



NEW YORK COMMUNITY MEDIA ALLIANCE

VOICES THAT MUST BE HEARD

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NYC Housing Authority ignores residents' voices

By **Luna Liu**, **World Journal**, 21 January 2010. Translated from Chinese by **Austin Woerner**.

A recent report by the NYC watchdog group Community Voices Heard found NYC Housing Authority in violation of federal regulations that guarantee residents the right to participate in policy decisions about public housing.

There are 400,000 New Yorkers living in public housing, but only 17 percent participate in their resident associations, and only 14 percent participated in their resident association's last election, according to the report.

The report, entitled "Democracy (In)Action," found that NYCHA has diverted \$10 million intended to fund resident participation activities to other uses. The report was based on responses from 1,153 residents of 38 public housing units across New York City, a sample reflecting the race, age, and neighborhood distribution of 400,000 public housing residents in 336 units.

According to federal regulations known as the 964 regs, public housing residents should be represented at three levels: the resident associations, elected by each building's residents and divided into 9 district councils; the Citywide Council Presidents (CCOP), whose members are elected by the district councils; and the Resident Advisory Board (RAB), elected by the CCOP and responsible for discussing all policy issues with the Housing Authority.

However, according to the report, the Housing Authority ignores the advice offered by the RABs, makes decisions that directly violate the wishes of the residents, and violates the 964 regs; for example, the Authority has abolished the right of a recently-deceased tenant's family to continue the lease and sold a public housing building in Brooklyn without first holding a public hearing.

The report found that only 14 percent of residents participated in their most recent resident association elections, 80 percent do not know that the CCOP and the RAB should have a voice in NYCHA policy decisions, and 92 percent do not know that NYCHA pays a yearly sum of \$73 million to the New York Police Department for policing services.

In addition, because resident leaders are often forced to take multiple offices, they have effectively eliminating 130 to 161 positions and hindering the transmission of the needs of residents, 60 percent of residents do not believe that their elected representatives represent the interests of residents.

Gloria Wilson, a resident of the Manhattan public housing building UPACA 6, said that because she could not bear to see residents' voices go unheard, she decided to run for her building's resident association. After she was elected, she found that the Housing Authority did not respect the opinions of the resident association. At every meeting, Wilson would have to request specifically for Chinese-language materials for the association's Chinese members, an illustration of NYCHA's lack of concern for the needs of non-English speakers.

Community Voices Heard has advised NYCHA to adopt the management system used by the Toronto city government, which allows residents to participate in policy decisions and budgeting.