

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

NYDIA M. VELAZQUEZ

7TH DISTRICT, NEW YORK

June 11, 2020

The Honorable Bill de Blasio  
Mayor, New York City  
City Hall  
New York, NY 10007

Dear Mayor de Blasio:

I am writing to urge you to restore full funding to the Basement Apartment Conversion Pilot Program (BACPP). This three-year pilot program, launched in early 2019, promises to assist forty homeowners in East New York in converting their basements into legal, healthy, and affordable rental units. It will simultaneously stabilize homeownership in a neighborhood already struggling with high levels of speculation and create affordable housing for a community facing significant displacement pressures. It is also worth noting that the BACPP was a clear commitment your administration made to the East New York community during the rezoning process just four years ago. This is a commitment that must be upheld.

The City's proposed Executive Budget for FY21, however, all but eliminates funding for this important program, slashing \$1.09 million in the coming year,<sup>1</sup> ensuring that it cannot move forward at a time when it's need is more critical than ever.

The COVID-19 crisis has exposed the profound inequalities that continue to plague our city. I certainly appreciate that difficult decisions will have to be made to respond to the looming fiscal crisis. However, it is imperative that our fiscal response not be carried out on the backs of communities like East New York.

Cutting programs like BACPP will only widen the divide in the tale of two cities. This program was urgently needed in East New York before the pandemic — it is more urgently needed now. It is a relatively low-cost but extremely high-impact program that at once confronts the mounting risks of foreclosure, unhealthy housing, overcrowding, and homelessness. It is a program with economic stimulus built into it, providing homeowners with an ongoing reliable source of monthly income. Moreover, East New York was an epicenter of the city's last housing crisis.<sup>2</sup> Our response to this new economic crisis must alleviate, not exacerbate, this inherent inequality and vulnerability.

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<sup>1</sup> Kully, Sadeef Ali. "City's Basement Apartment Program Buried by COVID-19 Budget Cuts." *City Limits*. May 11, 2020. <https://citylimits.org/2020/05/11/citys-basement-apartment-program-buried-by-covid-19-budget-cuts/>

<sup>2</sup> Furman Center For Real Estate and Urban Policy. "State of New York City's Housing and Neighborhoods 2010". *New York University*. 2010. <https://furmancenter.org/files/sotc/SOC%202010.pdf>

Importantly, the program also lays the groundwork for a citywide basement conversion program. As the city's housing crisis deepens in these desperate economic times, this unique affordable housing model is an untapped innovation that could bring relief to thousands of homeowners and tenants across the city. By eliminating the East New York pilot program, the city also deprives itself of this new and impactful housing model.

Just over one year into the pilot, nearly 900 community members have expressed interest in the program, with hundreds moving through the qualification process, and several poised to begin pre-development work.<sup>3</sup> I have heard from these homeowners directly. They could not be more clear in how crucial this program is, not only to them, but to their families, and to the East New York community as a whole.

I strongly urge you to not abandon your promise to East New York in its time of desperate need. I again respectfully ask that you restore full funding to this essential program and ensure that our long road to recovery is just and equitable.

Sincerely,



Nydia M. Velázquez  
Member of Congress

Cc:

Louise Carroll, Commissioner, New York City Department of Housing Preservation and Development

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<sup>3</sup> Kully, Sadeef Ali. "City's Basement Apartment Program Buried by COVID-19 Budget Cuts." *City Limits*. May 11, 2020. <https://citylimits.org/2020/05/11/citys-basement-apartment-program-buried-by-covid-19-budget-cuts/>