

## Transcript: Wake Up, New York! A Sunrise NYC Podcast

### 01: Green New Deal for Public Housing: Why Do We Need It?

In April, Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Senator Bernie Sanders reintroduced the Green New Deal for Public Housing Act at the federal level. In this episode, we are talking about the history of New York City public housing (NYCHA), where it is today, and why we must enact a Green New Deal for Public Housing in New York City. We speak with current tenants Jasmin Sanchez, Romaine Singleton, La Keesha Taylor, and Cesar Yoc to hear about their experiences living in NYCHA housing, and why the time for change is now.

*The following has been lightly edited for clarity.*

[00:00:00] (THEME: “Time Capsules” by Janet May)

**GIO:** [00:00:35] Welcome to our first episode of WAKE UP, NEW YORK! A SUNRISE NYC PODCAST, where we distill the big ideas of climate change and the Green New Deal and bring them to the local level.

**JENNA:** [00:00:47] I'm Jenna

**GIO:** [00:00:48] I'm Gio

**PAOLA:** [00:00:48] And I'm Paula and we're members of a local climate activist group called the Sunrise Movement. Our New York City hub wanted to make a podcast that focuses the conversation on politics, policy, principles, and culture, specifically in New York City.

**GIO:** [00:01:03] Join us as we explore what a Green New Deal means for our city. Learn more about local civics and realize our dreams for a green, new future.

**JENNA:** [00:01:11] We're kicking off our conversation by talking about a topic that we think embodies the spirit of Sunrise NYC, and that's the Green New Deal for Public Housing.

**PAOLA:** [00:01:20] I'm sure listeners might be asking why does the Green New Deal for Public Housing and important topic for Sunrise? And what does the Green New Deal have to do with public housing?

**GIO:** [00:01:28] To know the answer to both of these questions and to understand some new legislation on the table. We're going to dig into the history and evolution of public housing in New York City.

**PAOLA:** [00:01:39] Before we dive into this history, we first have to answer the question. What is NYCHA?

**JENNA:** [00:01:46] The New York City Housing Authority, which is referred to as NYCHA, aims to increase opportunities for low and moderate-income New Yorkers by providing safe, affordable housing and facilitating access to social and community services. NYCHA has earned the nickname “Shadow City” because, between 326 buildings, NYCHA has a population of 400,000 named residents (and up to 600,000 tenants, including those who are unnamed). If you were to stand up NYCHA as its own city, it would be the fifth largest city in the country. Right now, NYCHA is in physical, political and financial disrepair, which is leaving its tenants with unsafe and subpar housing. A recent study in 2017 estimates that NYCHA has a repair backlog of up to \$31.8 billion. So how did we get here?

**GIO:** [00:02:36] Now, let's go back to the beginning. NYCHA was founded during the heart of the Great Depression in 1934 by Mayor Fiorello H. LaGuardia as a replacement for famously shoddy New York City tenements to provide those affected by the depression with a decent place to live. Now, not only did NYCHA provide a place to live, it also created thousands of jobs within communities, including maintenance jobs and a police force that guarded NYCHA developments. During this time – through the thirties and onward – employees of NYCHA were skilled workers who are good at their trade and proud to do their jobs, which allowed them to efficiently manage and maintain the buildings that made up NYCHA development.

NYCHA was a gold standard for what public housing could look like in America. NYCHA buildings were built to a high standard and they were meticulously maintained. Not only that, but up until the 1960s, NYCHA selected its tenants using a rigorous application process, which screened for what they considered to be moral factors, such as alcoholism and single motherhood and excluded most tenants on welfare. White, Black and Puerto Rican families were carefully selected to join NYCHA’s community.

**JENNA:** [00:03:52] While these requirements may have helped form communities within public housing, long-time community organizer, Jasmin Sanchez argues that these policies were not as well intentioned as they seemed. Jasmin, a third-generation public housing resident who was born and raised in the Baruch Houses in the Lower East Side, points out the oft forgotten history of these requirements.

**Jasmin Sanchez:** [00:04:15] Well, public housing specifically started as part of like the New Deal effort pushed forth by FDR, and it was a great intention but it left behind Black Americans, right? Like, that bill did not do much to elevate, alleviate, or empower Black Americans. Right. And we know this for a fact because the intent of starting NYCHA specifically was to house those that were returning from war.

