New York City will pay $2.2B for failure to provide 'safe' public housing

New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) is set to fork over at least $2.2 billion after it admitted to lying to the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for years about the condition of public housing developments, and specifically, the presence of lead.

A consent decree issued Monday by the United State District Court in the Southern District of New York — after HUD filed a complaint against the city agency — details abhorrent conditions that some of New York City's most vulnerable residents had to contend with on a regular basis.

"Mold grows unchecked at many NYCHA developments, often on a large scale," the complaint reads. "Across the city, residents are provided inadequate heat in winter, leading to frigid apartment temperatures."

"Pests and vermin infestations are common, and as senior New York City officials have acknowledged, NYCHA 'has no idea how to handle rats,'" the complaint continues. "Elevators often fail, leaving elderly or disabled residents trapped in their apartments or sleeping in building lobbies because they cannot return to their homes. Leaks, peeling paint and other deterioration are commonplace, but go unaddressed."

In the complaint, HUD accused NYCHA of undermining the agency's inspection regimen to hide the fact that the living conditions were far from, "decent, safe and sanitary."

"NYCHA's failure to provide decent, safe and sanitary housing is simply unacceptable and illegal," U.S. Attorney Geoffrey Berman said. "Children must be protected from toxic lead paint, apartments must be free of mold and pest infestations and developments must provide adequate heat in winter and elevator service. NYCHA has put its residents at risk."

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New York City will make an initial investment of $1.2 billion to abate lead-based paint hazards, as part of the agreement. More than half of the city’s NYCHA buildings reported the presence of lead.

The city also agreed to provide $1 billion in capital funding over the first four years of the agreement and an additional $200 million in capital funding each year until the consent decree is no longer deemed necessary. The consent decree also calls for greater oversight of the agency and will result in NYCHA creating new departments of compliance, environmental health and safety and quality assurance.

“This historic agreement marks a new era for New York City’s public housing, one that puts families and their children first,” HUD Secretary Ben Carson said. “New York City and New York State are making an unprecedented commitment to put NYCHA on a new path. The cooperation of federal, state and city officials will vastly improve the living conditions for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who call NYCHA home.”

In April, New York Governor Andrew Cuomo declared a State of Emergency for NYCHA and pledged to infuse an additional $250 million in state aide for the agency, which houses more than 400,000 New York City residents.

Amid all of the NYCHA scandals under Mayor Bill de Blasio, NYCHA Chair Shola Olatoye resigned earlier this year.

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