

HELEN ROSENTHAL

Council Member, District 6
Manhattan

DISTRICT OFFICE
563 COLUMBUS AVENUE, AT
87TH STREET
NEW YORK, NY 10024
(212) 873-0282

CITY HALL OFFICE
250 BROADWAY, ROOM 1744
NEW YORK, NY 10007
(212) 788-6975

www.council.nyc.gov



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Contact:

Jennifer Blatus (CM Cohen): 718-549-7300 // jblatus@council.nyc.gov
Stephanie Buhle (CM Rosenthal): 646-647-4395 // sbuhle@council.nyc.gov
Will Gerlich (CM Williams): 917-608-8784 // wgerlich@council.nyc.gov

**CITY COUNCIL STRENGTHENS RENT FREEZE PROGRAM
AND HOMEOWNERS' PROPERTY TAX EXEMPTION FOR
SENIORS & PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES**

*Reso 426-2014 by CMs Cohen & Rosenthal Calls on State to Remove Looming
Expiration Date For Vital Expansion of NYC Rent Freeze Program*

*Reso 282-2014 by CM Rosenthal Calls on State to Increase the Income Threshold to
\$50,000 for the Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE) Program*

*Reso 410-2014 by CM Williams Calls on State to Increase the Income Threshold to
\$50,000 for the Disabled Homeowners' Exemption (DHE) Program*

***New York, NY – Today, members of the New York City Council voted in favor of
three bills to help seniors and people with disabilities stay in their homes.***

Resolution 426-2014, sponsored by Council Members Andrew Cohen and Helen Rosenthal, calls on the State to eliminate the sunset provisions included in the major 2014 expansion of eligibility for the NYC Rent Freeze Program (also known as the Senior Citizens Rent Increase Exemption program, or SCRIE, and the Disability Rent Increase Exemption program, or DRIE), as proposed in State legislation proposed by Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh (bill A.5565A) and Senator Diane Savino (bill S.4748).

The 2014 expansion, which raised the maximum annual income eligibility to \$50,000 and has provided a rent freeze to tens of thousands more seniors and tenants with disabilities, will expire and be repealed automatically in July 2016 if the State does not renew the law. A repeal of that expansion would place those seniors and tenants with disabilities in danger of losing their homes due to rising costs.

The NYC Rent Freeze Program was established to protect low-income seniors and tenants with disabilities from the rent increases that otherwise are required for rent-regulated housing. For those who qualify, rent is frozen at the time of application approval, protecting participants from future increases. Participating landlords receive a property tax credit to cover the increase in rent.

Before the 2014 expansion, seniors were only eligible for the NYC Rent Freeze Program if their annual household income was below \$29,000, and tenants with disabilities were only eligible if their annual household income was below \$20,412 for a single person or \$29,484 for two or more people.

New Yorkers are eligible for a rent freeze under the NYC Rent Freeze Program if they:

- Rent an apartment that is regulated by the state's Division of Housing and Community Renewal (i.e. rent-stabilized units, rent-controlled units, rent-regulated hotel units) or is within a Mitchell-Lama development.
- Have a total household income of \$50,000 or less.
- Spend more than one-third of their monthly household income on rent.
- Are either over 62 years of age, or receive Federal Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Federal Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI), U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs disability pension or compensation, or disability-related Medicaid (if the applicant has received either SSI or SSDI in the past).

The Council also passed Resolution 282-2014 by CM Rosenthal, which calls on state to increase the income threshold to \$50,000 for the Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE) Program, and Resolution 410-2014 by CM Williams, which calls on state to increase the income threshold to \$50,000 for the Disabled Homeowners' Exemption (DHE) Program.

When New York State expanded the income threshold to \$50,000 for the Rent Freeze (SCRIE / DRIE) program in 2014, it did not expand the comparable programs for senior and disabled homeowners, SCHE and DHE.

Even minor cost-of-living adjustments to entitlement programs such as Social Security and disability assistance can cause senior citizen and disabled homeowners to lose their tax exemption benefits from SCHE and DHE.

Under the **Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE)** program, New Yorkers age 65 and over are currently eligible for a property tax exemption if they own their

primary residence and their income is under **\$37,399**. Under the **Disabled Homeowners' Exemption (DHE)** program, New Yorkers with a documented physical or mental disability are currently eligible for a property tax exemption if they own their primary residence and their income is under **\$37,399**.

