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ADAMS WANTS IT BOTH WAYS AS HE RAISES TENANTS' RENTS

In response to Mayor Eric Adams' statement on the Rent Guidelines Board increases

New York City, NY – The Rent Justice Coalition (RJC), a city-wide coalition of rent-stabilized tenants, tenant advocates, and their allies, is condemning Mayor Eric Adams for his role in the Rent Guidelines Board process this year. It is an outrage that the board voted this week to increase rents 3.25% for 1-year leases, and 5% for 2-year leases, and that the mayor did nothing to support calls from rent-burdened regulated tenants imploring him not to raise their rents during a pandemic.

The Mayor appointed all of the board members, and no board has ever gone against what a Mayor has wanted in terms of increases or freezes. When the Mayor says he is “disappointed” in these large increases he is disappointed in himself. We are outraged at the massive increases and in his refusal to take full responsibility for them. Rockland County’s rent guidelines board also voted on increases this week and they were a fraction of New York City’s increases—0.5% for 1 year lease renewals and 0.75% for 2 year lease renewals. New Yorkers must not be fooled. These are the Adams Rent Increases.

The mayor says that the rent increase will help “small landlords.” According to JustFix, only 1% of rent-stabilized units are owned by landlords with 10 or fewer units, and 60% of units are owned by landlords with more than 1,000 units. The Mayor and others talk about small landlords, but the clear truth is these rent increases will displace tenants while putting even greater profits in the hands of corporate landlords.

NYC tenants and allies throughout the city demanded all year that Mayor Adams do right by low-income tenants who continue to struggle to pay their current rents—sometimes as much as 50% of household income—and were sold out as the mayor continues to support behemoth landlords who peddle the myth of small landlords who need rent increases. This year Adams made no public statement in support of tenants; instead he parroted talking points from the real estate industry, stayed silent as tenants who rallied at his Brooklyn home were suppressed by police, and allowed the RGB chair to go forward with his outrageous proposal.

The city is still fighting the COVID-19 pandemic, and tenants and advocates have spent the past three years working to keep vulnerable New Yorkers in their homes as COVID-19 rages on. More than half a million New Yorkers fell behind on rent during the pandemic, and NYC tenants owe hundreds of thousands in rent arrears on average. But landlords were not losers: the more than $2.5 billion in ERAP funds made available by the federal and state government were distributed directly to landlords and have still left the majority of low-income renters swimming in debt. With this latest rent hike, New York City has abrogated its responsibility to keep our people safely housed.

The RGB found a new level of contempt for tenants this year. Not only did they exclude Manhattan and Brooklyn (the Mayor’s own borough!) from in-person hearings, they didn’t schedule virtual hearings until they were pressured by 21 concerned members of the City Council, its Majority Leader, and two borough presidents. Yet it couldn’t have been clearer to tenants that board members were not there to listen to their testimony—striking evidence not obtainable by the RGB’s research—to inform their vote. Both landlord representatives and public members of the board showed their disdain for the process by falling asleep and visibly using their phones during tenants’ testimony, and in one case even joining a public hearing from a golf cart. The board cannot continue to deny their responsibilities to the public and to rent-stabilized tenants specifically who are impacted by their decision.

Tenants have made it clear to the Mayor that his actions this year will not be forgotten. Next year, as always, NYC tenants will return ready to demand a rent rollback and an end to predatory rent increases that will displace thousands of poor and working-class New Yorkers from their homes.

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