



New York City Comptroller  
**Scott M. Stringer**

**NEWS**

PRESS RELEASE

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## **COMPTROLLER STRINGER AUDIT TO REVEAL TENS OF THOUSANDS OF BACKLOGGED REPAIRS AT NYCHA - LITTLE PROGRESS, DESPITE NYCHA'S ASSURANCES**

**Repairs 'fixed' for purposes of record keeping as tenants continue to suffer**

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*55,000 backlogged repairs*

*Average 370 days to fix safety violations*

*Housing authority says problem 'fixed' if tenant not home*

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### **Stringer Announces Four-Part Reform Agenda to Bring Accountability To NYCHA**

(New York, NY) – The New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) makes tens of thousands of New Yorkers wait for weeks, months and sometimes even years before fixing serious problems such as asbestos, missing carbon monoxide detectors, broken elevators, leaky ceilings, and faulty stoves due to poor management and oversight, according to an audit released today by New York City Comptroller Scott M. Stringer.

The audit also revealed that NYCHA drastically under-reported data on its maintenance backlog, failed to properly train staff to get rid of mold, mildew, and excessive moisture conditions in tenants' apartments, and fell dramatically short when it came to meeting its own deadlines for repairs.

"For the 400,000 New Yorkers who live in NYCHA housing, the Authority's handling of repairs is a case study in mismanagement," Comptroller Stringer said. "There is a backlog of over 50,000 repairs – including thousands that have been ignored for over a year. During our audit we learned of one tenant who had a leaky ceiling that was so bad that she had to cancel Christmas, and another who had to deal with a leak for more than a decade. We also heard from a NYCHA tenant who was forced to live with mold for eleven years. And another NYCHA resident told us that when her stove started catching on fire on a regular basis, NYCHA told her 'they have no parts to fix it, they have no stoves to give' so she should 'buy her own stove.' This track record is shameful, and while there is no question that we have to fix these apartments quickly, it is equally clear that we must also fix NYCHA itself."

“I know that NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye is committed to turning the Authority around, and that’s why I am proposing a four-part reform agenda that will give us the tools to fix residents’ apartments, and NYCHA itself,” Stringer said.

Comptroller Stringer’s four-part agenda includes establishing NYCHASat, a fully transparent management tool based on the NYPD’s highly successful CompStat intended to track open work orders by development; budget reforms designed to bring NYCHA into line with other City agencies in terms of transparency and accounting standards; publicly releasing NYCHA’s Physical Needs Assessment, a comprehensive review of NYCHA infrastructure needs in all five boroughs; and using surplus funds from the Battery Park City Authority to support capital improvements at NYCHA, including technology and infrastructure upgrades. These proposed steps are discussed in greater detail in an accompanying press release.

The audit examined NYCHA’s maintenance and repairs from January 1, 2013 through July 31, 2014. Major findings include:

#### **‘Paper Repairs’ and Disappearing Work Orders:**

- In February 2013, NYCHA established a new policy of closing ‘non-emergency’ work orders if residents are not home when NYCHA attempts one time to make repairs; the Authority’s policy for Emergency Repairs is to visit twice before closing the work order. The policy reduced the backlog of repairs on paper, without fixing a single problem for those residents who were at work or otherwise not available when NYCHA finally appeared to make repairs.
- While NYCHA reported it had approximately 84,500 work orders open as of July 31, 2014, that figure understated the total number of work orders it had open by more than 50,000. This included nearly 31,000 inspection work orders, close to 17,000 preventative maintenance work orders and around 3,400 violation work orders.

“Making problems disappear on paper, while leaving residents to deal with leaky plumbing, faulty wiring and falling plaster is the worst kind of magic trick,” commented Comptroller Stringer. “Creative accounting is simply not the solution.”

#### **NYCHA’s Backlog:**

When auditors studied NYCHA work orders that were pending as of July 31, 2014, they found nearly 55,000 repair requests had been left open longer than NYCHA’s own policies allowed – and 2,591 of those requests had been ignored for more than a year.

To break down the backlog problem:

*NYCHA says **Emergency Repairs**, those repairs that affect the health and safety of tenants or property, such as gas leaks, heating outages, and major flooding, should be dealt with in 24 Hours:*

- More than 80 percent went un-addressed for more than twenty-four hours.
- Nearly 400 of the close to 4,000 open work orders were ignored for over a month.

*NYCHA says **Complex Repairs**, those repairs that require work by skilled tradespeople, including plumbing work, electrical work, and repairs to walls, should be completed in fifteen days:*

- It took NYCHA an average of 72 days to complete these repairs – nearly five times NYCHA’s timeframe for completing repairs.
- 40,000 work orders languished un-repaired for over two weeks.
- Nearly 13,000 were still not fixed after three months.

NYCHA says **Simple Repairs**, those that can generally be completed in a single visit, such as unclogging a drain, replacing a door, and sealing a bathtub, should be fixed in one week:

- More than 10,000 repairs remained un-fixed for longer than one week.
- Of these, nearly 10% were left for more than two months.
- Roughly 400 of requests remained un-addressed after three months.

### **NYCHA Delays Making Repairs Ordered by the Fire Department, the Department of Buildings, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene:**

- Auditors also found that NYCHA does not include outstanding health and safety violation work orders related to New City York Fire Department, the Department of Buildings, and the Department of Health and Mental Hygiene in its tally of backlogged repairs.
- When the audit team looked at this category of work orders – which can include repairs to FDNY standpipes, crumbling facades, and collapsing ceilings – they found that 91 percent of 3,374 repairs had been left open for more than three months.
- On average, it took NYCHA 370 days to make repairs in this category – and some had been open for 1,916 days, since May 2009.

### **Moldy Apartments Improperly Repaired**

In April 2014, NYCHA entered into a settlement with residents who claimed that NYCHA did not properly deal with mold, mildew, and excessive moisture conditions in apartments and suffered from asthma as a result. This agreement required NYCHA management to train maintenance employees on proper mold and mildew abatement. However, when auditors reviewed work orders and training logs, they found:

- Nearly 75 percent of mold repairs were completed by staff members that NYCHA failed to properly train.
- In almost two out of five cases, mold re-appeared – pointing to improper repairs.

### **Ignoring Residents’ Concerns**

Auditors also examined whether NYCHA followed General Manager (GM) Directive-3760, which requires that they ask residents to fill out simple satisfaction surveys after maintenance work is completed. In theory, these surveys allow NYCHA to track employees’ performance and address unsatisfactory repairs. However, auditors found:

- Internal NYCHA audits in 2012 and 2014 showed that GM Directive-3760 was not enforced, and management did not make sure surveys were completed.
- In September 2013, NYCHA decided to stop tracking responses to Resident Satisfaction Surveys because they could not identify anyone in the Authority who used the data.

In order to see what tenants would have told NYCHA if they had been asked, the Comptroller’s Office sent over three thousand surveys to NYCHA residents. The results paint a conclusive picture of mismanagement:

- Nearly six in ten respondents indicated repairs were not completed in a timely manner;
- More than 45 percent of respondents were unsatisfied with the work done;
- 42 percent of respondents indicated repairs had not been completed; and
- In 21 percent of cases, NYCHA did not show up for scheduled appointments.

“NYCHA must start listening to tenants, fixing apartments, and changing the way that it does business. I encourage the current NYCHA leadership team to make good on their promise to turn the agency around, and I ask them to embrace transparency and accountability. Working together, we can put finally begin to put NYCHA’s house in order,” Stringer said.

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