

**TESTIMONY FROM NYCHA'S CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER EVA TRIMBLE  
EXAMINING THE CAUSES OF VACANCIES IN NEW YORK CITY HOUSING AUTHORITY  
PROPERTIES  
COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HOUSING  
TUESDAY, JANUARY 31, 2023 – 10:00 AM  
CITY HALL COMMITTEE ROOM; NEW YORK, NY**

Chair Alexa Avilés, members of the Committee on Public Housing, other distinguished members of the City Council, NYCHA residents, community advocates, and members of the public: good morning. I am Eva Trimble, NYCHA's Chief Operating Officer. I am pleased to be joined by Sylvia Aude, Senior Vice President of Public Housing Tenancy Administration, and other members of NYCHA's team. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the status of vacancies in NYCHA developments. NYCHA is a critical affordable housing resource, and our goal is to get New Yorkers into available homes as quickly as possible without compromising the safety or quality of the home.

**Working to Improve Residents' Quality of Life**

My colleagues and I are using every resource available to improve the quality of life for NYCHA residents. In line with this vital mission, and in compliance with the 2019 HUD Agreement, we have been focusing intensely on addressing the areas that are of the highest concern for residents, including lead-based paint, mold, heat and elevator service, and pest and waste management.

As part of this crucial work, over the past few years we have been performing extensive (and required) environmental work in every apartment once they become unoccupied. Considering that residents stay in their NYCHA apartments for an average of 25 years, this is a key opportunity to complete critical health and safety work in these apartments.

The amount of work we must do to get these apartments ready for the next family is represented by the immense capital repair needs of our buildings – \$40 billion across the portfolio, an astonishing figure that continues to grow at the rate of about \$1 billion each year.

**Eliminating Lead Paint and Other Environmental Hazards**

I'd like to give you a few examples of the essential work we are performing. Since December 2021, we have been working diligently to ensure that all apartments are made lead-free under the City's new stringent lead-based paint standard of 0.5 milligrams per square centimeter. Since 2004, Local Law 1 has required landlords to perform lead abatement of certain components upon apartment turnover. NYCHA's policy is to abate all components to make an apartment lead-free for the new resident. In 2019, the City Council enacted new legislation that reduced the lead paint standard in New York City from 1.0 milligrams per square centimeter (mg/cm<sup>2</sup>) to 0.5 milligrams per square centimeter. The new lead standard took effect in December 2021, and NYCHA immediately began testing and fully abating vacant apartments to meet this new standard. When an apartment turns over, our Healthy Homes team conducts a lead inspection using this new standard. If lead paint is identified, the apartment is scheduled for abatement. From December 2021 through January 19, 2023, Healthy Homes has cleared nearly 4,500 apartments at the new, more stringent standard, with about a quarter of those requiring abatement.

On average, it takes four to six months to complete lead work during turnover. Once a work order is created for lead testing, Healthy Homes schedules the inspection with a certified vendor, conducts a quality assurance review of the lead inspection report, and provides the results (also known as a "lead disclosure") to the development. This process takes about four months to complete. If the apartment is negative, this is the end of the process. If the apartment tests positive, it takes on average an additional two and a half months to have a lead-certified contractor fully abate the apartment. In 2023, Healthy Homes is taking steps to shorten this timeline, including adding more resources to review testing reports, adding new abatement vendors, and, most importantly, proactively testing tens of thousands of apartments at the 0.5 mg/cm<sup>2</sup> standard so that they do not need to be tested again at apartment turnover. Since December 2021, NYCHA has proactively tested approximately 30,000 apartments at the 0.5 mg/cm<sup>2</sup> standard and expects to test an additional 40,000 before June 30, 2024.

While the practice of eliminating lead paint adds additional time to the apartment turnover process, it also means that every resident will move into a new apartment that is free of this environmental hazard. Our work in this area is a transformative accomplishment that addresses a long-entrenched issue and dramatically benefits residents.

We are also required to ensure that vinyl asbestos floor tiles are properly abated during turnover to make the apartments asbestos safe. Asbestos work is performed whenever there are broken or damaged asbestos floor tiles in an apartment. We abate around 30 vacant apartments each week to meet these requirements; since December 2021, we have abated asbestos floor tiles in more than 2,000 unoccupied apartments. On average, it takes 55 days to perform the asbestos investigation and 29 additional days to conduct asbestos abatement if the apartment tests positive. Notably, Healthy Homes coordinates the lead and asbestos work as much as possible to ensure that it occurs at the same time. It costs between \$28,000 to \$63,000 to complete lead and asbestos testing and remediation work, if necessary, in each apartment.

In 2022, it took an average of 236 days to get an apartment ready, including the time to complete any required lead paint work and asbestos work. Considering that our average residency is 25 years, many apartments also require extensive general repairs from years of wear and tear (for example, painting and cabinets). This also factors into the turnaround time; and along with staff and funding constraints, it means that we are not turning over apartments as quickly as we would like.

However, I am proud to be able to say that anyone moving into a NYCHA apartment will be safe from lead and asbestos. As noted, this extensive cleaning process, along with the general repairs performed, contributes to slower turnover times and longer waits for many families. NYCHA is a critical affordable housing resource for New York City, and we understand the implications of this delay. The previous practice was to match prospective tenants with apartments as soon as an apartment was vacated. This left many families waiting too long, often many months, before they could move into the apartment. Therefore, last spring we instituted a policy change to no longer match prospective tenants to apartments until the homes are turnkey ready. This reduces the amount of time between when residents are matched to apartments and when they can move in.

As of January 16, 2023, there are 5,964 unoccupied apartments out of 161,585 apartments available for occupancy, a 3.7 percent vacancy rate. This includes 1,662 apartments that are matched to households. To place this in context, the city's overall vacancy rate is 4.5 percent and 3 percent for rent regulated housing. And NYCHA's vacancy rate is lower than the national public housing vacancy rate of 5.4 percent. Please note that another approximately 1,000 apartments are permanently off the rent roll and not considered rentable since, for example,

they are used for NYCHA property management or maintenance offices or partner facilities, community facilities, or resident association spaces. To be clear, these apartments that are off the rent roll are not counted as vacant.

NYCHA works with partners in all levels of government to use every available resource to get New Yorkers into our deeply affordable apartments. We are grateful for the City's ongoing support, including through funding for the Vacant Unit Readiness program. In the current fiscal year, the City has made \$78 million available to NYCHA for this program, for rehabilitation work associated with expediting apartment turnover. Additional funding is also available for the following fiscal years.

### **Conclusion**

While we understand that it may be frustrating for prospective tenants to wait for a new apartment, the work we are doing is essential to providing a decent home and quality of life for their families, as well as the generations to come.

We are always eager to collaborate with the Council and other partners on how we can improve our service to residents and continue our progress as an organization.

Thank you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.