

# SOUTH BRONX RESIDENTS SOLUTION ON GREENING OUR 'HOOD

A report by Mothers on the Move and the Urban  
Justice Center's Community Development Project



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## **About the Authors**

### **MOM**

Mothers on the Move / Madres en Movimiento (MOM) is a member-led community organization founded in 1992 as a vehicle for low-income people of color to take strategic leadership in campaigns to transform ourselves and our South Bronx community. MOM envisions a society where resources and benefits are equally shared, and where people play a lead role in the important decisions affecting our communities. We are fighting for a South Bronx where future generations have clean air, well-resourced and community-controlled schools, safe streets, green space, healthy food, good jobs and more control over the wealth that our labor creates. MOM has a long history of successful fights to achieve this vision, marked by landmark victories to improve our school system, strengthen environmental protections, improve housing conditions and defend our dignity as South Bronx residents. MOM's recent work focuses on Environmental Justice and Public Housing, while Youth on the Move (YOM) works on education and safety issues. Most recently, in July 2010, MOM won a three-year campaign against the New York Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCO) and the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP) to prevent the plant from emitting toxic fumes into the air.

### **Urban Justice Center, Community Development Project**

The Community Development Project (CDP) of the Urban Justice Center (UJC) provides legal, technical, research and policy assistance to grassroots community-groups working for positive social change in low-income communities. CDP strives to support such groups in improvement efforts in the following areas: grassroots community organizing; affordable-housing and tenant organizing; sustainable economic development; technical assistance to not-for-profits; worker rights; environmental justice; and immigrant rights and organizing.



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# I. INTRODUCTION

The South Bronx has struggled for years with three of the most pressing social and economic inequities that affect urban, low-income communities of color: high unemployment, poor public health, and substandard housing conditions. Compared with other neighborhoods in New York City, the South Bronx community bears an unequal share of the burden in each of these areas. The South Bronx is home to the highest unemployment rate in the city at 12.6%<sup>1</sup>, claims one of the highest rates of asthma and obesity in the country,<sup>2</sup> and residents are exposed to housing infested with cockroaches, mold and other allergens at a higher rate than anywhere else in the City.<sup>3</sup>

After a year-long community visioning process, where members of MOM identified the need to address the intersecting issues of housing, environmental injustice and unemployment,<sup>4</sup> members of MOM decided to research a public policy solution that could address each of these interrelated issues simultaneously. This solution is a green jobs program, which we define as employment opportunities that improve the environment. After surveying hundreds of residents in the South Bronx, and exploring a variety of existing and proposed green jobs programs found in New York and elsewhere throughout the country, members of MOM have decided to call for the creation of a green jobs program focused in the New York City Housing Authority to retrofit each of the South Bronx neighborhood's 90 public housing developments to be more energy efficient. If implemented successfully, this green jobs program could create thousands of new jobs while simultaneously improving public health and housing conditions for low-income South Bronx residents.

## Methodology

In order to create a green jobs program that successfully addresses the employment, public health and housing concerns of South Bronx residents, MOM set out to capture the perspective of the South Bronx community in each of these areas. To do so, MOM, with the research support of the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project, conducted three separate surveys over the course of two years, held intensive focus groups with South Bronx residents, and conducted secondary research into current green job programs and potential sources of funding for implementing a program in the South Bronx.

**Surveys:** Over the course of the last two years, members of MOM, with research support from the Urban Justice Center's Community Development Project (CDP), conducted three separate surveys to collect information about housing, environmental justice and public health in the South Bronx. In all, MOM members surveyed over 500 people. Each of these surveys is described below:

- **Green Jobs Survey:** *From September to December 2009, 358 surveys were administered by MOM members to South Bronx residents in the community. Survey sites included New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) housing complexes, workforce development centers, and the Mothers on the Move office.*
- **Food Justice Survey:** *In October 2009, MOM conducted a food justice survey with 102 South Bronx residents.*
- **Public Housing Survey:** *From August to October 2008, MOM surveyed 106 residents of public housing in the Bronxchester, ER Moore and St. Mary's Park housing developments to gain their perspective on conditions in public housing in the South Bronx.*

**Focus groups:** In Spring, 2010, MOM facilitated two focus groups with South Bronx residents. These focus groups were held to gather qualitative data about residents' perspective on unemployment, green jobs creation, environmental and public health concerns in the South Bronx.

**Secondary research:** The Urban Justice Center conducted secondary research on unemployment, public health and housing conditions in the Bronx. Additionally, research was conducted on current green job programs and potential sources of funding for implementing a program in the South Bronx.

## **Roadmap**

This report is broken down into two overall sections; "The Problem" and "The Solution." The first section is broken into three parts that provide some background on, and analysis of, each of the following socioeconomic problems facing the South Bronx: unemployment, public health concerns, and housing conditions. "The Solution" section defines green jobs, reviews current programs and examines MOM's proposed green job program, the South Bronx Institute for Green Careers, to retrofit the neighborhood's public housing developments, addressing each of the interrelated problems facing the South Bronx community. Both sections include the perspectives of South Bronx residents that were uncovered through surveys and focus groups.

