

Housing & Human Services Committee Minutes
Thursday, April 2nd, 2020 at 7PM

Committee Members Present:

Ariel Miranda, Waldys Cruz, Ayisha Oglivie, Bruce Robertson, Osi Kaminer

Committee Members Absent:

Naysha Diaz, Carolina Charles

Public Members Present:

Marshall Vanderpool

Public Members Absent:

Richard Habersham, Al Melendez

Agenda

1. Call to Order
2. Introductions
3. COVID-19's Impacts on Human Services
4. COVID-19's Impacts on Housing
5. Old Business
6. New Business

Minutes:

-Ariel Miranda began the meeting highlighting reasons for bringing forward this month's agenda items focused on the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the community's housing and human services.

-Ariel Miranda highlighted the need to keep open the agenda as much as possible so as to allow for as many different concerns to be raised.

-Ariel Miranda stated his very concerns were the rise in unemployment, needs of small and mid-size landlords who oversee affordable housing portfolios, needs of renters who may not pay rent this month, needs of immigrants not receiving federal relief, and needs of homeless population.

-Ariel Miranda stated he is taking stacks and opened the meeting up to everyone.

-Osi stated she would like to know how shelters are currently operating and why people are currently being exposed more so now.

-Ariel stated that according to articles shared earlier this week, the reason why individuals are at higher risk within shelters is because their set up. Some shelters are arranged in a dormitory style setting, in close proximity to one another. One of the solutions suggested were to ensure that people were being removed from those sites and placed in other temporary medically appropriate shelter sites.

-Waldys Cruz stated he's been hearing that he's been seeing staff currently aren't being allocated medically protective equipment which is also furthering the issues within shelters.

-Waldys Cruz stated another issue he has been hearing of is the Corner Project staff not being able to address many of the issues our community is still facing

-Ariel stated one of the matters that he thought was incredibly important to note was that within the \$2 Trillion CARES bill just passed by Congress was that it actually removed the worker requirements that had previously been instituted in order to receive various human services benefits because it actually enabled many families to receive them when unemployed throughout this pandemic.

-Ariel stated another issue that has come up recently is Domestic Violence survivor advocates are warning there could potentially higher risks associated with one's inability to leave their home if they are in an abusive relationship. They are currently asking for more resources be devoted towards hotlines such as those set up by Safe Horizons. Because financial instability is even more common as a result of the pandemic, those most challenged by their hardship will have the most difficulty leaving their homes to seek refuge elsewhere.

-Ariel stated that one of the most sought after human service now is unemployment benefits. Crains New York reported there have been "7.8 million calls by New Yorkers seeking unemployment benefits last week", "80,000 filed for unemployment in week ending March 21st", and that NYU's Furman Research Center reported "roughly 1/3 of the 3.2 million households in NYC draw their primary income from someone who is vulnerable to income loss, 34% of workers in the city are at risk of losing income, and that about 48% of Hispanic wage-earners, 38% of Black wage-earners as well as 35% of Asian or Pacific Islander wage-earners were in vulnerable occupations in 2018". In addition, "Currently, the Federal Reserve is projecting a 30% unemployment rate".

-Ariel stated his concern is that the additional funds made available by the Federal government does not necessarily meet the needs of those who particularly live in New York state and may very well require the State government to provide additional resources as a result.

-Osi stated that she has been reading it could very well take up to 2 years before we can get the economy back and will take some time.

-Waldys stated the effects have led to us to a state similar to what many are saying is like the Great Depression and how it will strain government programs as well as funding particularly for Medicaid.

-Ariel reiterated Waldys point and how difficult it will be to receive health insurance when so many rely upon their place of employment. The protections offered by COBRA will still leave individuals having to pay unfeasible rates.

-Waldys stated he thinks we need greater advocacy to take place for medicaid as a result of these strains

-Ayisha stated the current unemployment benefits regulations could very well leave out many who may not be able to show they have lost their employment because they are self-employed. There is concern because there is no way to show they were employed other than by themselves. In addition there are undocumented communities that are not necessarily always on governments radar. There is concern when there is a very great lack of data available concerning these individuals that hinders their ability to qualify for services.

-Waldys stated he agreed and noted there are current barriers to receiving medicaid in vulnerable communities. As a result, this can lead families to choose between covering their medical bills and other badly needed expenses.

-Ariel asked Waldys if the employees that worked through the Corner Project relied upon Medicaid funding to which Waldys said they actually rely upon grant funding so it shouldn't immediately impact them at this moment.

-Ariel stated this is making him reflect on how the expected lack of future funding could very well impact non-profits that depend on government allocations and how the Comptroller has also made note of there being an expected 7% decrease in the city's revenue stream because of the pandemic, particularly \$2 billion this year and \$6 billion in the coming year.