In some of these public housing developments, they only admitted a very small portion of Black people. In one development of about 2,400 apartments, only 35 black families were allowed to enter. And one of the main things that public housing outlined – and this was actually printed – is that the tenants had to be worthy, they need to have income, and they also need to be a citizen, right. And we're just like, 'what?' You expect, you know, BIPOC people to have, like this credit worthiness or like this steady flow of income when we are not able to provide them the employment that they need. So even those criteria were not beneficial for people that looked like me back in the thirties.

**PAOLA:** [00:05:44] NYCHA was largely lauded as a liberal success. It provided a sense of safety and community for its tenants. And it was a beacon of stability for housing and all of New York City. In the 1960s, the New York Housing Authority came under increasing criticism from both the government and social justice movements to be more inclusive in housing. And in 1964, NYCHA ended a policy that held apartments for white tenants.

A few years later, in further attempts to integrate, NYCHA began allowing more individuals on public assistance tenancy. By the seventies, the tenants on public assistance, nearly doubled. Even with these shifts in occupancy, NYCHA remained a steady presence for housing and safety in New York City, even when the rest of the city fell apart.

Up until the eighties, NYCHA was considered a safer place to be than the rest of the city. After learning about NYCHA's history, we had to ask ourselves, how did one of the city's most stable forms of housing fall into complete disarray and into a multi-billion dollar budget deficit?

**GIO:** [00:06:46] In 1998, then-president Clinton signed the Quality Housing and Work Responsibility Act, which included a clause, the Faircloth Amendment that prohibited construction of public housing units after 1999. The passage of this bill – which is still in place – marked a watershed moment in the federal government's crusade against public housing because it signaled hostility to local efforts to provide working class people with decent and affordable accommodations.

Indeed, over the past several decades, the federally managed Public Housing Capital Fund has faced radical divestment. And it's estimated that over 10,000 public housing units nationwide are demolished every year due to resultant disrepair.

**PAOLA:** [00:07:36] Our producer Hillary spoke with multiple NYCHA tenants who are living through and organizing around the effects of the economic, political, and social divestment in NYCHA. She spoke with tenant organizer La Keesha Taylor, who lives in the John Haynes Holmes Towers in the Upper [East] Side. La Keesha loved her childhood growing up in and around [East] 92nd Street, but soon began noticing the problems her building had:

**LA KEESHA TAYLOR:** [00:08:00] It was, it was joyful. You had the best of [both] worlds because we lived on the Upper East Side. There's money here, except for in NYCHA – there is no money. But as a

child growing up, it was great because I had my friends. We, you know, we took care of each other. Your neighbors watched out for you. It was a true community.

You know, every summer, every couple of summers, NYCHA gave you a new refrigerator. The next summer you got a new stove. I had my friends, we were outside playing. They gave everyone sprinklers in their playground. Everything looked the same. If I went to my friend's development uptown, she had the same thing. We all had our boxed-in little playground with a sprinkler.

You know, we didn't realize at that time that all those gates made you feel like you were in jail. You know, you didn't realize that all of our boxed-in apartments also all had mold growing. You know, we didn't realize that all the money that NYCHA was spending on – wasting on –giving us stoves every couple of years when our stoves weren't broken was wasting the money that they should have been investing in fixing the pipes. You know, should have been investing in fixing the walls. Should've been investing in fixing our roofs. These are the things you don't realize as a child, but now as an adult, I look back and see they were wasting our money.

**GIO:** [00:09:22] Cesar Yoc has similar observations about his home, NYCHA's Millbrook Houses in the Mott Haven neighborhood of the South Bronx. Cesar, an urban planner and the founder of the Bronx Institute of Urban Systems, moved with his family from Guatemala and began living in public housing in 1989.

**CESAR YOC:** [00:09:41] In the '90s, it was more like a community. There was more culture, block parties, and then there were families playing music: salsa, merengue, bachata, hip hop. Families would get together and things like that.

And then, uh, later in the 2000s, I went to school (so I wasn't here for the beginning of 2000s) but when I came back, it was more like this culture started, sort of, like fading away. It was more about staying inside... People started talking about like, a rent increase, what's happening outside of their apartments with the crime, with the operations at NYCHA... [they] just didn't repair things on time.

In the early '90s and 2000s, the repairs used to be done a little bit faster. Right now it takes so long to do repairs – that also has changed since I came up – the timing of the repairs. Also, how repairs were done...