## SECTION 1 | The Problem

# The Intersection of Unemployment, Public Health & Housing in the South Bronx



## II. UNEMPLOYMENT IN THE SOUTH BRONX

*“If I could go back to school I would. But what I really need is job training so I can better myself and be able to compete for a job.” – Focus Group Participant #11*

The South Bronx community has faced high unemployment and poverty rates for decades. The neighborhood is found within the poorest urban county in the country,<sup>5</sup> and is consistently ranked as the county with the highest unemployment rate in New York State. As of July 2010, the Bronx was facing an unemployment rate of 12.6%, far above Manhattan’s rate of 7.9%.

### South Bronx Perspective on Unemployment

A consistent barrier named by focus group participants was a lack of education and training opportunities in the South Bronx. One focus group participant explained how a lack of education and training were affecting her employment opportunities:

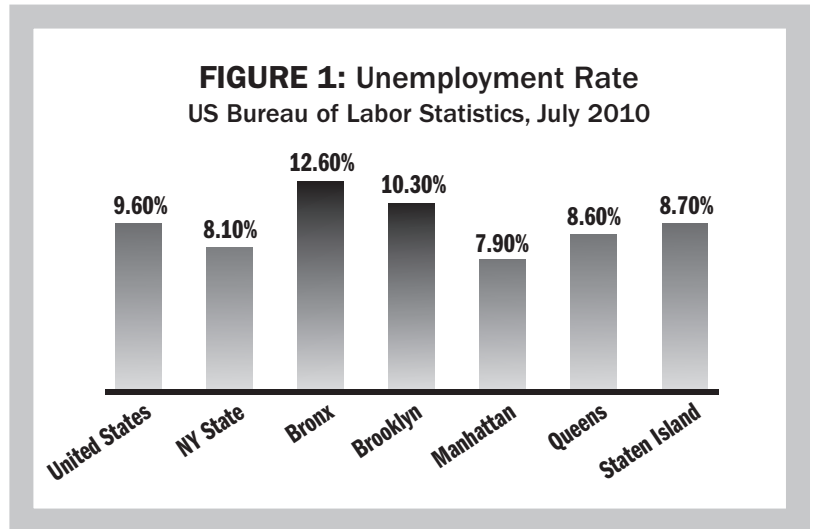
*“Unfortunately I do not have my GED, and a lot of jobs require that you have your GED or high school diploma. I find it very difficult to maintain my financial stability because I do not have the training or education I need to do these jobs.” – Focus Group Participant #10*

Additionally, although several job search programs currently operate within the South Bronx, survey respondents and participants in MOM's focus groups found these programs overwhelmingly ineffective at helping them obtain employment. Only 46% of survey respondents had heard of or participated in the South Bronx Overall Economic Development Corporation, a group that provides adult education and career development courses. And only 46% have heard of or participated in the Workforce 1 program, a New York City government program designed to aid the jobless in finding employment. Focus group participants elaborated on some of their experiences in these programs:

*“Sometimes the jobs that they send you to aren't really looking for anybody. Or sometimes you'll show up and the same 25 people you were just in class with were sent there to compete for the same job.”*  
– Focus Group Participant #9

*“I'm in the Workforce 1 program right now... all we do is sit in a room 9-5 or we are sent to jobs that are not even hiring.”*  
– Focus Group Participant #7

*“When I was in a job search program... I was pitted up against people that have gone further in their education than I have, which totally nullifies your chances.”* – Focus Group Participant #10



## **MOM's Related Work**

Job creation and development is an essential component to breaking the cycle of poverty, discrimination and distress, and fighting for economic justice in our communities. As the economic recession deepened during 2008 and 2009, MOM's Community Visioning process highlighted the need to develop strategies to address both the economic and ecological crises. These strategies include increasing job training programs, advocating for a living wage requirement, and encouraging the development of green collar industries in the South Bronx. MOM recently met with NYCHA officials to discuss ways to increase employment opportunities for very-low income people, including the public housing residents in the South Bronx.

### III. PUBLIC HEALTH AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS IN THE SOUTH BRONX

*“We’re dealing with a ton of health problems [in the South Bronx]. People have diabetes. They have high blood pressure, asthma and other respiratory problems. Children have allergies. The food isn’t fresh, and it’s sprayed with chemicals.” – Focus Group Participant #3*



Residents of the South Bronx are faced with many environmental concerns that are having detrimental consequences on the community’s health. Among the most serious is the poor air quality in the neighborhood, which has helped the Bronx reach the highest asthma rate in the city, at 8.9%.<sup>6</sup> The asthma rate for children in the Bronx is even higher, at 17%, which is eight times the national average.<sup>7</sup> Both indoor and outdoor air pollution are major contributing factors to the high rates of asthma in the South Bronx. The South Bronx has also been overburdened with polluting industries such as the New York Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFCO), which omit noxious odors and cause those living nearby to suffer respiratory and other health problems. South Bronx residents are expected to deal with the environmental backlash from years of improper sewage processing for many years to come.

