

**NEW YORK, NY (April 19, 2023)** – Legal Services NYC, The Legal Aid Society, New York Legal Assistance Group, the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition, Mobilization for Justice, Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, Urban Justice Center’s Safety Net Project, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, The Bronx Defenders, NMIC, Housing Conservation Coordinators, CAMBA Legal Services, and the Goddard Riverside Law Project released the following statement following New York City Council Progressive Caucus’s call for \$351 million for the Right to Counsel providers in their Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Priorities:

“As legal service providers on the front lines of New York City’s housing crisis, we applaud the New York City Council Progressive Caucus for calling on the City to increase funding for Right to Counsel by \$351 million – funding that is vital to ensure that every eligible New York City tenant who needs a housing attorney can get one.

“For more than a year now, thousands of low-income tenants, predominantly Black and Latinx tenants, have been forced through our housing court without an attorney, exponentially increasing their risk of eviction and homelessness. At present, the City is only funding legal service providers to take a third of all eviction cases being filed in housing court. Meanwhile, thanks to chronic underfunding, we have been forced to use funding from other resources just to meet the growing need while exhausted attorneys take on unmanageable caseloads. It isn’t fair and it isn’t right.

“We stand with the Progressive Caucus in calling on New York City to invest in this lifeline program that has proven time and again to reduce evictions and keep tenants safely in their homes. At a time of increasing rents, record level homelessness, and soaring eviction cases, the City must invest in protections that preserve affordable housing and keep tenants safe, not take them away.”

#### Background:

During the pandemic, in response to the urgent need, the de Blasio Administration opened up RTC citywide, including those households earning more than 200 percent of the federal poverty line to keep New Yorkers safely housed.

RTC providers met the challenge, representing all tenants who needed help in response to the extraordinary circumstances created by the COVID-19 pandemic, even with constant changes in the law.

Prior to RTC’s implementation, only one percent of tenants were represented by an attorney in eviction cases, which contributed to a massive power imbalance between landlords and tenants.

New York’s Right To Counsel law has been highly effective at keeping tenants in their homes. Over the last four years, 84 percent of tenants who received representation under Right To Counsel won their cases and stayed in their homes.

Moreover, the Community Service Society released a recent report revealing that, since implementation of RTC in 2017, the program has led to a decline in eviction filings by about 30 percent, keeping families housed and protected against homelessness.

When tenants do not have an attorney, they often do not know their rights and defenses or how to assert them, resulting in otherwise preventable evictions, which are destabilizing and traumatic for vulnerable families with long-term collateral consequences that affect employment, education, and health outcomes as well.

However, when a tenant has counsel, all stakeholders benefit. Housing is a fundamental human right and having tenants, who are usually people of color, proceed through a judicial process where their homes could be taken away from them without the assistance of an attorney is inherently unjust.

Often, attorneys are able to identify and secure resources for the tenant to address rental arrears; proceedings are more efficient for the court when attorneys for the parties are involved; and there is a return on investment for the City when tenants can remain in their homes and do not have to contribute to the City’s already burgeoning homeless shelter population.

New York City is in the midst of the worst affordability crises and the Right to Counsel is an invaluable tool in addressing this crisis head on. Fully funding this program will not only prevent evictions but in many instances serve as a lifeline for New York City families.

Earlier this week, RTC providers launched their City funding campaign, requesting an increase of \$351 million in the City’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget to ensure that this critical program is able to meet increasing demand.

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