



Picture the Homeless

2427 Morris Avenue, Bronx NY 10468. Phone: (646) 314-6423; Fax: (646) 314-6429

January 19, 2008

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEW CITY COUNCIL LAW TARGETS VACANT PROPERTY: *Council Member Tony Avella and Picture the Homeless announce Vacant Building “Anti-Warehousing” Legislation*

New York, NY. —City Council Member Tony Avella and Picture the Homeless joined together today on the steps of City Hall to announce the upcoming introduction of a comprehensive legislative package to incentivize the development of vacant and abandoned in New York City. This innovative legislation will reduce homelessness, stabilize communities, and reduce displacement as a result of gentrification.

“In 2006, Picture the Homeless issued a report on the number of vacant and abandoned buildings in the borough of Manhattan. The astounding findings in that report show that in this one borough alone there were a total of 1,723 vacant buildings which contained 11,170 empty units in those buildings”, stated Avella. “Even if a small fraction of these vacant properties were rehabilitated, we could significantly reduce the housing shortage and start to meaningfully address the problem of homelessness in this city.” Avella continued. “Yet what the city continues to do is to throw millions of dollars into programs that do not fix the homeless problem. Unfortunately, the homeless continue to endure the agonies of living in the shelter system, or on the street, while wealthy property owners keep their buildings empty waiting for a better financial opportunity to arise.”

Avella’s legislation calls for various changes to the city’s administrative code including the creation of a regular citywide census of vacant properties. It will also empower the Department of Housing Preservation and Development to levy fines against landlords of multiple dwellings who purposefully keep buildings empty. In addition, it will require the Department of Homeless Services to provide quarterly reports on the average cost of providing monthly shelter to the homeless. Most importantly it will allow current residents of the shelter system to opt out of the shelter program and allocate their shelter costs to a voucher program to be used to pay for non-shelter housing. A fund will also be created to provide capital for the rehabilitation of distressed vacant units to make them habitable, creating thousands of sites for housing development.

“We already know that there are 40,000 homeless in the shelter system in NYC. With all this gentrification going on—if these vacant buildings and lots aren’t used to create housing for the working poor and the homeless—you’re going to see that number skyrocket”, stated Marco Brumfield from Picture the Homeless

“Picture the Homeless, along with others, has seen the incredible effects on a neighborhood of allowing buildings to be warehoused,” said Ron Languedoc, Senior Staff Attorney, South Brooklyn Legal Services. “It creates blight, it causes people to feel unsafe, and it deprives homeless and other people of badly needed housing. This law is designed to address that.”

Rob Robinson from Picture the Homeless added, “Since a majority of our elected officials seem to lack the creativity and political will-power for legislation such as this, we at Picture the Homeless, which includes homeless and formerly homeless individuals, decided to put our own thoughts together to come up with solutions to end homelessness. We are pleased to have worked with Council Member Tony Avella to develop this bill.”

“I am honored to have authored with Picture the Homeless, with the assistance of Ron Languedoc, Esq., Senior Staff Attorney, South Brooklyn Legal Services, the Anti-Warehousing bill which we hope will significantly

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impact the future availability of housing to the thousands of homeless families living in New York City”, said Avella.

Council Member Avella and Picture the Homeless were joined at the press conference by representatives from CAAAV-Organizing Asian Communities, CHARAS, Inc., Church of the Holy Apostles, Met Council on Housing, East Harlem Preservation, East Side Congregations for Housing Justice, Fordham Lutheran Evangelical Church, Greater New York Labor-Religion Coalition, HOPE Community, Inc, Interfaith Assembly on Homelessness and Housing, New York City AIDS Housing Network, Supportive Housing Network of New York, and Arch Deacon Michael Kendall, Episcopal Diocese of New York.

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For further information call: Tony Avella 718-747-2137 or Sam Miller, Picture the Homeless 646-314-6423.