

**Testimony
Victor Bach, Senior Housing Policy Analyst
Community Service Society (CSS)
at Board Meeting, New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA)
October 13th, 2010**

RE: Opposition to Agenda Items 4, 5, and 6

The Community Service Society urges the NYCHA Board to reject agenda items 4 through 6. Together, they propose spending \$2.3 million of scarce federal capital funds received by NYCHA in order to purchase 76 police cars and vans, presumably to be owned/operated by the New York City Police Department (NYPD).

CSS views the proposed NYCHA outlay as inappropriate in several respects. Federal public housing capital dollars are intended to be invested in capital improvements in NYCHA housing and developments. New York City and the NYPD alone should bear the responsibility for additions to the fleet of police vehicles. It is an inappropriate gift from NYCHA to the NYPD.

NYCHA estimates that it has a \$7 billion backlog in capital improvements. When residents make urgent repair calls to the Centralized Call Center they are often told they will have to wait until 2011 for relief. Within that context, it is difficult to understand that NYCHA is about to squander some of its federal capital funds on police vehicles.

CSS has long objected to the annual payment of \$73 million in NYCHA's federal operating funds to support "special police services", particularly in recent years when NYCHA ran a high operating deficit. We believe that all city residents, whether or not they live in public housing, are entitled to adequate, respectful police protection for which they pay the City through their taxes.

In recent City Council hearings on police practices in NYCHA developments—at which NYCHA and the NYPD refused to appear—CSS testified to frequent trespass arrests in which young people of color are taken in and put through the system for minor infractions, such as lacking identification while on their own home grounds. The resulting arrest records can be an obstacle to subsequent employment. It is a sad irony that NYCHA is adding salt to these wounds by beefing up the police fleet.

The proposed purchase and the annual NYCHA payments to the NYPD are examples of what has come to be called "milking" of the housing authority by State and City

government. Other examples include 1) the recent practice of paying lower public assistance shelter allowances in NYCHA apartments than for those with private landlords, to cut costs for the City and State, 2) the \$23 million annual NYCHA payment to the City in lieu of property taxes, when many non-profit housers are exempted from taxes, and 3) the failure of the City and State to resume operating subsidies to their NYCHA developments, even when they were experiencing large budget surpluses and NYCHA was running at a serious deficit.

Washington is the only level of government that funds NYCHA. New York City is the only level of government that regularly takes payments from NYCHA. It is time to stop the siphoning off of NYCHA operating and capital funds by the City, at a time when every dollar NYCHA receives from Washington is needed to support and preserve our public housing communities. For these reasons CSS urges the NYCHA Board to reject items 4 through 6.