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Press Release

For Immediate Release:
July 22, 2009

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*** Photos will be available upon request at 6:30 PM.

Public Housing Residents Take City Council Speaker Christine Quinn on Tour of Public Housing

Call on City Council to fully fund public housing and create committee with residents to oversee Federal Stimulus Funds that the Housing Authority will receive

New York, NY – This afternoon public housing residents who are members of Community Voices Heard (CVH) took City Council Speaker Christine Quinn and City Council Members Melissa Mark Viverito and Robert Jackson on a tour of public housing developments to see firsthand the problems caused by funding cuts to the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) and the need for residents to be involved in oversight of the Federal Stimulus Funds NYCHA has received.

Along the tour of two NYCHA developments, Jefferson Houses in East Harlem and Grant Houses in West Harlem, Speaker Quinn and the Council members were shown the conditions created by a lack of funding and heard testimonies from residents about experiences such as waiting for a replacement for a broken refrigerator for four months, health problems caused by basement flooding, and residents with disabilities being trapped inside their apartment or outside of their building when elevators break down for days at a time. Residents of other public housing developments across the five boroughs held up enlarged pictures from their buildings showing serious need for repairs and maintenance, including broken and dangerous playground equipment, extensive water damage, a radiator that fell on a small child, and live wires hanging in public areas.

The City of New York is responsible for providing \$30 million annually in operating expenses for public housing developments that the city built. Last month, the City Council passed a budget for 2010 that did not include any money for operating funds for NYCHA. For years, lack of full funding on all government levels has caused the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) to have a huge operating deficit, projected at \$137 million for fiscal year 2010. As a result of this deficit, buildings are falling apart, elevators have become dangerous and even deadly, and rents have been raised, making public housing less affordable. CVH members called on Speaker Christine Quinn and the City Council to restore full funding for public housing to begin to address these issues.

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“Residents across the city depend on public housing as the only place we can afford to live. We demand the city stop ignoring its responsibility and take care of the public housing it built. By fully funding public housing with \$30 million this year and every year hereafter, the city would be investing in its future,” said Ann Valdez, CVH member and resident of Gravesend Houses in Brooklyn.

“We already don’t have enough as it is – and now they want to take even more. Where are we supposed to go when they hike rents, or little things like paying the rent on the 6th instead of the first? Where are we supposed to go? Are we supposed to disappear?” asked Veronica Johnson, resident of Jefferson Houses and member of CVH.

The tour also focused on the \$423 million in Federal Stimulus funds that NYCHA has received to make capital improvements to some developments. CVH members pointed out that in the past, funds for capital projects have not been used properly, as projects have been left unfinished, work has not been done well, and regulations are not always followed requiring that public housing residents are hired for some jobs. At Jefferson Houses in East Harlem, Resident Association members pointed out that years ago, money was allocated to replace fencing throughout the development. Today, temporary chain link fence still remains. Residents from Davidson Houses in the Bronx and Kingsborough Houses in Brooklyn pointed out enlarged photos of a common sight in many NYCHA developments across the city - scaffolding erected years ago for roofing and brickwork projects that still remains long after the projects were abandoned and never finished.

Roxanne Reid, CVH member and Tenant Association President of Castle Hill Houses in the Bronx, spoke about the difficulties of getting contractors to hire public housing residents for a Stimulus Package project installing green light fixtures that will save energy. “I sent them 45 residents who had experience working with the contractors. But instead they brought in their own crew, even though they are supposed to hire residents. They only hired 2 of the residents I sent to them. Not only that, but they put the wrong light fixtures in the first time, and now they have to pay for contractors to come back and do it over again,” she explained. CVH members called on Speaker Christine Quinn and the City Council Members to prevent the Stimulus Funds from being wasted by creating an oversight committee that would include public housing residents, grassroots organizations, unions that represent NYCHA workers, and key City Council Members. “The residents know what is needed in public housing. Who else is going to know what is best when it comes to jobs, elevators, and major repairs? The last time NYCHA renovated our elevators, they were breaking down again within days. If we were able to oversee the money, than we can make sure it won’t take so long to get things done and done right,” said Anne Washington, CHV Board Member and Grant Houses Resident.

CVH members stressed the importance of investing in and preserving public housing, as it is one of the last truly affordable housing options for low-income residents in New York City. “I have made a choice to sacrifice what I want to do to make sure my daughter is doing well in college, my other daughter is getting 85 in junior high school, and it’s because I am home to be with my children. Public housing has allowed me to do this also. There are a whole host of single mothers like me – and if it weren’t for public housing, where would we be?” said Veronica Johnson, resident of Jefferson Houses.

Community Voices Heard is a grassroots membership organization composed of over 30,000 low-income families in all five boroughs of New York City, many of whom are public housing residents, working on issues concerning job creation, welfare/workforce policy, public housing and community development. During the fall 2008 election, CVH mobilized thousands of low-income New York residents to vote in State Senate and State Assembly elections, through a non-partisan voter education project.