Application Documents Repository (2025 Annual Report)

Recommendation: DOF should consolidate all Rent Freeze applications and supporting documents into a single repository that provides descriptive details and status information equivalent to those currently available in the primary repository.

Document submission status consistently remains the most frequent concern raised with the ombudspersons. Currently, DOF maintains two repositories—one for certain TAP applications and one for all other submissions—making status verification cumbersome and less reliable. Depending on the information provided by the tenant, it can be difficult to confirm whether a document has been received or entered into the review queue. The current separation of documents makes both processing and effective customer service more time-consuming and potentially less accurate.

2. Document Preview Function (2025 Annual Report)

Recommendation: DOF should add a document preview feature in TAP, enabling applicants to view all files they have uploaded.

The program's application process often requires multiple document uploads. TAP currently does not allow applicants to view previously uploaded files, either during or after submission. This limitation results in duplicative uploads, omissions, and unnecessary inquiries. Each year, the ombudspersons receive many complaints about notices requesting documents that applicants have already submitted. These applicants often turn to the ombudspersons only after unsuccessful attempts to confirm submission through 311 or DOF customer service. Because documents are visible only to DOF staff until processed, automatic notices continue to generate requests for already-submitted materials. Allowing applicants to view their uploads would significantly reduce these issues and help applicants identify defective submissions, such as unsigned leases or income documentation from the wrong year.

3. Site Guidance for Tenant Access Portal (2024 Annual Report)

Recommendation: To improve the user experience, DOF should incorporate visual aids and simple, step-by-step instructions directly within the TAP interface to make the process more

manageable for individuals who may struggle with online navigation. In addition, DOF should explore options that would establish support specifically for TAP and other online submissions. This support should be equipped to handle a range of technical issues, ensuring that users can easily resolve any challenges they encounter while using the portal.

The introduction of the Tenant Access Portal in 2020 was a significant milestone, allowing tenants to apply online without the need for printing or mailing any documents. While TAP was designed to simplify the application process and serve as a self-service resource, there are areas that require improvement, especially as DOF plans for the renewal application phase of TAP.

Currently, the TAP webpage contains a link to a comprehensive 24-page PDF guide for tenants. While the guide is informative, it is not convenient for the typical SCRIE/DRIE demographic. To refer to the guide, users would need to either print it or keep it open in a separate window, which can be cumbersome, especially for those who are not tech-savvy. The guide's information should be readily available and visible on-screen during the application process to assist users less familiar with navigating web browsers.

Additionally, tenants often face challenges when using TAP and have reported difficulties in obtaining technical support. They have expressed that when they contacted DOF's general customer service lines for assistance, they were unable to connect with someone who could provide the required technical help. Given that the Rent Freeze Program serves a demographic that includes older adults who may be less familiar with online processes, it is crucial that DOF offer more accessible support for TAP.

4. Increasing Tenant Resources through the Tenant Access Portal (2023 Annual Report)

Recommendation: DOF should explore widgets or other interface components, such as those mentioned above, to enhance the user experience and make it easier for customers to complete their applications on time.

The Tenant Access Portal (TAP) has proven to be an effective tool for initial Rent Freeze applicants and DOF processing staff. In 2025, 9,077 SCRIE/DRIE tenants and 1,207 tenant representatives had registered TAP accounts, and users had logged on to TAP over 48,000 times from 2024 through 2025.

TAP's success provides further opportunities to support the Rent Freeze application process. For example, TAP's connection to application timeline data could manifest in deadline reminders or other prompts based on status events. More broadly, DOF could post a comprehensive calendar of Rent Freeze events in TAP to give online applicants the opportunity to ask questions or complete applications at events in their own communities. TAP could also offer applicants awareness of and access to forms in other languages without the need for an online search or live request.

B. Access to Information

1. Standardization of Responses to Status Requests (2023 Annual Report)

Recommendation: DOF should establish a standardized protocol for all personnel responding to SCRIE or DRIE status inquiries, which includes:

- I. Defining the components of a complete response to an application status request and determining the scope of response available through a 311 call.
- II. Identifying a standard set of minimum inputs required from participants to check their status.
- III. Implementing a mechanism allowing staff to confirm, within a few days of physical receipt, whether a document or any form of transmission has been received by SCRIE and entered into the review queue.
- IV. Specifying the level of access to information/documents needed for personnel to examine submitted materials and cross-reference them with processors' notes in the application system.

At present, status inquiries may be handled by various entities, including 311, the Senior and Disabled Programs Unit (which administers the Rent Freeze Program), the External Affairs Division, and the Office of the Taxpayer Advocate. Access to pertinent documents varies by unit and by how the information was submitted. For instance, beyond the universal SCRIE-DRIE Application Lookup tool, OTA's Rent Freeze ombudspersons utilize both the online Rent Increase Exemption application system and PDF scans of documents uploaded into the online document system. Access to these additional systems by other DOF units is inconsistent; many can access either the information available through RIE or the documents stored online, but not both.

This lack of a unified system likely contributes to incomplete or inconsistent responses. For instance, OTA cannot access Tenant Application Portal (TAP) submissions through the main document repository, as they are stored in a separate system, constraining the ombudspersons' ability to efficiently handle inquiries regarding TAP submissions. A fragmented approach with no standardized protocols for status inquiries exacerbates both call volume and wait times, while often yielding responses that are incomplete or insufficient.

2. Enhanced 311 SCRIE-DRIE Application Lookup (2024 Annual Report)

Recommendation: DOF should make additional information, such as information regarding preprocessing document queue status, available within the application already being used by 311 operators to provide status information to Rent Freeze participants.

In a continuation of a trend from the prior reporting period, the ombudspersons received high numbers of telephone inquiries that they would not normally handle, the vast majority of which involved application status. Although the normal protocol would be to redirect these inquiries to DOF customer service, callers often informed the ombudspersons that they had already attempted to reach customer service but had experienced connection issues or that they had already spoken with 311 or customer service but found that the information they received was

inaccurate or incomplete. In many of these instances, the ombudspersons addressed the caller's concerns by providing information regarding unprocessed documents based on information available to them in the main application document repository. This information is not currently available to 311 operators.

When Rent Freeze participants contact 311 with questions about their application status, 311 operators search for answers in DOF's internal online "311 SCRIE-DRIE Application Lookup" database. Allowing the 311 lookup tool to reflect other information available to DOF, such as updates on received paperwork in the main application document repository, would enable representatives to respond more accurately and completely to questions regarding application status. In addition, extending this access to other DOF public-facing operations that receive status inquiries, such as External Affairs, would help to lessen the volume of inquiries sent to the Customer Service Center.

C. Outreach Expansion

1. Early Notification of Program Features (2023 Annual Report)

Recommendation: Alongside each initial SCRIE/DRIE approval letter and benefit takeover approval letter, DOF should include a "welcome packet" that clearly and concisely lists key features of the Rent Freeze Program, emphasizing those aspects that are time-sensitive.

The NYC Rent Freeze Program provides a valuable resource to eligible tenants. However, its full potential can only be realized if tenants are aware of its features and understand how they can be applied to individual circumstances. Community-based organizations and tenants have conveyed to the ombudspersons that awareness and clarity regarding the program's key aspects can often make a significant difference in the benefits realized.

The ombudspersons propose the inclusion of a "welcome packet" along with the initial approval letter for every approved SCRIE or DRIE applicant. This document should be straightforward and written in easy-to-understand language. It would serve as a quick reference guide outlining key features of the Rent Freeze Program. The packet should not overwhelm customers with information, but should focus on the information that will be most useful to the most customers, such as:

- **Renewal Requirement:** Explanation of when to renew and alternative methods to obtain a renewal application.
- **Six-Month Grace Period:** Brief description of rights and obligations between tenant and landlord while renewal is pending.
- **Redeterminations:** Clarity on what this process involves and when it might occur.
- **Benefit Takeovers:** Explanation of the circumstances under which these may happen.
- **Apartment Transfers:** Description of steps to take when moving apartments and the effect on frozen rent.
- **Income Spike:** Explanation of when and how to apply the "income spike" rule.
- **Lack of Lease:** Guidance on possible options if no renewal lease is provided.

