

Proposal: Safety, services, and affordability to transform NYCHA

Background: I am a psychologist working at NYCHHC since 1997. The majority of my clients live in NYCHA and are elderly. Crime and issues of safety are the most common problems they face. Over recent years this has intensified and people who have grown up and lived all their lives in NYCHA feel more afraid now than ever. The constant stress and fear of harm has exacerbated medical and psychiatric health issues. They describe gangs hanging out in their hallways and people living in the stairwells. They report drugs, defecation and urination, and fighting. Violent crime, including rape and murder are on the rise in their areas. No one should have to live in fear and squalor, yet that is exactly what many children, families, and elderly face every day through no fault of their own.

Proposal: We are constantly decrying the lack of affordable housing in the city, but we do have affordable housing in NYCHA. Let's work to transform NYCHA into safe havens of community and creativity as well as affordability. If NYCHA were safe and nurturing communities, the many capable and hardworking people living there could thrive and it would reverse the trend for children and teens to fall easy prey to gangs and crime due to a lack of positive options.

To create needed change, I have 3 basic premises:

1. Safety. Resident's safety must be the first priority. Every NYCHA facility must have doormen and security in the lobby. Residents must show ID to enter and guests must be announced and buzzed in. The security will also check hallways, stairwells, and rooftops for safety. At the same time, the process to add family members to leases needs to be made more flexible and easier.
2. Services/amenities. Residents should have a say in what services would serve their community best. Examples include: Senior Center, afterschool activities and tutoring, exercise and nutrition classes, gardening, book clubs, sports, college prep, financial services, café with healthy options, educational/vocational counseling and referral, child care for working parents (imagine being able to drop off and pick up your child in your building as you go and come from work rather than having to travel out of your way to drop off and pick up). All of these services should be free or on a sliding scale based on income. If we invest in communities from the ground up we will be creating better opportunities for residents and can break the cycle of poverty and crime.
3. Improve the system of repairs and responses to tenant complaints. Have adequate buildings staff to address repairs in reasonable time.
4. Maintain stability and affordability. While making the above improvements, NYCHA must maintain the affordability and stability of tenant's rights that it has provided. One of the best things about NYCHA is that rent is based on a fair percentage of income. If a person's income declines or increases the rent is adjusted accordingly. This is incredibly fair and I wish all housing could be based on this system. I would not want to see this lost at NYCHA.