Another thing that I notice is like, there are more people struggling with work, you know, we have less jobs available. I used to work in Jobs Plus so I used to see the people coming in and trying to get work and a lot of them didn't have a high school diploma. And then I was looking into some of these statistics: in the Mott Haven area of the South Bronx, we have about 45% of people who don't have a high school diploma. So that also affected the neighborhood in Millbrook Houses. You know, you have a lot of people that are seeking better jobs. They were – some of them – wanted to move out because they say NYCHA sucks: they don't want to be here anymore; that things are falling

apart; you know, they don't care about us so let's move. Then they get stuck because it's so expensive outside.

There's this assumption that Millbrook – and [this] also applies to NYCHA per se – is that we are only in a certain economic ladder. You know, there are people here that make different, they have different salaries: there's some people that are unemployed; there are people that make decent wages; you know, there's people that, they get SSI; there are people with disabilities that try to get work. And also there's not a lot of high paying jobs. So, I see like more people certainly getting more stressed out. They look more depressed. You know, they have to deal with those life issues.

You know, it seems like they're, yeah, that they are being oppressed, that they're being pummeled by the system. And some of them are just keeping up in a sense. You know, they lash out in some form. And then with these policies happening... It has also exacerbated the problem. We basically get that pummel from everywhere, you know – it's like a ray of oppression happening at the same time. And then we have this cycle that – where we get blamed for the problems in the system – they don't want to take the responsibility that they're the one to cause these problems.

**PAOLA:** [00:13:17] Romaine Singleton also misses the community spirit of NYCHA and questions if living within a NYCHA development is really worth the cost of rent. Romaine, like Jasmin, is from the Lower East Side and grew up in the Samuel Gompers Houses.

**ROMAINE SINGLETON:** [00:13:29] The way the situation is now there's no more unity in the projects. And I mean, people still know people, but it's not as unified as it was before. There's no more trips – those all stopped. There's no more outdoor fund, no more recreational centers that children can go to. No more PAL.

Everything is crazy and haywire. You asked to get repairs – you got to wait six months before you can get anything done. You have to call a specific number to get information, to get repairs done. You have to constantly be observant of who's around you. You have more people – who, which you don't know where they came from – lurking in your building. You have people living in the stairwells: they're deprecating and urinating; they have the dogs; they have the Citi Bikes; it's like they own an apartment.

...And no one is coming down – when you call the cops, to ask them to try to get rid of these people, these squatters: 'Oh, we can't do nothing because somebody invited them in.' So what's the purpose of having a tenant association that nobody's going to enforce? Or the police are not going to enforce? It's just like you paying your rent to be considered a target.

You can live in a one bedroom apartment and they want to charge you \$17–\$1800 just for that one bedroom apartment. Everything is like falling apart and you paying X amount of dollars for shabby repairs. You get people that work in management office that – some – don't even live in the area or in your neighborhood or maybe not even in Manhattan or New York at all. Some of them live way

out there and in Long Island [and] don't know anything about NYCHA and they're just here for the check. And they think they can tell you what's going on with your apartment when they really don't know.

**JENNA:** [00:15:55] The war on welfare, central to American conservative doctrine, is alive and well. And nowhere are the devastating effects of government divestment for public assistance programs more apparent than in New York City housing projects.

A 2018 investigation done by New York State found that 83% of inspected apartment units in NYCHA buildings had at least one condition that could pose a health hazard to the tenant. And that 75% of inspected common areas had similar hazards. By almost every standard, the average NYCHA building is worse off than the average New York City building: heating breakdowns, for instance, are roughly three times as likely to occur in the average public housing building than the city average building; and toilet breakdowns and water leakages are about twice as likely. NYCHA facilities waste approximately 40% more energy than the median multi-family New York building. Residents of public housing also report bad health at a higher rate than New Yorkers in general; 14% of New Yorkers describe their health as fair or poor whereas 28% of nature residents report the same.

**PAOLA:** [00:17:03] High rates of poor health in NYCHA residents are likely due in part to exposure to mold and lead paint, both of which are disconcertingly widespread in public housing developments. The prevalence of mold and lead in public housing indicates a complete abdication of moral and legal responsibility on the part of the municipal government.

