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Advocates, Elected Officials & de Blasio Administration Celebrate Landmark Affordable Housing Protection for Low-Income People with HIV/AIDS in State Budget

“30% Rent Cap” in HIV/AIDS Rental Assistance Program Closes Loophole that Pushed Thousands into Homelessness

New York – The recently approved state budget included a “30% rent cap” affordable housing protection for clients of the NYC HIV/AIDS Services Administration (HASA) that will prevent homelessness for over 10,000 low-income New Yorkers living with HIV/AIDS and enable hundreds more to move out of the shelter system. To celebrate this milestone, people living with HIV/AIDS rallied outside City Hall today with elected officials and the new Commissioner of the Human Resources Administration (HRA), which oversees HASA. Advocates have been pressing for the measure for nearly a decade.

“I’ve been in and out of housing court for over a year and constantly worried about being evicted because I couldn’t afford to keep paying 73% of my Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) towards rent,” said Wanda Hernandez, VOCAL-NY’s Board Chair who has been a HASA client since 2001. “I sacrificed a lot of things because of my rent burden, from skipping medical appointments when I couldn’t afford the subway ride to skipping meals when money ran tight. But because of Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo’s leadership, I’ll now get to keep my home. Mayor de Blasio immediately stepped up to the plate to begin fixing policies that fuel homelessness and inequality.”

“The de Blasio administration is proud and heartened that the new state budget includes a rent cap for people diagnosed with HIV and AIDS. With the city facing an unprecedented affordability and homelessness crisis, it makes moral and economic sense to help our most vulnerable residents to stay in permanent housing. I commend the State Legislature and Governor Cuomo for their compassion in acknowledging the merits of this important policy,” said New York City Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services, Lilliam Barrios-Paoli.

“HRA is proud to stand with VOCAL to celebrate the inclusion of the 30 percent rent cap in the State budget. This housing assistance is a lifeline to vulnerable New Yorkers living with HIV and AIDS in our City,” said HRA Commissioner Steven Banks. “Having a home is essential to health and safety, and the 30 percent rent cap provides cost-effective help to avoid evictions and homelessness. We greatly appreciate that Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo made this critical housing aid a priority in the budget agreement.”

HASA’s rental assistance program for low-income people living with HIV/AIDS was the only low-income housing program of its kind in the state that required tenants to pay more than 30% of their income towards rent. Because of a loophole in state law, HASA clients receiving rental assistance were forced to spend upwards of 70% or more of their disability income towards rent, which led to high rates of arrears and housing loss. During the last year alone, the number of

homeless people living with HIV/AIDS in commercial SROs used by HASA for emergency housing rose by 28%, mirroring the broader pattern of rising homelessness under the Bloomberg administration.

Under the new law, HASA's rental assistance program will align with other low-income housing programs so that clients pay no more than 30% of their income towards their rent. New York City will pay approximately two-thirds of the cost for the rent cap and the State will pay the remaining one-third, although the policy is expected to eventually pay for itself by reducing emergency housing placements and avoidable Medicaid expenses.

"This is a historic accomplishment for the people of New York City. Thank you to Governor Cuomo, Mayor de Blasio, my colleagues in the legislature, and the hundreds of advocates for their persistence and commitment in fighting for the 30% rent cap. No longer will low income New Yorkers with HIV/AIDS be forced to live on \$12 a day because of an unfair loophole in the law," said Senator Brad Hoylman, the lead Senate bill sponsor.

"The enactment of the 30% rent cap marks an important step forward in the fight against AIDS in New York. I applaud Governor Cuomo and Mayor de Blasio for negotiating this smart policy that will ensure access to affordable housing for more than 10,000 low-income New Yorkers living with AIDS. The 30% rent cap is truly a community victory, congratulations to all the advocates who have fought so tirelessly on this campaign for nearly a decade," said Assembly Member Robert Rodriguez, the lead Assembly bill sponsor.

"This fight started 8 years ago. We believed, in 2010, that we had succeeded. Unfortunately, we faced a veto. But we didn't give up and we are here today to celebrate a victory for equity and real people," Assembly Member Deborah J. Glick, the original bill sponsor in the Assembly.

"For too long, people in HASA housing have had to choose between paying rent and paying for basics like food or medicine," said Senator Daniel Squadron. "Now, they finally will get some relief. I want to thank Senator Hoylman, former Senator Duane, Assembly Member Rodriguez, and of course Mayor De Blasio and Governor Cuomo."

"People living with AIDS shouldn't have to choose between paying their rent and going to the doctor or buying food. Creating an affordable housing protection for clients of the HIV/AIDS Services Administration has been a longstanding priority of the Black, Puerto Rican, Hispanic and Asian Caucus, and I am so pleased that Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo worked together to get this done," said Assembly Member Karim Camara.

"Homelessness can be deadly for people living with HIV/AIDS," said Corey Johnson, the only openly HIV-positive New York City Council Member. "It's difficult to focus on basic things like taking medication, going to the doctor or eating well if you don't have a stable place to live. I applaud Mayor de Blasio for working with Governor Cuomo to deliver real results for some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers in this budget by closing a loophole that pushed so many people living with HIV/AIDS to the brink of homelessness."

"Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo have a long history working together to promote

affordable housing. That partnership will now deliver immediate relief to more than 10,000 people living with HIV/AIDS who have been on the verge of homelessness because of a loophole in state law that should have been fixed long ago. After having spent years working with advocates to pass this affordable housing protection, I know this could not have happened a moment too soon and am grateful for their leadership” said City Councilman Carlos Menchaca, the first openly gay and Mexican-American elected official from Brooklyn.

“The City Council has long called for a state law that would create an affordable housing protection in the rental assistance program serving low-income people living with HIV/AIDS,” said Ritchie Torres, the first openly gay City Council member from the Bronx. “It’s essential to keeping people living with HIV/AIDS healthy and in their homes instead of costly shelters, emergency rooms and hospital beds. Because of Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo’s leadership, thousands of people living with HIV/AIDS will now get to stay in their homes and have a little bit more income to cover basic needs like food and healthcare.”

“We must prevent homelessness for every New Yorker, including the over 10,000 low-income people living with HIV/AIDS who are disabled. The 30% rent cap is a crucial step forward in the fight against homelessness in New York City and I want to thank all of the elected leaders and advocates who have fought for so long for its passage,” said Council Member Stephen Levin, Chair of the General Welfare Committee.

“The re-establishment of a 30% rent cap demonstrates that grassroots advocacy with the support of public officials is a powerful change agent. Together we have reversed one of the cruelest housing policies made by the Giuliani Administration and carried forth by the Bloomberg Administration,” said Regina Quattrochi, CEO of Bailey House.

“With this eminently sensible agreement between Mayor de Blasio and Governor Cuomo, which was approved by the legislature in the just-passed 2014-15 state budget, we have not only ensured the fair and equitable treatment of low-income New Yorkers disabled by HIV/AIDS, but taken a big step in reducing homelessness among people with HIV/AIDS and helped to improve their health and that of their communities. That’s a win for all!,” said Daniel Tietz, Executive Director of AIDS Community Research Initiative of America (ACRIA).

VOCAL-NY is a grassroots membership organization building power among low-income people affected by HIV/AIDS, mass incarceration and the war on drugs in order to create healthy and just communities. Visit our website at www.vocal-ny.org for more information.

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