

## **For Immediate Release**

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### **Citywide Groups Call for Action on Landlord Failure to Protect Kids From Indoor Allergens Triggering Asthma**

*Inadequate Protections Contribute to High Rates of Childhood Asthma and Hospitalizations*

NEW YORK, NY – The Coalition for Asthma-Free Housing brought together NYC Council members, residents, environmental justice advocates, labor, medical experts, and legal counsel today to urge bold action on asthma and health inequality in the city through the passage of the Asthma-Free Housing Act (Intro 385B).

The proposed legislation prioritizes prevention measures in homes of susceptible persons – residents diagnosed with asthma, COPD, or lung cancer – and requires landlords to annually inspect and correct indoor allergen hazards, including mold, pests, and underlying symptoms that may cause these conditions, such as water leaks and pest entryways (holes and cracks).

"The black mold in my apartment has made my son's asthma worse than it has ever been," said **Veronica Maldonado, tenant leader at 493 Chauncey Street and member of Make The Road NY**, "No parent should get a phone call from their child's school saying their child has been taken away in an ambulance for preventable asthma. I've pushed the landlord to fix the mold growing in my apartment, trying to keep my son safe. But, every time the landlord just paints over the mold, hiding it until it grows back. We need the City to protect tenants like myself and my son with the Asthma-Free Housing Act to make sure no more families suffer like we have."

### **The Benefits of Preventing Asthma are Clear**

The New York State Department of Health estimates the annual cost of asthma is \$1.3 billion in direct medical costs and lost productivity to the state. Hospitalizations account for \$660 million of those costs. **Councilwoman Rosie Mendez**, a lead sponsor of the bill, spoke about the bill at today's press conference, "For 10 years I have worked with advocates for passage of the Asthma Free Housing Act which is now known as Intro 385B. Asthma has a debilitating effect, especially on our children and senior citizens. Pests and mold are asthma triggers that produces poor indoor air quality and, in New York City, there are approximately one million individuals who have been diagnosed with asthma. A report just released by the Independent Budget Office found that the financial impact to New York City is estimated at \$1.6M to \$3.5M per year. This amount is down substantially from the \$20M that the Department of Housing Preservation and Development estimated under the previous draft version of this bill."

Another lead sponsor of the bill, **Councilmember Ritchie Torres** from the Bronx noted, “Asthma’s impact on our households, and kids in particular, must be mitigated by ensuring there are prevention measures in place in homes susceptible to the disease. Intro 385B would protect tenants from allergen hazards and create a process for the remediation of such hazards. It is a bill that would impact thousands of households throughout the City and should move through the Council quickly.”

### **Reducing the Asthma Burden on Low-Income Children**

Nationally, about 1 in 11 children have asthma, but in many low-income areas of New York City, the childhood asthma rate is 1 in 4. “Households in high poverty areas are three times more likely to report three or more maintenance deficiencies compared to households classified as low poverty,” said **Cecil Corbin-Mark, Deputy Director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice**. “Indoor environmental injustices like these lead to more absenteeism from school, hospital visits, and out-of-pocket costs for low-income, families of color. This bill will reduce that burden for families across the city.”

“As front line doctors in New York City’s public hospital system and as school health doctors, we see and treat many adults and children with asthma every day,” said **Dr. Matthews Hurley, 1st Vice President, Doctors Council SEIU**. “We believe the Asthma Free Housing Act will have a meaningful impact on both primary and secondary prevention of asthma attacks and other lung diseases that are directly exacerbated by mold and insect/rodent infestations. This legislation can have a great impact on the poorer communities of our City and especially communities of color which have high rates of asthma.”

**Christine Appah-Gyamfi, Senior Staff Attorney, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest** said, “The Asthma Free Homes bill provides the standards that are necessary to ensure that mold and other indoor environmental pollutants are properly addressed at their source. As advocates for families in need, we have seen that piecemeal approaches are not only ineffective, they have serious implications for environmental health and wellbeing. We urge the City to take bold steps to address this problem. This bill offers a sustainable solution and a workable framework for landlords and tenants alike.”

**Michael Seilback, Vice President of Public Policy & Communications at American Lung Association of the Northeast**, also expressed their strong support for the bill, “We thank Council Member Mendez for her tireless advocacy pushing the Asthma-Free Housing Act, which would have very important benefits for lung health in New York City. This legislation will protect all New Yorkers, especially those suffering from asthma and lung disease, who are often left

without recourse when it comes to reducing exposure to respiratory health hazards like mold in their homes.”

"Many harmful agents existing in apartment buildings are linked to asthma. We are calling on the city, landlords, and the public to end the proliferation of these harmful agents now." said **Christine Sangobowale, Center for Environmental Health**

**For additional information from council members and local coalition members, please contact:**

- John Blasco, Director of Communications & Scheduling, Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, 212-677-1077
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- Karen Imas, Doctors Council SEIU, 212.437-7373, [kimas@candm1.com](mailto:kimas@candm1.com)

**The NYC Council Members sponsoring Intro 385B include:**

Rosie Mendez (D2) \* Richie Torres (D15) \* Corey Johnson (D3) \* Margaret Chin (D1) \* Costa Constantinides (D22) \* Laurie Cumbo (D35) \* Peter Koo (D20) \* Antonio Reynoso (D34) \* Ydanis Rodriguez (D10) \* Deborah Rose (D49) \* Mark Levine (D7) \* Karen Koslowitz (D29) \* Helen Rosenthal (D6) \* Donovan Richards Jr. (D31) \* Annabel Palma (D18) \* Brad Lander (D39) \* Stephen Levin (D33) \* Carlos Menchaca (D38) \* Rory I. Lancman (D24) \* Daniel Dromm (D25) \* Inez Barron (D42) \* Ben Kallos (D5) \* Julissa Ferreras-Copeland (D21) \* Elizabeth Crowley (D30) \* Andy King (D12) \* Vanessa L. Gibson (D16) \* Inez E. Dickens (D9) \* Fernando Cabrera (D14) \* Darlene Mealy (D41) \* Alan Maisel (D46) \* I. Daneek Miller (D27) \* Robert Cornegy (D36) \* Ruben Wills (D28) \* Mathieu Eugene (D40) \* Letitia James (Public Advocate)

**The organizations urging the Council to pass Intro 385B and protect New York City children from asthma include:**

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East \* American Lung Association in New York \* American Thoracic Society (ATS) \* Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America \* CAAAV \* CEH \* Commission on the Public's Health System (CPHS) \* Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) SEIU \* District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO \* Doctors Council SEIU \* Fifth Avenue Committee/Comite de la Qunita Avenida \* LiUNA Local 78 \* Make the Road New York \* Moms

Clean Air Force \* Neighbors Helping Neighbors \* New York State Academy of Family Physicians  
\* New York State Nurses Association \* Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)  
\* Public Health Association of New York City (PHANYC) \* Northwest Bronx Community and  
Clergy Coalition (NWBCC) \* Stabilizing NYC \* Urban Health Plan Inc. \* Urban Justice Center \*  
WE ACT for Environmental Justice

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**The Coalition for Asthma-Free Housing** advocates for safer and asthma-free indoor environments for all New Yorkers. The coalition is comprised of over 20 organizations citywide, including community-based organizations, legal advocates, medical associations, and labor unions.