- Weekly Benefit Report Online: Where to find this and how it can be useful.
- “One-Third Rule” for Income Eligibility: Brief explanation of this rule.
- Walk-In Center Location and Hours: Information on where to go for in-person help.

Furthermore, the welcome packet can encourage tenants to engage with community-based organizations for additional guidance and support. Mentioning the Tenant Helpline for other tenancy-related issues could also be beneficial.

2. Extending Outreach to Tenant Representatives and Liaisons (2022 Annual Report)

Recommendation: DOF should explore outreach strategies, including a digital campaign, designed to capture the attention of those who are best positioned to assist program applicants, starting with family members and friends.

The language in current DOF Rent Freeze materials specifically targets program participants and potential applicants. For example, application information and instructions are generally addressed to “you,” the reader who is the applicant. DOF should develop additional Rent Freeze outreach and marketing materials that are addressed to others in close relation to the applicants, such as family and friends.

In the ombudspersons’ casework, applicants who enlist “tenant representatives” (as they are called in Rent Freeze applications) have higher rates of success in the application process. Applicants with representatives communicated more often with third parties, such as landlords or agencies outside of DOF, during the application process and were more likely to successfully complete applications.

Moreover, addressing Rent Freeze materials to a broader audience will open channels of communication, such as social media, that are associated with demographics other than those who are themselves eligible for the program. These additional opportunities for distributing Rent Freeze Program information may be useful to potential “tenant representatives” and should raise general awareness of the program.

3. Establishing a Forum for CBOs (2022 Annual Report)

Recommendation: Personnel from DOF divisions including Property, Legal Affairs, Community Affairs, and OTA should meet regularly with key community-based organizations to convey information and field questions.

Community-based organizations (CBOs) play a key role in disseminating information to tenants and identifying ways that tenants can maintain their benefits. Rather than instructing CBOs individually when opportunities arise, DOF should coordinate meetings at which CBOs and DOF personnel can communicate as a group.

Prior to the pandemic, DOF brought together a SCRIE/DRIE Task Force that included personnel from multiple DOF units as well as staff from various CBOs that assist SCRIE and DRIE applicants, from senior centers to pro bono legal clinics. Meetings of the Task Force centered on issues of concern and requests for clarification from individual CBOs regarding program operations. The meetings were an opportunity for DOF to remain apprised of the applicants’

perspectives on the Rent Freeze process as well as hearing firsthand of issues affecting program participants.

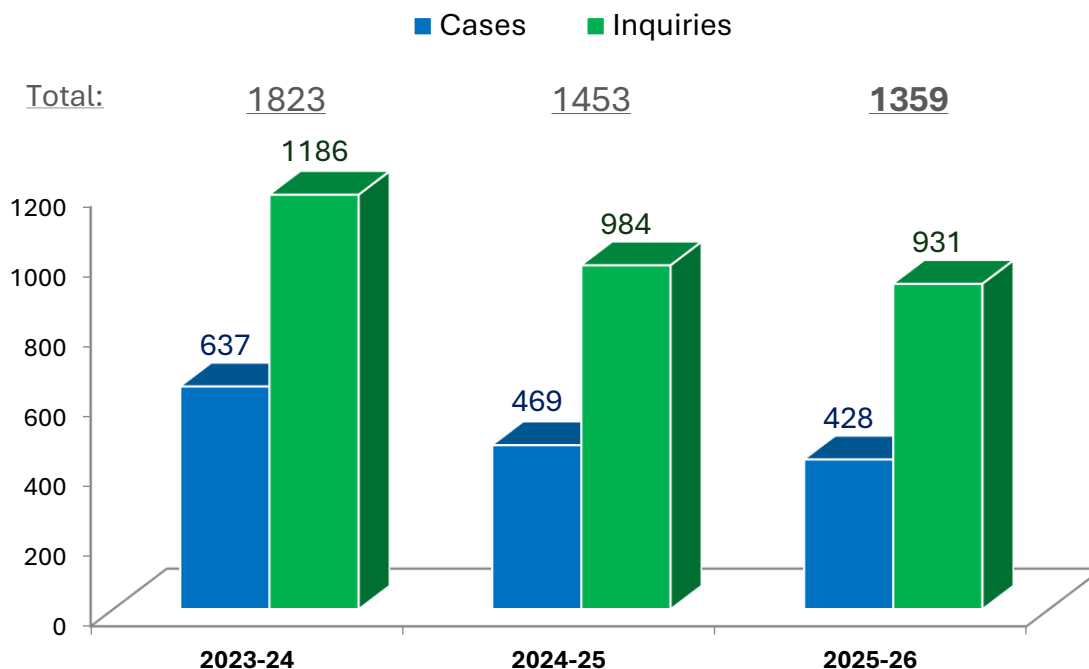
A similar effort by DOF could provide an effective forum for discussing the types of issues raised in prior Task Force meetings, and other current issues related to the program and its stakeholders. A task force could also provide guidance on recently issued policies and regulations and share best practices for keeping clients enrolled in the program.

Part IV: Rent Freeze Program Case and Inquiry Statistics for Fiscal Year 2026

A. Total Inventory of Cases and Inquiries

OTA classifies matters managed entirely within OTA as “inquiries” and those requiring the involvement of outside offices as “cases.” This year, the ombudspersons handled 1,359 cases and inquiries combined, down from last year’s number by 6.5%. When disaggregated into cases versus inquiries, the decrease in cases was 8.7%, versus a more modest 5.4% decrease in inquiries. As in prior years, SCRIE matters outnumbered DRIE matters by a ratio of approximately 4 to 1.

SCRIE and DRIE Ombudsperson Total Workload by Fiscal Year

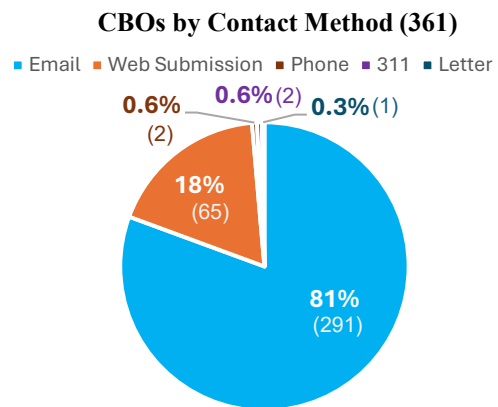
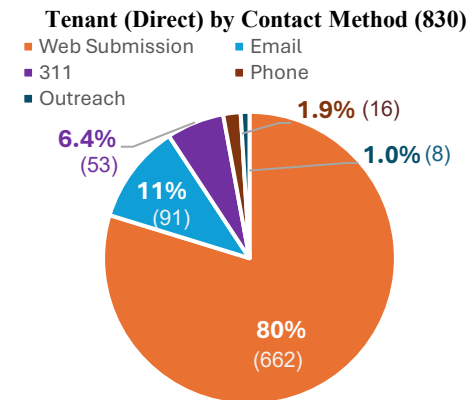
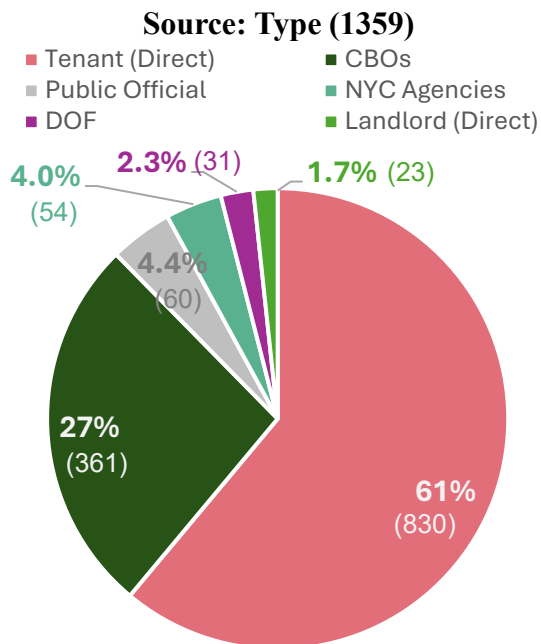


