



**Testimony to the New York City Council
Committee on Housing and Buildings
Submitted by the Supportive Housing Network of New York
February 23, 2023**

Hello, Chairpersons and members of the New York City Council. My name is Joelle Ballam-Schwan and I am the Associate Director of Engagement and Communications at the Supportive Housing Network of New York. We are here to show support for the Community Land Act, specifically Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (Intro 196) and Public Land for Public Good (Intro 637), and speak to how they would help further the production and expansion of desperately needed supportive housing in New York City.

The Supportive Housing Network of New York is a membership organization representing over 200 nonprofits who develop, own and operate 58,000 supportive housing units statewide, 38,000 of which are in New York City. Supportive housing is deeply affordable housing with embedded social services for people who have experienced homelessness and who have the greatest barriers to achieving housing stability: people living with a mental health diagnoses, substance users or those in recovery, youth aging out of foster care, people exiting the criminal legal system, survivors of domestic violence, and others.

Supportive housing is a key solution to addressing New York City's homelessness crisis, but available affordable land for developing it is extremely scarce. New York City's current supportive housing commitment, NYC 15/15, launched in 2015 committed to creating 15,000 units of supportive housing over the following 15 years. One of the greatest challenges to continuing this pipeline, however, is identifying affordable and appropriate sites. Both COPA and Public Land for Public good would help nonprofits acquire buildings and land to continue this crucial pipeline of supportive housing.

NYC 15/15 envisioned 7,500 congregate units — single-site residences which typically feature 60% of units for supportive tenants and 40% for low-income individuals and families — and 7,500 scattered site units — apartments rented from existing stock in the community in which the nonprofit provides mobile services. The scattered-site model has come with many challenges that pose a danger to the completion of the City's greatly needed program: the budgets for rents continue to be well below the current Fair Market Rent (FMR) and finding available apartments for the program has proven difficult. And, those that can be rented are often far from transit, not accessible and/or need maintenance work. The social service rates are also far below rates for single site residences even though services in a scattered site setting are more labor intensive than in congregate. As a result, we are now six years into NYC 15/15 and only 17% of scattered site units have been allocated versus 70% of congregate units.

In order to meet our target for NYC 15/15 we need to start thinking creatively right now. There are approximately 6,000 unawarded scattered site units that could be utilized more efficiently, which includes creating more congregate supportive housing. This will mean an even greater need for sites and land. COPA and Public Land for Public Good would assist in making this possible, as well as help keep supportive housing in the hands of mission driven nonprofits where it belongs. As mission-driven

landlords, nonprofits protect the long-term affordability and quality operation of supportive housing. Nonprofits also are mission driven to keep tenants from returning to homelessness. They're also more likely to create deeper affordability and extend affordability beyond the original regulatory period. Not only are nonprofits providing important public value in the long term, but their developer fees are reinvested directly into the community and their mission. By prioritizing nonprofits, the city will continue its longstanding virtuous cycle of nonprofit development and ownership. Empowering nonprofits to develop builds their capacity to build again, and again, thereby continuing to reinvest back into the communities they serve.

The City should also consider reallocating some of the funding for NYC 15/15 scattered site for preservation. Many of the older supportive housing stock is in a state of utter disrepair. And, if we don't preserve the units we currently have while creating new ones, we will be playing a continuous and never-ending game of catch-up.

Additionally, New York City needs an all-hands-on-deck approach right now to addressing our affordable housing and homelessness crises, and needs to identify city-owned land in every district and borough across the City. This is why the Network is also advocating to require the administration to publicize a list of vacant and underdeveloped properties under all city agency jurisdictions that are viable for development. Once identified, this land should then, under Public Land for Public Good, be prioritized for nonprofits.

Furthermore, the concept of prioritizing nonprofits for public land or under-developed sites, is not new. Under the Koch administration in the eighties, old SRO stock was prioritized for affordable and supportive housing by selling these vacant buildings to nonprofits for one dollar. This helped attract supportive housing to a new group of nonprofit housing developers who purchased and renovated buildings around the city that had been abandoned. This policy was a major factor in the growth of supportive housing in NYC.

Thank you to the Council and the Committee on Housing and Buildings and for hearing us and for recognizing the need and value of prioritizing nonprofits for available residential sites and public land. Thank you again.