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Press Release

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Spitzer Overlooks Public Housing in State of State Address

*Low-income New Yorkers urge Governor to remember
public housing funding crisis*

New York City —On January 9, 2008 at 1pm, Governor Spitzer delivered the annual State of the State address to highlight his priorities for the upcoming year. While the key themes of his speech included education, healthcare and strong, safe and vibrant neighborhoods, his speech overlooked a major issue facing hundreds of thousands of the State's poor, the public housing funding crisis.

In his address, the governor committed to invest \$400 million in a housing opportunity fund to build affordable housing for teachers, police officers, the elderly and disabled. While this represents a significant step towards addressing the affordable housing crisis in New York, some low-income New Yorkers are disappointed that Governor's did not mention the critical need to invest in the existing affordable housing stock in New York, such as public housing.

"The governor is talking about building new housing, which is very important, however, he is not talking about the housing that already exists that is in danger of being lost because the state won't pay for it," said Agnes Rivera, a public housing resident and leader of Community Voices Heard in New York City. She continued, "If the Governor wants livable communities, he needs to keep his promise to save public housing and to preserve all the communities that already exist."

Between 1998 and 2007, New York State did not provide any funding for public housing. In 2006, when campaigning for governor, Spitzer made a promise to reinstate funding by New York State for public housing. In 2007, the State allocated \$3.4 million dollars of operating subsidies for State built public housing. Still, public housing residents feel that the amount contributed is far short of the \$70 million that constitutes the state's share of operating subsidies for State built public housing. The shelter allowance bill, key legislation that contributed funds to public housing, while critical in bringing much needed resources to NYCHA, did not address the issue of the state's responsibility to pay ongoing operating subsidies for State built housing.

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Despite last year's progress, public housing residents are disappointed that the governor did not even mention public housing in today's speech. "I am very disappointed that the governor did not mention public housing. Way too many people will be devastated if he does not help us to save our homes and I am one of them. I am 61 years old and I need some place to stay. I have lived in public housing for 20 years. Am I supposed to just pick up and leave?" added James Caldwell, a public housing resident and member of Community Voices Heard.

In New York City, the New York Housing Authority (NYCHA) faces a \$225 million budget shortfall. In order to cover its deficit, NYCHA has been raising the rents of public housing residents, imposing fees for home appliances, cutting back on making urgent improvements and renovations and selling off property. As part of its cost cutting measures, NYCHA is also laid off hundreds of the agency's workers.

Anne Washington, a leader at Community Voices Heard and public housing resident said, "If the Governor does not prioritize saving public housing, many people will find themselves homeless with no place to live. I feel that housing is a right that everyone deserves to have and not funding public housing takes away that right from millions of people."

Community Voices Heard is a membership organization made up of 15,000 low-income families across New York, 6,000 of whom live in public housing. CVH members use various strategies including community organizing, voter engagement, research and direct action to win improved public policies for low-income people.

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