B. Cases and Inquiries by Source

OTA tracks the origins of Rent Freeze Program-related cases and inquiries, both in terms of the initiating party and the communication medium. For the current period, 61.1% of matters were directly initiated by tenants (or their family or friends) and the remainder came through third-party intermediaries. Once again, community-based organizations (CBOs) were the leading third-party representatives, initiating 26.6% of all matters. Other third parties included public officials (4.4%), City agencies outside of DOF (4.0%), DOF referrals (2.3%), and landlords (1.7%). Most of these figures were relatively similar to the previous year’s, with the exception of a 54.5% decrease in cases from other City agencies. A large portion of this decrease may be attributed to additional training and workflow streamlining in the Rent Freeze team within the Mayor’s Public Engagement Unit, which continues to work closely with DOF to provide direct assistance to individuals at their place of residence.

As in previous years, the communication methods used to reach OTA varied according to the source of the case or inquiry. CBOs communicated with DOF by email 81.1% of the time, down from 86.0% the previous year; web submissions increased from 9.7% to 18.0%. Individual tenants initiated contact via web submission 79.8% of the time, with only 11.0% sending emails. Altogether, submissions by web and email accounted for 92.9% of all matters. The remaining contact methods included 311 referrals (4.2%), direct phone calls (1.4%), outreach events (1.3%), and mail (0.3%).

Total Cases and Inquiries by Source for Fiscal Year 2026



C. Cases and Inquiries by Subject Matter

In this section of the report, the ombudspersons present their observations regarding notable changes in the number of matters, when disaggregated by subject matter, as compared to the prior year. The total counts by category for this reporting period are as follows:

Issues Presented	RY2024	RY2025	RY2026	vs. RY2025
Total^[1]	2412	1645	1569	76↓ (5%↓)
Submission Status—File Review Required	551	490	438	52↓ (11%↓)
Completing Application—Assistance Required	544	277	312	35↑ (13%↑)
General SCRIE/DRIE Program Information	252	166	140	26↓ (16%↓)
Appeal	248	157	126	31↓ (20%↓)
Landlord/Owner Noncompliance	114	74	96	22↑ (30%↑)
Tax Abatement Credit (TAC) Issues	132	77	64	13↓ (17%↓)
Request for TAC Report	72	58	63	5↑ (9%↑)
Income Requirements/Calculation	131	49	59	10↑ (20%↑)
Reasonable Accommodation	38	44	46	2↑ (5%↑)
Processor Error	36	34	46	12↑ (35%↑)
Benefit Takeover (BTO)	22	31	34	3↑ (10%↑)
Request for Clarification of Notice Received	94	50	32	18↓ (36%↓)
Application Request	29	26	20	6↓ (23%↓)
Issue Unknown ^[2]	18	22	16	6↓ (27%↓)
Redetermination	23	18	16	2↓ (11%↓)
Housing Preservation and Development (matters for HPD)	17	10	15	5↑ (50%↑)
Other Eligibility	15	16	12	4↓ (25%↓)
Major Capital Improvement	14	16	11	5↓ (31%↓)
Income Spike	12	4	8	4↑ (100%↑)
Portability (Apartment Move)	9	7	5	2↓ (29%↓)
Apartment Regulatory Status	18	8	4	4↓ (50%↓)
Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act	16	6	4	2↓ (33%↓)
Age or Disability Requirements	3	5	1	4↓ (80%↓)
Paperwork Received by DOF—Response Needed	4	0	1	1↑ (100%↑)

^[1] Because a single matter may fall under multiple issue categories, the aggregate sum of the per-category totals for a reporting year may exceed the total number of cases and inquiries for that year.

^[2] The “Issue Unknown” category counts incoming communications where no issue information was included in the initial inquiry and communications from the ombudspersons went unanswered.

The total number of cases and inquiries fell by 6.5% compared to the prior reporting period, returning to levels more consistent with periods prior to 2023. The decline in cases was at least partly due to the near total absence of matters involving tenants who had lost their benefits due to COVID-related failures to renew, which had previously been the basis of large numbers of cases, particularly in the two prior reporting periods. The absence of these cases suggests that the 2024-2025 reinstatement campaign for this population, led jointly by the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit and DOF's Community Affairs Division, was effective in bringing such cases to resolution.

For the fifth consecutive year, the Submission Status (27.9%) and Completing Application (19.9%) categories comprised the highest percentage of the ombudspersons' cases and inquiries. As in prior years, a number of the cases and inquiries in these two categories did not meet the usual criteria for the ombudspersons' matters—that is, they did not involve complex cases or require advocacy for the program participant in a disagreement with DOF. Rather, the applicants were simply unable to make contact with DOF customer service, either due to hold times exceeding an hour, portal-submitted inquiries that went unanswered for weeks, or misconnections in attempts to meet with customer service personnel despite having reserved virtual appointments.

Given the effort these customers had already expended in attempting to reach DOF, the ombudspersons could not redirect them to the normal communication channels, per normal protocol. The annual volume of such matters points to an urgent and unaddressed need for additional resources to improve DOF's customer service to this especially vulnerable audience.

Although the total number of matters declined this fiscal year, some subject matter categories saw notable growth, including the Landlord/Owner Non-Compliance category, which grew by 29.7%.¹⁸ The relatively high rent increases approved by the Rent Guidelines Board annually from 2022 through 2025 may have contributed to the rise in landlords claiming not to have received the credits owed to them. In the vast majority of cases, the ombudspersons were able to confirm that the benefit was intact and that there were no arrears with respect to the landlord's tax abatement credits, while in other cases, tenants were assisted with the reinstatement process. Some landlords still refused to acknowledge the benefit and continued to bill the tenant for the full rent amount, leaving limited-income tenants to decide whether to pay just the frozen rent (despite the landlord's continued attempts to collect) or pay the landlord for rent already covered by the City. In some instances, landlords had already taken their tenants to housing court for the alleged arrears, thereby resulting in tenants, caseworkers, and pro bono attorneys contacting the ombudspersons urgently for further documentation and clarification of frozen rent histories.

Processor error matters also rose considerably, by 35.3%. The actual number of matters in this category was the highest since OTA began recording cases by category in 2022. The success of

¹⁸ The number and nature of cases in this category raises the important question of stricter enforcement of the Rent Freeze Program's rules. While this issue lies outside of DOF's authority, the ombudspersons strongly support the exploration of policy initiatives and legislation toward this purpose.

any recommendations for application processing put forth by OTA, in this or any year, depends on the skill and capacity of the application processing unit. As noted previously, persistent errors in this aspect of the agency's operation call for improved training¹⁹ and—based on what the ombudspersons have noted this year in terms of processing delays—an alleviation of pressure on the processing unit, particularly as the City anticipates a significantly larger number of eligible applicants based on the new income limit.

Cases and inquiries regarding reasonable accommodations increased slightly, continuing a slow upward trend and representing the highest total number in this category to date. The ombudspersons noticed an uptick in requests from large pro bono legal organizations, often in connection with disputes in housing court. This indicates an increasing familiarity with the possibility of application deadline extensions due to physical or mental infirmities.

Despite an increase from the prior year, queries related to income requirements or calculation remained relatively low compared to historical numbers, suggesting the continued impact of the simpler income definition adopted by DOF in summer 2024 following an amendment to the Rent Freeze Program's governing law. The modest increase in cases in this category included tenants who had been revoked under the new definition, but who were legally entitled to be considered under the old definition based on their benefit start date. The new income definition may also have been a factor in the 36.0% decline in the matters under the Request for Clarification of Notice Received category, where, in previous years, a larger portion of the requests involved income documentation.