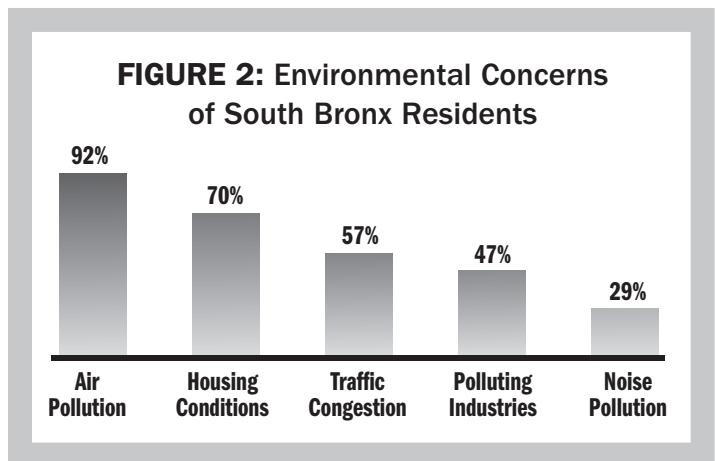


## South Bronx Perspective on Public Health

76% of survey respondents believe that environmental factors in the South Bronx play a role in contributing to their health problems. Survey respondents named a variety of factors they feel are negatively impacting their health, including traffic congestion, polluting industries and noise pollution. However, South Bronx residents felt air pollution was the single largest environmental concern in their neighborhood, with 92% citing air quality as a contributing factor to poor health. Below are several quotes from South Bronx residents regarding the air quality in their neighborhood:

*“I strongly believe the community suffers a lot because of the air quality [in the South Bronx]. Within several months of moving here, both of my children developed asthma. They never had it before moving to the Bronx.” – Focus Group Participant #1*

*“When I lived in Manhattan, I didn’t have as many breathing problems. I wasn’t living in the projects then. But since I moved [to the South Bronx] my allergies have been horrible and I’ve had more breathing problems than before.” – Focus Group Participant #2*



## MOM’s Related Work

MOM’s environmental justice efforts to reduce fossil fuel dependency, protect the environment, and decrease environmental health hazards have been ongoing since the 1990s. As a member of the Southern Bronx River Watershed Alliance, MOM has been involved in several environmental justice campaigns. MOM’s recent Clean Air Campaign has targeted the aforementioned New York Organic Fertilizer Company (NYOFKO) in Hunt’s Point that created a particularly bad smell in the area and negatively impacted residents’ health. Since then, MOM has held many rallies and protests, and engaged in talks with City Council members, assembly members and the Bronx president, finally winning a major victory in 2010 after successfully negotiating a settlement that requires all sewage be rerouted elsewhere for two years while an environmental impact survey is completed.

## IV. PUBLIC HOUSING CONDITIONS IN THE SOUTH BRONX

*“[Public] housing in the Bronx is crumbling all around us, and it’s affecting our health. They need to go green! They need to pick up the garbage and clean the air of pollution.” – Focus Group Participant #8*



The New York City Housing Authority, which runs the city’s extensive public housing program, has seen a continual disinvestment from all levels of government, which has resulted in rising rents and cuts in services for residents. Despite NYCHA’s massive deficit, public housing remains one of the only stable and affordable options for low-income people in the South Bronx. However, ongoing government disinvestment in public housing has taken its toll on the quality of the public housing stock in the South Bronx, and on the health of public housing residents. Public housing in the South Bronx is faced with a serious infestation of cockroaches, rodents, and mold, all of which are known to exacerbate asthma symptoms.<sup>8</sup> One study found that children from the Bronx were more exposed to these allergens than in any other part of the city.<sup>9</sup> All told, the backlog of necessary repairs in NYCHA buildings is estimated to cost \$6 billion.<sup>10</sup>

## South Bronx Perspective on Housing Conditions

In a survey of 106 public housing residents conducted by members of MOM in 2009 on the conditions of public housing, 49% rated overall conditions in public housing with an F.

Furthermore, in MOM’s recent Green Jobs survey, of the 76% of respondents that believe environmental factors in the South Bronx are contributing to public health problems, 70% cited poor housing conditions as a major contributing factor. Below are several quotes from focus group participants regarding public housing conditions:

*“When you’re in public housing, you have to deal with some dirty environments. It’s become so much worse recently, and it’s taking a toll on my health.”*

– Focus Group Participant #4

*“Right now they ain’t doing nothing about these rats that are all over my housing development. They’re even inside the walls in my building. They’ve dug holes in my walls. These aren’t little mice I’m talking about either, they’re big rats.”*

– Focus Group Participant #12

*“It’s important to have a clean environment, but they just don’t bother [in my public housing development]. They don’t clean the hallways, the garbage isn’t taken out and cleaned properly, the streets near us aren’t clean. And we’re the ones that have to smell and breathe all that in. I even see maggots in our garbage cans. That’s not good for us.”*

Focus Group Participant #8

**FIGURE 3: Resident’s Grades for NYCHA Housing Conditions in the South Bronx**

Repair Responsiveness	50% say =	<b>F</b>
Cleanliness of Common Space	54% say =	<b>F</b>
Functionality of Elevators	53% say =	<b>F</b>
Safety of Building	46% say =	<b>F</b>
<b>Overall Conditions</b>	<b>49% say =</b>	<b>F</b>

## MOM’s Related Work

MOM has an extensive history of fighting and winning campaigns for tenants’ rights, both in project-based Section 8 as well as NYCHA public housing developments. MOM’s most recent campaign focused on winning better management for residents in three South Bronx public housing developments (St. Mary’s, E.R. Moore, and Bronxchester Houses). In January 2009, MOM won this campaign when the manager was successfully removed after eight months of sustained pressure through media attention, direct action and leveraging relationships with local elected officials. Recently, MOM has been working to build a new base of leadership amongst residents of Forest Houses, who are also extremely concerned with security and maintenance issues, and accountability from NYCHA officials who excluded Forest Houses from receiving any portion of the federal stimulus funds allocated to NYCHA.

