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Right to Counsel Legal Services Providers Call on City Council to Fully Fund New York City's Groundbreaking Anti-Eviction Program

Coalition urges substantial funding increase, fair case rates, and end punitive contract penalties to preserve tenants' right to counsel and prevent evictions

(NEW YORK, NY) — The organizations that deliver New York City's landmark Right to Counsel (RTC) program — which guarantees legal representation to low-income tenants facing eviction — [testified](#) today before the New York City Council's Committee on Oversight and Investigations, warning that the program's future is at risk due to chronic underfunding, inequitable contract structures, and poor coordination between the City and the courts.

RTC providers, including The Legal Aid Society, Legal Services NYC, Mobilization for Justice, Bronx Defenders, Build Up Justice NYC (f/k/a Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A), CAMBA Legal Services, Housing Conservation Coordinators, the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, Queens Defenders, and BronxWorks, called on the City to take immediate action to stabilize and strengthen the program.

“New York City's Right to Counsel program has prevented tens of thousands of evictions and kept families safely in their homes,” **the providers said in joint testimony**. “But the program is in trouble and unless all of the stakeholders are equally invested in the program, the Right to Counsel will not live up to its promise of equal access to justice for New York City tenants.”

Since its inception, the RTC program has been one of the City's most effective anti-displacement tools — 89 percent of tenants represented by an attorney remain in their homes, and eviction filings have fallen by nearly a third. Despite its success, City funding has not kept pace with rising demand and the increasing complexity of housing cases following landmark tenant protection laws such as the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of 2019 and the Good Cause Eviction Law of 2024.

According to a recent Independent Budget Office [report](#), while the number of tenants eligible for representation increased 110 percent between 2022 and 2024, RTC spending grew by only 33 percent. Current funding — about \$136 million per year — covers at most 33,200 of the more than 50,000 tenants eligible for representation each year. As a result, thousands of low-income New Yorkers are forced to face eviction court alone.

Key Demands from RTC Providers

The coalition urged the City to take the following immediate steps:

1. **Increase overall funding for Right to Counsel** to meet the full demand for representation and address the backlog of unrepresented tenants.

2. **Raise the case rate to at least \$7,500 per case**, reflecting the true cost of ethical, effective representation, and **equalize rates** across all providers.
3. **End the 10% contract penalty** that unfairly withholds reimbursement from providers struggling to meet unrealistic performance metrics in an underfunded program.
4. **Mandate regular coordination between the Office of Civil Justice, Office of Court Administration, and RTC providers** to address systemic intake problems in Housing Court, particularly in Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island.

“At a moment when the eviction crisis has continued unabated, the City is severely under-funding a program that is objectively successful in both moral and economic terms,” **the providers continued**. “Every eviction prevented creates huge savings to the City by avoiding shelter costs and protects the most vulnerable New Yorkers.”

Providers warned that the current contract structure — which pays less than 60 percent of the actual cost of eviction defense — forces non-profit legal organizations to subsidize the program out of pocket, threatening their long-term viability. Inadequate case rates and punitive contract penalties have led to untenable caseloads, staff burnout, and diminished capacity to take new cases, leaving many tenants unprotected.

The coalition also raised serious concerns about breakdowns in court coordination and intake systems, citing examples from Queens where virtual intake procedures have prevented tenants with limited English proficiency from connecting with counsel, and from Brooklyn and the Bronx where overwhelmed calendars and referral delays have left eligible tenants unrepresented.

“The need for Right to Counsel continues to become increasingly important and urgent to protect low income New Yorkers and their ability to maintain their tenancies,” **said the coalition**. “But without reforms — and real investment — the City will see more evictions, more families entering shelter, and more communities destabilized.”

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The Legal Aid Society is a nonprofit organization that exists for one simple yet powerful reason: to ensure that New Yorkers are not denied their right to equal justice because of poverty. For nearly 150 years, we have protected, defended, and advocated for those who have struggled in silence for far too long. Every day, in every borough, The Legal Aid Society changes the lives of our clients and helps improve our communities.

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