

HA Residents, Workers Feel Unsafe in Projects

By DAVID SIMS | Posted: Monday, October 1, 2012 5:00 pm

Sixty-five percent of Housing Authority residents feel unsafe in their own buildings because of problems with locks on lobby doors, broken intercom systems, security cameras and on-site police, according to a new survey conducted by Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer.

Mr. Stringer, whose plan to reform the governance structure of the struggling agency was largely adopted by Chairman John Rhea, said that the HA had to take advantage of the \$42 million in local appropriations funding for security cameras at 80 developments.

He released the report Sept. 21 with Assemblyman Brian Kavanagh and State Sen. Daniel Squadron.

‘Bring Security Into 21st Century’

“While recent proposals to restructure the agency’s board and fill job vacancies have been positive steps, we still need to bring NYCHA’s security operations into the 21st century, using money that is waiting to be spent,” he said in a statement. “No tenant anywhere in the city should have to live in a building without functional doors that lock and other basic safety protections.”

Only 45 percent of survey respondents said that they had working locks on their lobby doors; 49 percent reported working intercom systems, and almost 80 percent said they would feel safer if security cameras were installed at their projects.

“Frustratingly, there’s a solution and it’s being left on the table,” Mr. Squadron said. “Expanding security cameras with millions in unspent funds, combined with these other key improvements, will go a long way toward allaying residents’ concerns and changing their reality.”

The \$42 million in security camera funding, earmarked by elected officials for 80 developments and left largely unspent by the HA, is now being moved through the procurement process, but Mr. Stringer said the delays underlined the need for more reform to the agency’s bureaucracy.

Teamsters Local 237 President Gregory Floyd, who represents most HA workers, said that his members often felt unsafe on the job.

‘Working in Dangerous Conditions’

“Our members feel threatened there, too. They’ve been around when shootings have occurred,” he said in a phone interview. “Our Elevator Mechanics going up to the roofs have found that the lights are out, and one of our Mechanics had the police draw a gun on him...They’re working in dangerous conditions also. They’re not immune to what’s going on.”

Almost 50 percent of survey respondents said the police presence in their buildings was inadequate despite the HA's \$70-million a year agreement with the city to receive "special police services" from the NYPD.

Mr. Stringer, Mr. Squadron and Mr. Kavanagh are suggesting a revision of this deal to ease the financial burden on HA without diverting the NYPD presence. The report also calls for a clear and simple repair system that prioritizes broken locks and intercoms.

More than 500 residents responded to the survey, which was largely conducted at housing projects in Manhattan.