



City of New York
Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine
Council Member Keith Powers

**Testimony of Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine and Council Member Keith Powers
Before the New York City Rent Guidelines Board**

Good afternoon Chair Davidson,

My name is Mark Levine and I am the Manhattan Borough President. I would like to thank you and the members of the Rent Guidelines Board (RGB) for the opportunity to testify today on behalf of myself and Council Member Powers.

While we fully understand the enormous responsibility that this board has to balance the needs of rent stabilized tenants as well as property owners, we strongly believe that now is not the time to raise rents on New Yorkers already struggling to pay their rent. It is our strong belief that there should be no increase.

It is our understanding that the Board is considering a 2-4.5% increase on one-year leases, and a 4-6.5% increase on two-year leases in rent stabilized units, largely due to concern regarding rising costs for property owners. While these concerns must be carefully considered, we must also consider the needs of tenants across the city who are struggling financially. Inflation and the consumer price index continue to rise, average wages in real terms are declining, and tenants are spending larger portions of their income on rent[1]. As a result, an alarming 39.5% of rent stabilized households spend more than 50% of their household income on gross rent[2]. The housing crisis facing our city only further burdens tenants across the city, with a lack of housing options driving median rent to as high as \$5,000 in Manhattan – well beyond the means of many New Yorkers today.

We fully acknowledge that recent years have not been easy on small property owners, and the City and State should take steps to help support maintenance costs and repairs for smaller building operators who are in need. The percentage of financially distressed buildings is on the rise, and that Manhattan bears the majority of these distressed buildings. However we cannot overlook that this board voted just last year to increase rents for rent stabilized units, and that now is not the time to put additional financial burden on renters.

We know that rent stabilized tenants cannot afford rent increases. If this board increases the rents of stabilized tenants, there are no units in which they can be alternatively housed. Displacing tenants through rent increases is not an issue our housing stock is in a position to absorb.