## SECTION 2 | The Solution

# Retrofitting Public Housing in the South Bronx

In response to the problems laid out in Section 1, MOM has developed a comprehensive and long-term solution to all three of these problems (unemployment, unhealthy environmental conditions, and deteriorating housing conditions): a green jobs training program, specifically for very low-income residents, who would “green” NYCHA buildings, enhancing housing conditions and subsequently improving public health. This section includes some basic information on green jobs, a review of current programs and finally MOM’s proposal for a green jobs training program.

## V. BACKGROUND ON GREEN JOBS

*“I love the idea of changing public housing to become green buildings. It would create jobs for our residents, and we’d also have more energy efficient homes.” - Focus Group Participant #4*

In response to the current economic and ecological crises, policymakers and community leaders have been calling for the creation of “green jobs,” or employment opportunities that improve the environment and increase the country’s energy efficiency. These jobs can range from blue-collar job opportunities in manufacturing and construction, such as the creation and installation of solar panels, to traditional white-collar jobs in government regulation or policy analysis. By investing in more efficient transportation, energy and housing infrastructures, the country has the opportunity to create millions of new jobs while simultaneously improving the environment and public health. Given the potential to alleviate both unemployment and public health concerns, local and national legislators have been allocating millions of dollars towards the creation of green jobs. Most significantly, the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by Congress in 2009, also known as the “Stimulus Act,” included around \$50 billion specifically for the creation of green jobs.<sup>11</sup>

### EXAMPLES OF GREEN JOBS

**Engineering:** These are jobs in science and engineering that help develop new energy sources that are better for the environment, like solar and wind power.

**Transportation:** These jobs help make transportation more energy efficient and better for the environment. For example, someone who worked with the MTA to figure out how to reduce pollution and energy usage would be working in a green job.

**Energy Efficiency:** Jobs in this sector would include people who help develop and construct “smart grids,” which help make energy demand response more effective.

**Construction:** These jobs include activities related to constructing new green buildings, retrofitting residential and commercial buildings, and installing other green construction technology.

**Environment Protection:** This sector covers any job that helps protect the environment and regulate polluting industries, such as monitoring local air or water quality.

**Agriculture:** Jobs in this sector help farmers and food producers to develop and use natural pesticides and other, more energy efficient and environmentally friendly farming and land use techniques.

**Manufacturing:** This sector covers all jobs that help produce and manufacture “green” technology as well as energy efficient manufacturing processes.

**Recycling and Waste Reduction:** This sector covers activities related to waste management, treatment, and reduction, as well as processing recyclable materials.

**Governmental and Regulatory Administration**  
This sector covers activities by public and private organizations associated with conservation and pollution prevention, regulation enforcement, and policy analysis and advocacy.

## Green Jobs in the South Bronx

Given the severe unemployment, public health and housing concerns currently facing the South Bronx, members of MOM feel the neighborhood would have much to gain by the creation and implementation of a green jobs program aimed at retrofitting public housing developments. Furthermore, as a community that has been overburdened by unemployment, public health and housing concerns since well before the current economic downturn, MOM members feel that the South Bronx should be a high-priority area to receive funding for the creation and implementation of a green jobs program. However, residents of the South Bronx have yet to benefit from the millions being allocated to green job creation in any significant way, despite the clear benefit these jobs would have on the area. For example, while Bronx County ranks number one in unemployment and poverty in the nation, it ranks 14<sup>th</sup> in the amount of stimulus money it actually received.<sup>12</sup>

## South Bronx Perspective on Green Jobs

97% of the Green Jobs survey respondents said they were “very interested” in a green jobs program being implemented in the South Bronx. Moreover, residents expressed a strong interest in a green jobs program that, in addition to creating jobs, improved air quality and housing conditions in the South Bronx; 69% of respondents said they were interested in a green jobs program aimed at improving housing conditions in the neighborhood, while an equal number expressed interest in a program aimed at improving the neighborhood’s air quality.

Below are several quotes from focus group participants that highlight interest in a program aimed specifically at retrofitting public housing developments in the South Bronx:

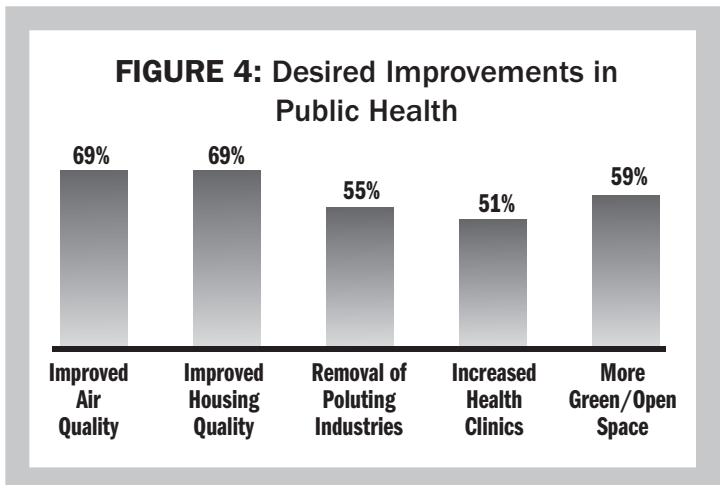
*“I think green jobs in public housing will definitely improve the health of the South Bronx community. These jobs will help clean up the environment, and you’ll help teach people to be healthier.”*

