



ASIAN AMERICANS FOR EQUALITY

277 Grand Street, 3rd Floor

New York, NY 10002

Tel: 212-680-1374 Fax: 212-680-1815

New York City Council Queens Delegation

Testimony by Margaret Chin, Deputy Executive Director

April 8, 2005

Good morning Council Members and thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Margaret Chin, and I am Deputy Executive Director of Asian Americans for Equality (AAFE), a non-profit community development organization working in New York City's immigrant and low-income communities for more than 30 years.

Today, we respectfully request the Queens Delegation for an allocation of \$250,000 for AAFE's Immigrant Center project. This funding will go toward the expansion and coordination of services to the growing number of Asian immigrants, as well as help further immigrant participation in the larger New York City community. Specifically, we hope to enrich our existing housing counseling and assistance programs. And we will continue to advocate for more housing options and better housing conditions as part of our advocacy, outreach, and community education program.

Let me speak specifically about how these programs serve the borough of Queens.

The scarcity of affordable housing in Queens is an issue often overlooked because of the boom of high-end residential construction. But the need is clearly apparent in the number of illegal conversions, the alarming incidences of overcrowding, and the long waiting lists for homes. For the Asian immigrant communities concentrated throughout Queens this scarcity is compounded by the need for culturally appropriate and linguistically sensitive housing services to access livable homes.

Queens Profile

Between 1990 and 2000, the population of Queens increased by 14.1%. In 2002, the average household size in Queens was the highest of all the boroughs. Queens also has the highest

percentage of households living in overcrowded conditions. Additionally, 23% of Queens households are rent-poor, spending 50% or more of their income on rent.

Housing Services

AAFE has been operating housing and eviction-prevention programs in Queens for the past 9 years. Additionally, we conduct advocacy and community education programs to help immigrants overcome language or cultural barriers to finding a home. The need for such appropriate housing assistance is increasing, as demonstrated by the number of clients who visit our service office in Downtown Flushing every day. In fact, our staff sees approximately 10,000 every year. Of these, 30% are housing related. Currently, we are resource-strained, serving many more clients than are covered by our contracts. For example under the umbrella of immigration services, we see more than twice the number of clients that are provided for in the contract and 1/3 of these visit us to get help on housing issues. Additionally clients come from across the borough. In addition to Flushing, clients also come from Woodside, Elmhurst, Jackson Heights, Corona, and Astoria, to seek help because AAFE is the only organization with the language capacity to address the needs of the multi-ethnic Asian and immigrant community. Funding is critical to help community-based organizations, such as AAFE, provide the counseling and face-to-face assistance that individuals and families require to address their housing needs.

The Future

We believe that these programs are only the first step. Ultimately, advocacy for housing preservation and construction must be the way to address this growing shortage. There is a need to develop a capital plan for non-profit development for low- and moderate income housing. We urge the Queens Delegation to continue to lead the effort to create a production strategy for Queens that would include local non-profit development groups that are working to fill the demand of those who are now living in substandard conditions.

#

We ask the City Council Queens Delegation to make access to affordable housing your priority for FY 2006, and look forward to working with you to resolve our community's long-term housing crisis.

Thank you for your consideration.