

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY WITH
COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS 1
CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON GENERAL WELFARE JOINTLY
WITH COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND
BUILDINGS

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March 27, 2023
Start: 10:14 a.m.
Recess: 1:53 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM - CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Diana Ayala, General Welfare
Committee Chairperson

Pierina Ana Sanchez, Housing and
Buildings Committee Chairperson

GENERAL WELFARE COMMITTEE COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Tiffany Caban
Crystal Hudson
Linda Lee
Chi A. Osse
Lincoln Restler
Kevin C. Riley
Althea V. Stevens
Sandra Ung
Nantasha M. Williams

HOUSING AND BUILDINGS COMMITTEE COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Shaun Abreu
Alexa Aviles
Charles Barron

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COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS 2

HOUSING AND BUILDINGS COMMITTEE COUNCIL MEMBERS
(CONTINUED) :

Tiffany Caban
David M. Carr
Eric Dinowitz
Oswald Feliz

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COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS 3

A P P E A R A N C E S

Raniece Medley, Civil Justice Coordinator of
the Office of Civil Justice.

Marricka Scott-McFadden, who serves as Deputy
Commissioner for Intergovernmental and
Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social
Services

Bruce Jordan, Chief Homelessness Prevention
Officer at the Human Resources Administration

Mark Levine, Manhattan Borough President

Leslie Thrope, Executive Director at Housing
Conservation Coordinators

Nakeeb Siddique, The Legal Aid Society

Rosalind Black, Citywide Director of Housing at
Legal Services NYC

Jonathan Fox, Director of the Tenants Rights Unit
at the New York Legal Assistance Group

Kristie Ortiz-Lam, Director of the Preserving
Affordable Housing Program at Brooklyn Legal
Services Corp A

Theresa Himelspach, affected tenant

Esteban Giron, Crown Heights Tenants Union and
the Tenants Political Action Committee

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COMMITTEE ON HOUSING AND BUILDINGS 4

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Runa Rajagopal, Managing Director of the Civil
Action Practice at the Bronx Defenders

Christopher Helwig, Supervising Attorney at
Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem and our
Housing Defense Team

Omarax Rosa, Project Manager for the Housing and
Justice Initiatives at the Harlem Community
Justice Center, a project of the Center for
Justice Innovation

Jeffrey Austin, Program Manager at CAMBA Legal
Services

Leslie Thrope, Housing Conservation Coordinators

Jessica Bellinder, Legal Aid Society

Lauren Price, Supervising Attorney at Brooklyn
Defender Services

Joanne Grell, leader of CASA in the Bronx

Priam Saywack, Deputy Director of the AHTP
Program at Queens Legal Services which is part of
Legal Services NYC

Keriann Pauls, Director of Coalitions and
Resource Management at TakeRoot Justice

Addrana Montgomery, Tenants' Rights Attorney at
TakeRoot Justice

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Jenny Laurie, Executive Director of Housing Court
Answers

Wanda Martinez, Tenant Leader with CMS out of
Queens

Lloyd Smith, member of Flatbush Tenants Coalition

Paulette James, member of the Flatbush Tenants
Coalition

Pilar DeJesus

Tom Gogan, Move the Money New York City Coalition

William Bershadsky

Monica Schreiber, Tenant Organizer with Brooklyn
Eviction Defense

Bryan Fotino, Tenant Organizer at Catholic
Migration Services and the Right to Counsel
Coalition

Valentin Lopez

Chaplain Sandra Mitchell member of Community
Action for Safe Apartments

Yoselyn Gomez, CASA

Ana Galvez, CASA

Sylvia Sanchez, CASA

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A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

Nathan Mitchell, CASA

Alejandro Corlat, Tenant Organizer with the
Goddard Riverside Law Project

Craig Gurian, Executive Director of the Anti-
Discrimination Center

Shannon Lumpkin, Tenant Organizer

Greg Lee

Pamela Ashwood

Karen Adams

Claristine Gardner

1
2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Testing, testing,
3 testing. Good morning. Today's date is March 27,
4 2023. Today's Committee is on General Welfare joint
5 with Housing and Buildings. Recorded by Walter Lewis
6 in the Committee Room.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning and
8 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing for
9 the Committee on General Welfare jointly with Housing
10 and Buildings.

11 At this time, we ask that you please
12 silence all cell phones and electronic devices to
13 minimize disruptions throughout the hearing.

14 If you have testimony you wish to submit
15 for the record, you may do so via email at
16 testimony@council.nyc.gov. Once again, that is
17 testimony@council.nyc.gov.

18 If you wish to testify in person, please
19 fill out a witness slip located at the Sergeant-at-
20 Arms' desk.

21 We thank you for your cooperation.

22 Chairs, we are ready to begin.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: [GAVEL] Good morning,
24 everyone. My name is Diana Ayala, and I am the Deputy
25

1
2 Speaker of the New York City Council and the Chair of
3 the General Welfare Committee.

4 I'd like to begin by thanking everyone
5 for joining us here this morning for our joint
6 hearing with the Committee on Housing and Buildings
7 on the Universal Access to Legal Services law and
8 tenant protection as well as on several bills.

9 Local Law 136 for the year 2017 created
10 the groundbreaking Universal Access Legal Services
11 program known as Right to Counsel. This program was
12 historic, the first in the country to guarantee
13 representation to tenants at risk of eviction. The
14 program provides free legal representation to tenants
15 who earn less than 200 percent of the federal poverty
16 level and who are facing eviction in housing court or
17 termination of tenancy from NYCHA. We know the Right
18 to Counsel program works to avert homelessness. Since
19 its passage five years ago and the subsequent passage
20 of Local Law 54 of 2021 which expanded the program
21 citywide, 84 percent of tenants who were represented
22 by a lawyer through Right to Counsel have been able
23 to stay in their homes.

24 New York City's investment in civil legal
25 services has increased significantly over the last

1 decade from 6 million in Fiscal Year 2013 to 166
2 million in Fiscal Year 2022. The increase in
3 investment is driven in part by the City's initiative
4 to tackle homelessness and lack of affordable housing
5 including through programs like Right to Counsel.
6 Yet, while it is called Universal Access to Legal
7 Services, many tenants who are seeking an attorney
8 through the initiative have not been able to secure
9 one. According to the Right to Counsel New York City
10 Coalition, each month since January of 2022, which is
11 when the eviction moratorium in New York City ended,
12 the number of tenants able to secure an attorney
13 through this program have steadily dropped. In the
14 first week of October 2022, the number of tenants who
15 have an attorney in housing court went down from 66
16 percent to 35 percent. According to the City, over
17 17,000 tenants did not have legal counsel in housing
18 court in 2022. Unsurprisingly, the representation
19 rate drop has significantly impacted communities of
20 color. Since the end of the moratorium, 82 percent of
21 new eviction cases were issued in majority non-white
22 ZIP codes, yet tenants from majority white ZIP codes
23 were 45 percent more likely to receive counsel than
24 tenants from majority non-white ZIP codes.
25

1
2 Today, we want to delve into how we can
3 bridge the inequities that exist in this program and
4 make it more accessible for all New Yorkers as the
5 program was intended when Local Law 136 passed.

6 I want to thank the Administration, the
7 advocates, legal service providers, and all who have
8 taken the time to join us.

9 At this time, I'd like to acknowledge my
10 Colleagues who are here today, Council Member Hudson,
11 Council Member Lee, Council Member Carr, Council
12 Member Aviles, and Council Member Caban, Council
13 Member Williams, and I think I saw Council Member
14 Restler somewhere so I'm sure he'll be back.

15 Finally, I would like to thank the
16 Committee Staff who worked to prepare this hearing,
17 Aminta Kilawan, our Senior Counsel, David Romero,
18 Counsel, Julia Haramis, Senior Finance Analyst, Rose
19 Martinez, Assistant Deputy Director, Nicholas
20 Montalbano, Senior Data Scientist, Lizette Claudia
21 Diaz (phonetic), Legal Intern, and my Staff, Elsie
22 Encarnacion, Deputy Chief-of-Staff, Malek Al-
23 Shammary, Director of Communications.

24 I would now like to turn it over to my
25 Colleague, Council Member Pierina Sanchez, Chair of

1
2 the Committee of Housing and Buildings to deliver her
3 opening statement.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Madam
5 Deputy. Good morning, everyone. I am Council Member
6 Pierina Sanchez, Chair of the Committee on Housing
7 and Buildings, and I want to thank my co-Chair,
8 Deputy Speaker, Council Member Ayala for holding this
9 joint hearing today.

10 As our City continues to confront a
11 pandemic-exacerbated housing crisis where not enough
12 homes are being built, certainly not enough homes are
13 being built for the most vulnerable in our city.
14 Housing quality in existing homes is declining, and
15 even still an increasing number of New Yorkers,
16 especially vulnerable New Yorkers, are facing
17 eviction. We must look at all the tools in our City's
18 toolkit to confront the crisis.

19 Today, our Committees are conducting
20 oversight on the Universal Access to Counsel Program,
21 more commonly known as Right to Counsel. We're also
22 looking at the various programs and initiatives that
23 the Administration has in place to better protect the
24 City's tenants. With two out of every three
25 households renting rather than owning their homes, 94

1 percent of residents in my District, often the most
2 vulnerable and under-resourced, it is critical that
3 the City use every tool at our disposal to make sure
4 that tenants are protected. The Housing and Buildings
5 Committee has been holding a series of hearings to
6 examine the tools available to tenants before they're
7 even faced with the possibility of eviction. This
8 includes the Administration's enforcing and
9 strengthening the Housing Maintenance Code Standards,
10 it includes creating more affordable housing through
11 the legalization of basements and cellar units, and
12 protecting the many vulnerable tenants already living
13 in those units. It means thinking bigger and
14 centering our housing on the social housing
15 principles. It's also ensuring that when a family is
16 in a moment of crisis facing the possibility of
17 eviction, they can come to the housing court with the
18 same legal protection as their landlord fully
19 represented by an attorney. In 2013, only 1 percent
20 of tenants were represented in housing court while
21 over 95 percent of landlords as we know were
22 represented. When the City Council passed the
23 landmark Universal Access to Counsel legislation in
24 2017 led by now-Borough President Mark Levine and
25

1
2 Borough President Vanessa Gibson, we began shifting
3 the balance toward tenant empowerment, providing
4 tenants with an attorney in housing court. It was a
5 recognition that there is something fundamentally
6 unfair about forcing tenants who are at risk of
7 losing their homes to come to housing court alone to
8 face their landlords and their landlords' attorneys.
9 Representation means more housing stability and
10 eviction prevention for families. According to OCJ's
11 own reports, around 84 percent of households
12 represented by an attorney in housing court are able
13 to stay in their homes. The COVID-19 pandemic upended
14 the five-year rollout of Right to Counsel. Courts
15 paused cases, eviction moratoria were put in place
16 and then ended, and new programs like the Emergency
17 Rental Assistance Program, or ERAP, were rolled out
18 to help tenants pay off rental arrears and provide
19 other protections.

20 Now, we're at another threshold moment.
21 The State Office of Temporary Disability is no longer
22 accepting ERAP applications. Not only does this mean
23 that tenants will have to find other ways to seek
24 rent arrears assistance, tenants have also lost other
25 important protections afforded by the Law. Legal

1 service providers are reporting that low pay and high
2 case loads have led to attrition, meaning that
3 despite Right to Counsel, there aren't enough housing
4 attorneys leaving tenants, once again, unrepresented
5 despite the protections they should be guaranteed.

6 Most recently, advocates share that 19,000 were
7 unrepresented last year. To me, this is Miss Vivian,
8 a constituent in my District, an African American
9 senior, retired civil servant who is contemplating a
10 move to the south contributing to the continuing
11 exodus of African Americans from our city. Tenant
12 attorneys are critical in protecting tenants' rights.

13 Beyond representing them in eviction proceedings,
14 they can help tenants who may not know that their
15 apartment should be rent-stabilized and was illegally
16 deregulated, they can advise on seeking rent
17 abatement for unaddressed repairs, they can assist in
18 illegal lockout proceedings, and they can help to
19 bring affirmative cases against a landlord who is
20 harassing the tenant or a group of tenants in the
21 building. These claims can also go unaddressed when
22 tenants are not made aware of these protections or
23 not provided the resources to adequately litigate
24 these claims in housing court.
25

1
2 Proposed Resolution 345-A sponsored by me
3 is calling on the New York State Legislature to pass
4 and the Governor to sign Assembly Bill 1493 and
5 Senate counterpart 2721 in relation to establishing a
6 New York State Office of Civil Representation to
7 provide access to legal services in eviction
8 proceedings.

9 Proposed Resolution number 499-A
10 sponsored by Council Member Abreu calls on the New
11 York State Legislature to introduce and pass and the
12 Governor to sign Assembly Bill 4993 and Senate Bill
13 3254 requiring that any party eligible under Local
14 Law for free legal counsel for an eviction proceeding
15 that has made a good faith effort to secure such
16 counsel can be granted an adjournment by the court
17 for additional time to secure counsel.

18 Thus, the need for Right to Counsel is
19 clear. Even as we continue to build homes, protect
20 units from deterioration, and protect tenants from
21 harassment, it is critical that we also protect them
22 in housing court.

23 I would like to thank my Staff, Sam
24 Cardenas and Kadeem Robinson (phonetic) as well as
25 Housing and Buildings Committee Staff Audrey Son,

Taylor Zelony, Jose Conde, Charles Kim, Dan Kroop,
and Brooke Frye (phonetic).

I look forward to hearing from the
Administration today about their efforts in
strengthening this vital tenant protection program
and will now turn it over to Committee Counsel to
administer the oath.

COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Good morning.
Will you please raise your right hand?

Do you affirm to tell the truth, the
whole truth, and nothing but the truth before this
Committee and to respond honestly to Council Member
questions?

ADMINISTRATION: (INAUDIBLE)

COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Thank you. You
may begin when ready.

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Good
morning. I want to thank Deputy Speaker Ayala and
the General Welfare Committee, Chair Sanchez and
the Housing and Buildings Committee for holding
today's hearing and for the opportunity to testify
about the Universal Access to Legal Services Law.
My name is Raniece Medley, and I serve as Civil
Justice Coordinator of the Office of Civil

Justice. Joining me today are Marricka Scott-McFadden, who serves as Deputy Commissioner for Intergovernmental and Legislative Affairs at the Department of Social Services, DSS, and Bruce Jordan, who serves as the Chief Homelessness Prevention Officer at the Human Resources Administration, HRA.

 Making the vision of expanded access to legal services a reality for those facing the threat of eviction has required the commitment of so many including the leadership of the Council, including both present and former Council Members. Much credit is also due to the team at DSS/HRA's Office of Civil Justice, OCJ, as well as the advocates and legal services providers who put in the hard work representing and supporting those facing eviction. It takes precisely this broad range of stakeholders and expertise to guide the implementation of this ambitious law.

 HRA's Office of Civil Justice has launched and operated a wide range of civil legal services for New Yorkers in need since the office's inception in 2015. At the center of this work is the implementation of New York City's

1
2 groundbreaking Universal Access, Right to Counsel,
3 Law. Over five years ago, in partnership with the
4 Council, New York City made history by becoming
5 the first city in the nation to enact a law
6 ensuring that all tenants facing eviction in
7 housing court or in administrative termination of
8 tenancy proceedings in public housing have access
9 to free legal services. Since the Universal Access
10 Law was enacted in 2017, the landscape for access
11 to housing justice for tenants in New York City
12 has been transformed.

13 Upon implementation of the Universal
14 Access law, residential evictions by city marshals
15 fell by over 40 percent between 2013 and 2019
16 while nationwide evictions climbed. The percentage
17 of tenants facing eviction in court with the help
18 and protection of legal representation stood at 38
19 percent at the end of 2019, pre-pandemic, and 62
20 percent at the end of Fiscal Year '22, up from a
21 mere 1 percent in 2013.

22 Moreover, in the overwhelming majority
23 of cases, when tenants have lawyers in eviction
24 proceedings, they get positive results. In
25 resolved cases in Fiscal Year 2022, 86 percent of

1 households represented in Housing Court and public
2 housing proceedings by OCJ tenant lawyers were
3 able to remain in their homes.
4

5 In 2020, at the outset of the COVID-19
6 pandemic, OCJ accelerated the citywide
7 implementation of Right To Counsel, more than two
8 years ahead of the legal mandate to meet the needs
9 of the most vulnerable in housing court. We
10 understood that early implementation may not be
11 the smoothest approach to the planned expansion of
12 services, but we answered the call and providers
13 showed up to support tenants citywide.

14 We are keenly focused on addressing the
15 needs of those facing eviction in housing court,
16 and OCJ has continued to work closely with our
17 network of legal services provider partners and
18 the Office of Court Administration, OCA, to
19 address issues impacting the cases of New Yorkers
20 who are entitled to free legal counsel as part of
21 the City's Right to Counsel program.

22 Early on as staffing and coverage
23 challenges presented, OCJ formally wrote to OCA to
24 amplify provider concerns and to seek support and
25

1 adoption of various measures, many recommended by
2 providers themselves.
3

4 By July 2022, OCJ, working with OCA,
5 was able to begin re-establishing presence in
6 borough housing courts to screen for legal
7 services eligibility and to facilitate tenant
8 connection with counsel, to alleviate the draw on
9 provider resources. We returned with enhanced
10 visibility. OCJ staff wearing bright turquoise
11 buttons announcing their presence for free legal
12 services along with some provider staff
13 circulating with distinctive tee shirts promoting
14 services.

15 Accompanying signage with the same
16 bright turquoise is also visible in the halls of
17 housing courts across the city where OCJ staff and
18 providers are on-site for intake and connection
19 with tenants at their initial court appearances.

20 Continued engagement with OCA and our
21 provider partners grew into OCA standing up a
22 Working Group. The Working Group led to job fairs
23 with local law schools to connect providers to
24 recent grads and has also been a space to consider
25 court processes and tenant connection to

resources, both of which have consistently been part of the discussion. Also, out of that Working Group came the Administrative Part pilot which has significantly increased HRA's presence in Housing Court to ensure eligible clients get quick access to financial assistance that will allow them to stay in their homes.

HRA launched a pilot in Kings County Housing Court on February 21, 2023. The pilot co-locates HRA homelessness prevention services in the courthouse to further assist individuals in active eviction proceedings at their first appearance.