The 19.7% decline in matters involving appeals may be the result of the combined effect of the more accessible income calculation and a markedly slower rate in initial and renewal application processing. A simpler income definition means applicants better understand income eligibility and are therefore less likely to challenge denials, while a significantly reduced rate of determinations in general may also mean fewer denials to challenge via appeals. Nearly all appeals cases involved preparation prior to submitting the appeal application as opposed to questions regarding appeals decisions that had already been made. The dearth of cases involving already decided appeals may be due to the ongoing improvements to the appeal application review process by DOF's Compliance Unit.²⁰

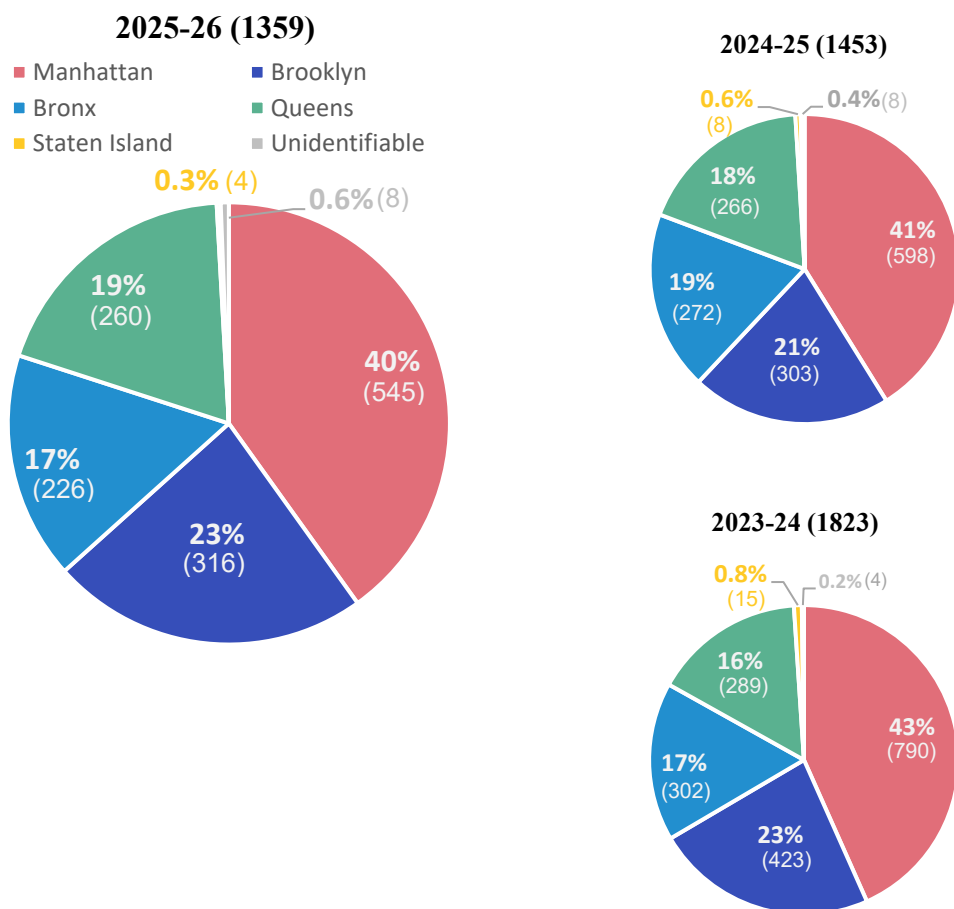
¹⁹ See Recommendation II.B.2, above.

²⁰ See corresponding recommendation in the ombudspersons' 2023-2024 Annual Report (II.A.4, "Appeals").

D. Cases and Inquiries by Borough

The chart below shows the breakdown of SCRIE and DRIE ombudsperson matters by borough. The distribution remains relatively consistent with previous years and reflects the proportion of rent-regulated units in each borough. Manhattan continues to generate the highest number of matters, with Brooklyn second. The number of matters in Staten Island remained significantly lower than the other boroughs, in accordance with its relatively low number of rent-regulated units.

Total Cases and Inquiries by Borough by Fiscal Year



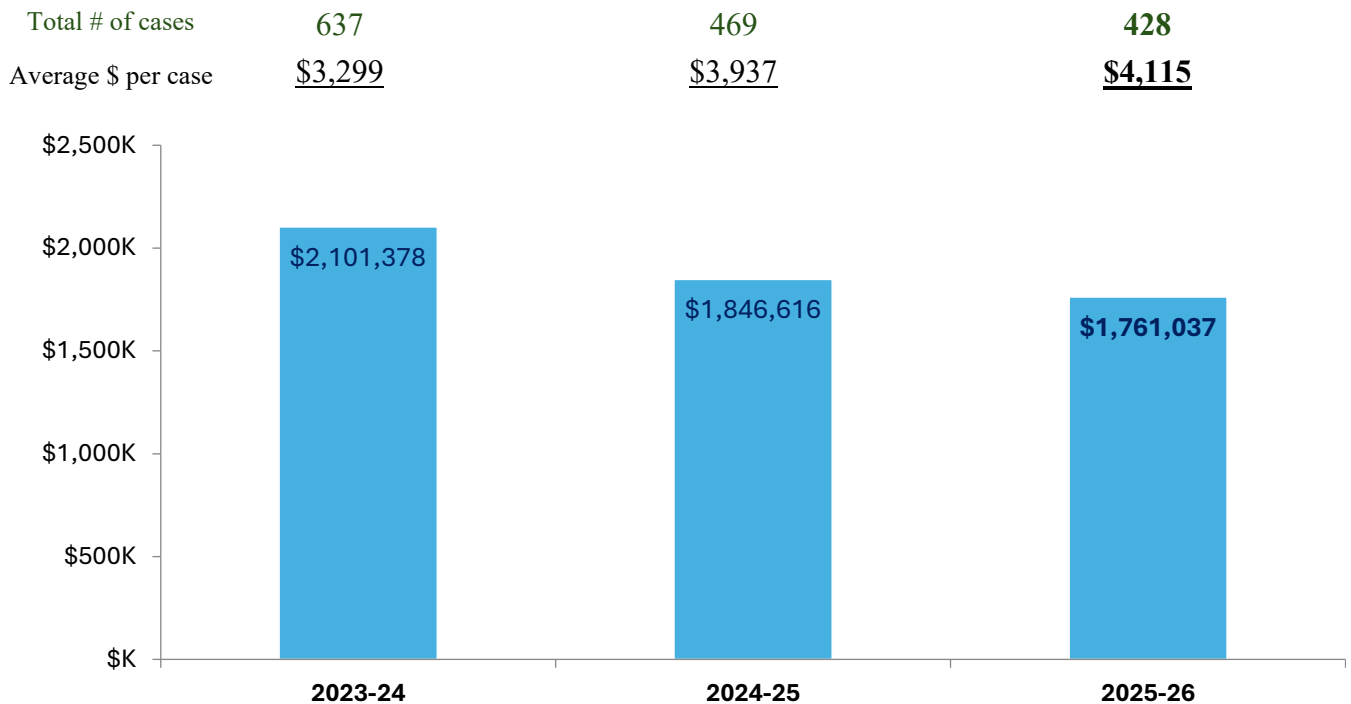
E. Dollar Impact of Ombudspersons' Work

The financial ramifications of the ombudspersons' work can be quantified via the tax abatement credits issued under the Rent Freeze Program as a result of their cases and inquiries. For this reporting year, the total monetary benefit conferred to Rent Freeze tenants and landlords decreased by 4.6% to \$1,761,037, while the amount per case increased by 4.5% to \$4,115 per case.