Beginning in 2012, under Mayor Bloomberg, the City of New York negotiated an agreement with the department of housing and urban development to reduce the frequency of federally mandated apartment inspections of building infrastructure and lead paint. From 2012 to 2016, the city stopped conducting these inspections altogether while fraudulently submitting paperwork, claiming that it was still complying with the federal government's mandates.

After details of this fraud came to light, a court appointed monitor was imposed on NYCHA by the federal government. The city fully deserved to be subject to oversight after lying to tenants and authorities about safety inspections. However, it's rather cruel and strange for the federal government to penalize NYCHA for disregarding hazardous conditions in their building without providing the resources necessary to improve those conditions. At the end of the struggle between varying levels of government, the tenants were no better off.

**JENNA:** [00:18:15] La Keesha has experienced more than her fair share of health and safety hazards within NYCHA and has fought to improve the conditions there.

**LA KEESHA TAYLOR:** [00:18:24] I see NYCHA residents as abused people, you understand? Because, again, they're marginalized, they suffered, you understand? It's the same thing... you're fighting against, like the mafia. Because again, if you don't know how to fight correctly, if you don't know

the steps to take to win this war, you're hitting your head against a wall. Because again, just plainly going to management, plainly asking management, you don't always get the right results. Oh my, like I said, my stove was not working. I complained for two months, they did nothing.

So what was I to do then? I would have to go above his head. And then, I would have to what: go to an elected official. Or what: call 250 Broadway; sue NYCHA. How long is that process going to take in order to actually yield a positive result? Am I going to live with a stove that can burn my child, catch fire, set my home on fire? You have to actually weigh out, you know, the positive versus the negatives... And that result – I could just buy another stove. I was fortunate enough that I could go out and buy another stove.

So the biggest part is like, I've lost a job over this. When we had our elevators being put in, I had, my kids were very young. And they were putting in the elevators and I couldn't get the babysitter up, I couldn't get the kids down. I was constantly late. I had just started a new job. I was working in the Bronx. I live on the 25th floor. It was utterly disgusting.

And it's just like, I was tired. You are tired. It was tiring. I was unreliable. I was like, 'I cannot walk down these stairs one more day.' I was like, I was almost in tears. I was like, 'I'm going to get fired from this job.' I had a friend, she was like, 'go, go, I'll watch the kids for a couple of hours and then I'll take them to daycare.' She did that for me. I made it to the job that day, but still at the end of the day, I still ended up getting fired. They were like, 'you're, you're, we can't, we can't do this anymore. You've missed so much. You're unreliable. We can't depend on you.' I was like, 'no problem. I'm not going to argue with you. How can I argue with you?' Because it was too much. I know, every day I came home, I was arguing and sending emails about the damn elevator. They were so unreliable about when the elevators were going to work, when they weren't going to work, it was ridiculous.

Like, I just couldn't do it because the kids were young. I was like, I can't carry the kids, the stroller and everything that entails with a kid. At first, I was like bumping up the baby in the stroller and people sometimes would help me bring him up. And then at the end he was like, 'Mommy, I could do it, I could do it.' And he started walking up the 25 flights – he would walk up and he was like two. And like: a two year old, 25 flights! That was the worst year. That was the worst year of my life. And I was like, 'that's it.'

And people in NYCHA, like I said, have been abused because again, they have to know the process, they have to know who to go to, and they have to be willing to fight. Because it's not as simple as 'let me go to the management, let me put in a ticket' and it's going to get resolved the first time. It rarely gets resolved the first time. It's like: you have to be a tenant in good standing; you have to be known as a fighter; you may have to be known as a problem person. I am a tenant that is known as a problem: I already have a lawsuit; I know who to contact; I am known as a person who will email 15 million people. So when I put in my ticket, 'you better go take care of her ticket.'

“As a landlord, you are violating my human rights and you are not doing your job of keeping me in a safe living environment.” And this is what I say in all my emails. And I send it to like... I send it to the councilmen; I send it to the landlord; I send it to their supervisor; I send it to my lawyers. I send it to everybody and I put in my tickets so there's a paper trail. And this is, this is hard work.

This is hard work that I do every single damn day, you know, and every single time that they violate my rights, this is what I do. But I make sure I have a ticket. I back it up and I send it out. But this is also... like we did a lawsuit, we did an HPD action to also try and fix the living conditions here at Holmes [Towers]. You know, I started a whole coalition in order to help NYCHA residents gain power to fight back, you know. And also to give them the knowledge that you can fight back. Because just me fighting back – I'm going to fix my house, I'm going to fix my four walls, but it's not going to do anything for this entire building. You know, it's not going to do anything for this entire development.