Granted a 45-day adjournment by the court, individuals visit the HRA team at the courthouse to initiate applications for one-shot deals, rental assistance, or other benefits that could address their housing concerns.

It is important to note that here in New York, a tenant does not have to find themselves in court to receive help when rent arrears become a looming threat. Homebase is a citywide resource tenants can access by visiting one of the 26 Homebase locations, learn more by calling 3-1-1, or by visiting www.nyc.gov/homebase. Through a

1
2 variety of rental assistance programs, tenants can
3 be connected to helpful resources including
4 assistance with benefits, financial counseling,
5 mediation services, job search assistance, and
6 links to useful community resources. We will
7 continue to engage with Court administrators and
8 other key stakeholders to uphold access to
9 tenants.

10 As New Yorkers, we are and should be
11 proud of the leadership shown in our Universal
12 Access Law that supports underserved communities
13 who have not had their voices heard. It works
14 alongside the other tools we use to keep
15 individuals and families in their homes.

16 Thank you, again, for giving us an
17 opportunity to discuss this first in the nation
18 initiative. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We have
20 also been joined by Council Member Osse, Ung,
21 Barron, Abreu, Dinowitz.

22 Council Member Abreu, did you want to
23 give remarks on your bill?

24 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Good morning and
25 thank you Chair Sanchez, Deputy Speaker Ayala as

1 well for holding this hearing and allowing me to
2 speak on my Resolution.

3
4 Resolution 499 calls on the State
5 Legislature to pass and the Governor to sign
6 Assembly bill 4993, 3254 requiring that any party
7 eligible under Local Law for free legal counsel
8 from an eviction proceeding that has made a good
9 faith effort to secure such counsel may be granted
10 an adjournment by the court for additional time to
11 secure counsel.

12 Right to Counsel works but not when the
13 courts are overloaded and cases are being
14 calendared even when tenants who are eligible for
15 representation haven't secured an attorney yet. We
16 may not be able to control how many cases are
17 brought before the court, but we can call on OCA to
18 calendar these cases such that tenants that need a
19 lawyer are getting one. That's why I'm supporting
20 the efforts of Senator Hoylman and Assembly Member
21 Rosenthal in their fight to get this bill passed
22 into law. We have got to protect the integrity of
23 Right to Counsel, and it's also not lost upon us
24 that pay parity is also an issue, and as a Council
25 we're working on this and look forward to hearing

1
2 more testimony and feedback today from both tenants
3 and providers. Thank you, Chairs.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We've also
5 been joined by Council Member Riley.

6 I think that we're going to be joined at
7 some point by Borough President Mark Levine, so we
8 may have to take a short break. I believe that he's
9 expected around 11-ish to give remarks.

10 I'll start with questioning. Current
11 providers have been unable to handle all of the cases
12 needing representation at the pace that these cases
13 have been scheduled, and the RTC legislation
14 specifies that the organization providing legal
15 services must be a non-profit with the capacity to
16 provide services. What plans, if any, do you have to
17 make funding available to private attorneys or those
18 agencies who might be looking to start a new eviction
19 defense practice? Advocates have told us that OCJ is
20 contracting with private parties to address this
21 backlog, and how does OCJ ensure quality assurance of
22 these petitioners?

23 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
24 you, Council Member. One of the efforts that the
25 City, the Office of Civil Justice at DSS, undertook

1 was to issue an RFEI or a Request For Expression of
2 Interest to understand how we might expand the
3 capacity of the program to enhance the legal services
4 and resources available to serve tenants. One of the
5 things that came as a result was that we had some
6 interest expressed by a number of individuals. We
7 have now undertaken and followed that with a
8 negotiated acquisition to be published that would
9 allow members of the legal services community to put
10 forth their interest in supporting the Right to
11 Counsel program. As we were facing unprecedented
12 times, the City undertook all efforts to be able to
13 expand the capacity of the program and extend
14 opportunities beyond the non-profit community at that
15 time, and so that's how we came to be in that space,
16 and the Office of Civil Justice, as we do with all
17 providers, engages with all participants in the
18 program to understand their activities and how they
19 are operating under the program. Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: What is the current
22 number of non-profit providers that you're
23 contracting with?

24 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: There
25 are approximately 13. One of those is a coalition, so

1 that coalition actually comprises a number of
2 organizations, and then there are smaller
3 organizations as well as two organizations that cover
4 every borough, one organization which covers three
5 boroughs, and then local-based organizations that are
6 specific to the boroughs.
7

8 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Does
9 OCJ regularly meet with these organizations,
10 specifically since the moratorium was lifted, I'm
11 hoping that there was some attempt to kind of get
12 ahead of the situation, anticipating that the loss of
13 personnel, I know every city agency has been
14 devastated by the impact of shortage in workforce,
15 but is this something that OCJ anticipated and was
16 proactive in trying to remediate before we got to
17 this point?

18 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
19 you, Council Member. We are in regular and constant
20 and consistent communication with the provider
21 partners who participate in the program. In thinking
22 about how the end of the eviction moratorium in
23 January would impact the services, certainly we were
24 engaged with our providers to understand what that
25 would look like as well as we knew and understood

1 that operating measures and processes in housing
2 court had changed as well and so the thing that OCJ
3 has committed to is to be responsive and to be
4 flexible and adaptive and engaging the providers, the
5 Office of Court Administration, so that we can be
6 responsive to concerns as they arise. Some of the
7 things that we've been able to do is make
8 programmatic or policy changes to how the program
9 operates to try to enhance and to support providers
10 in maximizing the resources available, and so we
11 engage with OCA where we would need their support for
12 some of those measures, and then other times we
13 encourage providers to undertake some of those
14 measures so that they might see some relief within
15 their capacity.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Is it specifically a
18 work shortage that's impacting a renter's right to
19 counsel or is it that coupled with the fact that an
20 unprecedented number of cases are being brought upon
21 residents at this point?

22 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
23 you, Council Member, for that question. I think that
24 we're looking at a confluence of factors. Obviously,
25 as we all have known and it's well-understood that

1 the working, staffing, and retention for legal
2 service providers is not unlike other sectors and had
3 been heavily impacted by COVID-19, but court
4 processes have been impacted as well, and so changes
5 in court processes, for instance, we know that one of
6 the strongest tenant protections that emerged in
7 COVID-19 was that eviction processes were stayed for
8 at least two years, and so just the fact that
9 litigation that was pending was paused, that new
10 cases weren't filed during that time, that's a
11 significant change in how courts were operating, and
12 so when we saw the end of the moratorium on January
13 15, 2022, we were coming back into the housing court
14 in a space of operations that had not existed before
15 and with Universal Access fully implemented citywide
16 which, again, had not yet been understood, so when I
17 say there's a confluence of factors, it was all of
18 those various measures and conditions that presented
19 at a very much unprecedented time.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I got it. I wouldn't
22 want to be in your shoes trying to figure this out.
23 This is a very difficult process and a difficult
24 time, but during this time, because I think that one
25 of the issues that we see at the Council when we're

1 talking to non-profit providers and to city agencies
2 is our inability to be competitive in terms of wages.
3 Has there been any conversation about adjusting
4 existing contracts so that our non-profit providers
5 are able to attract and retain staff?
6

7 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
8 you, Council Member. The Office of Civil Justice DSS
9 along with the Office of Management and Budget and
10 provider partners actually convened and had a Pay
11 Parity Working Group to align salaries for attorneys
12 with zero to four years' experience with the salaries
13 of similar experienced attorneys at the Law
14 Department. That was achieved. With regard to zero to
15 four year attorneys that are staff attorneys within
16 our provider partner organizations, there salaries
17 have reached parity, and that is something that is
18 baked in to the contracts that we have currently.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That's part of the
20 original contract? That's not an amendment?

21 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: That
22 evolved. That was not something that was in place at
23 the time that these contracts began at the initiation
24 of Universal Access Law, but it has evolved and so
25 that's something that took place over the course as

1
2 this has been phased into citywide implementation,
3 the work towards pay parity was also happening.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think I'm trying to
5 get at what changed post 2022 when we saw the
6 increased volume in courts and we saw a decrease in
7 staffing at our non-profits. What changed at OCJ?

8 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: There
9 are many changes that happened at OCJ that we're able
10 to control. Thank you, Council Member, for that. What
11 we changed are, again, some of the programmatic and
12 policy approaches that we had to, again, address the
13 resource draw that we saw from providers. As I
14 mentioned, one of the things that we did first is to
15 restore our presence in courthouses so that we could
16 be present in the courthouses to conduct eligibility
17 screens trying to support the administrative upfront
18 tasks that providers were responsible for at court,
19 again to make lawyer resources more available.

20 Another item that took place, for instance, with
21 regard to how cases move. We found that when there
22 were multiple occupant cases, cases that are filed
23 that have several tenants in one apartment that the
24 court was assigning each tenant in the apartment to a
25 separate legal services provider, even though legally

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2 it was not required for the nature of the case so one
3 of the changes that we made in concert with OCA and
4 their support was that judges began to assign such
5 matters to only one legal services provider who would
6 then screen and make a legal determination about
7 whether it would be required that the multiple
8 occupants had multiple representation. You could just
9 imagine just how much that saves on the capacity and
10 resources available by making that sort of change,
11 and there are a number of changes of that nature that
12 we made. We also supported providers in securing
13 contract services using recruitment firms to be able
14 to expand their capacity as well as being able to
15 connect with law grads as you heard with working
16 through the law schools and the hiring firms.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Just out of curiosity,
18 is HRA also at every courthouse?

19 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: I'm
20 going to turn that over to my Colleague who can just
21 speak more accurately to that.

22 CHIEF OFFICER JORDAN: Good morning and
23 thank you for the question. Yes, we do have HRA staff
24 at every courthouse and at the Red Hook Community
25 Justice Center, both representing the Family

1
2 Independence Administration as far as applying for
3 emergency rental assistance. Some days we also have
4 HASA there and we also have Adult Protective
5 Services.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Great. Okay. In your
7 opinion, is the program currently providing enough
8 funding to meet the current need of the
9 representation of tenants in newly filed cases as
10 well as the cases already pending in housing court
11 without representation? If not, what is the plan to
12 meet that need?

13 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
14 you, Council Member. At this time, we've been focused
15 on maximizing the resources that are there within the
16 program and just aligning the available legal
17 services resources to those tenants who are
18 presenting so that we can assess what, if any,
19 additional needs there may be, and those are
20 conversations that clearly our Commissioner has just
21 testified in budget hearings, and so those are talks
22 that are going as well.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Do we know what the
24 number of backlogged cases is to date?

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2 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
3 you, Council Member. You're speaking to the court
4 backlog? I can't speak to OCA's numbers.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Have you
6 included those over 60 who are over 200 percent of
7 the FPL?

8 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
9 you, Council Member. May I ask for clarification when
10 you ask have we included those individuals, in what
11 manner?

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We recently passed a
13 bill that would allow older adults over the age of 60
14 to qualify for Right to Counsel, and have they been
15 included already as part of the program?

16 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: My
17 understanding is that the active date for those folks
18 to come within coverage under the law has not come. I
19 believe that's slated for sometime in July for those
20 individuals to come within coverage of the Universal
21 Access Law.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. I'll ask one
23 more question because we have a lot of Colleagues,
24 and I want to give everybody time to ask questions.

1
2 What modifications to the RTC program are
3 needed to ensure that all tenants eligible for the
4 Right to Counsel receive full representation in
5 housing court?

6 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
7 you, Council Member. That's something that we are
8 constantly reviewing and considering as we engage
9 with provider partners. The Office of Civil Justice
10 recently has been holding provider focus groups as
11 well as stakeholder engagement groups with community
12 members, electeds, etc., so that we can get their
13 feedback on their perspectives and what their
14 experience has been to help inform us in that as well
15 as well as lessons learned that we may have gathered
16 over the years that the program has run. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm sorry, guys. I
18 kind of lied a little bit. Just one more question.

19 What is the Fiscal 2023 budget for
20 Universal Access to Counsel? We're looking for the
21 budget of UAC, not housing-related legal services.
22 How much has been spent so far?

23 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
24 you. Actually, I'll actually have to get back to you.
25 We'll follow with you on those numbers. Thank you.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. All right. I'm
3 going to turn it over to Council Member Sanchez.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much,
5 Deputy Speaker, and good morning.

6 I'm going to start off with just a few
7 followup questions from your previous responses. In
8 talking about what has been done to ensure pay
9 parity, you talked about the work that you all have
10 done to bring pay parity in comparison to the Law
11 Department for attorneys with zero to four years of
12 experience, but it's also really important to retain
13 those more seasoned attorneys that have been in
14 service with these providers for a longer period of
15 time because replacing them when they decide to step
16 down is also very costly and takes a lot of time and
17 adds to the burdens of our service providers so what,
18 if any, work has the Administration been doing to
19 ensure pay parity for those more seasoned attorneys.

20 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY:
21 Considerations about the contracts and values of the
22 contracts are ongoing. I can't speak further to those
23 processes at this time. Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, so I'm going
25 to interpret that as not much because you usually

1
2 have very detailed responses, and I just want to
3 emphasize that it is very important. In recognition
4 of a lot of the work that the Administration has been
5 doing, I think that's an important contour.

6 Another followup question on multi-
7 occupant cases. Could you share a breakdown of how
8 many multi-occupant cases have been determined to not
9 need multiple providers, multiple legal counsel?

10 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
11 you, Council Member. I don't have those stats
12 available at this time.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay. Thank you so
14 much. Delving into the OCJ/OCA relationship, because
15 so much of these questions are not in OCJ's
16 jurisdiction, how are you in communication about a
17 case standard? We know that prior to the pandemic,
18 according to a group of providers, it took
19 approximately 23 hours to resolve or represent one
20 tenant case, and then post-pandemic and coming back
21 in 2022 it's been closer to 29 hours for one case and
22 this at the same time that we're seeing higher levels
23 of attrition, higher levels of the number of cases,
24 longer and more complex cases, especially after
25 changes came into effect from the HSTPA so how is OCA

1
2 and OCJ in communication about these increased
3 challenges to providing legal counsel for indigent
4 New Yorkers?

5 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
6 you. We are a part of the OCA Working Group, which is
7 led by OCA court administrators, the provider
8 partners are a part of that group as well, and it's
9 in that space that the caseload standards that you
10 are speaking to, there's a committee if you will that
11 is an offshoot of that Working Group that is working
12 to establish those. All members and stakeholders that
13 are part of that Working Group are also consulted in
14 the consideration of how that caseload standard is
15 being built.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Thank you so
17 much. Speaking of case standards, we're aware that in
18 the fall of 2022, the OCA did convene a Case Standard
19 Committee. Is OCJ a part of that Committee as well?

20 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
21 you. OCA has stood up that Committee. We, as in DSS
22 (INAUDIBLE) City, we are not part of that Committee.
23 That Committee is stood up and run by the Office of
24 Court Administration.

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CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, understood.

Thank you so much for that.

Delving into the process, and thank you for giving us the visuals of turquoise buttons and signs and things like that that one might expect to see in the courts, that's really helpful to understand, but just in understanding the case flow or the flow that a tenant might experience, what is OCJ's process of assigning a case to a provider in housing court?

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank you, Council Member. OCJ takes the calendar for the month, and we assign providers to different days of the calendar. The courts have granted us courtrooms, or as we refer to them, they're referred to there as parts, but those are intake spaces. The calendars are set for individuals who have not yet retained attorneys, who don't have attorneys in their record, those cases are scheduled into those specific court parts where it is anticipated that they will make connection with those attorney. I should be clear that that's the first time on for those cases that they are scheduled into those parts to make connection with the legal services providers that we

1
2 have scheduled on those particular days. The Office
3 of Civil Justice staff attends those parts, connects
4 with those tenants as they are signing in to note
5 their attendance for the day, and the OCJ staff
6 screens for legal services eligibility to determine
7 whether the person is entitled to full legal
8 representation or brief legal advice which is
9 individualized legal advice in a single consultation.
10 It's at that time that OCJ will connect the person to
11 a legal services provider, indicating the level of
12 assistance that they are eligible for, and the
13 provider undertakes and engages with those
14 individuals based on their capacity at that given
15 time.

16 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Got it. Following up
17 to that, do you think that you have enough space to
18 conduct this work in the parts that they're assigning
19 to you.

20 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
21 you, Council Member. Space varies across the systems.
22 We've been able to restore our presence in the
23 courthouses in Brooklyn, in Manhattan, and in Queens.
24 Our services and the connection and support that we
25 offer has not been as needed in Staten Island because

1
2 of the case there and the providers able to manage
3 it, and the Bronx has not yet called for us to be
4 back as they are still conducting virtual intake.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay. Thank you. I
6 mentioned Miss Smith in my opening remarks, and I
7 could've talked about so many different individuals
8 who have come to my office and not had legal counsel
9 even though they would be eligible for it just on the
10 basis of their income. What does OCJ for tenants, how
11 do you reach folks if they're not able to be assigned
12 an attorney that first day?

13 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
14 you, Council Member. The individuals are connected to
15 attorneys and to the providers who are available at
16 the time that they are screened, and it's the
17 providers who are determining whether or not they
18 have the capacity to engage them and at what level,
19 and it's the providers who are responsible for
20 continuing to engage with those individuals if
21 they're not able to fully engage them at that time.

22 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Okay,
23 so just to make sure that I understand that, OCJ, you
24 talk to every single person who is eligible or
25 potentially eligible, you turn that over and then

1 that lapse in representation happens because the
2 provider is not able to take on the case?

3
4 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: The aim
5 is to connect them with the providers and, as we've
6 all heard and as we've just well discussed, providers
7 have varying staffing and retention concerns that are
8 taking place which changes from day to day how many
9 cases and how many people they may be able to address
10 at a given time, and different providers are managing
11 those individuals that they may not be able to fully
12 engage in different ways.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Talking
14 about the staffing and retention concerns, not that
15 old, but I still do remember a time, we can all
16 remember when these positions were highly, highly
17 coveted. We have various alumni on the City Council
18 like Council Member Abreu who was a legal services
19 provider and a representative. These were coveted
20 positions, like folks were in grad school, they were
21 in law school, and they were coming out and they
22 wanted to be providers for indigent New Yorkers, and
23 that has changed because of the wage disparities,
24 because of so many issues, burnout with the high
25 caseloads, just from a position statement, we're on

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2 the same page, the Administration is in agreeance
3 that there is work to do here to improve the working
4 conditions of our staff attorneys?

