

**Testimony from NYCHA's Executive Vice President for Operations Support  
Services Keith Grossman  
*Weather-proofing at NYCHA Buildings and Campuses*  
Committee on Public Housing  
Monday, December 16, 2024 – 10 a.m.  
New York City Hall Committee Room**

Chair Chris Banks, members of the Committee on Public Housing, other distinguished members of the City Council, NYCHA residents, community advocates, and members of the public: good morning. I am Keith Grossman, NYCHA's Executive Vice President for Operations Support Services. I am pleased to be joined by Dylan Baker-Rice, Deputy Chief Asset and Capital Management Officer; Siobhan Watson, Senior Director for Sustainability; Gillian Connell, Managing Director of Strategic Operations in the Real Estate Development Department; and other members of NYCHA's team.

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss our progress in ensuring that NYCHA developments are adequately prepared for the challenges of the winter season. The health and safety of residents is our top priority, and we have been working hard over the past several years to provide NYCHA families with comfortable and consistent heat. We are also proud of our efforts to help prepare some of our developments for the future through the latest innovations in sustainability.

**Heating Outages Are Down, and Restored Quickly**

We continue to make progress in reducing the number of heat outages as well as the time it takes to resolve them. As of December 12, so far this heating season we are resolving heat outages in an average of 8.5 hours, well below the HUD Agreement's target of 12 hours. We have also decreased the number of outages by 40 percent, and no outages have lasted more than 24 hours.

This progress is a result of targeted operational investments and improvements to process and management. Our work is guided by our Federal Monitor-approved action plan, which outlines the procedures and protocols we follow to prevent and respond to outages. The action plan also details how we communicate with residents about outages and repairs, provide warming centers in certain scenarios, and investigate outages that cannot be restored within 12 hours.

We aim to restore heat within an average of 12 hours overall, within 24 hours for 85 percent of heating outages, and always within 48 hours. As I noted, so far this heating season we are exceeding these targets. Please keep in mind that an outage pertains to a total disruption of service on an entire apartment line, hallway, building, section of a development, or entire development; outages may be planned for scheduled maintenance or unplanned due to unforeseen emergencies. When there are planned outages, NYCHA notifies residents in advance via robocalls and notices posted throughout the development.

I would now like to discuss some of the ways we are enhancing heating services while investing in a sustainable future for our properties.

### **Preparing for the Winter Season**

Our buildings and infrastructure are aging – the majority of our buildings are more than a half century old, and our boilers are 27 years old on average, past the 20-25-year expected lifespan for a boiler. For this reason, preventive maintenance is a vital part of our work to ensure consistent heat for residents. Every year, our Heating Management Services Department (HMSD) performs preventive maintenance and inspections to preserve and restore the reliability of nearly 5,000 pieces of heating equipment, including 897 boilers, 1,733 hot water systems, and 1,619 heat distribution systems. This involves inspecting, cleaning, lubricating, adjusting, repairing, and replacing worn components and ensuring that equipment and mechanical areas are in satisfactory operating condition.

Before this year's heating season began, HMSD and our vendors performed preventive maintenance – and made repairs, when necessary – on 100 percent of our heating equipment. Due to the large number of assets, NYCHA procured a vendor to conduct preventive maintenance on some our boilers, allowing NYCHA staff to focus on the hot water and heat distribution systems, which includes circulating pumps, vacuum tanks, and pipes that deliver heat to residents' homes.

Every year, we develop and maintain a list of critical heat and hot water equipment and systems that need replacement or extensive repairs, and we procure extra parts so we are prepared when key items fail. NYCHA invested over \$43 million in heating infrastructure upgrades at two

developments since last winter, and an additional \$224 million of investment at eight developments will be completed by the end of this heating season.

We also maintain a reserve of staged and non-staged boilers that can be activated in the event of a large-scale heating service disruption. Thirteen mobile boilers are currently connected to developments, and eight more can be deployed if needed.

And we increase after-hours staffing coverage ahead of the heating season, adding evening plumbing and electrical teams that can be deployed in response to outages. Additionally, an overnight (midnight to 8 a.m.) plumbing team is added when temperatures drop below freezing.

### **Transforming the Way We Operate**

We hired 70 additional frontline heating staff to support the reorganization of HMSD into a neighborhood-based model as part of our Transformation Plan's organizational reforms. This involved reorganizing our coverage of developments from 13 clusters into 28 "neighborhoods." Smaller portfolios enable staff to better understand the unique needs and challenges of each heat and hot water system in their neighborhood; better distribute work orders and resources; foster greater collaboration among stakeholders; and bring the crucial decision-making which occurs during an outage closer to the root of the issue.

We also established a Data Analytics Unit that uses key performance indicators to identify and track areas where we need to improve. A Planning and Skilled Trades Unit addresses patterns of heat complaints and service disruptions before and during the heating season. HMSD's Special Teams, composed of highly experienced heating staff, address the more complex issues that arise and perform preventive maintenance and repairs.