“Many New Yorkers rely on the assistance of the NYC Rent Freeze Programs for stability within their household. The elimination of these sunset provisions will provide stability for many of our vulnerable residents. As members of the New York City Council we must remain focused on maintaining affordable living for senior citizens and disabled residents who are on fixed incomes. This resolution is targeted towards eliminating the sunset provisions in order to prevent a large number of lower income tenants from falling through the cracks. I urge the Governor and State Legislature to uphold this vital piece of legislation so those who are eligible can benefit beyond July 2016 and are not faced with the anxiety of not knowing if they will be able to continue living in their homes,” **said Council Member Andrew Cohen**.

"Seniors and people with disabilities tend to have higher medical costs than the rest of the population, and those earning less than \$50K need help to stay in their homes. Last year New York State raised the income threshold for SCRIE and DRIE to \$50,000 to help an additional 13,000 people -- who will soon lose that right if the State does not renew funding in 2016; I co-sponsored Reso 426-2014 with Council Member Andrew Cohen to call on the State to make the raised threshold permanent. Meanwhile, senior and disabled homeowners are still waiting for expanded protections; I sponsored Reso 282-2014 calling on the state to increase the income threshold for the Senior Citizen Homeowners' Exemption (SCHE) Program to \$50,000. I'm grateful to the full Council for passing this package of legislation today and to Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh and State Senator Diane Savino for their leadership in Albany. I hope our State legislature will follow suit and pass A.5565A/S.4748 into law so that seniors and people with disabilities on limited incomes won't worry every year about being forced out of their homes," **said Council Member Helen Rosenthal**.

“I’m proud to work with my colleagues to pass Reso 410A-2014, which calls on the State to adopt legislation, A.06027, sponsored by Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh, which will increase the income threshold eligibility for the Disabled Homeowners Exemption (DHE),” **said Council Member Jumaane D. Williams** (D-Brooklyn), Deputy Leader. “I am proud that this resolution is part of a package dealing with income thresholds and sunset provisions for senior homeowners and renters, along with disabled homeowners and renters. As chair of the Council’s Committee on Housing and Buildings, my highest priority is to ensure that city government uses all of the levers at our disposal to help end the crisis of affordability in housing. We know that millions of New Yorkers pay more than half of their income in rent, and by expanding DHE eligibility, we will encourage Albany to act and ensure that more New Yorkers who have disabilities are protected against rent increases that would force many to choose between paying the rent and buying food or critical medicine. I would like to thank Chair Cohen for moving these bills, and the State legislative sponsors, Senator Savino and Assembly Member Kavanagh for their leadership in Albany on these issues.”

“So many of the seniors in our city live on fixed incomes and struggle to keep their homes. Increasing the income threshold for the Senior Citizen Homeowners’ Exemption from \$37,399 to \$50,000 is a no-brainer, ensuring that more seniors are able to afford to stay homeowners,” said **Council Member James Vacca**. “I’m proud to work with Council Member Rosenthal and our partners in the State Legislature, Assembly Member Brian Kavanagh and State Senator Diane Savino, to make the adjustment to this impactful benefit program a reality.”

“Maintaining the rent increase exemption programs are vital to our seniors and those with disabilities, who usually rely on a fixed income, and face continuously increasing healthcare costs. This will help them to stay in their own homes, where they feel more safe and comfortable, rather than being forced into an institution, or possibly ending up homeless. I commend Councilmembers Cohen, Rosenthal, Williams, Vacca and their colleagues for their efforts and commitment on behalf of our city’s most vulnerable, and I look forward to working with Assemblyman Kavanagh to advance similar legislation in the State Legislature,” said **Senator Diane Savino**.

Assemblymember Brian Kavanagh said, “The rent increase exemption programs help protect thousands of New Yorkers who would otherwise be displaced from their homes and their communities because of ever-increasing rents and incomes that don’t keep up. I thank Councilmembers Cohen, Rosenthal, Chin, and their colleagues for highlighting the need to extend the critical expansion of these programs that we accomplished last year – so the newly eligible recipients will be able to benefit beyond June 2016. We must take action now, so tenants don’t face great uncertainty as the deadline looms next year. I look forward to working with the Council, Senator Savino, and our colleagues in Albany to pass our bill to make expanded access to SCRIE and DRIE permanent.”

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