5 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
6 you for that question, Council Member. I don't think
7 there's any dispute that we support providers and we
8 support public interest law and we support what's
9 needed to have a robust Universal Access to Counsel
10 program.

11 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Okay,
12 thank you. It's always important to make sure that
13 we're starting from the same place, and I think that
14 we are.

15 Our Deputy Speaker asked this but just to
16 make sure, the Office of Civil Justice does not keep
17 track of what the caseload and the backlog is in the
18 courts? They don't share that information with the
19 City?

20 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
21 you, Council Member. The caseloads that various
22 providers have, we engage with providers and have an
23 understanding about those people that they have
24 served or able to serve. That's the engagement that
25

1 we're having with regard to what's happening at
2 court.
3

4 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Really
5 provider facing? Understood. Speaking from the
6 provider perspective, do you have a percentage of
7 tenants who may have been eligible tenants who are
8 facing eviction without an attorney at this moment?

9 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
10 you, Council Member. The most recent data that I
11 would point to is from the Universal Access Report
12 for Fiscal Year '22 that was recently published that
13 cited that in the fourth quarter of Fiscal Year '22,
14 which of course is just following the end of the
15 moratorium, there was approximately 63 percent
16 representation rate among folks who had cases pending
17 in housing court.

18 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: This 63
19 percent representation rate is among eligible cases
20 for representation or just all cases?

21 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Under
22 Universal Access, all matters are eligible for some
23 legal services.
24
25

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Got it.
Thank you. Do you have a breakdown of this by
borough?

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Yes, I
could get you those details more fully. Thank you.

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: I
appreciate that. Thank you. From your perspective,
you've heard us and you've heard advocates, and I
know that you mentioned that you have several Working
Groups, what do you think are the most serious
factors that are causing there to be a lack of
representation among the 30-something percent of New
Yorkers that are eligible.

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
you, Council Member. I can't say that there's
necessarily any one that stands out. As I said, I
think it is really the ongoing work that we have to
understand. There are a lot of moving pieces, and
it's a very dynamic process that we're engaging, and
so we prime ourselves to be responsive so that we can
respond even day-to-day as things are arising, and
that's that best way we find to be able to maximize
and ensure that services are reaching as many tenants
as possible and as many New Yorkers as possible.

CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. I'm going to yield to our Colleagues who have questions because there's a lot of us here, and then we'll circle back, but thank you for your responses. Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member Osse.

COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Good morning. Thank you, Chairs Ayala and Sanchez.

The first question that I want to ask is in regards to tenants being targeted by negligent landlords. In my District and I'm sure across the City, many of my constituents are neglected by their landlords and often are forced to live in hard living conditions due to failure to repair insufficient repairs. I know that this is not an isolated case and story for many of the tenants that live here in the City. There have been many tenants in my District who have been able to bring up cases up to litigation to force landlords to repair their homes. However, not everyone has access to an attorney or a lawyer nor public services, and I know that public services are already stretched thin. How is HPD and the City supporting our tenants who decide to take legal action against these negligent landlords?

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2 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
3 you, Council Member. I won't speak for my partner
4 agency, HPD, but I an speak for the Office of Civil
5 Justice as we manage and help in coordinating the
6 civil legal services across the City, one aspect of
7 the tenant legal services that we coordinate includes
8 the Anti-Harassment Tenant Protection Program, which
9 is a program that is particularly aimed at
10 conditions, landlord and tenant issues such as you've
11 just mentioned, and that is a distinct program in
12 terms of another program that we consider to be
13 distinct from the Universal Access program.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: How many attorneys
15 are in that unit?

16 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: I would
17 have to follow with you on that number. There are
18 three providers that participate as part of that
19 program. There are two key providers and then there's
20 a coalition of providers that are made up of at least
21 a dozen that participate in that program across the
22 City.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: You may not have
24 this answer off the top of your head, but do you
25 believe that, just a guess in terms of the amount of

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2 providers that are providing this type of resources
3 to tenants, do you think the supply is enough for the
4 demand that exists in the City?

5 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
6 you, Council Member. That's almost a trick question
7 because is it ever? Technically, I would say that
8 there's always a call and we always hear that there
9 is a need, but we find that we are able to connect
10 tenants that are brought to our attention and be able
11 to connect them to the providers that operate in the
12 program as they present.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: But the demand is
14 high? Is that something that you're witnessing at
15 all?

16 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
17 you, Council Member. High? I'm hesitant to
18 characterize it as high as compared to.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Okay. The last
20 question that I will ask, and this is aside from
21 tenant issues, but I also do represent a community
22 that has a sizeable amount of homeowners and
23 especially seniors who are homeowners who are preyed
24 on by deed theft. I was wondering if the providers
25

1
2 supply any support to cases where seniors are dealing
3 with a potential deed theft case?

4 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
5 you, Council Member. If providers do have such
6 services, they don't fall under the umbrella of the
7 tenant legal services that we coordinate through the
8 Office of Civil Justice, but surely our provider
9 partners could speak to those services that they have
10 available that extend beyond those that we
11 coordinate.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Who are the specific
13 provider partners again?

14 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Sure.
15 The provider partners range from Legal Aid Society,
16 Legal Services New York, New York Legal Assistance
17 Group, and the borough-by-borough, we range
18 everywhere from CAMBA to (INAUDIBLE) to MFJ.
19 (INAUDIBLE)

20 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: What is the process
21 in vetting these providers?

22 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Sure.
23 Providers came into the program based on a
24 solicitation. At the start of the Universal Access
25 program, and thank you for your question, Council

1
2 Member, providers came into the program because the
3 City issued a solicitation to be able to meet the
4 mandate of Universal Access, and providers responded
5 to that solicitation and so there's a typical
6 procurement process that we have with the City to bid
7 and to take those solicitations and to evaluate them
8 to bring them into the program.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Do you all handle
10 the contracts in terms of the procurement process and
11 these providers receiving the payments for the work
12 that they are doing or is that separate from what you
13 guys do?

14 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
15 you, Council Member. That is a function of the Office
16 of Civil Justice. We do maintain and manage those
17 contracts.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Okay. Have you been
19 seeing a delay in the handling of those contracts or
20 has that been an issue that many of your providers to
21 your concern or your knowledge by any chance?

22 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
23 you, Council Member. We've not seen a delay in the
24 management of the contracts. The Universal Access,
25 there are any number of contracts as we manage

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2 contracts across the scope of civil legal services
3 that we offer so if you had questions about
4 particular programs or particular contracts,
5 (INAUDIBLE) speak to that but I can't speak
6 generally.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: All right. I guess,
8 if I go into specifics, you listed CAMBA as one of
9 the providers. I know that I've been reached by CAMBA
10 about they've been having issues in terms of
11 receiving payment for some of the work that they've
12 been doing through their contracting process. Thus,
13 it sometimes gets in the way of some of the work that
14 they are providing to tenants within my community.
15 Can you speak to that by any chance?

16 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
17 you, Council Member. I can't speak to it at this
18 moment, but we can follow up with specifics.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Okay. Thank you.

20 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
21 you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I just want
23 to (Speaking Foreign Language).

24 I'm now going to call on Council Member
25 Abreu for questions.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Thank you, Chair. I
3 personally feel gaslit. I'm going to ask the question
4 again that my Colleague asked. Is there a demand
5 right now for legal services and is there enough
6 supply to address that demand?

7 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
8 you, Council Member. The Universal Access program
9 ensures access to legal services for every tenant,
10 every individual, city resident facing eviction in
11 housing crisis so as much as there are new cases
12 being filed and being cases presenting in housing
13 court, there is a call for services under the
14 Universal Access.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Yeah, the demand is
16 pretty high, and we shouldn't shy away from that.
17 19,000 cases of tenants facing eviction do not have
18 access to a lawyer that are entitled to one under the
19 law. We should not shy away from the fact that there
20 is a crisis right now, and there is a demand that is
21 not being served. We should not shy away from that.
22 Let me relax.

23 Does the Administration support
24 Resolution 499?
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2 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
3 you, Council Member. The Administration has that
4 under review.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: My question does
6 the Administration support the slowing of cases at
7 the state which under the jurisdiction of OCA, which
8 the City cannot do, does the City have a position on
9 this? Yes or no?

10 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
11 you, Council Member. I can't speak further to the
12 City's position at this time..

13 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: It's been two
14 weeks, it's been two weeks that this has been notice
15 for today, and the Administration has no position on
16 this resolution.

17 Is there a funding need at the City level
18 right now that's necessary for non-profits to right-
19 size their costs, to address personnel costs, to
20 address pay parity, does the Administration find that
21 there's a need for funding to be enhanced?

22 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
23 you, Council Member. As we are at the budget stage,
24 budget discussions and conversations are ongoing.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER ABREU: Thank you so much.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. Council
Member Hudson followed by Council Member Restler.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you and good
morning. The Council recently passed Local Law 20 of
2023, a bill I introduced that the Council
unanimously passed a few months ago. That law will
expand eligibility for Right to Counsel to any person
who is 60 years of age or older who's facing eviction
or termination of tenancy proceedings in housing
court. What's the estimated cost of this expansion
and when will additional funding be added?

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
you, Council Member. I can't speak to those specifics
at this time, but we will follow.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: How many older
adults, individuals 60 years of age or older, are
projected to need this program?

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
you, Council Member. I'll have to follow with those
numbers.

COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: What other
programs does OCJ or HRA have to specifically address
the housing needs of older adults to ensure they can
age in place with dignity?

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2 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
3 you, Council Member. One program specifically that I
4 would mention is the Assigned Counsel Project. It is
5 specifically designated to assist and focus on
6 individuals 60 and older who are living in
7 communities and who are facing eviction. We have a
8 number of providers that participate in that program.
9 Let me doublecheck. I don't want to misstate. We have
10 a number of providers that are participating in that
11 program specifically to service that group, but, of
12 course, because we have Universal Access, those
13 individuals are served and able to receive services
14 from any provider under the auspices of Universal
15 Access as well.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: You have no sense
17 of how many older adults that might be?

18 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: I'll
19 have to follow with you, Council Member, for more
20 precise numbers.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Does OCJ or HRA
22 have any training requirements for staff to ensure
23 that all personnel understand the unique
24 circumstances that may arise when working to assist
25 older adults?

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2 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
3 you, Council Member. OCJ and DSS, HRA training is
4 robust, and there is a unit that is dedicated to
5 that. I'd have to follow on the specifics of the
6 components of those trainings.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Okay. Does OCJ or
8 HRA have any regular communication with NYC Aging,
9 and, if so, can you please describe the communication
10 that you have?

11 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
12 you, Council Member. We do have fairly regular
13 communication with Department for the Aging as we
14 coordinate with them on a particular program that
15 connects tenants presenting in housing court who are
16 aging who may require additional services to be
17 connected both with services by the Department for
18 the Aging as well as for services from legal services
19 representation. That's actually something that we
20 coordinate with between the Office of Court
21 Administration, the Department for the Aging, their
22 TESS unit, and then also the Office of Civil Justice,
23 and so as those referrals are presenting, there is
24 coordination and communication there.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER HUDSON: Thank you. I just
3 want to reiterate some of the sentiments of my
4 Colleague. It's really disappointing, we know the
5 situation with Right to Counsel currently, we know
6 that there are thousands and thousands of folks who
7 can't get access to the attorney that they are
8 entitled to, and what we're all trying to do here is
9 to right that ship and make sure that everybody,
10 every New Yorkers who is eligible to receive counsel
11 can have access to that counsel, and so it's just
12 disappointing to know that the Administration is even
13 willing to acknowledge the fact that the demand is
14 not being met on record. Thank you.

15 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
16 you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We've also been joined
18 by Council Member Stevens. Council Member Restler.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so much
20 to Chairs Ayala and Sanchez. You both do a phenomenal
21 job. We're very fortunate to have you each in these
22 roles. It's good to see you each this morning.

23 I was looking at the data on the number
24 of homeless families that we have in our shelter
25 system today, and it's 13,761. We had seen a

1 phenomenal reduction during the eviction moratorium,
2 down nearly 50 percent as you all know this data
3 better than me, but we are back now at the levels of
4 the number of homeless families, the number of
5 homeless children in New York City that we did prior
6 to the eviction moratorium so all of the gains that
7 we have made have been lost in a relatively short
8 period of time. It's precisely because we are not
9 providing Universal Access to Counsel, and this was a
10 banner achievement of not just the Right to Counsel
11 Coalition but of HRA, and I'm afraid to say that this
12 initiative is in tatters in its current state. I am
13 extremely disappointed by the lack of representation
14 that tenants are facing in housing court. We are
15 failing to follow the law.

17 On the data, for February, do you have
18 the most recent data, what percentage of eligible
19 tenants had legal representation, a lawyer
20 representing the tenants in housing court, in
21 February?

22 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: I do
23 not have data for February 2023. The most recent data
24 we have was published in the FY22 Universal Access
25 Report. We do know that since the inception of the

1
2 program through the end of June 2022, we'd served
3 over 625,000 New Yorkers.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I just want to
5 stick to the data that I'm asking for though, so the
6 most recent data was December? Is that right? 30
7 percent of eligible tenants received a lawyer in
8 housing court?

9 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: The
10 most recent data that I shared was reflective of the
11 Fiscal Year 2022 data that we published in our
12 report.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: The data that
14 we've seen more recent than the previous Fiscal Year
15 is September, just 10 percent of tenants had
16 representation in court. In December, it was up to 30
17 percent, but still the vast majority of tenants who
18 are eligible, just to underscore eligibility, two
19 minimum wage earners in the same household make too
20 much money to qualify for the current law so our law
21 is inadequate in its current form, we need to
22 increase the eligibility and income levels, but even
23 still the vast majority of eligible tenants are not
24 receiving the legal representation that they need and
25 deserve to keep them in their homes. I want to

1
2 underscore Council Member Abreu's just extreme
3 frustration with your failure to provide a position
4 on the Resolution today. Do you think that OCA should
5 hear cases if tenants do not have the lawyers that
6 they are guaranteed in Local Law? Should those cases
7 move forward? They're happening right now, today, in
8 housing court. Should they move forward?

9 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
10 you for your question, Council Member. The
11 Administration is not prepared to answer that.
12 They're reviewing that at this time. Thank you.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Silence is
14 complicit. You are complicit in your silence so this
15 Mayor and this Administration is responsible for the
16 people who are being evicted from their homes today
17 who should have a lawyer in housing court. 84 percent
18 of tenants win, stay in their homes, if they have a
19 lawyer. We are failing them by failing to provide
20 legal representation. We are creating a homelessness
21 crisis so to have the Chief Homeless Prevention
22 Officer sitting up here, you as the Legal Services
23 Coordinator, to say nothing to defend tenants who are
24 on the brink of eviction, to me is this

Administration actively contributing to the
homelessness crisis.

I'd like to just briefly touch on the
staffing in your office. What percent of the lines in
your office are currently filled?

CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
you, Council Member. I'll have to follow with
specific numbers.

COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: My understanding
is that it's 50 percent. 50 percent of the positions
in your office are currently filled, and, with a 50
percent vacancy rate, 29 vacancies out of a 56-person
headcount, it's impossible to do your job so the
Administration in failing to take a position against
OCA's policies to evict people from housing court is
one thing, but by failure to fund your office we are
failing all of the legal services providers and the
tenants they represent because there's no way that
you can provide the support that is needed if you
don't have staff so to me, again, this Administration
is actively contributing to the homelessness crisis
in the City of New York by failing to provide you
with the resources that you need, and it is wrong,
and we as this Council are going to continue to push

1
2 and push and push to provide HRA with the resources
3 that they need so that not only do you have the staff
4 that you need but the legal services providers do.

5 I don't know where I am on time, there's
6 a clock somewhere, oh, three seconds. I'll ask one
7 more question if Diana and Pierina don't kick me.

8 Could you just advise, again, the status of the
9 Universal Access to Counsel contracts with the legal
10 services providers? Have they expired? Where are we
11 in the procurement process?

12 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
13 you, Council Member. Currently, there is an extension
14 of the contracts from the original solicitation, and
15 the Office of Civil Justice, DSS is preparing
16 solicitations for FY25 for the...

17 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Solicitations
18 will go out in FY25. Do you expect that those
19 solicitations will increase compensation for the
20 lawyers who work on these cases?

21 CIVIL JUSTICE COORDINATOR MEDLEY: Thank
22 you, Council Member. I can't speak to the budgeting
23 around any of those matters at this time.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: We are facing a
25 crisis in staffing at our legal services

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2 organizations. They are unable to retain and recruit
3 the lawyers that they need to be able to represent
4 tenants, and, if we do not provide them with
5 reasonable, fair compensation, it exacerbates
6 homelessness so we're going to push in this budget
7 for the resources that our legal services
8 organizations need, but we need HRA to be a partner
9 and in the upcoming solicitation to provide fair
10 compensation to our legal services organizations.

11 I appreciate you and the work that you
12 do. I know that you all are trying. We need the
13 Office of the Civil Justice Coordinator to take a
14 fiercer stand to defend our tenants because this is
15 not acceptable where we are today. Thank you.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I want to acknowledge
17 that we've also been joined and I forgot to call on
18 him, one of my favorites of all time, Council Member
19 Feliz. I'm so sorry. He is texting me, but if I
20 acknowledge him then he's going to leave so now he
21 has to stay.

