



Press Room



NYC Public Advocate Argues To Strengthen Housing Protections Against Federal Budget Cuts

March 25th, 2025

Press Release



Amid an ongoing effort by the federal government to reduce the budgets and effectiveness of federal housing programs, New York City Public Advocate Jumaane D. Williams pushed for the staffing and strengthening of municipal housing agencies. At a budget hearing of the Committee on Housing and Buildings, he argued that the safety of tenants and tradesmen alike depends on safe staffing levels and robust funding for inspection and infrastructure.

“We cannot have unsafe and weakening infrastructure that puts New Yorkers at risk,” declared the Public Advocate. “I would like to know if the administration plans to respond to the federal government and meet the goal of being fully staffed for HPD and DOB.” This comes as City Hall and city agencies have been reluctant to criticize the actions of the Trump administration that negatively affect the lives of New Yorkers.

As to the municipal budget and city administration, Public Advocate Williams noted that the Department of Housing Preservation and Development (HPD) currently has 382 open positions, a vacancy rate of 13.8 percent, and the Department of Buildings has over 200 vacant positions.

He further highlighted the direct dangers of underfunding and understaffing, both to tenants and workers. There were 30 construction-related deaths on the job in 2023, the most in a decade, and that for DOB “... The average inspection response has been negatively impacted due to being understaffed. The average wait time for construction inspections increased to 4.2 days, plumbing inspections increased to 3.9 days, and electrical inspections increased to 9.4 days more than doubled from before.”

In the face of federal cuts, the Public Advocate asked “What is the City planning to do to protect the federal funds and capital projects? Also, how will the City respond to a potential and probable backlog on the administration of Section 8 applications?”

The Public Advocate’s full comments as-delivered are below, and video is available here.

STATEMENT OF PUBLIC ADVOCATE JUMAANE D. WILLIAMS TO THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS

MARCH 25, 2025

Thank you very much, Madame Chair. I just want to congratulate the Acting Commissioner, congratulations, couldn’t happen to a nicer, more attentive guy, so I appreciate that. And I want to shout out my 16 year old, Amelie, who is here today, out of school, thanks for joining, junior in high school.

My name is Jumaane D. Williams and I am the Public Advocate for the City of New York. Thank you very much to Chair Sanchez and members of the Committee on Housing and Buildings for holding this hearing and always allowing me the opportunity to provide a statement.

Our housing agencies have faced high attrition rates with HPD experiencing a 45.6 percent change from pre-pandemic to current trends. As of February 2025, HPD’s vacancy rate is 13.8 percent with a total of 382 vacancies. HPD has bounced back from the pandemic lows with production in FY25 increasing from the low point of the previous two fiscal years. However, the vacancy rate from last month is still very high. It’s my hope HPD continues to approve prioritizing hiring to fill the gap and ensure it does not negatively impact the agency’s capacity.

According to the Preliminary Mayor’s Management Report, within the first four months of FY25, HPD issued 13 percent more violations compared to the same period of FY24 for hazardous conditions including 15 percent increase for Class A non-hazardous violations, 13 percent increase for Class B hazardous violations and 11 percent increase for Class C immediately hazardous violations. In addition, HPD’s Section 8 voucher utilization rate was 89 percent in the first four months of FY25, which was a 8 percent decrease compared to FY24. The rate is much lower because of the transfer from NYCHA that saw 3,000 vouchers added to the Agency’s baseline, which in turn increased the number of vouchers issued by 26 percent.

DOB faces similar staffing changes with a higher attrition rate of 68.3 percent change from pre-pandemic to current trends. As of February 2025 – I know DOB will be later, just putting on the record now – DOB’s vacancy rate is 12.41 percent with a total of 216 vacancies. Compared to HPD, DOB has been falling behind from the pandemic lows with production in FY25 being minimal compared to the previous fiscal years. It is critical that we ensure that DOB is also able to fill all its vacancies for this year.

There has been a concerning trend in building safety in the past couple of years. 2023 was the deadliest year for construction workers. There were 30 construction deaths on the job, which was the most in a decade. According to the Preliminary MMR, construction-related incidents with injury decreased from 237 to 143 and construction-related injuries decreased from 266 to 146, as DOB has put several steps in place to prioritize and ensure the safety of workers.

In addition, the average inspection response has been negatively impacted due to being understaffed. The average wait time for construction inspections increased to 4.2 days, plumbing inspections increased to 3.9 days, and electrical inspections increased to 9.4 days more than doubled from before

I’m hoping to hear from the administration about my concerns and asks for this budget cycle:

1. I noticed that almost \$214,000 that was set aside for the asylum seekers was removed. I'd be interested to find out where that money is going, and whether it's possible to substitute this money for a different need for HPD.
2. The current federal administration is dismantling agencies including HUD, and it is currently facing agency cuts and massive layoffs during a housing crisis. One department in particular that is seeing the deepest cuts is the Office of Community Planning and Development. This office funds disaster recovery and programs that help local communities build affordable housing. In addition, this office provides more than \$3.6B in federal funding for rental assistance, substance use treatment, mental health, and outreach to get those living outside into housing or shelter. HPD runs an emergency housing program for people who need to be relocated because of the fires. I'd like to find out how HPD is impacted by these cuts, and whether folks are on the verge of homelessness.
3. HUD has only one staff person for the entirety of the State of New York which has a population of approximately 20 million. What is the City planning to do to protect the federal funds and capital projects? Also, how will the City respond to a potential and probable backlog on the administration of Section 8 applications?

I hope during today's hearing the administration will provide information on the issues that I just highlighted in my statement. We cannot have unsafe and weakening infrastructure that puts New Yorkers at risk. I would like to know if the administration plans to respond to the federal government and meet the goal of being fully staffed for HPD and DOB.

I'll just end by saying a few weeks ago I was here at a public safety hearing. The only thing discussed during that public safety hearing was law enforcement. I just want to re-up the fact that all of these issues, whether education, or housing , really, really have to be a part of the public safety discussion. I hope soon, we'll talk about it as such.

Thank you.

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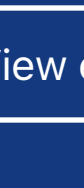
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