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NYC's Leading Civil Legal Service Providers Submit Joint Testimony Ahead of NYC Office of Civil Justice's Hearing on Programs to Provide Universal Access to Legal Services for Tenants Facing Eviction

Providers Highlight Importance of City's Landmark Right to Counsel Law, Urge City to Immediately Address Payment Issues Threatening New Yorkers' Access to Representation in Housing Court

(NEW YORK, NY) - The Legal Aid Society, BronxWorks, The Bronx Defenders, Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A, CAMBA Legal Services, Housing Conservation Coordinators, Legal Services NYC, Mobilization for Justice, Neighborhood Association for Inter-Cultural Affairs, Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, New York Legal Assistance Group, and NMIC today submitted [testimony](#) ahead of the New York City Office of Civil Justice's [hearing](#) on programs to provide universal access to legal services for tenants facing eviction highlighting the importance of the City's Right to Counsel (RTC) program and urging lawmakers to immediately address the payment issues and lack of resources threatening its continued vitality.

Established in 2017, the City's landmark RTC law for housing court cases has proven to be an essential lifeline for low-income tenants facing eviction, affording them access to legal representation in eviction proceedings. Tenants who appear in court with an attorney are far [more likely](#) to remain in their homes and avoid the devastating and far-reaching consequences of eviction, which can negatively impact one's employment, physical health, and mental well-being.

However, the RTC program continues to face challenges that, if left unaddressed, threaten New Yorkers' access to this critical representation.

RTC providers continue to face egregious payment issues and delays from contracts registered with the City's Human Resources Administration (HRA), which places immense financial strain on these organizations by forcing them to operate under financial uncertainty. Despite these contracts being registered on time, providers have been unable to invoice for services since July.

In addition to timely funding, the City must also streamline the contracting process itself by reducing unnecessary paperwork and bureaucratic hurdles that slow down the approval and payment process.

Additionally, RTC contracts for Fiscal Years 2025-2027 fall far short of addressing the growing need for legal representation in eviction cases, underfunding critical services and failing to account for the complexities of eviction defense. A lack of adequate resources will result in swaths of New Yorkers being unable to access the RTC program's services, further exacerbating homelessness and putting an even greater strain on the City's already overburdened shelter system.

“Ensuring that every New Yorker is afforded the opportunity to appear in housing court with an attorney by their side, advocating on their behalf, is paramount in preventing unjust evictions and preventing homelessness,” said **Munonyedi Clifford, Attorney-in-Charge of the City-wide Housing Practice at The Legal Aid Society**. “But the payment issues and delays that continue to plague the organizations who provide this vital service must be addressed to keep these protections firmly in place. Forcing providers to operate under near constant financial uncertainty is not only inefficient but endangers New Yorkers’ access to a program with proven success in keeping individuals and families where they belong: in their homes, and in their communities.”

“It is unacceptable that Right to Counsel providers continue to face enormous payment delays from the city’s Human Resources Administration contracts, placing immense financial strain on legal service providers, who exist only to help New York’s neediest families in a time of crisis,” said **Tiffany Liston, Executive Director of Mobilization for Justice**. “To make matters worse, providers doing precisely the same work are getting paid at different rates, all the while subsidizing the work from their own budgets. This extreme burden on RTC providers must stop.”

"The Right to Counsel program has been a lifeline for countless New Yorkers, ensuring they have the legal support they need to stand up against eviction and remain in their homes," said **Rosalind Black, Director of Citywide Housing at Legal Services NYC**. "But the persistent payment delays and funding shortfalls threaten to undermine the very protections this program was designed to provide. It is critical that the City addresses these challenges immediately to safeguard the stability and well-being of tenants across New York City."

“Tenants at risk of eviction come to us in need of assistance to remain in their homes and prevent being made homeless. New York City’s Right to Counsel providers need a *true* partner that provides the necessary support that is critical to ensuring that tenants receive the representation they need. It is imperative,” said **Leslie Thrope, Executive Director of Housing Conservation Coordinators**, “that NYC’s Human Resources Administration work to make the contracts fair and equitable so that providers can meet the needs of our communities and to recognize the work that our talented and skillful advocates do in meeting those needs.”

“The prolonged delays in the contract process experienced by the Anti-Eviction (RTC) providers have put many of us in a recurring state of financial hardship and uncertainty. The City of New York should not force the nonprofit sector providing critical human services into the position of incurring costs in order to deliver the services while not receiving timely reimbursement for said costs – nonprofits do not have large reserves, as they do not make a profit, that they can access for these purposes,” said **Jessica Rose, Executive Director of Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A**. “We are forced to take out loans, exhaust lines of credit, incur interest on these loans that are not reimbursable under the grants, and ultimately be conservative incurring costs contemplated under the contract budgets due to lack of cashflow and budget certainty. This has the net impact of undermining the success of this impactful and tremendously needed program.”

“Right to Counsel can only be as effective as it is properly implemented. Issues with payments—including delays and payment on only a percentage of expenses laid out—and failing to account for ongoing protracted cases

threatens the success of this groundbreaking program, and with it, New Yorkers' access to legal representation in housing court," said **Jonathan Fox, Director of the Tenants' Rights Unit at New York Legal Assistance Group (NYLAG)**. "No one facing eviction and displacement should have to endure this often overwhelming process alone, and RTC ensures that those who can't afford a lawyer to defend their home have a trusted advocate by their side. RTC providers must have the resources we need to fulfill the policy's promise; our communities deserve that much, and the stability and wellbeing of our city depends on it."

"The Bronx has the highest eviction rate in the city, and every day, we see families on the brink of losing their homes because they can't access the legal help they are entitled to," said **Runa Rajagopal, Managing Director of the Civil Action Practice at The Bronx Defenders**. "Right to Counsel was meant to be a guarantee, not a gamble—but without timely payments and adequate funding, the program cannot function as intended. The City's broken contracting system is putting tenants' homes and lives at risk while forcing public defenders and legal services providers to operate in financial limbo. If New York is serious about preventing eviction and homelessness, it must fix this crisis now."

"The Right to Counsel program is a nationally recognized, first-of-its-kind initiative that has transformed the landscape of housing justice in New York City," said **Philip Duncan, Assistant Director for Housing at Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC)**. "The City must properly invest in legal services providers to allow them to build sustainable programs to meet the demand for eviction defense. Adequate funding and timely payments to providers are vital to ensure that every New Yorker facing eviction has access to the legal representation they deserve."

"Sustainable legal services require stable funding. The current financial penalties and payment delays place an undue burden on providers, making it harder to deliver the quality representation that tenants deserve," said **Jerome Frierson, Vice President of Legal Services at BronxWorks, Inc.** "A collaborative approach—one that ensures timely funding and recognizes the structural challenges of eviction defense—would strengthen the Right to Counsel program and better serve New Yorkers in need."

"Since the implementation of the Right to Counsel program, legal service providers have zealously litigated complex legal issues reshaping the landlord and tenant relationships and housing practice in New York City. Complex cases that normally resulted in quick resolutions often leading to evictions are now being fully litigated resulting in longer but often positive results for New York City tenant," said **Alfred Toussaint, Director of the Housing Unit at CAMBA Legal Services**. "However, this phenomenon has led to larger caseloads for legal service providers who are not compensated for cases that last beyond the contracted fiscal year. Moreover, the legal service providers are burdened to accept a new volume of cases in addition to handling these older cases. This process further highlights the importance of additional funding to support the providers and their staff as they take on and maintain larger volume of cases."

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