22 Before I dismiss the panel, I really just
23 want to reiterate a lot of what has been said here
24 today. I think that we all understand that we are
25 living in unprecedented times and that every single

1
2 agency, every single non-profit is faced with work
3 shortage crisis. That's not anyone's fault. This is
4 something that is happening. We have to figure out
5 why it's happening but, while we do that, we cannot
6 on our watch allow families to go hungry, we cannot
7 on our watch allow more and more families to enter
8 the shelter system which is already significantly
9 inundated, and so we expect that the agency is going
10 to consider these shortages that are allowing more
11 and more cases to come before the courts and more and
12 more tenants to go unrepresented with a sense of
13 urgency, and I think that that is something, and I
14 know that you're here representing your respective
15 agencies, and I don't want to shoot the messengers as
16 they say, but I just really want to say that I don't
17 really ever hear the sense of urgency coming from the
18 city agencies when they come to present on issues as
19 important at this one. I've been on the receiving
20 end, I'm sure a lot of us have been on the receiving
21 end at some point where we are unable to make rent or
22 facing eviction because we have a landlord that is
23 unscrupulous and abusive, and it's a very scary
24 process and you couple that with all of the other
25 stressors that families are going through every day,

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2 it's an issue that requires that people be at the
3 office until we figure this out. I don't know how I
4 would go home not having figured that out, and I
5 think that we know, our providers are saying to us we
6 want these cases, we want to be able to fulfill our
7 mandate, we do not have the resources. Well, why
8 don't we have the resources? Again, is it a retention
9 issue? Are we losing attorneys to the private sector?
10 What exactly is happening in that universe that we
11 need to get to the bottom of because this is not one
12 of those times where we can kind of just sit here and
13 wait and hope that it gets better. This is a human
14 crisis, and we need to address it with every tool in
15 the toolbox as quickly as possible. We just went
16 through this with the SNAP benefits where we had an
17 unprecedented number of applications that had not
18 been filled and people that were still waiting to get
19 food stamps. These are safety net programs. They
20 should be available on demand. I get it. Again, I'm
21 not placing blame for the situation, but rather
22 acknowledging that we're not doing everything that we
23 can to remediate this as quickly as possible with the
24 urgency that it requires.

1
2 With that, if no one else has any
3 questions, Council Member Sanchez is going to close
4 us out, and then we're going to hear from our Borough
5 President, Mark Levine.

6 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. I just
7 want to join all of the sentiments that my Colleagues
8 here are expressing.

9 I do have a few more questions, but I'll
10 make it quick. Don't worry, Borough President Levine.

11 I look at our former Madam Deputy Borough
12 President Marricka Scott-McFadden, and I know that
13 you feel this, we're representing the Bronx, and the
14 Bronx is sort of the center of where this crisis
15 hurts the most in addition to neighborhoods within
16 the other boroughs but the Bronx as a whole is really
17 struggling with this reality and facing this crisis.
18 The fact that I probably see a small percentage of
19 the folks that walk into my office each, and that
20 small sample is showing a huge number of folks that
21 are not being represented. It's just very painful so
22 I want to join in the statements and the sentiment of
23 our Deputy Speaker, of Council Member Abreu and
24 others that I hope the Administration will take a
25 position that somebody who is eligible for Right to

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2 Counsel should absolutely not go before a judge
3 without that representation. Their instability can be
4 preventable at that final stage, and we have been a
5 leader in the nation as the City of New York to make
6 that happen, to make that representation happen so I
7 hope that we'll continue that. I just wanted to
8 quickly address the Mayor's State of the City
9 commitment this January 26th. There was a new
10 proposal included in there that related to tenant
11 protection that this Council wants to learn more
12 about if you have that information. In his speech,
13 the Mayor said that the proposal would help New
14 Yorkers stay in their homes by investing 22 million
15 dollars in tenant protection programs to provide more
16 staff dedicated to investigating and enforcing
17 against bad landlords, creating stronger partnerships
18 with community groups and legal services providers to
19 protect tenants from being pushed out of rent-
20 regulated apartments and cracking down on landlords
21 who discriminate against tenants based on their
22 source of income. Can you share a little bit about
23 this initiative, which agencies will be involved,
24 will HRA have a role in this as it relates to rental
25 assistance voucher discrimination? Is so, what will

1
2 that role be and what is the Administration's plan
3 for this proposal and timeline to implementation?

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: Thank
5 you for that question. Although those plans are
6 certainly being worked through, it is the role of
7 HRA, DHS, and DSS which is primarily an anti-
8 homelessness agency to play a strong role in all of
9 the points that the Mayor had pointed out in his
10 State of the City so we anticipate being involved as
11 well, although we don't have a concrete example right
12 now.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Okay, thank you. We
14 will continue to follow up on that.

15 I also wanted to ask for the
16 Administration's position on Resolution 344, which I
17 am sponsoring, which calls on the State to pass and
18 the Governor to sign Assembly 1493 and Senate Bill
19 2721 in relation to a New York State Office of Civil
20 Representation. Does the Administration have a
21 position on this legislation?

22 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SCOTT-MCFADDEN: I
23 think just to clarify, as I just said, the position
24 of the agency is an anti-homelessness and prevention
25 agency and therefore any attempt to move in that

1 direction we would be in support of that. Without
2 going through the absolute details of the
3 legislation, which we have not been able to do, we
4 certainly support anything that affirms tenants and
5 their rights.
6

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: I'm going to take
8 that as you're moving towards supporting both of
9 these Resolutions, which is, of course, where this
10 Council and our City needs to go from this Council's
11 perspective.

12 Finally, I want to acknowledge that
13 although HPD was not able to join us today at this
14 hearing, they have shared responses to questions that
15 this Council has posed on Partners in Preservation,
16 the Neighborhood Pillars Program, their tenant
17 harassment initiatives, and we will be making that
18 available to the public for followup. Again, we have
19 a stream here. I always have the analogy of the
20 stream and we have to not just address the tenant
21 instability issues at the very last phase, which is
22 in Right to Counsel in court, but everything upstream
23 and so we're going to continue to follow up on those
24 questions.
25

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2 With that, I want to thank the panel for
3 your participation. Looking over at my Colleagues to
4 see if anyone wants to ask any questions before we
5 let you go.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I just want to
7 say I cannot understand how City Hall sent you all up
8 here without answers to questions on the
9 Administration's policies and without data from this
10 Fiscal Year. I am very disappointed by the lack of
11 information today, and I feel like City Hall sent you
12 up as sacrificial lambs to get beat up by failing to
13 take hard positions on critical issues that are
14 causing and driving homelessness today, and I really
15 hope that we can work together on solutions. This was
16 very disappointing.

17 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much,
18 Council Member Restler. We'll be sending up a
19 followup letter. There were many different instances
20 in which you said you didn't have that yet, and we're
21 going to interpret that as the answers are
22 forthcoming so we will follow up and we will
23 definitely be publicizing if we don't receive that
24 information. Thank you, Council Member Restler.

1
2 With that, thank you to this panel. I
3 appreciate your time.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you, everyone.
5 We will now hear from our Manhattan Borough
6 President, Mark Levine.

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: It's good to be
8 back. I miss all of you.

9 Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker and Madam
10 Chair, for being fierce advocates for the Right to
11 Counsel and for holding this hearing. I am incredibly
12 proud of New York City for sparking a national
13 movement. There are now 15 jurisdictions around the
14 country which have enacted Right to Counsel, cities
15 and states around the country which have followed our
16 lead, so it pains me to say that here in the
17 birthplace of this movement, Right to Counsel is in
18 crisis, and I think it goes without saying but there
19 is no fairness, there is no justice in an eviction
20 proceeding when a tenant is not represented by an
21 attorney. We litigated that, we fought that out, and
22 we won six years ago. Those were the established
23 values of this city. That is the established law of
24 this city, and the law was not written to say that if
25 you're one of the lucky first 500 people you get an

1 attorney, the law was not written to say that if your
2 case happens to hit in the first few days of the
3 month and there's still providers available you have
4 an attorney, the law did not say that if you happen
5 to be in a borough which this month has more capacity
6 in its legal service system you get an attorney. The
7 law established this right, and the word that was
8 used from all of us up to and including the Mayor at
9 the time was right, the law established this right,
10 and that right is not being upheld in our housing
11 courts today, and it is having a devastating impact.
12 There are families in the shelter system today
13 because they were evicted without an attorney. That
14 is a fact, and there are thousands more who are
15 vulnerable because of that. There is only one short-
16 term solution to this crisis. There's only one. We
17 have to slow the calendaring of cases. No eviction
18 case in New York City should move forward if the
19 tenant does not have an attorney. That is the only
20 short-term solution to this crisis. It's the only way
21 we can assure that we're living up to this law and
22 that no more families wind up homeless because they
23 didn't have an attorney. We need the State to act on
24 that. I strongly applaud Council Member Shaun Abreu
25

1 for introducing a Resolution so that the City Council
2 can go on record in support of State action.

3
4 Technically, the Mayor does not have to sign to
5 approve or veto a resolution, but this is a very
6 challenging political fight in Albany, and we are
7 going to need a united front in New York City
8 leadership to win. We've been fighting already for a
9 year on this, and it's very, very important that the
10 Administration add its voice to this fight. It needs
11 to be the City Council and, of course, your allies,
12 myself and the amazing Borough President Gibson,
13 we're all in on this. We need the Administration on
14 the record expressing support for this principle, for
15 this legislation. We have to win, and the only way
16 we're going to do that is if we're united. It's very
17 disappointing to see that we do not yet have an
18 affirmative statement from the Administration on
19 this.

20 We have a longer term fight as well. You
21 all are working on the budget right now. I know
22 you're fighting on this. We're not putting enough
23 money into tenant legal services. There's not enough
24 money in the system to ensure that every tenant has
25 their right fulfilled, and more money is not a

1 solution today but in the months and years ahead we
2 have got to rebuild this system, we've got to rebuild
3 the capacity, we need lawyers to be paid better, we
4 need lower caseloads, and that is a budget fight
5 which I know you all are deeply engaged in.
6

7 Finally, there's another law that we
8 passed in the last Council. Deputy Speaker Ayala, you
9 were one of the prime sponsors. It established a
10 program that the City must carry out to fund outreach
11 and organizing to tenants so they know they have the
12 right to counsel. It's now known as Local Law 53. It
13 is not being implemented. It is not being funded. We
14 passed that law three or four years ago. It is
15 sitting dormant, and there are tenants in every one
16 of your Districts who do not know they have a right
17 to counsel and so when their landlord begins to
18 harass them or threaten them or abuse them, they may
19 be nervous about standing up and fighting because
20 they don't know they have an attorney ready to
21 represent them if their landlord retaliates with an
22 eviction, and so that's why we passed this law. It is
23 critically important. It is still unfunded. We need
24 groups on the ground, groups like CASA in the Bronx,
25 groups like Goddard Riverside in Manhattan, groups

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2 like Flatbush Tenants Unit in Brooklyn out there
3 going to door to door, going to tenants' meetings. We
4 passed that law. We won that fight. It's still
5 unfunded.

6 We have a multifront effort to restore a
7 measure of fairness and justice in eviction
8 proceedings in New York City. I am so grateful that
9 these Committees, that all of you in this room, I
10 know every one of these Council Members here is
11 dedicated to this, and I'm with you in this fight
12 until we fix this precious, precious program for New
13 York City. Thank you.

14 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.
15 Council Member Osse.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Thank you so much,
17 Borough President Levine. I just want to ask you a
18 question because I'm a bit frustrated that HPD did
19 not come today to speak about this hearing that this
20 issue is addressing. As we all know, there is a
21 housing crisis here in our City as I'm sure you're
22 aware of, not only in your role as Borough President
23 but as a Council Member in a District that you
24 represented. Any advice for us in terms of how we
25 should respond or react to the fact that a city

1
2 agency like HPD, which is supposed to address this
3 crisis and this issue at hand, how should we address
4 the fact that they're not here to testify at a
5 hearing like this?

6 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Thank you,
7 Council Member Osse. I know how dedicated you are to
8 Right to Counsel and grateful for your leadership.

9 You can draw a straight line between the
10 failure of this program in housing court and an
11 increase in homelessness. This is already a proven
12 fact because we had several years with this program
13 in place, and we saw that 84 percent of tenants with
14 attorneys remained in their homes so what do you
15 think happens when they don't have their attorneys.
16 This is absolutely a housing policy failure. The most
17 effective, the quickest, the easiest, the cheapest
18 affordable housing program is to keep a vulnerable
19 family in the home they already have. I, too, am
20 disappointed that HPD wasn't here to testify. I'm
21 disappointed the lack of answers to some of the
22 questions for HRA, and, as I mentioned, deeply
23 disappointed that we don't have a commitment from the
24 Administration to fight to slow the calendaring of
25 cases. Thank you, Council Member.

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COUNCIL MEMBER OSSE: Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: One of the questions that was posed is what is the biggest factor in preventing our non-profit organizations from being able to hire up, and the Administration feels that these contracts are adequately funded to pay a competitive wage. Do you agree with that?

BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Do I agree that it's about the contracts?

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I'm curious to know about the wage issue. We're losing more and more attorneys to the private sector.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Absolutely.

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: And they feel that the existing contracts are paying a living wage and that we're okay on that end.

BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Yes, we need a better contract for the providers. We need to pay the attorneys well. We're competing against private sector jobs that pay much more, and these are tough jobs. They are great jobs, they're impactful. I talk to young lawyers all the time. You want to do this work, you're going to change lives, but it doesn't pay well, and the caseloads are too high. We have to

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2 fix that. I want to emphasize that those fixes would
3 take time. Even if today we had more money for
4 attorneys, by the time you recruit people coming out
5 of law school and you hire them and you train them
6 and you build up a supervisory structure, more people
7 will have been evicted because they didn't have
8 attorneys so while we're fighting that mid-term and
9 long-term fight we just have to slow things down. We
10 have to slow the calendaring of cases. We could do
11 that tom. The courts have that power. They've done it
12 in the past. That's why the Resolution that Council
13 Member Abreu authored is the critical short-term fix,
14 but you keyed on the work we have to do in the budget
15 and beyond to get a better contract so that we can
16 recruit and retain enough lawyers.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I appreciate that.
18 Council Member Aviles.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILES: Thank you so much,
20 Borough President Levine, and thank you for all the
21 work. We are here because we are building off of this
22 incredible work you've done. Can you talk to us a
23 little bit about what you think would be the
24 appropriate level funding to fully implement Local
25 Law 53 and see it to fruition?

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2 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: It is so modest
3 relative to the budget of the City. I believe
4 advocates have identified approximately 5 million as
5 the target. Future speakers can weigh in on that.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILES: Tell us more about
7 Local Law 53 and what it would do, how it would make
8 a difference here.

9 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: As we were
10 rolling out this new right which we passed in 2017,
11 people on the frontlines working with tenants again
12 and again reported back that tenants are not learning
13 they have a right to a lawyer until literally they
14 are showing up in court for their eviction hearing,
15 and that puts a lot of power in the hands of the
16 landlords who are able to intimidate tenants because
17 the practice for generations has been that they will
18 haul you into housing court for an eviction case even
19 on flimsy grounds and historically you had no
20 attorney so they could push you out, and tenants
21 understandably are fearful of that and so they may
22 think twice about complaining about not having heat
23 because they don't want to be faced with a
24 retaliatory eviction proceeding, but if you explain
25 to them you have backup now, you have an attorney now

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2 paid by the City, stand and fight for your rights, it
3 changes the power dynamic. That was starting to
4 happen pre-pandemic. We just need outreach
5 proactively, organizing proactively so tenants
6 understand this right so that they can demand this
7 right, so that they're a political force to ensure
8 it's adequately funded, and we have a very high-
9 capacity non-profit community ready to do the work.
10 They're not funded for it. We passed a law to do
11 that. It's Local Law 53. It's the law of the City. As
12 far as I know, not one penny has gone into it, and we
13 could do it in this budget and it's a modest amount
14 and I appreciate your leadership on that.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER AVILES: Thank you and
16 absolutely agree. We can do it, and we have the
17 resources for this. It is a matter of political will
18 and what we see as important. We continue to fund
19 programs with no data, no evidence, no real
20 information that they're effective, and we know
21 something as effective and important as this that
22 centers this crisis that we know that we have as a
23 city that is the number one issue across New York
24 City, we should do better, and we should be able to
25

1
2 invest in this fully to protect our residents. Thank
3 you so much.

4 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Absolutely.
5 Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: When did Local Law 53
7 pass?

8 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: I think it was
9 2019, but...

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: 2018?

11 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Was it 2018?
12 Even worse. Going on five years.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Council Member
14 Sanchez.

15 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Borough
16 President Levine. Actually I do have one question,
17 but thank you, Borough President Levine, for your
18 leadership the first go around for getting this
19 through the last Council.

20 I wonder at that time and then continuing
21 to now, is it your position that the State has a role
22 here to play in funding Right to Counsel, helping New
23 York City fund it, and then the expansion of Right to
24 Counsel statewide.

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2 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: First of all,
3 the courts are run by the state Office of Court
4 Administration as well you know, OCA, the Chief
5 Justice has the ability to determine the rules in the
6 courthouses of this State and the City. They did it
7 during COVID. In fact, they actually ultimately shut
8 down eviction proceedings which was necessary at the
9 time. They have the ability to do this. They have
10 refused to do it so far. That's why the Chair of the
11 State Affairs Committee has had to put a resolution
12 in.

13 We also want to take this statewide, and,
14 ultimately, absolutely the State should put money on
15 the table to implement this. Absolutely. The State
16 bears some of the costs for homeless services as well
17 it should so one of the things we've calculated is
18 that you're actually saving money for the City and
19 State through Right to Counsel. You're spending a
20 couple of thousands of dollars on an attorney
21 upfront, or you're going to spend, what is it now,
22 50,000 a year for a family in a homeless shelter and
23 the average stay is longer than a year so for the
24 City Government and the State Government, investing

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2 in Right to Counsel is financially prudent, and the
3 State should help.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You'll be happy to
6 know that Council Member Sanchez and I are also
7 sponsoring a bill to change the eligibility criteria
8 for CityFHEPS programs to make more families eligible
9 for it which, as you indicated, the easiest way to
10 prevent homelessness is by keeping people in their
11 place of residence.

12 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: That's a
13 wonderful bill. You have my full support on that.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I know. We're excited.

15 BOROUGH PRESIDENT LEVINE: Thank you,
16 everybody.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I just want to make an
18 announcement. We're going to start public testimony.
19 We have two minutes per person, and we're going to
20 try to stick to that because there are a lot of your
21 colleagues that are sitting in the other room and, at
22 1 o'clock, there's another hearing that's scheduled
23 to begin so at 12:30, if we haven't move some of
24 those folks into this room, then they're going to
25 have to either go virtual or they're going to have to

1
2 go across the street, and we want to prevent that
3 from happening. I think if we kind of stick to the
4 two minutes that we should be able to get through as
5 many of today's testimonies as possible.

6 If your testimony is longer, you can
7 always submit that to us, and we will make sure that
8 it is included as part of the record.

