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Make it affordable

Provide low-interest and evaporating loans

BASE calls on the city to create an equitable lending program to allow low- and moderate-income households to convert their basements at minimal cost to the homeowner. The city should establish a sliding-scale financing plan that provides evaporating, interest free, and low-interest loans to fund the conversions based on income. For homeowners at or below 50% Area Median Income (AMI), loans should be evaporating to help vulnerable homeowners avoid the cost burden of conversion. Homeowners under 100% AMI should have access to interest-free loans to support conversion without the unsustainable burden of debt. Lastly, homeowners over 100% AMI should have access to low-interest amortizing loans to make conversion affordable and sustainable.

Create regulatory agreements to protect tenants

Basement tenants are some of the most vulnerable residents of New York City. Most tenants of illegal basements are low-income families, gig workers, seniors, or undocumented residents. The most consistent concern these tenants raise about a basement conversion program is that legalization will bring higher rents and ultimately displace them.

Tenants should not have to choose between unaffordable rents and poor living conditions. BASE calls on the city to create a regulatory policy to keep rents affordable and make sure basement apartments remain accessible for low-income New Yorkers. Homeowners that benefit from subsidized financing, zoning adjustments, and building code accommodations should be expected to pass on the benefits of the conversion program to their tenants in the form of affordable, sustainable rents.

Create an amnesty program for homeowners

The fines that homeowners with illegal basements are subject to can be financially devastating and can put homeowners on the path to foreclosure and financial ruin. As organizers and direct service providers, the BASE coalition knows that if homeowners are liable for these violations should they come forward to participate in the basement conversion program, they will opt to continue renting their basements illegally and the success of the program will be in serious jeopardy.

Therefore, BASE calls on the city to create an amnesty program for homeowners. This policy will allow homeowners with existing basement tenants and potential violations to come forward to participate in the program without the fear of having to pay burdensome fines. By allowing homeowners to join the program and have their violations go unpunished, it will not only ensure greater participation but it will also make the process more affordable for homeowners, who might be unable to afford the cost of the fines and the cost of converting the basement unit.