



Dear Senate and Assembly Members,

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the East Harlem/El Barrio Community Land Trust (EHEBCLT), in addition to serving as a representative of EHEBCLT to the New York City Community Land Initiative's (NYCCLI) Coordinating Committee. We come to you all urging that you prioritize CLTs and shared equity models in the state's budget.

EHEBCLT works to develop and preserve community-controlled, truly and permanently affordable housing, commercial, green and cultural spaces in East Harlem/El Barrio that prioritizes households of extremely low to low incomes. As a strategy to ensure permanent affordability, the EHEBCLT will own land and lease it to buildings on that land, as well as develop a resident-controlled Mutual Housing Association.

EHEBCLT launched in 2014 as pilot project of NYCCLI. After many years of deep grassroots organizing, we acquired our first four properties from the city in November of 2020. In partnership with nonprofit developers Banana Kelly Community Improvement Corporation and CATCH, we formed the East Harlem El Barrio Mutual Housing Association, which is taking on the work of rehabilitating the four buildings in the project, as we continue to work with residents to build out the tenant-lead governance structure. This project is a major milestone in New York's growing community land trust movement, preserving all residential units at below market rate for the length of the 99-year ground lease and beyond, where 14 units will be set at 35% AMI, 18 units at 100% AMI, and 4 units set aside for people coming out of homelessness. The commercial and community spaces will also be set at below market rate rents, and will prioritize local community residents and smaller businesses in support of the local economy.

As significant as this project is, the time and effort required to organize this 38-unit project was incredible. Six years of organizing through the dedicated struggle of our parent organization, Picture the Homeless, who operated with limited resources and capacity to educate community members and local city elections and agencies on the need for innovative solutions to the city's housing crisis was a big fight for what may seem like a small project. What makes this work so hard is the lack of funding, both on the capital side of community land trusts projects seeking to acquire land and property, as well as the extensive people power that is crucial to building out the vision and strategy for community ownership models. Despite the deep contributions that community ownership can have on community wellbeing, by putting those most impacted at the center of decision making processes that concern their homes and communities, it has been historically difficult to secure resources for this type of work.

It is with deep understanding of this struggle that we call on state legislators to prioritize community land trusts and other shared equity models in the capital and housing budgets. To truly open a path for community ownership, communities must be given access to sufficient

funding to make acquisitions, development, and operations actually possible. We are in a promising time for cooperative housing models, as policies such as Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) and Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (COPA) gain wider support across the city and state. However, these policies will have little impact if real funding is not connected to them. The state legislature is in a position to make these policies have real-world impact on the state's housing needs by carving out funding for them in the state's new budget. Capital funding would allow NY residents to not only acquire property, but also to invest the funds needed for rehab and development that is necessary to create the living conditions that all NYers deserve.

We look forward to working with you all to house all NYers with dignity and care.

Sincerely,

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Project Director

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