9 All right.

10 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our first panel
11 will consist of Nakeeb Siddique, Leslie Thrope,
12 Rosalind Black, Jonathan Fox, and Lauren Price.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin. Make
14 sure that your mic is on.

15 LESLIE THROPE: Thank you. Good morning.
16 We are legal services providers from the following
17 organizations: Brooklyn Legal Services Corporation A,
18 New York Legal Assistance Group, Legal Services NYC,
19 The Legal Aid Society, and Mobilization for Justice.

20 We offer this testimony this morning to
21 provide feedback and recommendations about the Right
22 to Counsel program. Each speaker on this panel will
23 talk about a different aspect of the Right to Counsel
24 program, specifically its effectiveness, challenges,
25 the need for sufficient funding, additional resources

1
2 to expand our capacity, and a need for partnership
3 with the Office of Civil Justice to address attorney
4 attrition.

5 In regard to the strength of the program
6 as discussed earlier this morning, it is crucial that
7 low-income tenants have attorneys. Before Right to
8 Counsel, about 1 percent of tenants had attorneys
9 versus 95 percent of landlords were represented by
10 counsel during eviction proceedings. After Right to
11 Counsel, by 2019 representation of tenants great to
12 64 percent in our targeted ZIP codes. As noted
13 several times this morning as well, 84 percent of
14 tenants who have an attorney avoid eviction so it's
15 clear that the Right to Counsel is effective against
16 evictions.

17 It's cost-effective as well. In Fiscal
18 Year 2022, for example, the average daily number of
19 households and individuals in the shelter system was
20 about 2,700. This costs the City and State about 1.7
21 billion dollars. Funding for the Right to Counsel is
22 significantly less than funding spent on shelters,
23 approximately 2 billion spent on shelters. While the
24 Right to Counsel is effective, there are significant
25 challenges, and it's these challenges that leave

1 large percentages of our city's population without
2 counsel. We thank the Council for holding this
3 hearing and considering how the Right to Counsel can
4 reach its full potential. Thank you.

5
6 NAKEEB SIDDIQUE: Good morning. My name is
7 Nakeeb Siddique. I'm with The Legal Aid Society. My
8 pronouns are he/him/they. I want to thank you all,
9 and I want to speak just very briefly here to how we
10 got to where we are with the Right to Counsel program
11 and this stage of the crisis. Crisis and housing
12 instability predated the pandemic, but I'm really
13 talking about three years ago this spring. The whole
14 city, the whole world kind of fell off a cliff. We
15 lost 20,000 New Yorkers in about two months' time and
16 about a million jobs, and that really laid the seeds
17 of the current crisis that we have in the Right to
18 Counsel program. You heard the providers were called
19 to step up and provide services during that terrible
20 time at the height of the pandemic. We did so. Were
21 we ready? That's a question. I don't think we were
22 ready, but we went from a handful of ZIP codes to
23 every ZIP code in the city. The five-year rollout
24 program was accelerated. It had to be, but were we
25 ready? Did we have what we needed to do that work? If

1 I can just speak a little bit about work, right?
2 We're lawyers, for sure, we're lawyers up here. We do
3 lawyer work. That's the easy part of the job. We have
4 the person, the client up in the Bronx, in Co-op City
5 during April 2021, we got her succession rights. We
6 did that by going to an administrative agency, by
7 going to court, that's plain vanilla. I'm thinking
8 about now the client in Queens whose case was easy.
9 She owed rent in this pandemic, but our colleague,
10 one of our paralegal colleagues, a proud 1199SEIU
11 member, Jorge, he went and figured out everything
12 that the client needed, starting by asking her what's
13 your goal. She wanted to stay there, age in place
14 with dignity so he went and applied for ERAP, the
15 Emergency Rental Assistance Program, for her. He got
16 her Section 8. He was her lay social worker. That's
17 the hard part of the job. The pandemic, that was the
18 earthquake, and the metaphor I think was apartment
19 that there would be a tsunami that followed the
20 earthquake. We've seen that. That's the increase in
21 housing petitions and eviction filings, and that's
22 what we're really dealing with now. You're going to
23 hear from my colleague, talk about how for that work
24 that we do, it's 70 cents on the dollar. It's going
25

1
2 to sound familiar to a lot of our clients, to a lot
3 of our siblings who are mothers and sisters over
4 here, that's what we get paid, so I urge you all,
5 we've gotten through five years of the Right to
6 Counsel, to cast ourselves five years' henceforth,
7 2027, 10 years and work our way back. Are we going to
8 be proud of what we did to make this program a
9 permanent feature of the City? Thank you.

10 ROSALIND BLACK: Good morning. I'm
11 Rosalind Black, the Citywide Director of Housing at
12 Legal Services NYC. I'm going to talk about the
13 funding challenges in the Right to Counsel program
14 and how it impacts providers and tenants that we're
15 privileged to serve with the hope that significant
16 improvements can be made in funding by the City in
17 the upcoming Request for Proposal that's going to be
18 funding us for the next three years. Our current
19 funding is substantially and harmfully less than the
20 cost of running a Right to Counsel program. For many
21 providers, the funding covers only 60 to 70 percent
22 of the cost of the work required by our contracts,
23 and, while this funding has always been challenging,
24 it's gotten worse during the pandemic as cases are
25 taking longer to resolve. There's been a 24 percent

1
2 increase in the number of hours it takes an attorney
3 to complete a case since 2018 while there is
4 increased administrative and training burdens that
5 mean there's fewer hours than ever available for
6 attorneys to get their work done. At the same time,
7 providers like all New Yorkers have seen growing
8 expenses and rent and healthcare and other costs.
9 What this means is we're forced to delay hiring staff
10 when they leave, we're forced to forgo necessary
11 support services like social workers, like
12 paralegals, and not make other necessary investments
13 in infrastructure in our programs. We also attempt to
14 mitigate the funding shortfalls by subsidizing the
15 programs with other funding so this means other needs
16 of low-income New Yorkers are being sacrificed and
17 not met to fill this funding gap. It's not fair, and
18 it's not sustainable. The City has to ensure there's
19 enough funding also to cover the tenants with the new
20 cases filed and also that backlog that's sitting
21 there that they have no idea about. There has to be
22 funding for enough cases. The number of cases funded
23 right now with this program is significantly short of
24 the need and woefully inadequate. Continuing to
25 underfund this program, they're undermining Right to

1
2 Counsel and they're leaving people facing eviction
3 without attorneys. There are other funding needs that
4 need to be met. We have to hire and retain enough
5 staff so people aren't burnt out and they have
6 reasonable caseloads that can provide high-quality
7 representation. We have to have enough funding to
8 deal with attrition and leaves as staff are leaving
9 and funding social workers and funding community
10 lawyering and being able to have full programs that
11 provide the best possible services to our clients.

12 Thank you.

13 JONATHAN FOX: Good morning, everyone, and
14 thank you very much for the opportunity to testify
15 this morning. My name is Jonathon Fox. I'm the
16 Director of the Tenants Rights Unit at the New York
17 Legal Assistance Group. As others have said, we
18 urgently call on OCJ and the City to partner with
19 providers to ask the Office of Court Administration
20 to slow down calendaring of cases to match provider
21 capacity and to adjourn cases to allow tenants to
22 connect with counsel.

23 The other two points that I want to cover
24 briefly are that legal services providers need
25 dedicated additional resources to enhance the Right

1
2 to Counsel attorney pipeline and for new attorney
3 training, and this will expand provider capacity.
4 Council Member Sanchez, to get to the point that you
5 made before, these did used to be desirable jobs, and
6 they still are, but legal services providers in
7 partnership with the Office of Civil Justice need
8 dedicated funding to work on a pipeline that starts
9 with law schools locally and expands to law schools
10 nationally. New York is blessed with the Pro Bono
11 Scholars program which is a great way to get people
12 into this practice and to be ready to go and admitted
13 in June after they graduate law school so there are a
14 lot of structural things that with dedicated funding
15 could lead to an attorney pipeline so that any time
16 there is a position available, there will be multiple
17 people ready, primed to jump right in to start
18 defending tenants in eviction proceedings.

19 With that need for an attorney pipeline,
20 we also need dedicated resources for a comprehensive
21 training institute. The providers collectively spend
22 so much time individually training new staff, and it
23 consume tremendous resources. Among us, we have...

24 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Go ahead.

1
2 JONATHAN FOX: We have such a deep bench
3 of attorneys with expertise in every area of eviction
4 defense, and if we can get that knowledge into our
5 new attorneys comprehensively and collectively people
6 will be able to jump into the practice of eviction
7 defense with great success, and this will also
8 minimize attrition because people will feel more
9 fulfilled and more capable to address these urgent
10 eviction defense matters.

11 KRISTIE ORTIZ-LAM: Hi. My name is
12 Christie Ortiz-Lamb. I am the Director of the
13 Preserving Affordable Housing Program at BKA,
14 Brooklyn Legal Services Corp A, and I'm going to be
15 talking about attrition.

16 For any program providing legal services
17 and eviction proceedings to be successful and
18 sustainable including both New York City's existing
19 program Right to Counsel and the efforts being
20 considered to expand to the State level, there must
21 be an understanding of current growing issues of
22 attorney attrition. Legal services providers are
23 currently scrambling to fill vacancies and to attract
24 dedicated and qualified attorneys to the practice.
25 Attracting qualified candidates requires a housing

1
2 practice that pays a living wage, provides training,
3 mentorship, and support for staff to avoid burnout
4 and allow for a meaningful work/life balance for
5 practitioners. The mass exodus of public defenders
6 due to low pay and burnout over the last year was
7 chronicled by the New York Times article published in
8 June 2022. According to the article, public
9 defenders, including housing attorneys, are often
10 overworked and undercompensated with their salaries
11 well below the salaries of city lawyers and
12 prosecutors. Acknowledging and responding to the
13 unprecedented attrition that all Right to Counsel
14 providers have experienced is necessary to ensure the
15 sustainability and success of the City's program and
16 to guarantee the sustainability of any program
17 implemented at the State level. Providers are
18 experiencing unordinary high attrition and are
19 competing against one another to hire from their very
20 small pool of applicants. This increase in attrition
21 is in line with that felt across the legal services
22 field throughout the pandemic period, but it is
23 further exacerbated by the lack of funding and
24 structural support afforded to advocates tasked with
25 implementing the City's new and groundbreaking

1 program and will even more significant in the event
2 of an expanded statewide program. Staffing structures
3 must enable providers to hire sufficient staff to
4 provide adequate time for training, supervision, and
5 client engagement outside of court so that staff who
6 join this program are able to sustain their practice.
7 High attrition rates impact remaining staff
8 sustainability as well. For example, when a staff
9 attorney, what happens to that caseload? It has to be
10 transferred to the current attorneys that are there.
11 That is a huge impact to the current staff. It lowers
12 morale and then just increases incrementally the
13 amount of work that that attorney has to do, all the
14 while taking cases on a weekly basis during intake at
15 the courthouse. Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. I think
18 that the clarity around the expansion and how that
19 influenced where we are too, I hadn't made that
20 connection. I really appreciate that and obviously
21 appreciate all of the work that you all have done.

22 Have you collectively at any point come
23 up with a number that would make you whole?

24 ROSALIND BLACK: In regards to a budget?

25 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The funding, yeah.

1
2 ROSALIND BLACK: I think it's a
3 complicated question. If we're going to be funding
4 just the number of cases in our contracts now. We
5 talked about it only being 60 to 70 percent of the
6 funding, but we know that leaves many, many New
7 Yorkers still without the Right to Counsel so are we
8 going to fund every case that's sitting in the court
9 without a lawyer and all the new filings, then that's
10 going to change that number, if that makes sense.

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: That makes sense, but
12 it would be nice to kind of round it out to a number
13 that we can prioritize as part of our budget
14 negotiations as well because we understand. We have a
15 huge homelessness crisis in the city, and we don't
16 want to continue to add to that unnecessarily and so
17 as many evictions as we can prevent under our watch
18 we will fight for.

19 I felt like I had another question, and
20 it just slipped...

21 KRISTIE ORTIZ-LAM: Can I go?

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yes.

23 KRISTIE ORTIZ-LAM: I think in response to
24 the case cap that we were talking about earlier and
25 then a set amount per case. I think we've been

1
2 arguing with OCJ for years about increasing the
3 number of what dollar amount is attributed to each
4 case so I think if we had that further discussion,
5 perhaps with you guys included, then maybe we perhaps
6 could have a number set in stone.

7 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Okay. Do you by any
8 chance use attorneys, I don't know what the pipeline
9 is, I have absolutely no idea, but that there are
10 attorneys that have to do volunteer hours, is that a
11 pipeline? I know like Volunteers of Legal Services,
12 which I love, but is that an option?

13 JONATHAN FOX: There's a requirement that
14 every person who's going to be admitted do 50 hours
15 of pro bono work, and we have had those people do
16 engagements with us at various points. I don't really
17 think that's a sustainable model to get people, 50
18 hours for someone who has no idea what our practice
19 involves and who may not be very committed to the
20 work to begin with, which is sometimes the case, is
21 not really going to solve the crisis. On the other
22 hand, the Pro Bono Scholars Program, which gets
23 people who are in their last semester of law school
24 to do a 12-week credit-bearing externship to wrap up
25 their law school credits, that can be a very viable

1
2 mechanism and can be used to fill spots that are
3 vacant post their Pro Bono Scholar period.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I think we have to
5 explore everything at this point because we have
6 asked the courts to slow down the number of cases,
7 and they don't seem to be too responsive at this
8 point, and that concerns me because the more we sit
9 here and litigate it the more cases that are being
10 brought to the court.

11 Thank you so much. Council Member
12 Williams.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Hi. I want to
14 thank Brooklyn Corporation A. I know you guys have
15 done a lot of work in my District around
16 foreclosures, and I know that Right to Counsel only
17 applies to tenants so what resources do you get to
18 help homeowners who are facing foreclosure? Where do
19 those resources come from because you're not able to
20 use this funding for those or are you?

21 ROSALIND BLACK: No, we're not. I can talk
22 a little bit. We do have a Foreclosure Prevention
23 Program. It used to be funded statewide, and they're
24 engaged in a battle right now in Albany to get that
25 money back into the budget.

1
2 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So you only
3 receive State funding for...

4 ROSALIND BLACK: I hope so. We have in the
5 past, but it wasn't in the budget, and there's a
6 budget fight in Albany.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: So you never
8 received City funding for that?

9 ROSALIND BLACK: No City funding for
10 foreclosure.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WILLIAMS: Okay. Thank you.

12 NAKEEB SIDDIQUE: Can I just say something
13 about, I heard this morning that there was this
14 thought that maybe we'll bring in some folks who are
15 just private practitioners as part of the Right to
16 Counsel, and I just want to sort of say off this
17 question about foreclosure and what we all do, it
18 might be worth saying can somebody like that, a
19 private practitioner, kind of do what we do here to
20 say nothing of bringing in folks who are not
21 organized workers, but the point is we do have these
22 kinds of holistic services where even if we can't
23 necessarily represent somebody in an employment
24 matter or immigration, we have the resources as non-

1 profits that do poverty, racial, social justice kind
2 of work so I just wanted to add that.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. I just
5 actually have a quick followup on that. We talked
6 about the unfunded mandate to cover seniors who maybe
7 don't fall under the federal poverty level and under
8 the restrictions that the previous Right to Counsel
9 requirements would fall, do you think that there's a
10 space for for-profit providers to serve that
11 population?

12 ROSALIND BLACK: You all probably well
13 know that the statute itself for Right to Counsel
14 says it's going to be administered by not-for-profit
15 providers, and there's a reason for that, the
16 incentives that come about when you do this work
17 could be quite concerning if you're doing it with
18 private providers. I don't think seniors deserve any
19 less than anybody else.

20 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

21 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you. We'll now
22 call our next panel.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our next panel
24 will consist of Theresa Himelspach, Esteban Giron,
25 Charles Messick, and Nicolas Vargas.

1
2 THERESA HIMELSPACH: Hello, everyone. I'll
3 be short. Thank you for being here today. My name is
4 Theresa Himelspach, and I've been lucky enough to
5 live in New York City for my undergraduate studies. I
6 live in North Manhattan and would like to share my
7 experiences with unlawful landlords.

8 I live with two roommates in a pre-war
9 building under rent stabilization that is falling
10 into disrepair due to landlord neglect. My neighbors
11 are my community, and we have not received justice.
12 Instead, we received falling-in ceilings, rampant
13 mold growth, and other unsafe and unsanitary
14 conditions. We now require Right to Counsel to defend
15 ourselves against unlawful rent increases of over
16 1,000 dollars a month that threaten to dislodge
17 tenants within their rights. Without justice, myself
18 and my community will have no peace. We are thankful
19 to Riverside Goddard for organizing my community and
20 providing Right to Counsel, but we require the City
21 to be held accountable for allowing tenants being
22 abused. We must continue fighting for our Right to
23 Counsel to uphold our rights and the well-being of
24 our community. Fund Right to Counsel and fight to
25 uphold tenants' rights.

1
2 ESTEBAN GIRON: Good afternoon. I'm
3 Esteban. I'm with the Crown Heights Tenants Union and
4 also with the Tenants Political Action Committee.
5 I've turned in my testimony so you can take a look at
6 it when you have a chance. I live in Crown Heights
7 North, in the 35th Council District. We've seen more
8 evictions than any other neighborhood in the City
9 since the end of the eviction moratorium. The vast
10 majority of tenants in my neighborhood qualify for
11 Right to Counsel, but they have nonetheless been
12 evicted without representation. We would be in a very
13 different situation right now if we had emerged from
14 the pandemic with a fully funded Right to Counsel
15 program and if judges and administrators with the
16 Office of Court Administration really cared about the
17 rule of law. You will have the opportunity to vote in
18 favor of some resolutions calling on State lawmakers
19 to uphold the law that we worked so hard to pass.
20 This is a great way to show support and solidarity
21 for us. It is frustrating that so much of the
22 administration of the Right to Counsel program
23 depends on things that happen in Albany. However, the
24 New York City Council does have oversight and direct
25 authority over the budget, and fully funding this

1
2 program right away is the bare minimum. If you aren't
3 demanding the full funding of the Right to Counsel
4 program, I don't believe that you care about tenants
5 or homeless folks or that you're a champion for
6 working-class black and brown tenants in your
7 District. Without a roof over one's head, there is no
8 healthcare, there is no education, there is no food
9 security, there is no public safety, and there is no
10 future. What could be more important than keeping
11 people from becoming homeless? For groups like mine
12 and Brooklyn Eviction Defense and others fighting
13 evictions, we're going to keep doing this, keep going
14 to the streets, physically stopping people's
15 evictions, overturning them even. We will continue to
16 do this work for ourselves and for our neighbors, and
17 we are watching to see how serious you all are about
18 providing real tangible support for your vulnerable
19 constituents. We need to see 70 million more in
20 funding. Show us that you we matter to you. Thank
21 you.