As in prior years, the relatively large dollar impact per case reflects the high volume of applications completed with the assistance of the ombudspersons due to the applicant's inability to access application assistance through normal DOF channels. To a lesser extent, the size of the dollar impact also reflects the comparatively larger rent increase percentages approved by the Rent Guidelines Board from 2023 through 2025 iterations.

The following chart shows the dollar impact totals for the current and prior two reporting periods:

Dollar Impact by Reporting Year



Part V: Ongoing Developments

A. Legislation

The following are legislative items passed or proposed during the reporting period and notable in relation to DOF's administration of the Rent Freeze Program:

1. \$75,000 Income Limit

Earlier this year, the New York State Legislature voted to increase the maximum income for Rent Freeze eligibility from \$50,000 to \$75,000,²¹ the first increase in a decade. The increase will become operational in the NYC Rent Freeze Program pending adoption of a corresponding local law by the New York City Council.²² Although the timing is uncertain, the ombudspersons anticipate that the number of applicants and program participants will begin to increase significantly, particularly in combination with the relatively recent statutory change connecting the income definition to federal adjusted gross income. In anticipation of these developments, DOF units involved in the Rent Freeze Program are preparing for expanded outreach and training efforts as well as the possible need for operational changes. As discussed in the recommendations in Parts II and III of this report, efficiency and accuracy in both application processing and applicant guidance will be essential to maximizing the amended income limit's impact. Applicants should note that the eligibility rule requiring the tenant's lease rent to exceed one-third of the tenant's monthly income continues to apply.

2. Notable Proposals in the New York State Legislature's 2025-26 Session

(a) Cost of Living Adjustment

Bill S1457B/A5344 provides for adjustments in income eligibility to reflect yearly increases in the consumer price index (CPI).²³ Given the more than 10% CPI increase over the past three years,²⁴ this proposal is crucial for the continued effectiveness of the program. While the ombudspersons strongly support the current increase to \$75,000, they also note that if CPI had been taken into account starting ten years ago, when the current income ceiling was established, the income limit for 2025 would have been over \$65,000, instead of \$50,000. The difference between the two numbers suggests that many tenants who could have benefited from the program in past years were excluded by an unrealistically low income limit.

(b) Retroactive Frozen Rent Calculation and Earlier Effective Date

The ombudspersons have frequently encountered the issue addressed by Bill S2534/A7851: tenants too often become aware that the program exists long after their initial eligibility date, which means that they have missed the opportunity to freeze their rent at a much lower rate and

²¹ RPTL §§ 467-b (3)(a) and (b).

²² Int. No. 0978 2026 is currently under consideration by the New York City Council.

²³ A prior version (S.B. S9009b, New York State Legislature, 2026) of the budget bill that increased the income ceiling to \$75,000 had provided for a CPI adjustment, but that provision was omitted in the final version.

²⁴ Based on historical CPI-U data for New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA at <https://www.bls.gov/regions/northeast/data/xg-tables/ro2xgcpiny.htm>, accessed Sep. 1, 2026.

with an earlier start date. The legislation proposed by this bill would allow tenants to freeze their rent at the rate they were paying when they were first eligible, regardless of when they actually apply. The calculation of the effective date is also changed: whereas DOF currently sets the effective date at the start of the month following receipt of the initial application, under Bill S2534/A7851, a benefit's effective date would be the later of either the date two years prior to submitting the initial application or, for applicants who have been eligible for less than two years, the date on which they first became eligible.

(c) Two-Year "Income Spike"

Bill S4252/A10721 introduces a two-year grace period during which tenants removed from the program due to income ineligibility can regain their previous frozen rent amount if reapproved as initial applicants. Under the current framework, the window for reapplication is limited to one calendar year post-revocation. The one-year window locks out tenants who experience abnormal income increases—such as those related to seasonal work—that span multiple calendar years, thereby disqualifying them from reverting to their former frozen rent amounts when their income normalizes. Extending the reapplication period to two years would afford tenants the opportunity to retain the intended benefits of the existing legislative framework by reverting to their prior rent levels, depending on their income level upon reapplication.

(d) Notification Requirements

Bill S561A/A1863 aims to enhance tenant awareness by mandating periodic notifications about the Rent Freeze Program, particularly in conjunction with events that affect rental rates. Should this legislation be enacted, both City and State agencies, as well as landlords operating under housing laws, would be required to include information on potential eligibility for the program in specific tenant communications. Similarly, Bill S3742A/A1563A expands the Rent Freeze eligibility notice obligations applicable to landlords from the current annual and new tenant notice requirements to require notices in all rent bills and leases, including renewals.

(e) Language Services

Bill S5280A/A824 would require municipalities to provide language assistance to Rent Freeze participants, including translation of documents into the six most common non-English languages (per municipality), interpretive services upon request, and assistive services upon request or demonstration of need by individuals with physical or cognitive impairments. While the City has its own existing language requirements, these bills would fill numerous gaps remaining in language accessibility throughout the Rent Freeze process.

(f) Program Expansion Based on Rent-to-Income Ratio

With the goal of providing relief to low-income New Yorkers whose financial circumstances are severely constrained due to housing costs, Bill S1805/A1877 would expand program eligibility to any New York City tenant living in a rent regulated apartment and paying at least 50% in household income toward rent, regardless of age or disability status. Per the bill's proposal, 10% of the tax revenue lost by the City would be reimbursed by New York State.

B. Outreach and Training²⁵

The ombudspersons' Rent Freeze outreach and training efforts this year continued the pace set in the prior reporting period and added new partnerships to existing relationships with internal and external stakeholders. A significant portion of the ombudspersons' informational outreach efforts were organized by DOF's Community Affairs Division, whereas trainings were mainly arranged directly with the ombudspersons. Nearly all tenant outreach events were in person, and attendance numbers were similar to the prior reporting period.

Notable events included:

- Information and enrollment events with DOF's Community Affairs Division
- Rent Freeze clinics at councilmember and assemblymember offices
- Rent Freeze training sessions for CBOs, including pro bono legal and social work organizations

OTA also began taking part in a recurring meeting with DOF's Community Affairs Division and the Rent Freeze specialist team from the Mayor's Public Engagement Unit. During these meetings, which are ongoing, the three units discuss outreach strategies, unresolved cases, and possible systemic issues affecting Rent Freeze tenants. OTA and Community Affairs are also collaborating on plans for a semi-annual roundtable discussion between DOF and its partner CBOs regarding current Rent Freeze Program topics. Separately, OTA met with members of the Legal Affairs Division of DHCR's Tenant Protection Unit to discuss opportunities for cross-referrals and information sharing.

²⁵ The ombudspersons' outreach efforts are also counted in the statistics reported in OTA's broader annual report.

Part VI: Success Stories

▪ A Victim of Domestic Violence Moves On, But Continues Benefit

A case manager at a community-based organization contacted OTA regarding a client who had recently applied for a redetermination, which, if approved, would lower her frozen rent. The client's redetermination application was in pending status because she had not been able to provide proof of income for a tenant who had very recently left the household. As the case manager explained to the ombudsperson, the previous tenant, whose name had been on the apartment's SCRIE benefit for years, was the current tenant's ex-husband, who had been repeatedly required to leave the residence due to his acts of domestic violence, but nevertheless returned intermittently. Finally, earlier this year, he left the household permanently and his name was removed from the lease.

At that point, the remaining tenant believed that she would have to start over as a new applicant and submitted an initial SCRIE application, not realizing that she could apply to continue her ex-husband's benefit as a remaining household member, regardless of the separation. Starting over would mean a \$500 frozen rent increase that she could not possibly afford—hence the application for a redetermination of the frozen rent amount. The case manager had contacted the ombudsperson because her client, for obvious reasons, could not contact the prior benefit holder to ask him for the required household income documentation. At the same time, the tenant felt that a redetermination was the only way to prevent the loss of her home.