-At this point, Ariel said he would like to begin moving on to discussing housing needs in the community and began by addressing an individual bill S1825A that was introduced in the New York State Senate by State Senator Michael Gianaris.

-Bruce noted that he has seen it also introduced in the Assembly and asked if there's been any updates as to whether it will be getting passed

-Ariel stated that he has not heard much but that the current bill has already received the support of 23 State Senators and will require a total of 32 votes in total to pass the senate before stating he thinks the Committee should consider supporting the bill by a resolution. In addition, he noted that at this time there's been mention that the Governor has been trying to end the session very soon and so there is a particular need to get it passed sooner rather than later.

-Ariel stated that what's been mentioned is that there is a desire to have the costs associated with not requiring tenants to pay their rents to then ultimately go to the banks and institutions overseeing lending practices.

-Bruce asked if we've already received counsel from anyone regarding our abilities to pass a resolution to which Ariel stated that we have been given permission to vote using online/digital services after having cleared up concerns over the Executive Order suspending the Open Public Meetings Law.

-Ariel noted that with this being the case, the committee could move forward on passing a resolution right away or begin to craft language to take before the Executive Committee where they themselves can vote on it there.

-Osi asked to have the language of the bill shared again with her and so Ariel had it shared once again.

-Bruce asked to have chat enabled on Zoom for future meetings and Jonathon said he would be happy to have it available in the future

-Ayisha requested having the bill put on screen share and Ariel began sharing the New York Senate website through screen share

-Ariel went through the nysenate.gov website showing the information on the bill

-Bruce requested we went ahead on crafting the resolution to which Ariel agreed before noting that he would be happy to include other resolves that support other bills, policy suggestions, and positions on actions, asking for everyone's input moving forward.

-Ayisha began stating that she would like the language to be crafted so as to go further than that of the bill and acknowledge not just loss of employment but financial hardship and explain this in further detail.

-Ayisha stated one reason for this is that if we don't provide benefits to commercial renters they could very well be left out of the benefits currently needed; others are people who have contractual jobs.

-Ariel asked if there is particular language that might be beneficial to have included before then suggesting that the previous statistics mentioned earlier were included.

-The committee agreed to add the information for the first few "Whereas" (as is shown on the resolution)

-Bruce asked how the legislators have been defining hardship and unfortunately the committee could not determine that given the very text of the bill. Bruce said he would look to ask Senator Robert Jackson or Assemblyman Al Taylor.

-Osi asked what everyone thought of a system of income-driven rent.

-Ariel noted he thought it to be interesting because our country as a whole may not be as supportive but we do have it in NYCHA already

-Ayisha noted she's spoken to legislators as well as Ava Farkas from Met Council about rent regulation being implemented on the federal level... (but then her mic went out)

-Ariel went on to add additional statistical information from the NYU Furman Center noted earlier

-Waldys Cruz asked for specifics about the statistics and asked to make clear whether it refers to the State of New York or the City of New York, to which the committee did.

-Ayisha came back online and suggested bringing forward federal regulation as a resolve in hopefully another resolution to help families throughout the country dealing with economic instability, she would like to have language address families who may not have income that is immediately verifiable, would like to receive data about how many families do not currently have income that is verifiable, would like to have language address the unclear text in Senator Gianaris' bill regarding hardship, and would like to have language requiring on-going assessments of where families in New York State are financially while we are in the midst of the pandemic because it is very likely 90 days protection may not be enough.

-Osi noted she agrees with Ayisha's concern that 90 days may not be sufficient and thought it important to make clear why it may not be in the resolution.

-Ayisha stated she has been speaking with a local business owner who is concerned she may not be able to weather the storm through 90 days as is because of the loss of revenue and therefore won't be able to continue offering employment after those 90 days. Small businesses not surviving and people losing their jobs as a result would contribute to a decrease in employment and people's abilities to pay past the 90 days.

-Ayisha put forward a whereas to address the concern for a 90 day period in the resolution

-Ariel put forward a whereas concerning a survey by property nest reporting 40% of renters not being able to pay rent.

-Ayisha mentioned that she was wondering if the NYS legislature may have the authority to pass similar legislation to the Emergency Price Control Act signed by President Franklin Roosevelt during war time and thought it would be important to implement due to the impact of COVID-19

-Waldys stated he would like to have the whereas suggested by Ariel included

-Jonathon stated he found a NY Times article that also supported the findings of the property nest survey and so the committee agreed to have it included moving forward

-Ayisha went back to her previous point and stated she found additional information regarding price controls that stated in the 1940s over 80% of the housing stock was placed under rent control during WWII, according to the Right To Counsel page

-Osi stated she would like to have a separate resolution begin addressing homelessness to which Ayisha expressed she'd be open to while also making sure to address SOTA and The Homes Guarantee package of bills

-Ayisha stated she would like to have language included in the resolution that cites information directly, not by the Property Nest hyperlink alone, to which Ariel agreed and made changes in the resolution to directly state the information was collected from them.