22 UNIDENTIFIED: Hello. How are you all
23 doing today? I went to HRA to get help regarding my
24 rent, and HRA gave me a letter to go to Homebase. I
25 went to Homebase, and then Homebase says that they

1 cannot help me, and I'm just trying to figure out
2 okay, why is that, because HRA sent me a letter to go
3 to Homebase. They told me to leave Homebase. I go
4 back to HRA and tell them what was told me. HRA then
5 gives me another letter and says go back to Homebase.
6 During that timeframe, each time you have to go back
7 to Homebase it's a 30-day waiting period just to even
8 go and sit in front of someone at Homebase to even
9 have a conversation. I got sent back to Homebase
10 again for them to say okay, give us another 30 days
11 before we can see you. During this all this process
12 and timing, I have gotten threatening from the
13 landlord regarding, what is it, rent demand letters
14 and things of that nature that you're going to go to
15 court so how does this work? Because if you're doing
16 the right things and if you have entities in place to
17 help and they're telling you to go and do certain
18 things but then you're getting sent, it's like a
19 merry-go-round of just bad information so what
20 happens for a tenant like myself who is trying to
21 make it happen? I don't know. At this point, it's
22 just like come here and just speak to you all because
23 I don't know what else to do at this point because
24 I've been sent from one place back to another then to
25

1
2 go back to that same place for them to kick me back
3 out so I don't know what else to do. I don't know if
4 you all can help me with that.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We actually can. Leave
6 your information with the guard. We will follow up
7 with you and the different agencies. I completely
8 understand, I don't know if you were here when I was
9 mentioning many years ago I was part of the Jiggetts
10 program and it was because I was on the verge of
11 eviction, and the same exact thing. I went to HRA and
12 I said here you go, I owe back rent, how can you help
13 me, and they had absolutely no help to give and no
14 words of wisdom or advice. It was because I happened
15 to walk into Bronx Housing Court and, at the time,
16 Borough President Fernando Ferrer's office used to be
17 on the first floor and on the way up from filing the
18 eviction case, responding to it, I said let me go in
19 this office, and I went into the office and they
20 connected me to the Jiggetts program that inevitably
21 kept me housed, but the level of bureaucracy and the
22 lack of coordination between the different programs
23 is really unforgivable, and I don't understand how in
24 2023 we're still...

1
2 UNIDENTIFIED: Every time I go there,
3 they'll give me a card, they'll say call. You try to
4 call. No one is answering the phone. No one even
5 responds to an email. It's like these gatekeepers
6 when you even go into the establishment, they're like
7 you have to have this, this, and this, and you bring
8 that to them, and they say no, you have to have now
9 this, this, and this so how are people supposed to
10 even navigate a system that seems to be, you open one
11 door to then go to another door, and in my case it's
12 like I have started this process in December to then
13 wait to January, wait to February, wait to March, now
14 to go into April to where we're going to have to go
15 into court because I have been waiting this long, and
16 HRA keeps saying to me you qualify for X, Y, and Z,
17 CityFHEPS, so if I qualify for that, why do they keep
18 kicking me out to then for you to tell me to go back
19 over there. It doesn't make sense to me.

20 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Yeah...

21 UNIDENTIFIED: So now at this point, it
22 was like okay, come here and speak to you all.

23 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We appreciate you
24 coming here because not only are you speaking for
25 yourself, but you're also speaking for millions of

1
2 New Yorkers that are probably going through the same
3 who wouldn't necessarily know to come here so I thank
4 you for giving those individuals that are not
5 represented here physically a voice, and no one
6 should have to go through the extreme, but if there
7 are any listeners in the crowd or online that are
8 going through something similar, please visit your
9 City Council Member's office. We do have the ability
10 to act as an intermediary between you and the Office
11 and try to facilitate it so that the process is not
12 as crazy as you're describing, and I believe it
13 because I've been there so I really appreciate that.

14 I have a question for Esteban. The 70
15 million, where did you get that number because I've
16 asked the question several times today and nobody
17 seems to have a number. How did you arrive at that
18 number?

19 ESTEBAN GIRON: It's my understanding that
20 the Right to Counsel Coalition has come up with this
21 number as what we would need to basically get to
22 basic funding. We would really need more than that,
23 but that's just baseline. I think they said there
24 were like maybe 60 or 70 percent funded based on, I
25 guess this is probably coming from the legal services

1
2 providers and just the overall picture of what's
3 happening.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Absolutely.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Did you say 7
6 million or 70?

7 ESTEBAN GIRON: 70.

8 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: All right. Thank you.
9 We will now call our next panel.

10 UNIDENTIFIED: So should I wait for you?

11 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: No, you're going to
12 give them your information, and then we're going to
13 follow up with you, the gentleman next to you.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our next panel
15 will consist of Jeffrey Austin, Omarax Rosa, Runa
16 Rajagopal, Chris Helwig, and Leslie Thorpe.

17 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It doesn't matter.
18 Whoever wants to go first. Just make sure that it's
19 on.

20 RUNA RAJAGOPAL: Good afternoon. My name
21 is Runa Rajagopal. I'm the Managing Director of the
22 Civil Action Practice at the Bronx Defenders. Folks
23 know the Bronx Defenders, we provide holistic
24 defense, collaborative defense in civil and criminal
25 (INAUDIBLE) and we help tenants in three distinct

1
2 ways. We address the housing issues that come up in
3 criminal court, family court, for non-detained or
4 detained non-citizens court. We provide the Right to
5 Counsel in the Bronx, and we provide community
6 services although we're not able to provide those
7 services in the way we used to, and we have a crisis
8 of epic proportions. As you all know, the Bronx is
9 the heart of that crisis. Since you didn't get data
10 before, I wanted to provide you some stats that we
11 have where in the last year there have been at least
12 100,000 new eviction filings in New York City in
13 2022, 40,000 of those were in the Bronx compared to
14 the year before which was 14,000 so almost a three
15 times increase. The Bronx has the highest rate of
16 eviction filings, almost 8.5 percent of households
17 have an eviction filing, and that's compared to the
18 next borough of Kings County which is 3.35 percent,
19 2.7 in New York county, and 2.5 in Queens. Just to
20 let you know about our intake in the Bronx, there is
21 the highest number of cases on the calendar. We have
22 100 to 110 cases on the calendar every day for
23 intake. Let's say 80 tenants appear and say we want a
24 lawyer, we screen them. Let's say 70 people are
25 eligible. The majority of people, black and brown,

1
2 are eligible for the Right to Counsel. We are only
3 able to represent about 30 to 35 percent of people
4 who come through our intake so we are turning away
5 every month hundreds of tenants, and the people who
6 contact us in our community intake, we are not able
7 to help them anymore. We have a hotline, and we're
8 turning people away. I know I'm out of time but
9 wanted to renew funding levels. You talked about
10 parity and addressed something that OCJ had said
11 which is that we have not reached parity. In 2018, we
12 had reached parity with the Law Department and then
13 they quickly received a 3 percent increase so we
14 were left behind again so in addition to right-sizing
15 our contracts, funding in holistic ways, we need to
16 stop what's happening right now not just by slowing
17 down cases. We need to divert everyone who doesn't
18 need to be in housing court and the capacity issue
19 isn't just us providers, everyone keeps talking about
20 us, the court system doesn't have capacity. They
21 don't have interpreters, court attorneys, clerks, and
22 DSS and HRA don't have enough staffing. We heard they
23 are 50 percent staffing, 20 percent under (INAUDIBLE)
24 The capacity issue is for everyone so we just need to
25

1
2 divert people, slow things down, and make sure this
3 right is real. Thank you for letting me go over.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: The way that we clap
5 is like this. Thank you.

6 CHRISTOPHER HELWIG: Hello. I wanted to
7 thank the Committee for having us to testify. My name
8 is Christopher Helwig. I'm a Supervising Attorney at
9 Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem and our
10 Housing Defense Team. We're a holistic public defense
11 organization. We're operated out of Harlem, and we
12 serve people on a wide variety of civil, criminal,
13 and family legal issues.

14 What I really wanted to take my limited
15 time today to talk to you about is the fact that the
16 Right to Counsel program really does work when it
17 works, but a really effective Right to Counsel
18 program has to incorporate the fact that the
19 majority, in many cases of the work, happens outside
20 the courtroom. It's not enough to have a lawyer stand
21 up once or twice or three times and tell a judge yes,
22 no, I don't know, this should happen, because a lot
23 of the underlying problems that tenants are facing
24 exist outside the court, and a perfect example of
25 that, my team just closed a case for a Mrs. R. Mrs. R

1
2 had a 20,000-dollar default judgement issued against
3 her. Because of Right to Counsel, we were able to get
4 involved. We got the default opened up, and we
5 prevented her immediate eviction. That would've been
6 maybe a month or two before she was evicted again,
7 but, luckily, our team had the resource and the
8 capacity to spend the time out of court we needed to
9 to get her an ongoing rental subsidy to actually pay
10 her rent going forward, to raise 29,000 dollars in
11 back rent and get that paid off, but the amount of
12 time, the disparity between how much time me as a
13 lawyer was spending in the courtroom for her versus
14 our team was having to spend outside the courtroom
15 was immense, and it's just really important, we want
16 to really echo everything that Runa was just saying
17 and everything that the previous panelists have said,
18 but a real vision for Right to Counsel in New York
19 has to include not just a lawyer in the courtroom but
20 a lawyer and advocacy outside the courtroom. Thank
21 you.

22 OMARAX ROSA: Good afternoon. My name is
23 Omarax Rosa, and I am the Project Manager for the
24 Housing and Justice Initiatives at the Harlem
25 Community Justice Center, a project of the Center for

1
2 Justice Innovation. Thank you for the opportunity to
3 provide testimony today. I am here today to speak
4 about our experience in Harlem with Universal Access
5 to Counsel and recommendations we have for the City
6 Council to fully realize and (INAUDIBLE) this
7 groundbreaking and important law. Since 2001, the
8 Harlem Community Justice Center has been the housing
9 court for landlord and tenant matters in East and
10 Central Harlem. Currently, Harlem's Housing Court
11 Part U is being heard downtown in Manhattan Civil.
12 However, we continue to help tenants out of our
13 Justice Center and throughout the community. I
14 oversee the help desk where we support tenants
15 through the housing court process and provide
16 eviction prevention services to provide housing
17 stability. The help center has worked with seniors,
18 community members with mobility issues, with mental
19 health, cognitive, and language challenges. Each of
20 these issues compound the already immense stress and
21 barriers clients confront while navigating the
22 housing court process and fighting to keep their
23 homes. Our help center is full of tenants every day
24 facing eviction. Since the eviction moratorium ended,
25 we have found it increasingly rare for our clients to

1
2 get direct representation and for us as advocates to
3 have any impact on the process, even on the most
4 desperate and heartbreaking of situations.

5 In closing, we strongly believe in the
6 importance of high-quality holistic legal services
7 for tenants facing eviction. We believe full legal
8 representation for tenants is essential and should be
9 fully funded to provide the level of protection it
10 was intended to. We also believe the Office of Civil
11 Justice should make the referral process to Right to
12 Counsel as open, as early, and accessible as
13 possible. Lastly, we recommend expanding community-
14 based interventions like our help center. Fully
15 funding and implementing Local Law 53 would be a
16 strong step in the right direction. Local Law 53
17 would support tenant organizers, non-profits like us
18 to do this proactive and affirmative tenant outreach,
19 education, and organizing to each and every
20 neighborhood and every building in the city.

21 JEFFREY AUSTIN: Hi. My name is Jeff
22 Austin. I'm a Program Manager at CAMBA Legal
23 Services. Today, we wish to highlight the immense
24 challenge of adapting to a world that is rushing to
25 move past the pandemic while leaving many of our most

1 vulnerable New Yorkers behind. We applaud recent
2 efforts by OCJ and OCA to address these challenges
3 such as the pilot program in Brooklyn that grants a
4 45-day adjournment to connect tenants with HRA and
5 the RTC providers upon their first court appearance.
6 Measured policies such as this not only reduced the
7 administrative burden on the courts and the RTC
8 providers, thereby expanding capacity but also helped
9 to simplify a confusing and stressful process for
10 tenants in which they are too often shuffled between
11 over-calendared court parts and overburdened service
12 providers. This is a significant step. However, we
13 must do more to expand access to justice.

14
15 Our recommendations include the
16 following. Reduce the administrative burden on
17 providers so that our resources can be dedicated to
18 the work of keeping tenants in their homes and ensure
19 that the upcoming 2025 RFP is broad and flexible to
20 allow all interested and eligible providers to apply.
21 This will ensure that robust diverse service models
22 exist to meet the varied needs of tenants. Full
23 implementation of the Right to Counsel Law in New
24 York City requires the participation of all the non-

1
2 profit housing law providers in the city who are
3 capable and interested in providing these services.

4 We look forward to continuing our work
5 together to ensure that all tenants have a meaningful
6 Right to Counsel when their homes are at risk. Thank
7 you.

8 LESLIE THROPE: Hello and thank you,
9 Chairs Ayala and Sanchez, Committee Members and City
10 Council at large, for the longstanding support of the
11 Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition. My
12 name is Leslie Thrope, and I work for Housing
13 Conservation Coordinators, one of the five members of
14 the Legal Services for the Working Poor Coalition
15 that includes CAMBA, Mobilization for Justice,
16 (INAUDIBLE), and TakeRoot Justice. The Coalition was
17 created with the support from City Council to address
18 the civil legal services need of working poor and
19 other low-income New Yorkers whose income is slightly
20 higher than the poorest of New Yorkers that's
21 rendering them ineligible for free civil legal
22 services while being one missed paycheck away from
23 facing eviction or other dire consequences. Our
24 Coalition members are in the support of the
25 resolutions and bills presented today as the

1 expansion of the Right to Counsel for the most
2 vulnerable New Yorkers statewide is essential to the
3 health and safety to the tenants at risk.

4 Additionally, Coalition members also provide services
5 under the Right to Counsel program, and we are
6 witnessing firsthand this crisis in housing court
7 that has been described here this morning. However,
8 I'm here to provide an insight on why the services
9 that our Coalition provides is so important to
10 alleviate further stress on the current crisis in
11 housing court and, more importantly, how our work
12 made possible by the Legal Services for the Working
13 Poor funding helps stabilize housing for thousands of
14 New York City households and can even obviate the
15 need for an eviction filing. We continue to see that
16 working poor New Yorkers, many from communities of
17 color, who can barely make ends meet face
18 catastrophic consequences as the result of civil
19 legal problems. They include not being paid for their
20 work, not being paid overtime, identity theft,
21 freezing of bank accounts as the result of collection
22 lawsuits they don't even know about or being denied
23 public benefits to which they are entitled. The
24 Council's funding for Legal Services for the Working
25

1
2 Poor is the only funding that specifically targets
3 the civil legal needs of working people to ensure
4 continued self-sufficiency for families struggling to
5 survive in New York City. It is important that we
6 support the statewide Right to Counsel, we provide
7 relief to city tenants who require meaningful
8 representation under the law, and that you continue
9 to support the Legal Services for the Working Poor
10 program which provides this flexible funding. Thank
11 you.

12 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you so much.

13 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our next panel
14 will be Priam Saywack, Jessica Bellinder, Keriann
15 Pauls, Joanne Grell, and Lauren Price.

16 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin.

17 JESSICA BELLINDER: Good afternoon. Thank
18 you for inviting us to come testify. My name is
19 Jessica Bellinder. I'm with the Legal Aid Society.
20 I'm going to let the panelists introduce themselves
21 because I didn't actually anticipate everybody being
22 here so please.

23 LAUREN PRICE: Lauren Price. I'm a
24 Supervising Attorney at Brooklyn Defender Services,
25 and we're a member of the LEAP Coalition, which is

1
2 part of the AHTP funding, and that's what I want to
3 discuss.

4 JOANNE GRELL: I'm Joanne Grell. I'm a
5 leader of CASA in the Bronx.

6 PRIAM SAYWACK: My name is Priam Saywack.
7 I am the Deputy Director of the AHTP Program at
8 Queens Legal Services which is part of Legal Services
9 NYC.

10 KERIANN PAULS: Hi. Good afternoon. I'm
11 Keriann Pauls. I'm the Director of Coalitions and
12 Resource Management at TakeRoot Justice, and we
13 coordinate the LEAP Coalition's work under the AHTP
14 program.

15 JESSICA BELLINDER: We're all here I
16 believe to talk about the AHTP program, which is also
17 under consideration for funding, and we believe is a
18 complement to the Right to Counsel program. It was
19 created in 2015 at a time when the City was rezoning
20 parts of each of the five boroughs. It has expanded
21 since then, and the goal is to protect tenants from
22 the gentrification pressures that arise through
23 rezoning. It has become apparent that the entire city
24 is ultimately under severe pressure in terms of
25 gentrification and tenant harassment and so luckily

1 we've been able to expand our services citywide. The
2 services are not entirely sufficient to meet the need
3 obviously, but we wanted to talk about why it is
4 important as a complement to RTC because we have a
5 network of tenants rights through the Housing
6 Maintenance Code, through accessibility issues,
7 through protections against harassment, and the
8 City's commitment to allowing tenants to
9 affirmatively litigate these issues enables them to
10 stay in their homes, especially when they don't have
11 options for alternative housing, and the support for
12 this type of work gives meaning to those laws.

14 PRIAM SAYWACK: I'm just going to talk
15 about a few changes and considerations that we think
16 would be helpful in administering the AHTP program.

