

August 7, 2026

Contact: mediarequests@bds.org

For Immediate Release

Brooklyn Defenders Sues NYPD & NYCHA Over Unlawful Surveillance of NYCHA Residents Through Municipally-Funded Broadband Program

New York City Secretly Uses Big Apple Connect Program for Real-Time Surveillance of NYCHA Buildings, Violating Constitutional Rights and City Law

Lawsuit Urges Court to Halt Surveillance Expansion Through Big Apple Connect and Delete All Associated Data

(New York, NY) – On behalf of the **Langston Hughes Houses Tenant Association** and the **Tilden Houses Tenant Association**, **Brooklyn Defender Services** and **Beldock Levine & Hoffman LLP** filed a [lawsuit](#) Thursday evening against the City of New York, the New York City Police Department (“NYPD”), and the New York City Housing Authority (“NYCHA”) over its unlawful surveillance of NYCHA residents through the municipally-subsidized broadband internet program, *Big Apple Connect*.

In 2022, New York City launched the Big Apple Connect (“BAC”) program to provide “free, fast, reliable, and secure” internet access and digital infrastructure to NYCHA residents, who may otherwise be left behind in an increasingly digitized world.

Unbeknownst to NYCHA residents, NYC secretly used the program to provide the NYPD with access to real-time surveillance of two dozen NYCHA buildings, in violation of residents’ constitutional rights, as well as city law. The NYPD plans to expand its live surveillance capabilities to every camera within the 220 NYCHA buildings with BAC connections across NYC.

“NYCHA spoke to us frequently about Big Apple Connect and free internet, but neither NYCHA, NYPD, nor the City ever mentioned an NYPD surveillance program to us,” **said Ciprian Noel, President of the Tenants Association of Langston Hughes Houses**. “What makes me most uncomfortable is the possibility of 24-hour, seven-day-a-week monitoring whenever they choose. I believe they are taking advantage of us, and in my view, this program will destroy bridges rather than build them.”

Using Big Apple Connect’s bandwidth, NYPD has linked public housing cameras to its Domain Awareness System (“DAS”), a massive surveillance system containing a vast repository of data

collected from and about New Yorkers. With DAS, NYPD develops comprehensive profiles of individual New Yorkers, tracking their movements, habits, and routines.

“I believe this level of surveillance access is dangerous because it can become discriminatory and prejudicial to the people in our community. It can become pure harassment,” **said Gina Boatright, President of the Tilden Houses Tenant Association.** “I object to NYCHA or law enforcement taking advantage of residents because that internet was provided free of charge. If Big Apple Connect is being used in this way, I would rather NYCHA take it back.”

By integrating DAS into the NYCHA broadband system, public housing residents’ daily lives will be catalogued for access and use by NYPD, providing an intimate window into a NYCHA resident’s life.

“By giving the NYPD warrantless, real-time access to surveil NYCHA residents at their homes, the City is subjecting them to an extraordinary level of government monitoring that chills their First Amendment rights and violates the Fourth Amendment’s protection against unreasonable searches,” **said Anca Grigore, Director of Brooklyn Defenders’ Seizure & Surveillance Defense Project.** “What makes this especially troubling is that this kind of surveillance would never be imposed on private apartment buildings through a backroom agreement between city agencies. Instead, the City exploited the fact that NYCHA residents depend on public housing to turn a program that promised internet access into a tool for pervasive police surveillance.”

The NYPD’s hijacking of the Big Apple Connect program violates the NYC administrative code and the New York State and U.S. Constitutions.

By failing to publish impact and use policies concerning the use of BAC to expand NYPD surveillance, NYC has violated the Public Oversight of Surveillance Technology (“POST”) Act, legislation which was passed specifically to increase transparency around the NYPD’s rapidly expanding technological surveillance abilities.

NYC has violated prohibitions against bias-based and discriminatory policing and protections against unreasonable searches and seizures, including unreasonably intrusive surveillance, guaranteed by the federal and New York State constitutions.

“More than a decade after ‘stop-and-frisk’ was declared unconstitutional, the NYPD is still illegally targeting Black and Latino New Yorkers for enhanced surveillance and policing,” **said Jeremy Ravinsky of Beldock Levine & Hoffman LLP.** “What makes this program so sinister is that it was sold as a service to benefit families and children residing in public housing. Instead, the City deceived NYCHA residents by turning their homes into a panopticon.”

The lawsuit asks the court to:

- Prohibit NYC from the use of this surveillance technology before posting a surveillance impact and use policy at least 90 days prior to its use pursuant to the POST Act and compel NYC to publish any relevant memoranda of understanding
- Declare that expansion of law enforcement surveillance targeted only at NYCHA properties is a violation of the prohibition on biased-based policing under New York City Administrative Code
- Declare that a program of law enforcement access to constant movement-tracking video surveillance with no judicial oversight is unlawful and in violation of the First and Fourth Amendment
- Permanently enjoin New York City from continuing this surveillance expansion program, or any successor, replacement, or substantially equivalent program
- Permanently enjoin New York City from accessing, querying, analyzing, or making use of any data previously collected through Big Apple Connect infrastructure, and from sharing, transferring, or disclosing any data
- Compel NYC to destroy, delete, or otherwise dispose of all footage, images, records, logs, and other data generated by the unlawful CCTV surveillance program and provide affirmative proof of destruction

###