*– Focus Group Participant #2*

*“Changing the projects to be green buildings is a great idea. If they’re more energy efficient, it would create jobs for our residents. It would be great for the South Bronx.”* – Focus Group Participant #11

*“Retrofitting the public housing building structures will help residents save money and the city save money, and will also make us healthier. Isn’t that’s the goal, to save money and be healthy? Having these jobs will be great for everyone.”* – Focus Group Participant #1

*“Green jobs would definitely be good for public housing and the south Bronx. This could be better than Section 3, which is supposed to give residents jobs. If we had a program that would hire people in housing, it’s a great idea.”* – Focus Group Participant #6



## VI. CURRENT NYCHA PROGRAMS

NYCHA is the oldest and largest housing authority in the nation with 340 developments, 180,000 apartments and a \$1.6 billion budget. Its half million residents represent one-sixteenth of NYC's total population and a significant portion of NYC's workforce. In recent years, the authority has struggled with increasing deficits, only worsened by high rates of unemployment in public housing and across the city. The employment struggles of residents have impacted NYCHA's rent revenues; in the past year, NYCHA has seen a 50% increase in the number of households that owe back rent.<sup>13</sup> It is therefore in the self-interest of NYCHA to improve the employment status of residents, since the decrease of unemployment and underemployment directly translates to increased rent revenue. Furthermore, the spending and policies of this vast government authority directly impact NYC's economy and housing market, and set an example for housing authorities across the nation. Because of its significant size and influence, NYCHA is in a key position to influence resident employment policy nationally, potentially benefiting thousands of people. The following sections are a review of NYCHA's current employment programs.

### Section 3

HUD regulations, known as Section 3, stipulate that one third of any jobs created through public housing capital improvement spending must go to low-income community members. Federal funding through the Capital fund, Neighborhood Stabilization Program, Community Development Block Grants and stimulus funding are all subject to Section 3 regulations, representing a substantial amount of funding for job training and employment. Unfortunately since the funding is project specific, the jobs created are only temporary positions that end as soon as the project is completed. The Section 3 program is financially beneficial to most housing authorities because the federal funding can do double duty for them; the housing authority pays residents to do necessary capital improvements and then, since rent are usually set at 30% of income, residents who are employed pay more in rent back to the housing authority. However, due a serious lack of enforcement by HUD, many local authorities do not comply with regulations, choosing to completely ignore the obvious benefits for residents. A recent study found that of the 3,200 jobs created with the \$432 million in stimulus funds given to NYCHA, only 214 of the jobs were given to NYCHA residents, a mere 6%, and a full 24% less than required.<sup>14</sup>

### CURRENT AND PROPOSED GREEN JOB LEGISLATION

Many pieces of legislation on the national, state and local levels have recently been introduced with the intention of creating green jobs. Some of the major pieces of legislation include the following:

#### ***Clean Energy Jobs & American Power Act***

Introduced by Senators Joe Lieberman and John Kerry in May 2010, this bill limits emissions from electric utilities, large manufacturers and transportation, and puts a price on carbon pollution. In doing so, this bill hopes to encourage clean energy innovation in the private industry and spur job creation.

#### ***Green Jobs Act of 2007***

Introduced by former Representative Hilda Solis, who is currently the Secretary of Labor in the Obama administration, this bill passed in 2007 and allocated \$125 million to establish national and state job training programs for green labor.

#### ***The Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007***

Representative Nick Rahall sponsored this act, which was designed to increase energy efficiency and the availability of renewable energy by setting higher fuel economy standards, repealing certain oil and gas tax incentives, and adopting higher energy efficiency standards for common household appliances.

#### ***Green Jobs/Green NY***

Passed in New York State in September 2009, this bill provides \$112 million for the creation of 14,000 green jobs, as well as a reduction in energy costs for 1 million households.

## Resident Employment Program

On the local level, NYCHA has developed its own job program, the Resident Employment Program (REP) administered by NYCHA's Department for Resident Employment Services (RES). Much like Section 3, the REP requires businesses with more than \$500,000 in contracts from NYCHA to allocate 15% of total labor costs to hired NYCHA residents. However, a recent audit by the NYC Comptroller found that these regulations were largely unenforced by the RES and that in fact closer to only 8% of funds are actually make their way to NYCHA residents.<sup>15</sup> Since the audit, NYCHA has developed formal policies and procedures for the REP, however a follow-up audit found that even these procedures were not always implemented.<sup>16</sup>

Recently, RES welcomed its first class into the "Resident Training Academy," a new job training program for NYCHA residents. The full-time, 8-week program features two tracks of training (construction and janitorial) and aims to train 150 residents in the first year, with 75 receiving job placements at NYCHA developments.<sup>17</sup> However, minimum requirements for participation, particularly strict education requirements, prevent this program from helping the NYCHA residents who are most in need of job training and assistance: those lacking a formal education. The program also requires participants to be on the NYCHA lease agreement, a restriction that limits many residents from participating. Furthermore, program participants are unpaid (unlike most apprenticeship programs), so only financially secure residents are able to participate.

Another shortfall of the Resident Training Academy is that it does not train residents for actual "green jobs;" it only provides training in basic construction techniques and basic janitorial skills. The green industry has increased rapidly in the past several years, a growth that is expected to continue. NYCHA residents need to be trained specifically for green jobs so they can achieve financial and occupation stability. Furthermore, NYCHA is planning on spending millions of dollars on green initiatives in the next several years, and NYCHA residents deserve to see the jobs created from that spending.