17 The first issue I'm going to talk about
18 is just making sure that provider capacity is
19 reserved for affirmative and group representation.
20 Today, during this hearing, we've heard a lot about
21 the issues with the Right to Counsel program,
22 underfunding, all of the issues with that, and we
23 believe that the AHTP work and the Right to Counsel
24 work are both equally important and complementary.
25 Certainly, it's very important that every tenant in

1 an eviction proceeding receive representation.
2
3 However, the group representation and the more
4 affirmative work contemplated by the AHTP program is
5 complementary and actually makes there be less folks
6 in eviction proceedings. There are lots of tenants
7 living in horrible conditions, and they need
8 representation as well. There are a lot of tenants
9 being harassed into leaving their apartments. The
10 AHTP program actually makes sure that there are less
11 people being displaced, there are less people in
12 eviction proceedings, there are less landlords
13 purposefully refusing to provide proper repairs
14 forcing people to leave, there are less landlords
15 overcharging tenants forcing them to leave.

16 The next thing we want to talk about
17 which was already addressed in terms of the RTC
18 program, but it's also an issue for us, that the case
19 rates don't necessarily reflect the actual costs of
20 litigating of cases and funding fairness. We need
21 cost-of-living adjustment increases as we know
22 inflation is super high. There are issues with
23 attorney retention as well, and we want to just
24 maintain the high quality of legal services for
25 vulnerable New Yorkers, and we want true pay parity

1
2 with city lawyers. As Miss (INAUDIBLE) mentioned a
3 while ago, I think there's really only been...

4 I just want to mention one thing really
5 quickly. We also want discretion to take on New York
6 City Housing Authority cases, group representation in
7 those buildings because those are among the most
8 vulnerable New Yorkers, and we have been doing the
9 work already, we've helped hundreds of tenants, but
10 we're not receiving funding for that under the AHTP
11 program.

12 JOANNE GRELL: Good morning. I got into
13 this group, but I represent CASA. We do a lot of work
14 in the Bronx around community organizing and tenants'
15 rights, etc., and part of what we do is we go do
16 court watches where we sit in court and watch the
17 atrocities that are committed every day. One case
18 that I'd like to speak to you in particular is a
19 woman who came in with five children and she had
20 already been evicted. She was speaking to the
21 landlord's attorney and signed over a stipulation
22 saying that she would pay the rent, which she did not
23 have the money to pay. Luckily, we were able to speak
24 to her and give her the information that she has a
25 right to an attorney, and she actually did end up

1 getting an attorney to see her that day so that's
2 just part of the work that CASA does and part of what
3 Right to Counsel means to some of the most vulnerable
4 New Yorkers.
5

6 This is why we need Right to Counsel
7 fully funded, and I'm just going to give you a list
8 of what we would really like to see the City Council
9 help us with, which is to pass Resolution 499 in
10 support of the statewide RTC which would mandate that
11 tenants have time to get an attorney, pass Resolution
12 345 which is in support of RTC and will demand that
13 the court pause all cases for eligible tenants that
14 don't yet have a lawyer, it would ensure that the
15 Office of Civil Justice manage the waitlist of
16 tenants and make sure that all tenants who have been
17 denied can get a lawyer, to ensure that OCJ meets
18 regularly with tenants and organizers which I don't
19 believe they do to develop solutions that will comply
20 with the law, fully fund RTC, and you heard the 70
21 million dollar number, that is something that RTC has
22 done research on, and that would maintain the legacy
23 of RTC and would allow to fund Local Law 136, and
24 also, lastly, to call on HRA to fund Local Law 53
25 immediately. HRA must announce publicly when they

1
2 will release the RFPs for Fiscal Year 2024. Thank you
3 so much.

4 LAUREN PRICE: Thank you so much. My
5 colleagues covered a lot of the points that we want
6 to make about AHTP, but it's broader than just the
7 affirmative litigation that they were talking about,
8 and that's something that our office at Brooklyn
9 Defender Services specifically is focused on. We work
10 on supporting tenants before they're in court, and
11 that is essential to helping tenants stay in their
12 homes and out of the shelter system. In our current
13 model, AHTP allows offices with existing clients like
14 holistic public defenders like ours, neighborhood
15 offices or others that serve special populations or
16 have particular systemic issues that are their focus
17 to keep being a resource for some of the most
18 vulnerable families in our city without requiring
19 that those tenants wait until their first court
20 appearance to need a lawyer and without requiring
21 every provider seeking funding from the City to do
22 in-court (INAUDIBLE) intake. Because our model allows
23 us to connect with existing BDS clients before
24 there's a housing court case, we're able to address
25 all the issues that precede or outside of litigation

1 with our existing clients who already know our
2 office. I don't want to set up a false dichotomy.
3 Regardless of what the work is called, AHTP, UA, RTC,
4 we want to reiterate the importance of funding
5 Universal Access to legal services regardless of
6 whether the tenant is in court or before they're in
7 court or in fact could they avoid court, and we want
8 to emphasize the necessity of ensuring that clients
9 have a choice in how they approach potential
10 landlord/tenant disputes and allow for continuity of
11 representation when it's possible. In our office,
12 clients are referred to us by other Brooklyn Defender
13 Services units that are already working with our
14 office in another court-appointed forum. We then can
15 establish work directly with these clients without
16 doing additional screening or an extensive in-person
17 intake. This minimizes our clients' stress, it saves
18 times and resources, and it allows us to anticipate
19 civil legal problems that might come about from the
20 other cases. We can intervene and often prevent
21 litigation. It also allows us to ensure (INAUDIBLE)
22 outcome, and one forum is less likely to have an
23 adverse effect on another.
24
25

1
2 I'll just wrap it up quickly. Our clients
3 are routinely facing eviction based on allegations
4 mirroring those in their criminal court proceedings,
5 and our family defense clients are fighting to keep
6 their families together in part because of issues
7 with their landlord harassment or unsafe living
8 conditions. Programs like ours that ensure that we
9 can provide these crucial legal services not only
10 mean the best outcome in housing court for our
11 clients but in family, criminal, and immigration
12 proceedings. Thank you so much.

13 KERIANN PAULS: I just want to share and
14 just say thank you so much to all the tenant leaders
15 who are sharing about how important the Right to
16 Counsel is. In addition to that, we partner with a
17 lot of these tenant organizers, community-based
18 organizations as we do the legal work under the Anti-
19 harassment Tenant Protection, AHTP, program. Just
20 want to amplify how important this program is with
21 the common goal alongside the Right to Counsel in
22 preventing displacement, preventing people from
23 experiencing homelessness and living in housing that
24 is dignified, that is safe and affordable and where
25 they can raise their families and live in community.

1
2 I'm going to go off script a little bit because a lot
3 of what we have to say are recommendations on how to
4 improve the Anti-harassment program, and we have a
5 concept paper I believe that's been circulated with
6 you all that we've collected drafted across the AHTP
7 providers so you'll have that attached to our written
8 testimony as well, but I just want to get some of the
9 broad things in addition to what my colleagues have
10 said is currently this program prohibits us to
11 subcontract and partner with community-based
12 organizations in that way. That's a huge change that
13 we're looking and seeking so that we can get our
14 references from the experts, from the organizations
15 on the ground in the buildings, organizing tenants
16 and supporting them in building leadership so we
17 really need that contract change. These contracts
18 require a lot of data collection from tenants, from
19 clients who already are experiencing so many people
20 asking for sensitive information about their life and
21 it's a prohibitive thing in getting people to sign up
22 for our services that they need in order to fight
23 against landlord harassment so we're looking for
24 those changes as well. One of the great structures of
25 the AHTP program is that we can work in coalition

1
2 under it. There are administrative costs associated
3 with coordinating coalitions, with ensuring that the
4 programmatic work is done, and so we're looking for
5 funding across the contract that supports that
6 coordination. It's a model that's been really
7 successful. It's allowed very dynamic services to be
8 provided across the communities so we're looking for
9 that. I just want to reiterate that as we put funding
10 into the Anti-harassment Tenant Protection program,
11 that alleviates the pressures and capacity concerns
12 of the Right to Counsel program. The sooner we can
13 get to tenants and build from their power to fight
14 against landlord harassment and displacement that is
15 done outside of the courts, the less of a volume of
16 cases and the less displacement we'll see in our
17 communities. Thank you so much for your oversight and
18 what you do to ensure the agencies like the Office of
19 Civil Justice actually hear us and implement these
20 changes. Appreciate that.

21 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much. I
22 just have a quick question for our leader from CASA.
23 Thank you for everything that you all do for the
24 Bronx. In the lead-up to this Council hearing, of
25 course there was a Right to Counsel hearing that HRA

1 hosted a few Fridays ago, Friday evening, and as a
2 member of the Right to Counsel Coalition, I'm
3 wondering if you can speak to what that Friday
4 evening timeslot did to attendance? Was the Coalition
5 consulted in the selection of that time?
6

7 JOANNE GRELL: Actually, they were not
8 consulted, as my understanding, they were not
9 consulted in the time selection, and I'm not exactly
10 sure what occurred. I don't know how much attendance
11 was there, but I could certainly find out for you and
12 follow up as the Administration said.

13 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you so much.

14 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Thank you. Our
15 next panel is Addrana Montgomery, Jenny Laurie, and
16 Wanda Martinez.

17 ADDRANA MONTGOMERY: Good morning. My name
18 is Addrana Montgomery. I am privileged to be here
19 today in my capacity as a Tenants' Rights Attorney at
20 TakeRoot Justice, but I am also here in my capacity
21 as a Brooklyn native, raised by a single mother of
22 three girls. I have lived in both public and rent-
23 stabilized housing throughout my life. I distinctly
24 remember in the 1980s as a young teen accompanying my
25 mother to housing court when she had fallen behind on

1
2 rent from an unexpected medical or school expense
3 that her secretary salary couldn't weather. Since we
4 never had a lawyer on our own, we were coerced into
5 settlements that were always an unreasonable payment
6 plan on my mother's salary. As an average African
7 American family that had migrated from the south in
8 the 1950s, we had no access to generational wealth
9 and didn't have family and friends from whom we could
10 even borrow a few thousand, let alone a couple
11 hundred, dollars. I watched how these court
12 appearances sucked the dignity out of my mother while
13 the landlord attorney would walk away with the
14 satisfaction that they had gotten another index
15 number to settle. Decades later, I was exhilarated to
16 participate in a tenants movements fight to pass the
17 New York City Right to Counsel law, and I began to
18 see landlord/tenant power dynamics shifting. Data
19 began to show that the eviction rates were
20 plummeting, but I am here now with a palpable sense
21 of anger and despair. The Right to Counsel law is in
22 crisis. Since the COVID eviction moratorium ended in
23 January 2022, TakeRoot Justice along with the Right
24 to Counsel New York City Coalition has been calling
25 on the courts to slow down new eviction cases as

1
2 legal services providers need the time to provide
3 meaningful representation, but the courts have rushed
4 to clear inventory, scheduling 60 to 70 cases per
5 courtroom per day. Even judges know this rush relies
6 on the assumption that most tenants will default or
7 quickly settle without their day in court. My
8 colleagues and I have seen a runaway speedup in our
9 eviction defense caseload. On TakeRoot's most recent
10 intake day, there were over 100 new cases. Our
11 caseloads are not sustainable. The quality of
12 representation each and every client deserves as
13 spelled out in the Right to Counsel law is not
14 compatible with the court's demand for speed. Just
15 give me two more minutes. Nevertheless, housing court
16 refuses to use their power to schedule eviction cases
17 at a reasonable rate consistent with due process.
18 Prioritizing speed over justice is the antithesis of
19 this Right to Counsel law. Now, on our intake days at
20 Queens Housing Court, I have to tell single black
21 mothers, young Latino families, elderly South Asian
22 couples that there are not enough lawyers to
23 represent them. The courts overflow with thousands of
24 minority low-income tenants and the mostly white male
25 landlord bar refuses to recognize the human lives

1 behind these index numbers. The Right to Counsel
2 program was meant to counter this disparate racist
3 impact, not facilitate it. Instead, the court's
4 insistence on prioritizing speed above all else is
5 taking a toll on court workers, housing lawyers, and,
6 most importantly, the hundreds of thousands of New
7 Yorkers Right to Counsel was enacted to serve.
8 TakeRoot Justice and the Right to Counsel New York
9 City Coalition urge you to support the much-needed
10 actions by the Office of Court Administration that
11 you've heard this morning. Thank you.

13 JENNY LAURIE: Good afternoon. My name is
14 Jenny Laurie. I'm the Executive Director of Housing
15 Court Answers, a non-profit which helps tenants avoid
16 eviction. We do our work through the staffing of
17 information tables in the New York City housing
18 courts and via a hotline. This work is partially
19 funded by City Council initiative funding, and we
20 very much appreciate that support. One of our tasks
21 is to refer tenants to legal services providers. Our
22 phone number is on the paper that landlords use when
23 they start a housing court case that they have to
24 serve on tenants. Our hotline currently receives
25 about 350 to 400 calls a day from tenants, most of

1 whom are in various stages of a court proceeding. In
2 the first half of this Fiscal Year, we took over
3 20,000 calls on our hotline. Additionally, many more
4 tenants call 3-1-1 and get the Tenant Support Unit. I
5 highlight these numbers only to point out the
6 enormous need that tenants are showing for help in
7 their eviction cases. Prior to the ending of the
8 eviction moratorium, we were able to refer all these
9 tenants to counsel or to other programs, either the
10 Assigned Counsel Program for Seniors, help filing
11 AHTP actions if they had housing repairs, and all of
12 that. That entire system has completely fallen apart.
13 Most of the tenants we talk today are not getting
14 counsel.

16 I also want to talk a little bit about
17 the something like 50 percent of tenants who default
18 on their nonpayment cases according to a recent
19 report by the Furman Center. The Furman Center found
20 that 40 percent of warrants statewide resulted from a
21 default decision in the case and that tenants knowing
22 that they had a right to counsel reduced the number
23 of defaults so I think that points out how important
24 Local Law 53 is in terms of organizing. We support

1 obviously the two resolutions before the City Council
2 and thank the City Council for its support.
3

4 WANDA MARTINEZ: Good afternoon. My name
5 is Wanda Martinez, and I am a Tenant Leader with CMS
6 out of Queens, and I'm here to also express how
7 important it is to have these tenant organizations
8 that let us know the rights that we have and help us
9 confront situations that otherwise will continue to
10 make our lives a little less pleasant. In my case, it
11 was repairs. We have been fighting for repairs for
12 decades, and it wasn't until CMS came in, helped us
13 organize, helped us file the appropriate paperwork so
14 that our voice was heard with the courts, with the
15 landlord who has since all this started finally
16 making the repairs and giving us the quality of life
17 that we deserve. We are paying our rents; they should
18 render the services. I guess I want to reiterate how
19 important it is to keep these organizations funded so
20 they can continue to educate the tenants of New York
21 City as to their rights and in that case in New York
22 State because Right to Counsel is needed there also.
23 Thank you for listening to us today.

24 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.
25

COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our next panel will be Lloyd Smith, Paulette James, Pilar D., and Tom Gogan.

LLOYD SMITH: Good afternoon, everyone. I am Lloyd Smith, and I'm a member of Flatbush Tenants Coalition, and my mission is to convince our elected officials how important RTC is to us as tenants in NYC. RTC helps tenants in our city to better understand this complex housing court system. People like myself, seniors, black and brown people, immigrants who do not have a command of the English language, and persons who are coming to the court for the first time. I have a couple of questions to ask the Council.

What can this Council do to help provide tenants with RTC?

Are the tenant actually receiving the Right to Counsel as we speak? I can answer that question myself. No, we are not.

What important (INAUDIBLE) is having on tenants? I can answer that also. It is drastic.

I have a couple of asks. We need at least 70 million additional dollars. I am asking the City Council to support a statewide defense RTC

1
2 legislation, which would mandate that in any city
3 where tenants have the Right to Counsel, eviction
4 cases be adjourned until tenants have legal
5 representatives. Today, more than 17,000 tenants in
6 NYC are being denied RTC. We won't stop fighting
7 until we are sure and safe and stable housing is a
8 right for all tenants. We will fight. I must end this
9 by saying I must work the work of him that sent me
10 while it is day for night cometh when no man shall
11 work. As long as I'm in the world, I am the light of
12 the world. Thank you, Council Members. Please help us
13 get this bill passed statewide. Again, I thank you.

14 PAULETTE JAMES: Good afternoon, everyone.
15 My name is Paulette James, and I'm a member of the
16 Flatbush Tenants Coalition. The Flatbush Tenants
17 Coalition is one of the fighters for Right to Counsel
18 since the beginning actually. Since 2017, Right to
19 Counsel was passed to provide tenants with counsel,
20 and what a shame Right to Counsel was passed to
21 provide tenants with counsel and today it seems worse
22 to get one. Why do we have to fight if housing is a
23 human right? City Council, which side are you on? All
24 tenants need counsel. Landlords take advantage of
25 tenants, insult tenants, confuse them, and sometimes

1
2 lie, and that leads to eviction. Now, new to you,
3 landlords are taking, filling their apartments with
4 paid government tenants. Now, these tenants, you
5 don't know who they are, the old tenants, they come
6 in and I don't know. One instant ran up to another
7 tenant, knocking down the door and telling them open
8 the door, and totally leaving a hole in the door.
9 Those things are new, and that is because we don't
10 have enough Right to Counsel lawyers to go around.
11 Most of my colleagues and everybody spoke today about
12 the things we are going through, but I see my time is
13 up, and I would like to end here to say City Council,
14 we are counting on you to help us and save us from
15 fears and tears. Thank you so much.