When presented with the tenant's situation, the ombudsperson informed the case manager that her client should have submitted a benefit takeover (BTO) application rather than an initial application, not only because the BTO would allow the tenant to continue at the prior frozen rent, but also because newly approved initial applicants are not eligible for redeterminations. Although she was technically beyond the six-month deadline for a BTO application, the ombudsperson asked the case worker to arrange for her client to complete the necessary forms, which the ombudsperson would then present to the Senior and Disabled Programs Unit (SDP) with a request that they process the BTO in place of the previously submitted initial application so that the current tenant could continue receiving the prior benefit.

When SDP received the request, which included information about the reason for the prior tenant's permanent relocation from the apartment, they noted that the prior tenant had apparently not been residing in that apartment for the entirety of the period during which he nevertheless had been renewing the benefit. If SDP found that the ex-husband had been renewing the benefit even though the apartment was not his primary residence, DOF might be obligated to terminate the benefit, thereby making it impossible for the spouse to continue at the prior frozen rent. The ombudsperson requested further clarification from the case manager, who provided an explanation in writing to clarify that although her client had been granted a divorce some years prior, she did allow the ex-husband to return periodically due to his serious health issues until he finally found a new permanent residence. Having reviewed all of the relevant documentation, SDP allowed the BTO application to be processed as if it had been submitted on time.

The BTO was approved, returning the tenant's frozen rent to the prior level. Because the BTO allowed her to continue an existing benefit rather than starting anew, the tenant was eligible for a redetermination based on the income information submitted with the most recent prior renewal, without having to contact her ex-husband for additional income information. After the BTO application was approved, saving her over \$500 in frozen rent, the tenant's resubmitted redetermination was also approved, lowering the tenant's frozen rent by a further \$673. Neither reduction would have been possible had the tenant been treated as a new applicant. After the tenant's submission of the BTO per the ombudsperson's guidance, the tenant became the new SCRIE beneficiary in her apartment, with a rent amount that she could afford on her own.

▪ **A Little-Known Income Rule Makes the Difference in Reversing Denial**

At a DOF outreach event, a tenant approached the ombudsperson with concerns about her renewal application. The tenant had been revoked in the past for exceeding the income limit. She reapplied later and was approved, but struggled with her higher frozen rent. At the same time, she was being harassed by her landlord, who sought to collect rent amounts that often did not reflect the SCRIE benefit. She hoped that the ombudsperson could give her a sense of whether she might be revoked once again when she renewed based on her most recent income.

While discussing the tenant's concerns, the ombudsperson asked whether the increased income that led to her previous revocation could recur at some point. The tenant said it was very difficult to talk about that period, because some of that income was inherited upon the death of her mother. The tenant had taken care of her parents, who were both Holocaust survivors, for many years until they passed away within a few years of each other. Their deaths had been traumatic for her, and since that time she had sought treatment for her mental health. It was only recently that she was able to bring her attention back to trying to refreeze her rent.

The ombudsperson reviewed the application on which the revocation had been based and found more than \$7,000 of IRA income that pushed the income outside the eligible range. The tenant believed that this was inheritance income, but wasn't certain, as her memories of that period were clouded. The ombudsperson requested any additional documents from that period that the tenant could provide. Among the additional documents, the ombudsperson received a Form 1099-R that designated the IRA income as a death benefit that should have been excluded from the SCRIE income calculation.

The ombudsperson brought the case to SDP. They agreed that the income would have been excluded had the processor known that it was inheritance income; however, SDP could not simply reverse the decision. Based on its review of the file, SDP concluded that the revocation was caused by the tenant's failure to supply sufficient information. SDP noted that the revocation could have been reversed at the time if the tenant had filed a timely appeal, but the appeal deadline had long since passed. SDP also noted that the tenant could request a reasonable accommodation from DOF's EEO office that would allow her to file a late appeal, which SDP could then consider. However, due to the tenant's extreme distress whenever referring to that period in her past, the ombudsperson did not want to obligate her to submit an accommodation request for that period unless absolutely necessary.

From the ombudsperson's perspective, requiring an appeal under the circumstances was unreasonable. In the ombudsperson's experience, not just tenants, but even community-based organizations were unaware of the inheritance exclusion. The tenant had in fact contemplated asking DOF for reconsideration, but was told only that there were no exceptions to the \$50,000 limit. No one she spoke with mentioned the inheritance exclusion. The tenant could not be expected to file an appeal based on information not available to her.

The ombudsperson also noted that the denial letter was the only correspondence the tenant received upon submission of the renewal in question. DOF's records indicated that there had been no requests for additional income information, despite the New York State return indicating that the income might be deductible, as well as DOF's own policy of requesting supplemental documentation if there might be additional deductions that would result in income eligibility.

SDP took a second look at the case and found that there should have been a request for additional information, giving the tenant the opportunity to produce the Form 1099 that verified the exclusion. As such, SDP agreed to review the additional information without requiring the submission of an appeal. Upon recalculation of the income, the revocation was retracted and the tenant had the opportunity to renew her benefit. Once the tenant submitted all required documents for the periods to date, the tenant received more than \$22,000 in retroactive TAC. The case also became part of an ongoing discussion regarding the need to provide more robust Rent Freeze training to our community-based partners, particularly with respect to income calculation.

▪ **Correcting the Frozen Rent Upon a Closer Review**

A tenant's representative reached out to the DRIE ombudsperson regarding a troubling case: although DOF had approved her client's initial and renewal applications, the rent appeared to have been frozen at an incorrect amount due to delayed processing.

As a general rule, a tenant's benefit will begin in the month after DOF receives the initial application, regardless of how long it takes to complete the approval process. Benefit start dates are often retroactive for this reason. Perhaps even more importantly, the date of DOF's receipt of the application may determine which lease will be the basis of the frozen rent—one month's difference can mean a rent frozen at a higher amount, which could cost the tenant thousands of dollars over the course of the benefit.

With that in mind, the ombudsperson searched the application on file for a postmark to establish whether DOF had correctly documented the relevant date for determining the timing of the benefit. The ombudsperson found a February 2024 postmark for the applicant's initial application submission, but for some reason, the application had not been uploaded into the processing system until November 2024. The discrepancy between the dates provided the explanation for two processing errors. First, instead of March 1, 2024 (the correct benefit start date based on the postmark), the benefit was set to begin on December 1, 2024. Second, due to the gap between receipt and processing, the wrong lease term was used to determine the tenant's frozen rent.

The ombudsperson informed SDP of these issues and the corrections were promptly made. By adjusting the frozen rent amount and changing the start date, the taxpayer immediately saved more than \$1,600 and will continue to benefit from the lower frozen rent as long as she continues in the program.

▪ **Overcoming Two Years of Obstacles in Attaining Rent Freeze Approval**

In 2023, the New York State Legislature passed a law rendering certain non-rent-regulated apartments eligible for the Rent Freeze Program. That same year, a resident of such an apartment applied for DRIE. Her application was rejected by DOF on the basis that her apartment did not meet the regulatory status requirement. The SCRIE ombudsperson assisted the tenant with an appeal that referenced the new law. Based on the appeal, SDP reversed its decision regarding the apartment's eligibility, but the application was ultimately denied due to the applicant's income.

In 2024, she reapplied and was again denied because of her apartment's regulatory status. The ombudsperson conveyed to SDP that this question had previously been addressed, and the applicant's apartment was deemed eligible. SDP again reversed the denial, and the tenant, whose income was now within the limit, was finally approved for DRIE.

Although the DRIE credits had already begun to post to the landlord's property tax account, the landlord refused to acknowledge the DRIE benefit, purportedly due to the words "Mitchell-Lama" in the page header of the DOF approval letter. The ombudsperson learned that this was a DOF processing error, but one that could not easily be corrected because of the way approval letters are generated. The ombudsperson reached out to the landlord with proof of the credit transfers and an explanation of why those words in the approval letter did not actually correspond to any aspect of the benefit.

