

TESTIMONY FOR SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL SERVICES
SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT HEARING – APRIL 15, 2010

Good morning. My name is Lachonne Morton. I thank you for the opportunity to speak about this important issue that affects countless New Yorkers like myself. I live in the Bronx where my current apartment has been my home since 1977. My four children, who are now adults and out of the household, were all born and raised in this apartment.

I am unable to work and subsist on Social Security Disability benefits. Since my rent exceeds my monthly income, I am not left with any money after paying my rent. My relatives assist me in meeting my monthly living expenses. I am lucky to have this assistance because they are by no means wealthy.

I received my Section 8 voucher in September 2007 after applying in 2005. I was very happy to receive this voucher since it would reduce my high rent burden. I immediately went to my landlord. He initially refused to accept my voucher and suggested that I should move. This was very stressful and I was not sure what I could do. I considered moving but I have lived in this community for the greater part of my life and the rent is less than what I would likely pay for another apartment. During this time, my voucher nearly expired but, fortunately, it was extended. I later came into contact with the Legal Aid Society and the attorneys there agreed to represent me in a lawsuit against my landlord. I came to learn that there are laws that protect me from discrimination based on how I plan to pay my monthly rent. The lawsuit started in May 2008. After the court decided in my favor over a year later, my landlord, after much delay, completed the landlord package. I immediately submitted the landlord required papers and my papers to the New York City Housing Authority. The New York City Housing Authority

rejected the papers because one of the forms the landlord filled out had incorrect information. I asked my landlord to make the proper corrections but my landlord delayed for some time. Soon after, the New York City Housing Authority announced they would no longer process any rental packages.

After everything I endured, finding out that I would not be able to use my voucher was devastating news. I was on the cusp of greatly reducing my rent burden; now that is not so. If I had Section 8, I would pay 30% of my income towards my rent instead of not being able to pay the rent with my income. I would have more money for necessities such as food and clothing. I would be able to ease the burden on my relatives that graciously assist me when they can and at great cost to them. Instead, I am unable to pay the rent and remain concerned about how I will be able to hold on to my home.

In closing, I urge our elected officials to work towards a solution to this crisis. There are many people for whom Section 8 would provide a great measure of stability. A great burden is lifted when one does not have to worry about something as basic as where they will be able to rest their head at night. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.