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*****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE*****

Four Borough Presidents Urge Adams Administration to Fully Fund Right to Counsel in the FY 2024 Budget to Ensure that Low-Income Tenants Facing Eviction Have Access to Legal Representation

(NEW YORK, NY) — The Legal Aid Society, Legal Services NYC (LSNYC), New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG), Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A (Brooklyn A), NMIC, Urban Justice Center’s Safety Net Project, Mobilization for Justice, CAMBA Legal Services, The Bronx Defenders, Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, and Housing Conservation Coordinators commend New York City borough presidents Mark Levine of Manhattan, Vanessa L. Gibson of the Bronx, Antonio Reynoso of Brooklyn, and Donovan Richards of Queens for their [joint letter](#) released today to the Adams Administration calling for [\\$351 million in increased funding](#) in the City’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget for New York City’s landmark Right to Counsel program.

In March 2022, for the first time ever, LSNYC announced that it was unable to staff Housing Court intake in Queens for the remainder of the month due to increasing demand and insufficient capacity. Legal Aid and NYLAG made a similar announcement last April due to the same issues.

Since then, RTC providers have been forced to [decline over 10,000 housing court cases](#), and without increased funding in the City’s Fiscal Year 2024 budget to retain and hire staff, this trend will continue into the indefinite future.

Since the eviction moratorium lifted last January, eviction filings have soared in New York City. According to the [Cornell ILR Eviction Filings Dashboard](#), in 2022 there were 39,699 eviction filings in The Bronx; 30,480 filings in Brooklyn; 20,043 in Queens; 19,549 in Manhattan; and 2,503 in Staten Island.

The number of eviction filings increased significantly in every borough from 2021, underscoring the need for RTC providers to be fully funded in order to meet the rising demand.

Even if fully staffed, providers are only contracted to represent roughly a third of all tenants facing eviction - approximately 32,000 of the 120,000 eviction cases expected to be filed this year.

Currently, Legal Aid has 35 RTC attorney vacancies and an attrition rate of 30 percent due to insufficient compensation and extremely high caseloads, coupled with rising rents, student loan debt and New York's exorbitant cost of living. LSNYC has 10 RTC attorney vacancies and, at last count, an attrition rate of 39 percent. NYLAG has five RTC attorney vacancies with an attrition rate of 22 percent.

For the City's Fiscal budget, RTC providers' request of \$461 million, which includes the existing \$110 million in current RTC contracts and \$351 million in additional funding, would:

- increase providers' capacity to represent all eligible people who come through New York City Housing Court;
- fund salary increases for staff to address unprecedented attrition and to attract prospective hires;
- bridge the funding shortfall that undercuts providers' ability to administer essential civil legal services work.

In addition to funding, the City must overhaul its fraught contracting process which hinders RTC providers and many other non-profits who contract with the City - an issue that has been widely reported and [acknowledged](#) by Mayor Eric Adams and Comptroller Brad Lander as in need of a complete overhaul.

Delays in contract registration, the point where non-profits start to receive money from the City, create major cash flow challenges that make it extraordinarily difficult to make payroll, purchase critical services or pay vendors on time, which results in late fees and higher vendor prices and disqualifies organizations from lines of credit. Providers are often forced to take out loans to compensate for the late payments from the City. As City delays persist, these loans accumulate interest fees that squeeze organizations into a financial bind to make payments.

The City must establish new protocols that increase the contract advance to more than 25 percent as necessary, rather than forcing Legal Aid, LSNYC, NYLAG and other RTC providers to front these costs with resources not available.

“Right to Counsel has served as a lifeline for thousands of low-income tenants, keeping families safely housed and communities whole,” said **Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine**. “But funding for this invaluable initiative hasn't kept pace with demand, and thousands of tenants are having to navigate housing court without the attorneys they're entitled to. It's critical that we fully fund Right to Counsel and ensure no New Yorker faces eviction without representation.”

“We are at a critical impasse in our city as thousands of our most vulnerable residents are waiting to receive the necessary legal representation needed to remain in their homes,” said **Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson**. “Right to Counsel has a proven track record of keeping tenants in their homes, but with the current staff shortages, it is clear more must be done to support this historic legislation that has empowered countless individuals seeking justice in Housing Court. I want to thank Mayor Eric Adams, Speaker Adrienne Adams, the New York City Council, the Right to Counsel Coalition, and housing advocates for their collective work supporting this program and commitment to fighting for our tenants.”

“This city's vision for justice is only as good as our ability to achieve it,” said **Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso**. “We have the opportunity to now set the standard for how we show up for our low-income residents by fully funding this landmark program. \$461 million is what it takes to make Right to Counsel the truly transformative intervention we know it can be, and I stand firmly with my colleagues in calling on Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams to prove this city is the leader in housing justice we aspire to be.”

