



## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL HOUSING & BUILDINGS COMMITTEE

September 15, 2016

Good morning and thank you, Committee Chair Williams and the other members of the Housing & Buildings Committee, for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Eve Weissman and I am a staff attorney at New Economy Project, which for 20 years has worked with community groups to promote economic justice in New York City's low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color.

Several years ago, recognizing the promise of Community Land Trusts (CLTs) as a critical tool to address root causes of gentrification and displacement in New York City, our organization joined grassroots, community-based, faith-based, social justice, and affordable housing groups across the City to form the New York City Community Land Initiative (NYCCLI), a broad-based alliance committed to winning deeply and permanently affordable housing for all New Yorkers. Our coalition has been laying groundwork for CLTs and other non-speculative housing models that promote development of housing and neighborhoods for and with community members who are not currently served by the private market.

Today, New Economy Project testifies in support of the Housing Not Warehousing Act, a package of three bills designed to: (1) create a mandatory registry for all landlords holding their property vacant (Intro 1034); (2) mandate an annual count of all vacant property in New York City (Intro 1036); and (3) establish a list of all city, state, federally, and authority-owned vacant property suitable for the development of affordable housing, and recommend paths towards bringing these units to occupancy where possible (Intro 1039). These bills represent a critical opportunity to identify unutilized property that should be tapped to create deeply and permanently affordable housing, and to serve other community uses such as open, cultural and commercial space. We believe these objectives could be accomplished in part through the transfer of vacant and unused property to CLTs.

In 2011, fellow NYCCLI member Picture the Homeless led a vacant property count that identified thousands of vacant properties across New York City.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, New York City's

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<sup>1</sup> See *Banking on Vacancy: Homelessness and Real Estate Speculation*, Picture the Homeless, available at: [https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/103341274/Banking\\_on\\_Vacancy.pdf](https://dl.dropboxusercontent.com/u/103341274/Banking_on_Vacancy.pdf).

sheltered homeless population exceeds 60,000 people,<sup>2</sup> and hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers live in overcrowded and inadequate housing. The City must take meaningful steps to end the warehousing of property that has kept so much usable living space off the market. These bills represent a key step in solving the City's housing crisis and eradicating homelessness by identifying where vacant properties are located and who owns them, and by creating pathways for these properties to serve as housing for the extremely low-income households that need it most. Thank you.

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<sup>2</sup> See *Basic Facts About Homelessness: New York City*, Coalition for the Homeless, available at: <http://www.coalitionforthehomeless.org/basic-facts-about-homelessness-new-york-city/>.