So we have to do this together as a community. So my knowledge has to be your knowledge, and my power has to be yours. We have to do it together.

**GIO:** [00:24:15] In 2012, things went from bad to worse for New York housing developments when Hurricane Sandy swept through the city. Half of all NYCHA buildings are located in low lying evacuation zones making them particularly vulnerable to extreme climate events.

The Superstorm affected 77,000 NYCHA residents in 402 buildings that lost electricity and elevator functionality. Most of these buildings also lost heat and hot water, and some buildings remained without heat for weeks after the hurricane ended. In some cases, according to the *New York Times*, elderly tenants and tenants with disabilities were left stranded in darkened freezing towers in these weeks following the storm.

In 2015, Mayor de Blasio secured \$3 billion from FEMA, which he promised would be used to stormproof entire housing projects affected by Sandy. However, FEMA agreed only to pay for repairs on specific buildings damaged in the storm. NYCHA remains woefully unprepared for the next climate disaster while still reeling from the last one.

We must work as hard as we can to prevent extreme climate events like Sandy from happening again. But we must also realize that strong, modern housing infrastructure is necessary in case New York does see another calamity in the future. The Green New Deal for Public Housing is an imperative for today. The city's most vulnerable populations can't wait any longer.

**PAOLA:** [00:25:59] I spoke with Sunrise member Arthur Borden-Heilman, who works with the public housing coalition, on why a Green New Deal-style bill is best suited to address the issues with public housing.

**ARTHUR BORDEN-HEILMAN:** [00:26:09] I imagine most people that are listening to this have some idea of what a Green New Deal is. But to understand what a Green New Deal for Public Housing is



we have to remind ourselves that a Green New Deal is just a philosophical framework – that's it. It's not legislation, it's just a way to think about how we can have the world that we deserve and the world that our fellow beings on this planet deserve – and we do not have to sacrifice good quality jobs to have that, we do not have to sacrifice Black and Brown communities, poor people, right?

There is a false assumption that you have to make choices in scarcity between 'do we care for the planet' or 'do we care for people?' That's bullshit. We can do both. We can do that in a bunch of different lenses. There might be a Green New Deal for Education, a Green New Deal for Infrastructure, a Green New Deal for Transportation.

But the very first bill that's been released is this one. And I think it's a perfect representation of what a Green New Deal is because if you look just in New York City, for example, a very large percentage of greenhouse gas emissions in the city come from housing or more specifically the built environment. So it comes from electricity, from heating of houses, it comes from actually constructing houses, comes from greenhouse gases that are emitted from building materials, things like that. That is to say, that if we care about the climate crisis in large dense urban areas like New York City, it is critical to think about the built environment.

So actually, if you look at which buildings have the worst records in terms of emissions, public housing buildings are among the worst buildings. Not because public housing tenants have four cars plugged into the outlet of their apartment, but because these buildings were built in the 1940s, '50s, '60s, '70s, and they haven't ever been upgraded. In fact, they're in such a deficit of funding that often these buildings haven't had any significant upgrades for the last 50, sometimes 70 years.

By focusing on public housing – across the country and where we're located in New York City – you actually get some of the most bang for your buck in terms of carbon reduction. And on top of that, we actually have the authority. It's, it's actually pretty easy to do because the buildings and the land are already owned by the federal government. And so you don't need to impose regulations, you don't need to have, you know, insider conversations with a CEO – you just need to pass a bill.

The last thing I'll say is that the reason that, particularly in New York, a Green New Deal for Public Housing is so impactful is because there are – the official number is just above 400,000 people live in public housing, but the real number is somewhere around 700,000 people live in public housing in New York, which is one in 12 New Yorkers. That's almost as large as the city of Miami or the city of Boston, which is to say that public housing in New York is a city within a city. And if we could pass a Green New Deal for Public Housing in New York, and across the country, they would be the very first all-green cities in the world.

**PAOLA:** [00:29:58] Jasmin is excited for all the Green New Deal for Public Housing could do for NYCHA and understands the policy and investments that would occur.