## NYCHA Green Programs

The idea of greening and weatherizing the city's public housing stock is not a new one. It came to the forefront when Mayor Michael Bloomberg's planNYC pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from government owned buildings by 30% before 2017, which includes all NYCHA buildings.<sup>18</sup> Thanks to \$423 million in federal capital funding from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act this process is underway. By the end of 2010, NYCHA plans to purchase and install 55,732 Energy Star refrigerators, 99 elevators with gearless technology (reduces energy usage), 1,200 Delta Water Sense faucets, and white gravel for building roofs in 8 developments.<sup>19</sup> While all of these additions will help to reduce NYCHA's energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions, these improvements only cover a small fraction of NYCHA's vast portfolio (see Figure 5).



**FIGURE 5: Summary of NYCHA’s Planned Improvements**

Initiative	Total Number NYCHA Plans to Update <sup>20</sup>	Total Number in NYCHA Portfolio <sup>21</sup>	Percent of Total NYCHA Portfolio
Elevators with Gearless Technology	99	3,323	2.98%
Water Sense Faucets	1,200	356,814	0.34%
White Roofs	8	2,604	0.31%
Green Roofs	1	2,604	0.04%

To ensure the sustainability of energy reduction, NYCHA’s long term energy policies now require all new appliances to be Energy Star rated and all new plumbing materials must have an EPA Water Sense rating. NYCHA is also installing the first green roof on the new Corsi Houses Community Center in East Harlem, which will greatly decrease heating and cooling costs by serving as a natural insulator. While one building is a start, since NYCHA owns over 2,600 residential buildings, there is much more work that needs to be done and many more residents that could benefit from these household improvements and employment opportunities.

**“Green City Force”**

A few city-wide programs have stepped up to aide in the greening of NYCHA properties. The Million Trees NYC Initiative has already planted 11,195 trees on NYCHA properties and another 300 are scheduled to be planted this year.<sup>22</sup> Many of these trees will be planted by the Green City Force, a new 6-month, full time, paid “green-collar” job training program for 18-24 year olds.<sup>23</sup> Run by a local non-for-profit, the program will provide participants with classroom and on-the-job training in painting roofs, public education, and entry-level certifications. Most importantly, the Green City Force will work on weatherizing low-income homes and participation in the program is prioritized for low-income New Yorkers. However, neither these programs are designed specifically for NYCHA residents or developments, which, because of its size, needs its own programs to train residents and improve housing conditions.

**Shortfalls of NYCHA Green Programs**

Notably, most of the above examples are neither NYCHA initiated nor NYCHA run. The only comprehensive green program NYCHA has discussed is the \$371 million Energy Performance Contracting Program, which is actually a Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) program and is still pending HUD’s approval. This multi-stage process uses initial investments from power companies to finance the first phase, which will include installing instantaneous hot water heaters, energy efficient light bulbs, boiler replacements, elevator replacements and additional tree plantings in 19 NYCHA developments. The first phase is estimated to save NYCHA \$62.5 million annually; this money will then be used fund subsequent phases. However, the program does not include a green job training component for residents, the people who most need these jobs.

Furthermore, the only way to ensure the sustainability of energy initiatives is to include full stakeholder participation in developing and implementing a solution. Thus far, NYCHA has acted individually, without adequately considering the community’s ideas and opinions. As always, the unique perspective and support of residents will be integral to the sustainability of such a wide-reaching solution. MOM members have worked hard to ensure the community input and involvement in the planning of their solution: to create a green job training program, participants of which will work to green NYCHA properties.



## VII. MOM'S GREEN JOBS PROPOSAL: THE SOUTH BRONX INSTITUTE FOR GREEN CAREERS

### Program Description

A green jobs program in the South Bronx aimed at retrofitting public housing developments has the potential to alleviate three serious problems facing the South Bronx: unemployment, public health, and housing conditions. Given their ability to do so, MOM is calling on New York City and State officials to allocate money towards to creation of a public housing retrofit program.

- 1. Retrofitting Public Housing in the South Bronx:** Retrofitting public housing, or updating old systems and structures with new systems, would include a wide range of 'greening techniques' that aim to enhance existing structures, improve energy efficiency and increase building sustainability. All retrofitting measures will need a substantial amount of funding; however this money will directly create high-quality, green jobs in the South Bronx, while simultaneously improving public health and housing conditions.
  - a. Green Roofs:** Replacing current NYCHA roofs with sustainable "green roofs," which would include a variety of local plants. Implementing this across all NYCHA buildings will ensure a huge financial pay-off in greatly reduced heating and cooling costs and increase community access to green, public space.
  - b. Energy Efficient Appliances:** Installing energy efficient light bulbs, stoves, refrigerators, washers and dryers would again greatly reduce NYCHA's energy use and bills, and replacing toilets and showerheads with low-flow models would reduce NYCHA's water consumption and bills. The retrofit program would expand NYCHA's proposed Energy Contracting Program to cover all major appliances throughout the NYCHA portfolio.
  - c. Urban Agriculture:** Urban agriculture, or the growing of food and the raising of animals in urban communities, would utilize unused NYCHA property to support public health, by supplying residents with low-cost, healthy food and additional job opportunities. Urban agriculture programs could take the form of rooftop gardens, community gardens, or backyard farms.