And we assigned additional managerial employees to the evening Heat Desk operations, streamlining decision-making for issues that arise after traditional business hours and during weekends and holidays. The Heat Desk is a 24/7 operation which monitors potential service disruptions from various data and dispatches staff accordingly.

Our repair teams also operate on a 24/7 basis, and to support these roving repair teams we established an after-hours field supervision schedule and skilled trades coverage. Enhanced staff

training is another way we are improving the way we operate. NYCHA revamped its Heating Plant Technician (HPT) curriculum to include new heating assets installed, with an enhanced focus on preventive maintenance. Additionally, we created a direct-to-training model with mentorship, where new HPTs go directly into training to learn in a low-stress environment prior to working on heating equipment at a development. Once assigned to a property, they are paired with veteran heating staff who provide real-life, hands-on training.

These changes are increasing accountability, oversight, and efficiency – and the NYCHA community is benefitting from faster resolution of issues thanks to the more hands-on management of our heating assets.

We also enhanced the way we communicate with residents. We make sure residents know about outages through flyers, robocalls, our website, social media, and MyNYCHA alerts; so that we can address any lingering issues, residents can automatically let us know if they're still experiencing a service disruption when they receive a service restoration robocall. When residents submit heat complaints via MyNYCHA or the Customer Contact Center (CCC), we ask additional triage questions that enable us to deploy repair staff most efficiently. I do want to note that we can most effectively identify and respond to issues when residents report concerns via MyNYCHA or the CCC.

### **Major Investments in Heating**

NYCHA modernized heating controls at 51 developments, which involves installing a building management system and apartment temperature sensors. Apartments that were typically too hot are now at a more comfortable range of 72 to 74 degrees during the day and 69 to 71 degrees at night, with the heat coming on in cycles to prevent overheating and underheating and to reduce energy costs. We can also monitor building temperatures and heating and hot water systems in real time at these developments, enabling us to respond to issues faster.

Although our heating infrastructure is extensive and our capital needs are enormous – nearly \$13 billion for heating systems portfolio-wide – we are working hard to execute on the funding we have to address some of the major investment needs. Through 2026, we are replacing 500 boilers through capital work and PACT conversions. Two hundred and ninety-seven boilers will be replaced through capital projects across 76 developments thanks to \$3.4 billion in City, State,

and federal funding. Since 2019, we have replaced 134 boilers through capital projects and addressed 237 boilers through our PACT partnerships. Another 278 boilers have been converted through PACT and are under construction. Thanks to Hurricane Sandy recovery funding, 20 developments are receiving new heating and hot water systems housed in elevated and flood-proofed structures.

We're not just replacing in kind but are putting in place more effective systems. For example, to improve hot water service, we are incorporating modern designs in our new heating plants – decoupling hot water equipment from space heating equipment so that issues with one do not impact the other – and upgrading building-based equipment.

### **A Greener, More Sustainable Future**

In accordance with our Sustainability Agenda, we are moving away from steam-generating heat and hot water systems when possible (by deploying geothermal energy and electric heat pumps) and improving building envelopes through window replacements – advancements that help reduce outages, enhance system performance, benefit the environment, and keep residents safe and comfortable.

Through the Clean Heat for All Challenge – a collaboration between NYCHA, the New York Power Authority, and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority – an initial \$70 million investment will lead to the development and production of 30,000 new heat pumps for NYCHA residents. The families who are already benefitting from them at Woodside Houses report that they are working well – and this environmentally friendly, easily installable technology will provide reliable heating and cooling for thousands of residents ultimately.

We invested about \$341 million in Energy Performance Contracts, replacing boilers and modernizing heating systems at 70 developments. And nearly \$26 million of weatherization upgrades are completed or in construction. We are also taking advantage of “direct install” programs, where local vendors (funded by local utilities) repair and replace apartment radiator valves and traps at no cost to NYCHA; this improves steam distribution and residents' comfort.

While we are pursuing all possible funding sources and investing that limited funding as wisely as possible, the reality is that there simply is not enough funding to address all the needs across

the entire portfolio. That is why we are implementing bold and innovative solutions – such as PACT and the Trust – that will provide residents with dramatically improved quality of life through comprehensive building renovations, including fully upgraded heating systems.

### **Improving Residents' Quality of Life**

By improving the way we operate and investing strategically in the future with the limited funding available, we are strengthening the Authority while delivering better services for residents.

The challenges at NYCHA are significant, but they are not insurmountable – in fact, we are demonstrating that through partnership we can achieve great change. While there is still much work to be done, we appreciate the support of our stakeholders, including members of the Council, which is enabling us to be a better landlord for the NYCHA families we serve and improve their quality of life.

Thank you. We are happy to answer any questions you may have.