**Jasmin Sanchez:** [00:30:06] The Green New Deal for Public Housing literally calls for an investment in the public housing stock that we have, which is federally owned throughout the nation. AOC's bill does not state like, 'this is what we need.' It just says that, 'we must invest this much'. And initially it was \$172 billion. Now it's at \$180 billion. But this bill is really different. And, there have been bills presented in front of Congress before that called for, let's say \$72 billion... Yeah, that's cool, right? But what happens then? Where is the investment in people? So that is why this bill is so fantastic because it not only focuses on the infrastructure of public housing, like the bones of it, but it also focuses on the people that live there.

There are seven specific grants that are written into this to empower the residents because we do have these rights. And, the main ones – like, we're talking about: okay, we're going to have our units retrofitted without displacement which is fantastic; we're going to have energy efficient appliances which is great; we're ensuring that folks have specific grants that they need... So like one of them is a resiliency grant. A lot of the places in which public housing is situated throughout New York City and other vulnerable communities in the United States... they don't have means if a natural disaster occurs – we're left alone, as we've seen with Superstorm Sandy and as we've seen with COVID, right? The government failed to provide any information or resources to us. And with this grant specifically, we have this hub... Not only that, it'll get us a center with technology throughout the development. What that looks like: it could be wifi for all; like, we don't know what that can be – we put into that grant what we want to see. And that is an addition to any FEMA money that we can get, right.

[The Green New Deal for Public Housing] calls to repeal the Faircloth Amendment that says that we can't build any more public housing – let's get rid of that! We have an opportunity to address two of the nation's most critical issues, which is climate change and the homelessness crisis in one shot. Let's get rid of that, and that's that.

Through Section 3, which is the employment program of public housing, call to not just... right now, it's 30% of low income residents need to be hired to work in any sites that are public housing. This bill calls for an increase to 90%. We should be doing the work within our own communities. This is how you put the "U," the capital U, for unity in community. Like, we want to preserve, we want to protect, we want to take care of our own space – that makes us proud to say like, 'we are from here, look at what we did.' And when you have folks that are investing and working within their community, there's that sense of ownership. So it calls for an increase to 90%, which is unheard of federally, right?

But the true genius of Section 3 is that, right now, public housing uses private entities to do the work, whether that's plastering, painting, grounds, et cetera, construction, brick laying. There are tons of people that live in public housing that have acquired this skill through massive training and have licenses, certifications, credentials. This bill, the Green New Deal for Public Housing bill, empowers those residents to start their own business so that they can acquire those contracts

before the private entities, which means they get priority. And we hold the authorities in whichever state accountable to do that. No other bill has even focused to that level, right?

In addition to that – just really quickly – is that the Green New Deal for Public Housing actually called [for] about 325,000 jobs nationally over 10 years, which means that we're going to get people working, right? And I think that that's really important. But not only jobs – these are like green, union jobs. Ain't no Amazon happening here, right? We're getting people to work. We're getting them to work in their communities. We're getting them to... greenify is not a real word, but we're getting them to greenify their communities and the nation.

Right, we're talking about retrofits, energy efficient appliances, eliminating the root cause of mold, fixing any leaks, el ventilation systems, providing reliable heat and water, upgrading any appliances with the energy efficient... um, purchasing electricity from a clean power grid, installing like recycling infrastructure, implementing a comprehensive waste program.

One of the things too is that we would like to generate our own energy, and they're starting to do this. I think Queensbridge Houses, which is the largest public housing development, have solar panels on their rooftops. So we want to start having that throughout all of the NYCHA developments. In addition to that, we want to make sure that there's green gardens; right now, if you look at public housing, everything is asphalt, and we're talking about just the lack of trees within public housing (especially now that Sandy hit, most of the developments, they've cut them down).

And while people say this is a lot of money, this is only because there has been disinvestment since the 1970s. Had you done right by people that live in public housing since the '70s, we would not be in this condition that we are right now.

Things can look really different if folks just say that this has to happen, and this is how we're going to get there and not worry about how the money is going to trickle in. There's always ways to get that, right? They have to think about the people that are living here and not necessarily, like, their special interest partners or groups, right? It's time to do the things that are moral. This is morally right to do.