“With our borough and city facing such a severe housing shortage, we must do all we can to ensure no one is unfairly evicted from their home,” said **Queens Borough President Donovan Richards Jr.** “That’s why it’s so critically important that we fully fund the Right to Counsel in eviction cases. No one should be thrown out of what may be the only home they have ever known without having a fair chance to be heard in court.”

“We applaud borough presidents Levine, Gibson, Reynoso and Richards for their call to Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams to fully fund Right to Counsel this upcoming budget to ensure that low-income New Yorkers facing eviction have access to an attorney,” said **Adriene Holder, chief attorney of the Civil Practice at The Legal Aid Society.** “Our clients already face an uphill battle in housing court, and denying them their right to legal representation makes it all the more likely that they will end up unjustly displaced from their homes and communities. During a time of rising rents and unprecedented inflation, the City must invest in its most vulnerable citizens and fund programs like Right to Counsel that will keep New Yorkers safely and stably housed.”

“Housing is a human right. For our neighbors who are most vulnerable to displacement from eviction, we know that legal representation through the Right to Counsel program is life changing. Without adequate funding, thousands of tenants are at risk of losing their homes, further exacerbating the housing crisis in New York City,” said **Lisa Rivera, president and CEO of New York Legal Assistance group (NYLAG).** “Tenants should not be forced to represent themselves in housing court because of inadequate investment in this landmark program. We applaud and thank borough presidents Mark Levine, Vanessa L. Gibson, Antonio Reynoso, and Donovan Richards for standing with New York City tenants and calling on Mayor Adams and Speaker Adams to fully fund the Right to Counsel program.”

“We are deeply grateful to borough presidents Levine, Gibson, Reynoso and Richards who fought so hard to get Right to Counsel passed years ago and who are still fighting today to make sure this program becomes a reality for not just some tenants, but all eligible New Yorkers facing eviction,” said **Raun Rasmussen, executive director of Legal Services NYC.** “New York City made a promise to tenants when it adopted Right to Counsel and it is time for it to deliver on that promise by providing the funding necessary to allow providers to staff up and help the growing number of tenants fighting to stay in their homes.”

“We are heartened by the call of borough presidents Levine, Gibson, Reynoso and Richards for the City’s full funding of the Right to Counsel in this upcoming budget so that the program can meet the actual demand for services by tenants eligible for representation under the law,” said **Jessica Rose, executive director of Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A.** “We can be a model for the entire country on the right to housing – the program is at a critical juncture and needs adequate support in order to be sustainable and successful.”

“NYC’s Right to Counsel law has been a massive success and an example for the nation,” said **Lauren Springer, Tenant Leader and Steering Committee Member of the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition.** “The city must step up to defend it and fund it. This letter from Borough Presidents Levine, Gibson, Reynoso and Richards is a testament to how important Right to Counsel is and we thank them for standing with us to call on the Mayor and the Speaker to invest in Right to Counsel. The time is now.”

“Thank you to borough presidents Gibson, Levine, Reynoso, and Richards for their unwavering support for the Right to Counsel program and their commitment to ensuring that all tenants who are entitled to counsel under the law receive the legal help to which they are entitled,” said **Tiffany Liston, executive director of Mobilization for Justice.** “Because the program has proven extremely effective at keeping tenants housed, it makes a direct and positive impact on the city’s seemingly intractable homelessness problem. Properly funding Right to Counsel will keep thousands upon thousands of families out of the city’s extremely expensive shelter system.”

“Thank you to Borough Presidents, Levine, Gibson, Reynoso and Richards for your support to fully fund the Right to Counsel program for tenants facing eviction in our city,” said **Leslie Thrope, executive director of Housing Conservation Coordinators.** “Without the funding, tenants will continue to face injustice and

homelessness will continue to rise. Fully funding the Right to Counsel program will cost the city much less than the alternatives AND it is the humane and right thing to do.”

"We stand with borough presidents Levine, Gibson, Reynoso, and Richards in their call for the Adams Administration to fully fund the Right to Counsel program in the upcoming budget," said **Rodrigo Sanchez-Camus, director of legal, organizing, and advocacy at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)**. "As eviction filings continue to rise, it is essential that we provide legal representation to low-income tenants facing the threat of displacement. By allocating the necessary resources to the program, we can ensure that the Right to Counsel program is able to address the urgent needs of New York City's most vulnerable residents. NMIC is committed to working together with our fellow providers and city officials to expand access to justice and protect the housing rights of all New Yorkers."

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, with [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.

Last month, the City Council Progressive Caucus [unveiled its own budget priorities](#) which include a call for an additional \$351 million to fund the City's Right to Counsel program.

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