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CO-CHAIR WOMEN'S CAUCUS

Kathleen A. Roberts, Chair
New York City Rent Guidelines Board
1 Centre Street, Suite 2210
New York, NY 10007

19 June, 2017

Dear Chair Roberts and Members of the Rent Guidelines Board,

I am writing to thank the Board for approving rent freezes on one-year leases for the past two years, and to urge you in the strongest terms possible to disapprove any increases this year. Despite the recent rent freezes, New York City rent-stabilized households are clearly struggling, often paying over one-third of their income in rent.

I urge you to consider the fact that in 2017, the average rent-stabilized tenant is rent-burdened by federal standards, despite living in allegedly affordable housing. Even more disturbing, an estimated 43% of New Yorkers in homeless shelters are coming from rent stabilized apartments.

My office works with thousands of tenants every year who are struggling to hold on to their apartments. In my district, residents are doubling up in order to avoid becoming homeless, and our seniors are especially vulnerable.

In light of the ongoing affordable housing crisis, I ask that you not only reconsider the move towards a rent increase, but go one step further. We need to give tenants a rent rollback. For years, rent increases have surpassed landlords' operating costs and tenants' spending power. And, this year the cost of fuel decreased by half.

The Board should also consider a specific rent rollback for tenants who use the Senior Citizen Rent Increase Exemption (SCRIE) and Disability Rent Increase Exemption (DRIE) programs. Our seniors and disabled citizens, who overwhelmingly live on fixed incomes, should not have to pay more than one third of their income in rent. When those who use SCRIE and DRIE recertify this year, their rent amounts should be capped at one third of their income, no matter how much they previously paid in rent.

In the years previous to the recent rent freezes, the RGB prioritized the needs of landlords over New York City tenants. The Board's preliminary vote sends the signal that it is preparing to return to a status quo that values the profit margins of landlords over the livelihoods of tenants.

We can do better. Our priority above anything else should be helping New Yorkers to remain in their homes. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely Yours,

Council Member Helen Rosenthal
Manhattan, District 6