Lastly, is that there's a proposal in this bill that says that there would be like a resident council, like a national resident council, because there has to be some sort of transparency and accountability. If you leave it up to the authorities, they have been conditioned to not do right by residents (and I'm not saying all, I'm just saying all the ones that I've spoken to and I've spoken to quite many in different states and countries). And I think that that's really important because it puts public housing back into the public sector that way. And it also puts it back into the hands of public housing residents. And I think that that is why the Green New Deal for Public Housing is by far the only solution that we have.

**GIO:** [00:37:34] Romaine looks forward to the social programs that a comprehensive Green New Deal could provide, specifically job programs.

**ROMAINE SINGLETON:** [00:37:41] I have a son, he's not working now. I have nephews that need a job – they're handy with their hands. And if they see that they can go to school and learn the trade to help build the Green New Deal to the standards of living and make money on it, a decent living, plus live in the area – that's all a plus. Because right now we have outside contractors coming in here and [they] don't know jack about anything. But if you've got people that work and live in the neighborhood, in your building, instead of sitting around doing nothing – go to school, get a trade.

If you get somebody from the Green New Deal that's working in your development, you could call them up, 'I need you to do whatever you can when you can, blah, blah, blah.' 'All right, give me, give me a day.'

**GIO:** [00:38:42] Cesar, an urban planner who has had a lifelong interest in ecology, understands the potential scale and impact of a Green New Deal for NYCHA.

**CESAR YOC:** [00:38:52] When I think of the Green New Deal for Public Housing, I'm thinking innovation. And thinking like: why, because we live in a poor community, do we always have to think that we are poor and not be part of innovations or dealing with this climate change problem?

Even though we have been oppressed, that doesn't mean that we had to accept our oppression – we can use physical infrastructure, we can use social program development and economic development. We are part of the planet and we have a right to dream and envision something better. You're talking about changing society and changing how people see their environment and how they could contribute to being the solution to these problems: climate justice and environmental justice. So I see the Green New Deal for Public Housing that way: showing the rest of the world that even though we were poor, we can contribute to those solutions to climate change. Why don't we think big?

**ARTHUR BORDEN-HEILMAN:** [00:39:54] The Green New Deal for Public Housing, if passed the way it's written right now, would be a landfall victory for climate activists. It would be the equivalent, in 10 years, of taking all of the cars off of the state of New York and Florida combined. It is not only the right thing to do for the climate but we are 50 years overdue providing this investment to public housing tenants which are, at least in New York, 97% Black, Brown, and poor. This is a bill that literally has a chance of being passed, and it would be one of the most transformative bills to be passed in a very long time. And you can help.

**PAOLA:** [00:40:49] Thank you for listening to WAKE UP, NEW YORK! A SUNRISE NYC PODCAST. Come back for our next episode, the second part of our conversation on the Green New Deal for Public Housing. We'll be diving into the politics of this bill and competing policies, and the significance of organizing around it.

**JENNA:** [00:41:05] Special thanks to Jasmin Sanchez, Romaine Singleton, La Keesha Taylor, and Cesar Yoc for sharing their stories about NYCHA. Additional thanks to Arthur for his explanation of the Green New Deal, as well as Hillary, Frankie, Natalie, Josh, and the rest of the Sunrise NYC podcast team.

**GIO:** [00:41:25] To learn more about Sunrise NYC, visit us online at [sunrise-nyc.org](https://sunrise-nyc.org).

## SHOW NOTES

Check out [gnd4ph.com](https://gnd4ph.com) to learn more about this tenant-led, activist-supported movement. Call your representatives to tell them that we cannot wait any longer for a Green New Deal for Public Housing. Tune in to our next episode in which we talk more about GND4PH, and how we can actually make it happen, together.

*Wake Up, New York! is hosted by Paola Sanchez, Gio Santalucia, and Jenna Tipaldo. This episode was edited by Natalie Bartfay and mixed by Josh Stark. Our music is composed and performed by [Janet May](#). This episode was written and produced by Frankie James Albin, Natalie Bartfay, Joel Machado, Hillary McDonald, Paola Sanchez, Gio Santalucia, Josh Stark, and Jenna Tipaldo. Special thanks to our correspondent Hillary McDonald and Arthur Borden-Heilman – co-lead of the Sunrise NYC GND4PH team – as well as Jon Kirsch, Susie Nakash, and Nikki Luna Paz.*

*If you're interested in getting involved in Sunrise Movement NYC, check out our [New Member Sign-Up form](#), or find us at [sunrise-nyc.org](https://sunrise-nyc.org).*