The landlord responded a few weeks later. According to them, the real issue was that they could only accept SCRIE and not DRIE. To the ombudsperson's knowledge, this is not permissible under the law; however, the landlord continued to bill the tenant the full rent amount and began to claim that her payments were in arrears, despite the continuing Rent Freeze Program transfers to the landlord's account. Believing that it would be the most efficient way forward, the tenant, who was eligible for either program, requested that DOF convert her benefit to SCRIE. Normally, DRIE tenants only convert to SCRIE if they become ineligible for the former, and the conversion would coincide with a renewal period. In this case, neither of these circumstances applied, and perhaps for that reason, it took months for the conversion to be approved.

Upon approval for the conversion, the tenant showed her landlord that she was now a SCRIE recipient, but the landlord continued to refuse the benefit. This time, the landlord, despite continuing to accrue the benefit on their property tax account without comment, insisted that the tenant apply through the New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) instead. The tenant, exhausted from months of disputes with her landlord over alleged arrears, agreed to apply through HPD. The ombudsperson assumed that OTA's part in the tenant's approval process had finally come to an end when the tenant applied to HPD on her own in November 2025.

In February 2026, the tenant received a letter from HPD stating that her application was denied due to her income exceeding the eligibility limits. Because it had been so long since the submission of her original application with DOF, HPD was looking at a different income year (2024) from the one in the DOF application (2023). The denial letter itemized HPD's income calculation, the result of which exceeded the limit set by the 1/3 monthly income eligibility rule. The tenant forwarded the denial letter to the ombudsperson and her elected officials, expressing regret that all of their efforts had failed in the end.

When the ombudsperson reviewed the calculation in the denial letter, however, it appeared to be based on the prior version of a statutory income definition that had been amended before the calculations had been made. Moreover, even under the prior definition, certain required deductions had not been applied. According to the ombudsperson's review of the 2024 income documents, the tenant was eligible under either income definition. The ombudsperson relayed this information to the tenant and asked if she would be willing to appeal once more. The tenant agreed and the ombudsperson contacted HPD with her findings.

According to HPD, the additional deductions were not applied because the tenant had submitted a tax return where the formatting had caused a misalignment of text, including in some of the figures. HPD agreed to revisit their determination if the tenant submitted a correctly aligned version.

Upon review of the reformatted document, HPD reversed the denial and approved the tenant's application. The ombudsperson reviewed HPD's approval letter and found that the benefit start date was January 1, 2026. Only then did the ombudsperson realize that the tenant had submitted her HPD application without informing them that she had been approved by DOF almost a year prior. With HPD's later start date, not only would a year of the benefit be erased, but the frozen rent would also be higher than the one approved by DOF.

The ombudsperson provided HPD with documentation showing the tenant's original DRIE application submission and approval dates. HPD discussed with the ombudsperson the practical issue of approving the tenant retroactively while ensuring that the landlord did not receive duplicate credits. After some coordination with DOF's Property Division, HPD reissued an approval letter reflecting the correct start date and the original frozen rent. Upon receipt of the new approval letter, the landlord, after nearly two years of DRIE credits lowering their property taxes, finally agreed to honor the benefit and reflect the credit in the tenant's rent bills.

Part VII: DOF Actions on 2024-2025 Recommendations

The following entries describe the status of recommendations made by the ombudspersons in the prior fiscal year's annual report. Italics in this section indicate the text of recommendations as they appeared in the 2024-2025 annual report.

Preventing Premature Revocation

Recommendation: DOF should revise the notice cycle to ensure that tenants receive clear notification of their grace period end dates earlier in the process, and that final revocation letters are not sent before the end of the grace period. In addition to prominently stating the grace period's expiration date, all notices should explain that DOF must receive outstanding documents on or before that date. Ideally, notices would also clarify that tenants may continue paying their frozen rent while their renewal is under review, though they may still owe increases for that lease period if the renewal is ultimately denied or revoked.

DOF Action: In accordance with its policy not to issue revocations for failure to renew until 180 days have passed, DOF's Property Division has made some revisions to its notices that provide tenants with clearer information. The division is working to implement processing procedures that consistently avoid premature revocation. These efforts are in addition to ongoing data sharing with DOF's Community Affairs Division, which in turn works with its community partners to reach as many tenants as possible before the renewal period expires.

CRM Submission Phase Out

Recommendation: DOF should phase out CRM-based submissions and require applicants to use TAP for all uploads. The transition should be supported with robust outreach and marketing, including multilingual materials and targeted communications that emphasize TAP's benefits.

DOF Action: DOF agrees with this recommendation as it relates to the Property Division's ongoing efforts to improve the electronic submission processes available to tenants. These improvements seek to reduce processing errors and increase consistency, improve efficiency, and enhance transparency.

Improving TAP Functionality

Document Preview Function and Notices via Email

Recommendation: DOF should add a document preview feature in TAP, enabling applicants to view all files they have uploaded.

Recommendation: DOF should begin sending notices by email and make all mailed notices available for download in PDF format through TAP.

DOF Action: These recommendations have been acknowledged by DOF as part of a larger project to enhance TAP's efficacy as an information base for tenants; however, the Property

Division will need further discussions with the Finance Information Technology Division regarding the potentially extensive technical aspect.

Application Assistance Line

Recommendation: Applicants calling 311 for real-time TAP assistance should be routed directly to staff trained to resolve submission issues. These staff should also have escalation contacts within the Finance Information Technology Division.

DOF Action: As with other recommendations involving this subject matter, DOF will explore how this recommendation would align with projects addressing the larger issue of tenant access to information, whether through customer service or otherwise.

Centralized Application Documents Repository

Recommendation: DOF should consolidate all Rent Freeze applications and supporting documents into a single repository that provides descriptive details and status information equivalent to those currently available in the primary repository.

DOF Action: DOF supports this recommendation and continues to explore implementation strategies.

Reinstatement Post-Section 8

Recommendation: DOF should establish an internal policy to preserve prior frozen rent levels for returning Rent Freeze applicants who lose their Section 8 benefits. This recommendation may require legislation.

DOF Action: Due to the complexity of this recommendation, further discussion within the agency is required.

Automatic Income Verification

Recommendation: DOF should explore implementing optional automatic income verification for tenants, enabling income eligibility to be confirmed directly through NYS Department of Taxation and Finance data. This will provide applicants with the option to obtain and provide fewer documents with their applications, and potentially reduce application review time.

DOF Action: Feasibility of automatic income verification is being reviewed as part of a longer-term project to enhance renewal processes.

