

FACT SHEET: Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA)

Control Our Homes, Control Our Destinies: New Yorkers Want Affordable Housing and Resident Control

SAMUEL STEIN, OKSANA MIRONOVA, IZIAH THOMPSON

Introduction

New York City tenants have long paid too much money in rent while having too little control over their homes. This dynamic expresses itself in many ways, including:

- » punishingly high rent burdens, with [most tenants paying more than 30 percent](#) of their income in rent and a third paying a majority of what they earn to their landlord every month;
- » precarity and instability in housing, with tenants moving out of apartments they can no longer afford and landlords flipping properties to capture changing property values;
- » rising eviction and homelessness, with [113,667 eviction cases](#) filed last year and a record high [89,105 people](#) in New York City Department of Homeless Services shelters as of December, 2023.

In part as a response to these compounding crises, more and more New Yorkers are interested in the concept of “social housing,” which [CSS defines](#) as housing models that “promote permanent affordability, democratic resident control, and social equality,” like [public housing, limited equity cooperatives, and community land trusts](#). Eight out of ten New York City voters support social housing

production as a means to address the city’s housing crisis, according to [a recent survey](#). Social housing has been successful in New York and across the country, but – unlike other cities around the world – New York has never produced enough of it to resolve our ongoing housing crisis.

We polled New Yorkers to ask them what they need to get ahead economically, and whether they would support a state legislative proposal – known as the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (TOPA) – that would allow tenants to buy their buildings and convert them into social housing. The findings were clear across demographic and geographical lines:

- » **Affordable Housing was the number one thing New Yorkers said they needed to get ahead economically.**
- » **New Yorkers overwhelmingly support TOPA, with 82 percent of respondents answering affirmatively when the program was described to them.**

This poll is evidence of a strong mandate from New Yorkers to invest in affordable housing and pass the Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Act (A3353 – Mitaynes/ S221 – Myrie) and similar bills at the local level (Intro 196 – Rivera).

Affordable Housing as Economic Mobility

Our surveyors asked New Yorkers the following question:

I am going to read you a list of things people have said would help their ability to get ahead economically. Which two of the following would most increase your potential to get ahead economically?

[Affordable housing was by far the most popular choice](#) for every demographic group and for residents of every borough, followed by a more diffuse set of second choices. “Affordable housing” was the choice of a majority of low-income respondents, and the plurality choice for Democrats, Republicans and Independents alike. While New Yorkers are concerned about a wide variety of economic and social issues, they are united in their view that a shortage of affordable housing is holding them back.

Social Housing Conversions are Widely and Deeply Popular

Later in our survey, we asked New Yorkers about their support for TOPA, describing the program this way:

Currently there is a proposal to change how residential buildings are sold. Under this proposal, when a landlord sells a building, tenants would be given the first chance to buy the building and would receive public money if they turned the building into permanent affordable housing. Based on what you know do you favor or oppose this proposal?

The answer from New Yorkers across all lines was a clear and enthusiastic “yes.”

82 percent of respondents answered favorably to the proposal, with especially strong support from women, people of color, people who are worried about family expenses, and people waiting on major repairs from their landlord. While the question polled strongest among Democrats, roughly three quarters of independents and two thirds of Republicans also supported the proposal.

	Support TOPA	Don't Support TOPA
All respondents	82%	18%
Male	80%	20%
Female	84%	16%
White	80%	20%
Black	86%	14%
Hispanic	84%	16%
Asian	80%	20%
Mixed race	85%	15%
18-29	80%	20%
30-49	76%	14%
50-74	85%	15%
75 & over	67%	33%
Democrat	87%	13%
Republican	68%	32%
Independent	78%	22%
Worried about family expenses	87%	13%
Not really worried about family expenses	80%	20%
Need major repairs	88%	12%
Don't really need major repairs	81%	19%

New Yorkers are a diverse and often contentious group of people. It is quite rare to find such universal

support for a policy proposal, let alone one as potentially transformative as a well-funded TOPA program.

Recommendations

New Yorkers have a clear message for the city, state and federal governments: expand affordable housing so we can achieve economic progress, and pass TOPA so we can [convert our homes into social housing](#).

- » The state government should pass TOPA (A3353/Mitaynes, S221/Myrie), and ensure the program is well funded to kickstart social housing conversions across New York State.
- » The city government should pass the Community Opportunity to Purchase Act (Intro 196/Rivera), which, like TOPA, would put the future of tenants' housing in residents' decision-making power. The city should also turn away from destructive austerity politics and invest in affordable housing construction and preservation.
- » The federal government should fully fund public and subsidized housing, reversing decades of structural disinvestment, as well as pass laws (like HR 5244/Omar) that would create a program comparable to TOPA at a national level.

ABOUT THE UNHEARD THIRD SURVEY

The 2023 Unheard Third is a scientific telephone survey of 1,758 New York City adult residents reached by cell phones and landlines from July 6th through August 7th, 2023. It was designed by Community Service Society in collaboration with Lake Research Partners, who administered it using Random Digit Dialing and professional interviewers. The sample included 1,113 low-income residents (up to 200% of federal poverty standards, or FPL), and 645 moderate and higher-income residents (above 200% FPL). Interviews were conducted in English, Spanish, and Chinese. The margin of error for the entire survey is +/- 2.3 percent, for the low-income component is +/- 2.9 percent, and for the higher-income component is +/- 3.9 percent, all at the 95% confidence interval. For further information on the survey please reach out to Emerita Torres at etorres@cssny.org.

Executive Officers

President and CEO

David R. Jones, Esq.

Executive Vice President and COO

Steven L. Krause

2023-2024 Board of Trustees

Mark A. Willis

Chairperson

Magda Jimenez Train, Esq.

Vice Chairperson

Jerry Webman

Treasurer

Joseph J. Haslip

Secretary

Terry Agriss
Alexander N. Barrett
Karen Y. Bitar, Esq.
Matthew J. Camp, PhD
Kimberley Chin
Angela Dorn, J.D.
Melinda J. Dutton, Esq.
Richard W. Eaddy
Abigail Feuer
Florence Frucher
Richard N. Gottfried
Khaled Haram
Gayle Horwitz
Corey Johnson
Jacqueline Koppell
Doug Lawrence
Khary Lazarre-White, Esq.

Mark R. Lofton
Robert O. McCabe
Teal Newland
Geoffrey Newman
Regan Kelley Orillac
Sarah S. Park, Esq.
David J. Pollak
Michal Rosenn
Donald W. Savelson, Esq.
Aimee Scillieri, Esq.
Ken Sunshine
Phyllis Taylor
Jeffery J. Weaver

HONORARY LIFE TRUSTEES

Stephen R. Aiello, Ph.D.
Nicholas A. Gravante, Jr.



633 THIRD AVE, 10TH FL,
NEW YORK, NY 10017
PH 212.254.8900

www.cssny.org