

August 11, 2017, NEW YORK – New York City today became the first place in the country to guarantee counsel to all low-income people facing eviction, following a three-year campaign by tenants, tenant organizations, and allies. The bill, Intro 214-B, becomes law with Mayor Bill de Blasio's signature at a signing ceremony at Community Action for Safe Apartments in the Bronx, after passing City Council in July by a vote of 42-3.

"This is a huge victory for fundamental human and civil rights at a time when those rights are under attack," said Randy Dillard, a tenant leader at Community Action for Safe Apartments (CASA) and a leading advocate for a right to counsel since 2013. "For low-income families, keeping their home is as consequential as it gets. For the first time, New York City's low-income tenants facing eviction will be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve and will have a fighting chance to stay in their homes and communities."

The Right to Counsel NYC Coalition drove the push to adopt this groundbreaking policy since its creation in June 2014. The Coalition is made up of advocates across the spectrum: bar associations, unions, advocates for homeless people, advocates for seniors, advocates for disabled people, almost every civil legal services agency in the city, faith leaders, landlords, national experts, and many more. Last year, Coalition members packed the steps and chambers of City Hall to capacity with a press conference and hearing in support of the bill, then drew more than 150 people to a rally at which members delivered hundreds of letters, petitions signed by thousands of New Yorkers, and a letter from faith leaders to the Mayor and the Speaker. In addition, the Coalition secured support for the right to counsel legislation from all 42 community boards in Manhattan, Brooklyn and the Bronx, as well as the borough boards in those boroughs. After the Mayor's announcement, the Coalition remained closely involved in negotiations over the language of the bill, developed a list of principles to guide the bill, responded to legal issues raised by the city, proposed draft language for amending the legislation, and recruited pro bono assistance with legal research and legislative drafting from some of the city's top law firms.

Early on, advocates realized that cost would be the major concern. Working with the Coalition, the New York City Bar Association commissioned an independent study of the bill by the global financial advisory firm Stout Risius and Ross. This study showed that the policy would not only pay for itself, but would also save the city an additional \$320 million per year.

The right to counsel will help stabilize communities and ward against unjust, forced displacements. Evictions are already down 24% since the City increased funding for eviction-prevention legal assistance starting in 2014. But despite increased resources, landlords have a distinct advantage: 97% of all landlords are represented by counsel in eviction proceedings, compared to only 27% of tenants. The law makes full representation available to 100% of low-income tenants who face eviction, and brief assistance to all tenants regardless of income.

As a result of the new law, tenants will be more likely to assert their right to decent, safe homes and communities because they know they will have legal help if they end up in court. The resulting policy is one that will keep people in their homes and prevent homelessness, saving families and individuals from the trauma of homelessness and saving the city money. It is also a watershed moment in the national right to counsel movement. **"It's impossible to overstate the significance of this on a national level," said John Pollock, Coordinator of the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel, which worked with the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition. "New York City has broken the ice on a right to counsel in housing cases, and now we're hearing lots of other cities and states saying they want to be next."**

A full history of the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition and its work to bring about a right to counsel for low-income New Yorkers facing eviction can be found on the [Coalition website](#).

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