APPENDIX I

Ombudspersons' Case and Inquiry Dollar Impact by City Council District

District/ Council Member	Number of Inquiries				Number of Cases				\$ Impact*			
	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026
1 C. Marte	28	36	21	27	11	17	16	15	\$8,854	\$55,777	\$55,070	\$61,164
2 H. Epstein	38	45	30	32	10	18	8	15	\$16,957	\$57,433	\$16,317	\$32,174
3 C. Wilson	56	66	48	37	28	29	29	18	\$97,456	\$87,513	\$126,723	\$57,905
4 V. Maloney	46	39	26	35	14	30	15	19	\$58,108	\$180,518	\$112,950	\$134,884
5 J. Menin	28	37	30	26	18	19	15	17	\$57,166	\$62,460	\$63,103	\$99,432
6 G. Brewer	40	55	40	41	26	43	14	32	\$79,030	\$122,749	\$45,901	\$140,831
7 S. Abreu	60	52	44	37	30	27	20	20	\$99,452	\$95,717	\$156,515	\$145,541
8 E. Encarnacion	15	13	19	21	7	13	6	4	\$14,776	\$27,971	\$15,056	\$7,690
9 Y. Salaam	31	34	26	31	8	19	10	13	\$11,784	\$33,373	\$17,315	\$29,970
10 C. De La Rosa	92	114	85	72	39	69	64	26	\$136,650	\$351,469	\$252,433	\$145,698
11 E. Dinowitz	31	27	29	22	14	9	16	8	\$54,932	\$23,774	\$57,958	\$32,029
12 K. Riley	20	19	9	12	7	2	5	8	\$7,137	\$0*	\$4,601	\$28,966
13 S. Aldebol	12	16	5	12	9	8	7	5	\$11,192	\$16,534	\$21,755	\$5,164
14 P. Sanchez	30	52	38	32	15	20	14	16	\$58,555	\$74,892	\$69,767	\$51,920
15 O. Feliz	34	27	25	22	8	20	10	8	\$25,380	\$32,841	\$55,555	\$23,562
16 A. Stevens	18	24	36	23	11	19	16	13	\$29,152	\$14,184	\$57,878	\$19,160
17 J. Sanchez	16	14	10	19	7	7	11	5	\$27,617	\$29,053	\$23,522	\$6,962
18 A. Farías	12	9	23	10	4	4	5	6	\$5,600	\$953	\$25,641	\$9,331
19 V. Paladino	5	8	5	5	4	2	2	4	\$32,862	\$7,372	\$7,180	\$13,510
20 S. Ung	25	27	20	15	17	15	21	19	\$85,789	\$54,130	\$98,395	\$93,251
21 S. Thomas-Henry	10	6	18	14	3	12	6	4	\$16,116	\$10,158	\$2,302	\$7,485
22 T. Cabán	10	19	14	12	7	9	9	10	\$7,596	\$12,816	\$11,938	\$30,679
23 L. Lee	3	17	6	10	6	3	5	4	\$1,329	\$28,647	\$78,944	\$22,954
24 J. Gennaro	23	15	13	22	7	9	2	7	\$24,008	\$34,916	\$14,653	\$29,710
25 S. Krishnan	30	20	15	17	14	16	9	6	\$97,184	\$66,455	\$40,087	\$32,558
26 J. Won	14	16	18	19	8	19	16	8	\$8,801	\$66,473	\$29,650	\$49,189
27 N. Williams	9	11	8	11	10	6	5	6	\$14,987	\$18,690	\$43,797	\$24,369
28 T. Hankerson	0	1	3	15	0	0	0	0	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*
29 L. Schulman	33	20	20	18	11	5	6	5	\$84,772	\$33,366	\$23,564	\$58,040
30 P. Wong	7	0	7	5	3	2	5	5	\$2,326	\$7,285	\$24,436	\$6,086
31 S. Brooks-Powers	5	1	4	6	1	3	3	1	\$338	\$11,970	\$7,038	\$8,844
32 J. Ariola	6	7	10	6	3	2	6	1	\$7,007	\$145	\$14,283	\$6,883
33 L. Restler	11	15	17	4	10	6	4	6	\$18,086	\$7,755	\$15,499	\$30,957

District/ Council Member	Number of Inquiries				Number of Cases				\$ Impact*			
	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026	FY2023	FY2024	FY2025	FY2026
34 J. Gutiérrez	13	21	16	8	7	8	5	9	\$8,650	\$24,404	\$39,997	\$26,275
35 C. Hudson	16	30	29	19	12	17	9	7	\$8,777	\$53,993	\$25,764	\$22,388
36 C. Ossé	7	12	10	17	2	4	3	6	\$778	\$6,857	\$14,545	\$9,730
37 S. Nurse	4	6	4	9	4	5	1	0	\$749	\$12,458	\$3,112	\$0*
38 A. Avilés	6	10	4	3	4	4	2	3	\$728	\$35,150	\$26,026	\$4,245
39 S. Hanif	11	22	8	12	5	12	9	4	\$8,516	\$71,435	\$28,611	\$6,524
40 R. Joseph	45	46	22	34	15	34	11	12	\$46,974	\$97,251	\$30,003	\$39,291
41 D. Mealy	16	12	15	14	3	6	8	4	\$1,858	\$4,974	\$9,619	\$6,169
42 C. Banks	10	5	4	4	3	4	2	4	\$14,749	\$3,782	\$2,193	\$5,860
43 S. Zhuang	14	29	10	7	8	27	4	8	\$18,006	\$95,717	\$28,969	\$49,335
44 S. Felder	19	14	13	18	6	6	4	5	\$59,960	\$25,026	\$4,184	\$21,973
45 F. Louis	11	14	15	18	8	5	8	13	\$31,708	\$5,753	\$16,986	\$36,901
46 M. Narcisse	3	4	5	2	0	0	0	1	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*	\$4,086
47 K. Santosuosso	9	5	19	20	2	3	5	11	\$9,134	\$574	\$16,523	\$58,701
48 I. Vernikov	23	34	22	26	7	8	11	4	\$40,499	\$34,051	\$47,642	\$30,099
49 K. Hanks	5	6	3	0	6	1	1	1	\$8,614	\$1,314	\$539	\$0*
50 D. Carr	3	6	2	2	5	2	1	0	\$9,129	\$1,250	\$0*	\$0*
51 F. Morano	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*
N/A**	50	48	60	27	7	9	5	2	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*	\$0*
Total	1063	1186	984	931	474	637	469	428	\$1,469,827	\$2,101,378	\$1,884,538	\$1,768,476

*Because dollar impact is calculated according to increases in tax abatement credit, matters that do not implicate a change in the tax abatement credit amount (for example, a renewal without a rent increase) can result in a \$0 dollar impact even if successfully resolved.

**Inquiries from persons outside of the five boroughs or where the tenant's address was not provided were categorized as "N/A" for purposes of this chart.

APPENDIX II

Glossary of Terms

Appeal: A request, usually submitted on the DOF Application for Appeal, for reconsideration of a DOF determination. Most often, appeals ask for reexamination of denied Rent Freeze applications or revoked Rent Freeze benefits.

Benefit Takeover Application: An application to take over the benefit of a Rent Freeze Program beneficiary who has died or permanently vacated the apartment.

CBO: Community-based organization.

CRM: DOF's internal customer relations management software system.

DHCR: The New York State Division of Homes & Community Renewal.

DOF: The New York City Department of Finance.

EEO: DOF's Equal Employment Opportunity office. The EEO reviews requests for reasonable accommodations.

FIT: Finance Information Technology, DOF's IT division, is in charge of electronic applications for property collections and accounting; tax policy, audit, and assessment; and parking and payment; as well as systems modernization and network operations.

Frozen Rent: The amount of reduced rent, set in accordance with the applicable Rent Freeze Program laws, that the tenant must pay to the landlord.

Legal Rent: The maximum rent that a landlord can charge a tenant for a rent-regulated unit according to applicable law.

MCI: Major capital improvement. Authorization of an MCI by DHCR generally includes a rent increase to compensate a landlord for the cost of building-wide renovations.

Reasonable Accommodation: In the context of DOF programs, a reasonable accommodation is a modification or adjustment to program requirements that is necessary for an applicant or program participant with an impairment to apply for or participate in the program. For Rent Freeze applicants, the most common requests involve an extension of time given as a reasonable accommodation for a person with an impairment to complete the renewal process. Applications for reasonable accommodation are referred to the Department of Finance's disability service facilitator in its Office of Equal Employment Opportunity.

Redetermination: An adjustment to a tenant's frozen rent amount after a permanent loss of 20% or more of the tenant's combined household income as compared to the income reported in the tenant's last approved application. In order to be considered for a redetermination, a tenant must submit a redetermination application to the Rent Freeze Program or request a redetermination review in the designated area on a benefit takeover application.

RIE: Rent Increase Exemption database. DOF's internal application processing and participant data storage application.

SDP: The Senior and Disabled Programs Unit within DOF's Property Division. SDP is responsible for administering the Rent Freeze Program and certain other tax benefits.

TAC (Tax Abatement Credit): The amount credited on a landlord's property tax bill in accordance with the Rent Freeze Program.