*"I want to know more about the foods that we eat, how to grow it better, the different pesticides that aren't good for us, things we should and shouldn't do in growing food. I want to be able to teach my kids how to eat better, and I want to learn how to maintain a healthy diet, so I don't feel tired, so I'm not in pain."- Focus Group Participant #2*

- d. Weatherizing and Updating:** Some key weatherization techniques include updating insulation, installing new windows, sealing leaks, and updating heating and cooling systems. These simple changes will vastly decrease NYCHA's heating and cooling costs, helping reduce NYCHA's deficit and promote green living in public housing. We are proposing these measures be implemented in all NYCHA properties.

- e. **Green and Open Space:** A study conducted in 2007 found that one in four children in the South Bronx is obese, which increase the risk of diabetes, high blood pressure and cancer.<sup>24</sup> The lack of healthy food options and green, open space in the neighborhood only fuels this epidemic. In fact, the South Bronx has the smallest ratio of parks to people in New York City.<sup>25</sup> Green and open spaces are critical components to a healthy community, and encourage residents to utilize the space for exercise and recreation. NYCHA has an abundance of empty lots and other underutilized urban spaces in the neighborhood that could be turned into green, open spaces, through the planting of native trees, shrubs, and flowers.

*“We need more parks! Downtown they have special parks for dogs... so why can't we get more parks here for people in the Bronx?” – Focus Group Participant #4*

- f. **Local Hiring:** Any green jobs created through this program will go to public housing residents, or other low-income residents of the South Bronx. Prioritizing NYCHA and low-income community members, maximizes the authority's investments and helps to fulfill the authority's mission to sustain affordable housing through job creation. This would be similar to the Resident Employment Program and the Section 3 regulations, however all jobs created would go to NYCHA residents.
  - g. **Community Involvement:** Community members and NYCHA residents, as the primary occupants of the buildings, should lead the prioritizing of retrofitting projects. Their input would be utilized to inform NYCHA administration and contractors throughout the retrofitting process. Current resident participation bodies would have the power to prioritize and approve all retrofitting activities.
2. **The South Bronx Institute for Green Careers:** NYCHA would create a green job-training program for residents to complete the aforementioned improvements to NYCHA properties. A full-time, 10-week, comprehensive, paid program would teach current greening techniques. A 2005 estimate cites 3,000 unemployed public housing residents in the Bronx, which was before the economic recession.<sup>26</sup> Based on the high rate of unemployment, an ideal program would provide training for 500 residents every year.
- a. **Education:** Only 6% of unemployed NYCHA residents have a college degree. Many do not have the necessary math and English proficiency to participate in traditional apprenticeship programs. As a part of the green job training program, participants will learn general and industry-specific Math and English to inform more technical knowledge.
  - b. **Green Technical Skills:** The program would be focused on building retrofitting techniques including, but not limited to the installation of windows, insulation, appliances, updating old heating systems, development of green and white roofs, and urban agriculture. Multiple trainings could each focus on a specific greening strategy and allow residents to specialize.
  - c. **Living Wage & Benefits:** In line with union apprenticeship standards, all program participants will be paid a living wage during the job training program. Furthermore, all jobs created to retrofit public housing in the South Bronx must pay a living wage comparable to industry standards and offer health insurance and other benefits. Embracing these high-road employment practices will not only provide comprehensive support to residents, it will also maximize the authority's investment by increasing rents, and encouraging resident participation and completion.

- d. Upward Mobility:** Jobs created through this program will include pathways for promotion and upward mobility, primarily through union membership upon completion of training. Up-to-date trainings will ensure skills developed are marketable and will lead to long-term, stable employment in the emerging green sector. All trainings will need to include proper industry certification.
- e. Job Placement and Employment Services:** After completion of the program, NYCHA would, in partnerships with local trades groups and unions, help graduates find and sustain employment. Again it is in the self-interest of NYCHA to provide services that encourage long-term, stable employment for residents, since this will increase the authority's rent revenue.
- f. Requirements for Participation:** Participation in this program should be prioritized for NYCHA residents who need job training the most; this includes those with limited formal education. All residents will be able to apply for participation in the job training program, regardless of education level.
- g. Community Involvement:** Directly impacted by this program, South Bronx residents are ideally situated to be involved in and lead the creation, implementation and oversight of the green jobs program. Current resident participant structures would be utilized for community involvement, oversight and decision-making.

### **Issues Addressed:**

By implementing this program, public officials could bring about the following benefits to the South Bronx community:

**Energy Efficiency:** By installing new windows and insulation, upgrading heating and cooling systems, and replacing outdated appliances, NYCHA has the opportunity to significantly lower energy usage and costs. These savings would greatly help reduce the agency's ongoing deficit problem and encourage green conscious living among residents.

**Public Education:** Retrofitting activities and the job training program will both provide key public education opportunities for the promotion of environmental justice. Currently, many New Yorkers, including public housing residents, are unaware of their impact on the environment. This program will promote environmentally friendly living, and allow public housing residents to lead the way to a greener New York City.

**Job Creation and Unemployment:** The Bronx has 90 public housing developments with 44,440 apartments. A green jobs program to retrofit each of these developments would create thousands of jobs in a variety of fields ranging from construction and manufacturing, to clerical and administrative work.

