



June 8, 2023

From: Catholic Migration Services, Tenant Advocacy Legal Team
To: The New York City Rent Guidelines Board

Re: 2023 Rent Guidelines Proposals

Dear Members of the Board,

We respectfully request your consideration of this letter in connection with this year's rent guidelines. Professionally, we are legal services attorneys who represent low-income tenants, mostly in Queens. Personally, some of us are also tenants of rent stabilized apartments.

We write to ask you to please not increase the rent at all, or if there must be an increase, keep the rent increases as low as possible. As you are aware, many tenants throughout New York City, and especially in the outer boroughs, are still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Many low-income tenants used up whatever meager savings they had to stay afloat while out of work during the pandemic, and many fell behind on rent. Many of our clients have been unable to re-join the workforce because of health issues resulting from long covid. Some household incomes have decreased by half, or more, because a breadwinner died from the disease.

Now, as the city emerges from the pandemic, tenants are faced with another challenge: inflation. For those who were able to go back to work, their wages have not kept up with the rising cost of living: the 2023 RGB I&A Report found that wages adjusted for inflation in NYC decreased by more than 2% (page 8). As the costs of food, transit, and other necessities continue to rise, tenants have less and less income to spend on rent. Most of our clients already spend far more than the recommended one-third of their income on housing costs, including rent and utilities. If rent stabilized rents increase significantly, they will be spending even more. Many of these clients are working people – their incomes are just high enough to make them ineligible for housing subsidies, yet not high enough to afford rent increases along with other household necessities like food.

Meanwhile, the increases landlords have received over the years are more than their own self-reported alleged increases in expenses. While landlords profit, poor and even middle class tenants are being evicted because they cannot afford these increases; despite these profits, many of our community members live in apartments and buildings in varying states of disrepair.

On a personal note, some of the signing attorneys are tenants of rent-stabilized apartments, which we can *just* afford despite being two-income professional households with no children. If we can't afford a rent increase, think of the majority of our community members that likely earn substantially less.

New York's rent stabilized housing stock has the potential to offer stability, allows tenants to plan for the future, and to keep contributing to their communities. The option to renew a lease, however, is only meaningful if tenants can renew at an affordable rate. Dramatic rent increases that tenants cannot afford will lead to more eviction and displacement throughout New York City. Please do your part to fight displacement, and to keep New York City affordable for New York's tenants.

Thank you for your consideration,

Jonathan Cohen, Kelly Horan, Samantha Lyons, and Sarah Hainbach
Tenant Advocacy Attorneys at Catholic Migration Services