



**Broken boilers: inadequate reporting obscures depth of problem
Oversight – Chronic Heat and Hot Water Failures in NYCHA Housing**

Testimony to New York City Council

**Chair Ampry-Samuel of the Committee on Public Housing
Chair Torres of the Committee on Oversight and Investigations**

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Chairs Ampry-Samuel and Torres, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony and for holding this important hearing on an urgent and devastating problem. Pratt Center for Community Development works for a more just, equitable, and sustainable New York City by supporting low- and moderate-income communities to plan for and realize their vision. In the service of this mission we have partnered with and provided technical assistance to dozens of community-based organizations. We are currently working with the Turning the Tide Collective, comprised of groups that organize and serve public housing residents in Red Hook and Gowanus, Brooklyn, such as Red Hook Initiative, Families United for Racial and Economic Equality (FUREE), and Fifth Avenue Committee. Turning the Tide works to increase climate change resiliency specifically in these public housing communities.

As the climate change-influenced extreme weather of “Bomb Cyclone” Grayson was approaching, we wanted to visualize the extent to which people in NYCHA developments were being impacted by heat and hot water outages, and we set out to gather data to create a map.

What should have been a simple task we soon realized was impossible; instead our effort is a testament to what is wrong about the reporting systems for problems in NYCHA developments and with the information that the City makes available to the public about conditions within NYCHA. Of course this is information that our community partners have been saying for years, but we want to take this opportunity to support their lived experience and to further elaborate on the ways in which these systems prevent NYCHA from gaining the full picture of what is wrong (and robs them of the opportunity to respond), and prevents the public from understanding the extent of the problems. These realities hamper our collective ability to arrive at the solutions that the 400,000 residents of public housing need, and compromise our mission as a city to preserve affordable housing and ensure safe and healthy housing conditions for all – especially the most vulnerable among us.

To find out where there were outages, we first started cataloging news stories. 5 media outlets¹ generated a list of more than 20 developments² with outages. We then went to reference NYCHA's own data. They have a [page](#) just for elevator, gas, heat, and hot water outages: Reported outages and estimated completion dates are listed on this web page.

However, there are a number of limitations to this site that might interfere with the completeness of the data we obtained.

- Previous outage data is deleted when the page is updated and is then no longer publicly available
- It is updated with unknown frequency, meaning that in theory it could have been updated more than once between the times that we checked and downloaded data, causing us to miss information.

We downloaded NYCHA data three times: on January 5th, January 8th, and January 9th, generating a list of 6 developments, none of which contained developments from the list of 20 in the news media. This means that either NYCHA did not have that information in its data set, OR that its system of clearing tickets and removing the complaints while failing to keep a publicly accessible comprehensive list obscures the full picture from the public. Additionally, the way that 311 complaint data about NYCHA residences is captured also has a high probability of causing records of reported outages to be "lost."

Beyond these failures of data disclosure, we have other reasons to believe that the map we created (see attachment) is incomplete. Community-based partners and residents also self-reported outages at Gowanus Houses and in the Coney Island area, but since we were not able to get detailed information about those issues, and we did not cast a wide request for self-reports, we opted not to map those. **However, we believe that the outages for heat and hot water during this period were more extensive than shown on the map.**

The public needs to have access to NYCHA data on Open Data NYC or on NYCHA's website in order to:

- o understand NYCHA properties' conditions better;
- o advocate more effectively; and
- o oversee the budget for repair allocations.

The public data needs to be comprehensive and integrated

- o Currently, NYCHA does not publicly disseminate most of data the agency collects:
 - NYCHA's data should be inclusive of all types of data collected and in all time spans data is collected. NYCHA should adhere to [New York City Open Data Law](#) (local law 11 of 2012).

¹ [ABC Eyewitness News](#), [NBC New York](#), [Patch New York](#), [BK Reader](#), [NY Daily News](#)

² Harborview Terrace, west side; The Woodside Houses; Tilden Houses; Pink Houses; Sedgwick Houses; Patterson Houses; Jefferson Houses; Lower East Side Rehab; Rutland Towers; Independence Houses; Redfern Houses; Forest Houses; West Brighton II development; Red Hook West -one building-; Randall Avenue; Balcom Av Development; Sotomayor Houses; Rosebank Houses; Reid Houses; Haward Houses

The data needs to be explained

- When the agency publishes data (for example through "[My NYCHA Developments](#)") it should (but currently does not) come with comprehensive metadata; which is information about the method of data collection (who collected it, when, how, etc.)

The data provided should be easy to manipulate

- The Open Data Law calls for data to be available in a format "that allows for automatic processing" which means both that it should be in one place or linked and that it should be in machine readable format (i.e. in spreadsheet/database formats like Excel sheets that can be manipulated/analyzed and not PDFs)

Conclusion

In short, it's clear that the extent to which there are heat and hot water outages in NYCHA residences is massive and unacceptable, whether there is "extreme weather" or not. Climate change also alters our notion of "extreme" weather, as we are forced to adapt to the "new normal." The trauma of surviving outages of this sort impact residents long after the specific incidents and the cumulative toll of ongoing incidents causes stress levels to rise to dangerous levels. The point of today's hearing is to raise up this reality, and to attempt to comprehend the extent of and source of the issues so that as a city we can move swiftly to address the need. And yet, the systems for even assessing that need are deeply broken. **Pratt Center calls on NYCHA and Mayor de Blasio to increase transparency around those systems and others, to heed the calls of the most directly impacted people, and to fully invest in preserving our largest single stock of affordable housing by making sure it is safe and healthy.**

Thank you.

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Attachment: ***Heat and Hot Water Outages in NYCHA During Extreme Weather: "Bomb Cyclone" Grayson and Aftermath Map***

NOTE: This testimony was prepared by the Pratt Center for Community Development. It does not necessarily reflect the official position of Pratt Institute.

Heat and Hot Water Outages in NYCHA During Extreme Weather

"Bomb Cyclone" Grayson and Aftermath

-  NYCHA properties with no heat or hot water (or both)
-  All other NYCHA properties

This map shows NYCHA properties with no heat and hot water for which Pratt Center was able to retrieve data. It does not necessarily include all NYCHA properties with these outage issues. For example, people with firsthand knowledge of the conditions in Gowanus Houses and in developments in Coney Island reported outages personally to Pratt Center.



Data sources: NYCHA, 311 complaints, media scan of outage-related stories.
Data retrieved between 1/4/18 and 1/10/18