-Ariel brought up the Right to Counsel homepage to note that it currently states there are over 90,000 who have signed on to a petition to not pay rent and asked if the committee would like to have a whereas make note of this.

-Osi stated she was worried it could come off as threatening to which Waldys agreed

-Ayisha said she understood but thought it helpful to soften the language noting that there are so many who can't pay rent.

-Ultimately, the committee agreed and presented a whereas for the resolution as is now written

-Ariel asked if the Committee would like to continue writing out the resolution tonight to which everyone agreed

-Ariel began writing out the first be it resolved regarding State Senator Gianaris Bill

-Waldys asked to have another whereas be included noting how Governor Cuomo's 90-day moratorium will be leaving many families vulnerable to falling behind in their rent post the 90 days

-Ayisha noted how there was a city representative from Florida who went viral on social media for being incredibly upset at their City for shutting off services in the wake of the pandemic due to families' inability to pay their utilities. She also noted that Right to Counsel also was of the opinion that both previously owed amounts and accrued cost during the pandemic be forgiven. Following this she asked that the committee include language in the resolution to address this, to which everyone agreed.

-Waldys went back to his point and said he will send language to make clear how he would like to have the whereas mentioned prior written and Ariel said he would add it

-Osi asked if there is data from the Census we could use to potentially strengthen further the whereas but Ayisha noted the information from 2010 may not be relevant. However, Ayisha did note we could use the previous data we've noted several times before about those who were already rent-burdened.

- Ariel noted that this reminded him the NY Times stated roughly half of New Yorkers are rent burdened.

-Osi asked if there is specific information focused on our district

-Ayisha noted that we could check the DOHMH Community Profile for that data and Ariel pulled it up to begin inputting the information as additional whereas for the resolution

-Osi asked if there would be any information on Seniors' income that might be affected to which Ariel said he thought there might not be on the profile

-Ayisha noted that Right to Counsel was also arguing landlords should not be able to increase rent and tenants should have the right to renewals under the current circumstances because displacement should not be an option made available

-Waldys asked that we make clear the data from the Community Profile is dated in the resolution to which Ariel agreed

-Ariel continued to review the profile hoping to find the information on Seniors that could be noted in the resolution but did not find anything

-Ariel asked Waldys to share the language for the aforementioned whereas

-Osi asked if we knew of statistics in the news regarding seniors losing income to which Ariel stated it might be a very niche statistic given that many seniors live on stable fixed incomes that very well do not have to do with employment but there should probably be some information somewhere

-Ayisha mentioned how she has experienced learning from seniors that many are already rent burdened by having fixed incomes and the pandemic could very well add to this issue.

- Ariel stated he does know that in areas such as human services, Seniors are being affected by potentially not being able to access senior centers, reach their home health aides, and receive meals which is what's been all over the news
- Ariel noted it might be beneficial to mention supporting organizations like Meals on Wheels with further funding
- Ayisha noted she would like to see more specific data on what's currently impacting seniors before putting forward a resolution on the matter to which the committee agreed
- Ayisha noted that Waldys did put in a previous resolution 26% of able bodied individuals in our district receive SNAP
- Waldys noted he'd sent his whereas and Ariel added it to the resolution
- Ayisha noted HRA has been making concessions to their application process so as to ensure people could apply more easily and that she would like to know if similar measures are being taken with other resources
- Ariel asked the committee if they are in support of increasing funding for human services throughout the city as a whole and the committee agreed
- Ayisha decided to go back into her emails and forward over the SNAP resolution previously worked on back in January 2019
- Ariel made small edits to the resolution and named it "Resolution in support of protecting the community from the current impacts of COVID-19"
- Ayisha asked to have another resolution address market-rate tenants who do not have protections from price gouging during the COVID crisis even if they may very well be a part of the large numbers who are rent burdened because unfortunately they are not as equipped with as many protections.
- Ariel agreed it was important because of an article where a landlord tried to take advantage of the increased demand for housing when healthcare workers are coming from across the country to serve in our hospitals. This landlord tried to increase the rent 25%.
- Osi asked to be shared the article and so Ariel shared it via email.
- Ayisha also read aloud an excerpt from Street Easy clarifying that market rate apartments can be increased by any amount the landlords want.
- Ariel created a resolve including language to address this as well as giving automatic lease renewals upon them ending during the COVID-19 pandemic
- Osi asked if we knew how much of our housing stock is rent-regulated to which Ariel said lies close to almost 80%
- Ariel also noted that by Assembly district we are known to have the highest stock
- After this, the committee called the resolution to a vote and the resolution passed unanimously.
- Ariel called the meeting to a close, Waldys seconded, and the meeting ended.