**Section 3 and Resident Employment Program Enforcement:** A green jobs program to retrofit public housing developments in the South Bronx could specifically target and train public housing residents for these employment opportunities. In this way, the city could comply with the Federal Section 3 regulations, which require public housing authorities to hire public housing residents and other low-income people for employment opportunities created in their agencies.

**Improved Housing Conditions:** Retrofitting will help improve living conditions in NYCHA residences by upgrading and installing new windows, appliances, roofs, etc. Furthermore, NYCHA could use the savings from its reduced energy costs to carry out critical capital improvements in public housing in the South Bronx, thus improving the quality of life for public housing residents.

**Improved Air Quality:** Improving the ventilation systems and removing allergens in public housing can help improve indoor air quality, thus reducing pollutants and irritants that cause and exacerbate asthma and other respiratory problems. For many residents, this will greatly improve their overall health, and aid in reducing health care costs.

**Improved Public Health:** Improvements to buildings will decrease allergens and pests that contribute to poor public health. Furthermore, urban agriculture development would increase supplies of local, fresh, healthy food in the South Bronx. Public health would further benefit from increased green and open spaces where residents could participate in a wide range of athletic activities.

**Social and Economic Justice:** Many of these improvements would allow residents to simply live like many other New Yorkers, since the South Bronx is currently behind many other neighborhoods in resident quality of life. For too long the city government has funded programs in high-income neighborhoods, while ignoring the needs of South Bronx residents. Implementing this program would be a small, yet comprehensive step to correcting this injustice.

## **Proposed Program Set-Up**

All retrofitting activities would be coordinated and managed by NYCHA or other contractors hired to complete retrofitting. Currently, three NYCHA departments, the Construction Department, the Contract Administration Department and the Technical Services Department, manage the various kinds of capital improvements. This existing structure would be utilized to manage all retrofitting activities. Oversight to ensure employment regulations pertaining to contractors are fulfilled would be provided by NYCHA's Department for Resident Employment Services, who currently oversee REP and Section 3 regulation compliance. Decisions pertaining to project development and prioritization would be made by residents, through the existing resident participation structure. Depending on the size and scale of projects, the Citywide Council of Presidents, District Councils, Resident Associations or Green Committees would prioritize and approve all retrofitting activities.

The actual green job training should be administered through a NYCHA and local union partnership. Together unions and NYCHA will recruit participants, and provide support services to ensure completion of the program. Local union partners will provide the specialized green job training and professional support, ending in union membership. Upon completion of program, NYCHA will then coordinate with retrofitting contractors to place program graduates in retrofitting job openings, preferably those in their own neighborhood. After completion of retrofitting activities, NYCHA and union partners will work together to develop and find further occupational opportunities for program graduates.

## **Projected Costs and Benefits to New York City**

This program, while using a fair amount of NYCHA's resources initially, stands to greatly financially benefit NYCHA and its residents in the long run. As mentioned before, all employment development efforts that increase resident income will ensure increased rent revenue. Furthermore, investing in an emerging sector like green jobs ensures the long-term stability of such resources, providing a reliable source of income for the housing authority. And finally, many of retrofitting techniques will increase energy efficiency and decrease NYCHA's energy and water costs.

This program will however require an initial and then yearly allocation of funds. Current programs could be utilized to cultivate the necessary funds. Capital improvement projects are already and will continue to be funded using one-time American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and the yearly Capital Fund. Furthermore, through the Energy Contracting Program, NYCHA will leverage additional resources already slated for energy efficiency measures, which could be used to cover a portion of the full retrofitting plans. Since NYCHA will already be hiring workers to complete these capital improvements, jobs created by the spending could simply be given to green job training participants.

Funding for the job-training program could also come from a variety of sources. Currently NYCHA allocates some money to resident economic development programs; these funds could partially or fully be diverted to cover green job training. Additionally, partnerships with trade unions could be leveraged to utilize current apprenticeship programs that often cover training costs for participants. At the very least, trade unions could help minimize costs for program facilities, instructor fees, administration personnel and equipment. Stipends and benefits to residents will constitute the majority of program costs; however, the housing authority would then see some of this money back through increased rent revenue. If NYCHA provides \$10,000 per participant upfront to cover training and support services, they could expect to see about \$2,400 of that money back in rent, making the net investment per participant only \$7,400. Overall to support 500 residents per year, NYCHA would need to allocate \$5 million, of which \$1.2 million would come back to them in rent, with a net investment of only \$3.8 million.



## **VIII. CONCLUSION AND A CALL TO ACTION**

This report documents South Bronx residents' needs for better housing, a healthier environment and for critical employment opportunities. It makes needed connections between intersecting struggles faced by South Bronx residents and lays out a proposal that we believe can provide a framework for solving these pressing concerns in our community. But data needs legs and feet to move it, minds to shape strategy, and leadership to get us from where we are now to where we want to be.

That is why we are calling on our elected and government officials to provide the leadership and follow the vision laid out in this report. We are calling for sensible solutions to the problems facing the South Bronx that will have a real impact on people's lives.

The changes we need are not optional if we want to secure not only social, economic and environmental justice, but the very survival of future generations and the planet itself.

## ENDNOTES

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For more information, please visit:

Mothers on the Move:  
[www.mothersonthemove.org](http://www.mothersonthemove.org)

Urban Justice Center, Community Development Project:  
[www.urbanjustice.org/community](http://www.urbanjustice.org/community)