16 PILAR DEJESUS: Good afternoon. My name is
17 Pilar DeJesus. I wear many hats besides the one I
18 have on today, but today I am going to speak as a
19 constituent, as a voter, as a Latina who's been born
20 and raised in this city for 42 years, and I just want
21 to really first highlight and I want to also support
22 and uplift a lot of my colleagues who spoke about the
23 issues when it comes to us as legal services
24 providers and what's happening in the court and with
25 tenants and the organizers and the tenant leaders

1
2 that are here in the room, and so I just want to
3 uplift that and then, again, just remind the Council
4 and other legislators across the state we have, I
5 call it a housing pandemic, we have a mental health
6 pandemic. Without housing, your mental health really
7 is impossible to be stable, and I know this
8 personally of being illegally evicted at one point in
9 my house and also personally talking to individuals
10 who have lost their jobs and then go on the street
11 and then also start using more heavier drugs and
12 become unstable. I also want to talk to we have a lot
13 of youth that are homeless, and we're always talking
14 about the youth, we want to get the youth, we had a
15 youth situation in Washington Heights not too long
16 ago, and I think we need to start addressing the root
17 of that problem, and a lot of it is coming from the
18 housing instability. Yes, food insecurity as well,
19 but the housing instability is really, to me, one of
20 the main roots of what the mental health instability
21 we have going on, and we're not addressing that. I
22 think we also need to find out accommodations with
23 HRA. HRA one-shot deals are not for all. If you do
24 not have future ability to pay, you're not going to
25 have that money to get it, and a lot of these other

1 charities is just not enough so you really do rely on
2 one-shot deals. I also want to highlight that we have
3 the Rent Guidelines Board season coming up, I'll end
4 with two more points and that was it, but Rent
5 Guidelines season is coming up. Council needs to step
6 in there too. We need those rents rolled back. We
7 need a special hearing on that. We really need also
8 the State to cancel the rent and mortgages during the
9 pandemic because, honestly, we have a really huge
10 housing pandemic in my opinion, and so, again, some
11 of the solutions are HRA maybe needs to make
12 accommodations for some folks who do not have future
13 ability to pay. We need to consider maybe doing rent
14 waivers for folks during the period of the pandemic
15 because I don't honestly see a healthy path to this
16 mental health crisis we have. It's a housing crisis,
17 but it's tied to the mental health instability crisis
18 we have currently. I just really would love to the
19 City Council, the State, everyone all hands on to
20 address the mental health crisis we have going that
21 is also rooted in housing. Thank you.

23 TOM GOGAN: Good afternoon. Thank you,
24 Council Members Sanchez and Abreu, for both of your
25 resolutions. I support 100 percent. My name is Tom

1
2 Gogan. I'm with the Move the Money New York City
3 Coalition. When I was younger, I was a tenant
4 organizer for many years actually. One of the groups
5 that I worked with was Northern Manhattan Improvement
6 Corporation which provided a very good model, and I'm
7 happy to see that they're part of the Working Poor
8 Coalition calling for implementing Local Law 53 and
9 for expanding it and for really, I'm going to
10 underline, implementing it. It's great to have words
11 on paper, but what we need is action in terms of
12 actually funding these programs to the extent that
13 they need to be, and that's where Move the Money
14 comes in and it's also where the City Council comes
15 in. Clearly, it's important for the Council to take a
16 stand relative to the current Administration at City
17 Hall saying get this done. Enough with the talk about
18 getting it done. Really get it done.

19 Number two, we have to talk about where
20 the resources are really going to come from on the
21 long-term. On the short-term, the money's there. On
22 the longer-term, we are in a serious deep, deep
23 expanding crisis, and we've got to look at the
24 federal government in addition to the state
25 government, and that's why we talk Move the Money.

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There is way too much money going to wars and the Pentagon's military spending, not enough that covers our veterans when they get home from these awful wars, and definitely not enough resources coming back down into our communities so I implore any Council Member who has not yet signed onto Resolution 423, which Carlina Rivera inaugurated, that's not the correct term, in early December so please sign on as a co-sponsor, and I thank Council Woman Ayala for having just done that. That's very significant to have the Deputy Speaker on board. Thank you so much.

WILLIAM BERSHADSKY: Good afternoon. My name is William Bershadsky. I personally witnessed the court's violation of the Right to Counsel, and I would like to ask the Committee if they have any ideas how we can hold the courts responsible for this. Can somebody answer my question, please?

COUNCIL MEMBER: I'll answer your question, if I may, Chairs. We think it's very important for the State through the Office of Court Administration to slow the pace of cases. That's why we put forward Resolution 499. Also, Pierina's Resolution would expand Right to Counsel statewide which is very, very important.

1
2 At the City level, we're going to do
3 everything that we can to make sure that there's
4 adequate representation for Right to Counsel.

5 WILLIAM BERSHADSKY: Thank you for the
6 answer, but, from my observation, I don't think
7 nothing has been done to hold the court responsible.
8 I think with cumulative efforts, this is just an idea
9 I want to run by everybody here, that maybe we can
10 have a meeting with the head judges and chief judges
11 of all the courts in the boroughs, the Landlord
12 Tenant Courts, and have them pause every single case
13 until the Right to Counsel law is obeyed 100 percent.
14 Can one of you tell me when we can have this meeting
15 with the judges?

16 COUNCIL MEMBER: I told you earlier in the
17 other room the Sergeants can give you our contact
18 information, and we can be in touch with you or refer
19 you to your individual Council Member, but we're
20 always in conversations with the Right to Counsel
21 Coalition led by Susan and the coalitions here today
22 so thank you all for attending.

23 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our next panel
24 will be Sandra Mitchell, Valentin Lopez, Bryan
25 Fotino, and Monica Schreiber.

1
2 MONICA SCHREIBER: Hi. I'm Monica
3 Schreiber. I'm a Tenant Organizer with Brooklyn
4 Eviction Defense. We're a borough-wide tenants union
5 building tenant power with other tenants, and we keep
6 each other safe and housed because the State has
7 failed to do so. That's why we're here today, trying
8 to defend Right to Counsel because the State has
9 illegally disrespected our voices and our bodies as
10 we are constantly under threat of eviction. We need
11 City Council to be RTC champions and come out
12 publicly to say that we will fight to defend RTC.
13 Specifically, we ask that you pass City Council
14 Resolution 499 in support of our statewide Defend RTC
15 legislation. This would mandate that tenants have the
16 time they need to get Right to Counsel. I also demand
17 that you pass Resolution 345 in support of statewide
18 Right to Counsel for all New York tenants. I demand
19 that the courts pause all cases for eligible tenants
20 who don't yet have RTC until there is lawyer
21 capacity. I demand that you ensure that OCJ manages
22 the waitlist of tenants to make sure that all tenants
23 who have been denied RTC get a lawyer. I also demand
24 that you ensure that OCJ meets regularly with tenants
25 and organizers to develop solutions that it will

1
2 comply with the law to hold annual hearings and
3 release annual reports. So far, it's been two years,
4 and there's been one hearing, and it was on a Friday
5 night as we all discussed. I demand that you fully
6 fund RTC. As it exists now, the law is not currently
7 fully funded. This is leading to retention challenges
8 at legal services organizations, and this discourages
9 zealous representation. We need the City Council to
10 build on and maintain the legacy of RTC and to add at
11 least 70 million dollars to fund Local Law 136.
12 Finally, I'm demanding that you call on HRA to fund
13 Local Law 53 immediately. HRA must announce publicly
14 when they will release the Request for Proposals for
15 the Fiscal Year of 2024 and the 3.57 million dollars
16 they've allocated for such a goal. Thank you.

17 BRYAN FOTINO: Hello. My name is Bryan
18 Fotino. I am a Tenant Organizer at Catholic Migration
19 Services and the Right to Counsel Coalition
20 representing tenants throughout Queens. I'm here
21 today because, as others have pointed out, I've seen
22 the Right to Counsel degraded time and time again
23 over the past few months. I have been in court
24 helping connect tenants with their rights, and,
25 unfortunately, there is no bona fide Right to Counsel

1
2 at the end of the day because court cases are still
3 moving forward and people are still being evicted
4 without lawyers, and I don't think that's right. I
5 think that's a violation of human rights. We also
6 don't have representation for affirmative cases. I
7 represent tenants at 94-16 34th Road like Wanda
8 Martinez who spoke before, and, thankfully, they've
9 been able to connect with a CMS lawyer who has helped
10 them sue their landlord and hold their landlord
11 accountable for repairs violations, but not all
12 tenants in New York City and throughout the state
13 have that right so we're really advocating for a full
14 statewide Right to Counsel, not this watered down
15 version that has been forth in the Assembly budget.
16 We need the full version with adjournments, with no
17 carve-outs for New York City tenants just because we
18 have some watered down Right to Counsel law here
19 doesn't mean we shouldn't have the full protection of
20 the State law mandating adjournments because at the
21 end of the day the City doesn't control the court
22 system, the State does. We need the full version for
23 affirmative cases, for any case that could result in
24 eviction so that's why I'm calling on all of you and
25 the City Council today to please support Resolution

1
2 499 and Resolution 345 as well as the other proposals
3 of the Right to Counsel Coalition that would urge the
4 State to pass statewide Right to Counsel. I have been
5 in dozens of these lobby meetings with State
6 Legislators, and so many of them don't seem to
7 understand the issue. They don't understand how the
8 housing crisis is affecting New Yorkers, how it's
9 leading to rising homelessness, rising shelter
10 population, and how we need a lawyer for everybody
11 who is being evicted so I am calling on you to put on
12 the pressure to the statewide legislative officials
13 and demand that they pass a statewide Right to
14 Counsel as we deserve.

15 VALENTIN LOPEZ: (Speaking Foreign
16 Language)

17 INTERPRETER: Good afternoon. My name is
18 Valentin, and I am here, I'm sorry, but there was a
19 technical problem but I have proof, I have been
20 moving my attorneys at (INAUDIBLE) Housing, but I'm
21 still waiting. The next one is on March 18th.
22 Otherwise, the case will be closed. (Speaking Foreign
23 Language)

24 VALENTIN LOPEZ: (Speaking Foreign
25 Language)

1
2 INTERPRETER: I have rental arrears of
3 12,000 dollars, and if I don't pay it I will be
4 thrown to the streets, and what I receive from
5 disability is not enough.

6 VALENTIN LOPEZ: (Speaking Foreign
7 Language)

8 INTERPRETER: I also would like that
9 there's more financing for this law and more money
10 for people of lower income.

11 VALENTIN LOPEZ: (Speaking Foreign
12 Language)

13 INTERPRETER: And we need attorneys for
14 clients like me who lack attorneys.

15 VALENTIN LOPEZ: (Speaking Foreign
16 Language)

17 INTERPRETER: That's it.

18 CHAPLAIN SANDRA MITCHELL: Blessings to
19 everyone. Thank you for your listening ear and thank
20 you for your open hearts. My name is Chaplain Sandra
21 Mitchell. I'm a proud and active member of CASA,
22 Community Action for Safe Apartments. I'm a
23 registered in the Bronx, living in the Bronx for 53
24 years. We, the tenants, we fought for and won the
25 Right to Counsel in 2017, making New York City the

1
2 first city in the country to have this right. We need
3 this tool to stop displacement and reduce
4 homelessness in our city. My previous landlord took
5 me to court on false charges of rent arrears. He
6 falsely presented a case, inflating the amount owed
7 by almost seven times. I had legal representation
8 even though I was able to prove that I held back the
9 rent due to his neglect and refusal to make repairs,
10 and, even though I proved and paid the correct amount
11 owed within 24 hours of the case, I still was
12 displaced and had to go into the shelter. Many ER
13 visits and hospitalizations later due to the turmoil
14 and trauma of fighting homelessness, by the grace of
15 God Almighty, I am here before you today continuing
16 to fight for communities everywhere to have the Right
17 to Counsel. If Right to Counsel had been effect, I
18 would have never lost my apartment. We need this tool
19 to stop displacement, protect the tenants against
20 unscrupulous greedy landlords, and to reduce
21 homelessness in our city. This situation plays out
22 across the country, resulting in mass displacement
23 and homelessness in our country. It costs upwards
24 from 3,000 dollars per person to house one person on
25 a twin-sized bed that can only hold a 100-pound

1 individual. I was 165 pounds then. I had to sleep
2 with six women in one room. There were many, many
3 fights, but the shelter costs the taxpayers 2 million
4 dollars per year or more. It would be more cost-
5 effective and most humane to render free legal
6 assistance with Right to Counsel. We need to save our
7 communities and keep people in their apartments using
8 the tool of Right to Counsel. Just a few seconds
9 more, please. This tool must be made statewide as it
10 is cost-effective to our country. We are asking City
11 Council to be our City's vindicator and champion and
12 invincible advocates to fight for Right to Counsel
13 and to fully fund Local Law 53 immediately. We are
14 demanding a full stop to housing court cases being
15 heard without allowing time for tenants to be
16 assigned legal representation with Right to Counsel.
17 Yesterday, it was me. Today or tomorrow, it could be
18 you. Housing is a human right. City Council, we need
19 you to fight. City Council, we need you to win this
20 battle for your constituents. Fight to fully fund and
21 sustain Right to Counsel. City Council, we, the
22 tenants, the ones who stood in long lines despite
23 COVID to vote for you, we need you to enforce and
24
25

1 fully fund Local Law 53. Thank you so very much for
2 your listening ear.
3

4 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Thank you. Our
5 next panel will be Ana Galvez, Yoselyn Gomez,
6 Alejandro Corlat, Nathan Mitchell, and Sylvia
7 Sanchez.

8 YOSELYN GOMEZ: Hello. (Speaking Foreign
9 Language)

10 INTERPRETER: Since 2017, I've been
11 fighting for the right to have a counsel and also so
12 that every person in New York may have a counsel.

13 YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign
14 Language)

15 INTERPRETER: (INAUDIBLE) today I' in my
16 apartment, I almost have also another case in housing
17 court, and my landlord is one of the most well-
18 renowned that are pushing people to eviction
19 (Speaking Foreign Language)

20 YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign
21 Language)

22 INTERPRETER: (INAUDIBLE)

23 YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign
24 Language)

1

2

INTERPRETER: Today, we're representing

3

(INAUDIBLE) of the Bronx.

4

YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign

5

Language)

6

INTERPRETER: Because we are from the

7

Bronx, (INAUDIBLE) continues leading. We are the

8

number one place with most tenants on the streets,

9

and we will continue fighting, we will continue

10

fighting for the 70 million to be given, and we will

11

be fighting for everyone in New York City.

12

YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign

13

Language)

14

INTERPRETER: I know that I have an

15

interpreter, that's why the time is being shortened,

16

but I want to (INAUDIBLE)

17

YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign

18

Language)

19

INTERPRETER: As CASA, we are here and

20

we're fighting for attorneys and what happened with

21

(INAUDIBLE) and they never gave us even one penny,

22

and they let it fall asleep so where did this go,

23

where did this go, to Legislators, and so if they

24

give us the money, as CASA, we will continue

25

fighting.

1
2 YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign
3 Language)

4 INTERPRETER: Thank you very much to
5 Legislators and Council Members from the Bronx.

6 YOSELYN GOMEZ: (Speaking Foreign
7 Language)

8 INTERPRETER: Thank you very much, and if
9 you cannot go to the Bronx then please send your reps
10 because those that aren't here, you have your rent
11 paid, those who are here, us, we do not have our
12 rents paid so thank you very much.

13 ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

14 INTERPRETER: My name is Ana Galvez. Good
15 afternoon.

16 ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

17 INTERPRETER: I am a leader at CASA.

18 ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

19 INTERPRETER: I think today we have heard
20 about numbers...

21 ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

22 INTERPRETER: And loss.

23 ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

24 INTERPRETER: And I will tell you today
25 why it is important to have counsel.

1

2

ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

3

INTERPRETER: Me, without knowing that I

4

was already in the court system, I received an

5

eviction notice.

6

ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

7

INTERPRETER: If it hadn't been for CASA,

8

for this woman on my side, and for the organization,

9

I would be on the streets.

10

ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

11

INTERPRETER: And that's why it's so

12

important to have this financing because out there,

13

there's a lot of Anas who didn't know that they have

14

that right.

15

ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

16

INTERPRETER: I cannot say that I sing

17

victory yet because I'm still fighting to keep my

18

home.

19

ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

20

INTERPRETER: Please believe me when we

21

say that we need the money to Right to Counsel and

22

all the money to know our rights.

23

ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

24

25

1
2 INTERPRETER: And that we will continue
3 this fight, and we don't care how many more hearings
4 we have to go, tenants will be present.

5 ANA GALVEZ: (Speaking Foreign Language)

6 INTERPRETER: Thank you very much, and I
7 hope that you consider all the words of all of us who
8 are here today.

9 SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign
10 Language)

11 INTERPRETER: My name is Sylvia Sanchez. I
12 represent CASA, member of this organization.

13 SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign
14 Language)

15 INTERPRETER: I am a live example of what
16 tenants are going through.

17 SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign
18 Language)

19 INTERPRETER: So many evictions were not
20 held thanks to this woman and thanks to this
21 organization of CASA.

22 SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign
23 Language)

24 INTERPRETER: I was desperate (INAUDIBLE)
25 housing court and it continued being denied.

1

2

SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign

3

Language)

4

INTERPRETER: With a upset, sick child at

5

home.

6

SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign

7

Language)

8

INTERPRETER: And one day after court I

9

went to CASA, they heard my case.

10

SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign

11

Language)

12

INTERPRETER: And they helped me find an

13

attorney.

14

SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign

15

Language)

16

INTERPRETER: And thanks to God I am still

17

at home.

18

SYLVIA SANCHEZ: (Speaking Foreign

19

Language)

20

INTERPRETER: Thank you very much.

21

NATHAN MITCHELL: Good afternoon. My name

22

is Nathan Mitchell. I'm here to testify on behalf of

23

CASA. I'm a CASA member. I just want to say that I

24

think the Right to Counsel is very important to us

25

because everyone in New York City and State should

1
2 have a right to counsel. We're being very affected by
3 this. We're being displaced. My neighborhood, I see
4 is we're just being displaced by the landlords, and
5 it's funny because they're not doing repairs, they're
6 raising rents, and during this pandemic everything is
7 going up like necessities, our utilities, our food.
8 Our rents are going up, and a lot of us can't afford
9 attorneys and lawyers. We're just going through this
10 blind so the right to counsel and I thank CASA again
11 because they helped me to learn about a lot of stuff
12 that I had no idea, and our communities, we're just
13 losing them to a lot of landlords that's really not
14 doing anything. We're going to court. A lot of us
15 don't know anything about what's going on. I've been
16 in court a lot of times where we didn't have
17 interpreters or the people that did interpret, the
18 people that didn't speak English had no idea that
19 they even had a right to counsel so when you give
20 them the information, they're like, by the time you
21 give them the information, it's a little late. They
22 already maybe signed papers, they had no idea what
23 was going on so there's a large amount of us that are
24 low-income workers, fixed incomes that's going
25 through this. I believe every tenant should be given

1
2 time to get an attorney because we're being unjust
3 here. We're being unjust. The Right to Counsel sounds
4 great and all, but are we really getting the Right to
5 Counsel? No. I've seen it a million times. I go to
6 court almost every week just to look at the cases to
7 see what's going on, and we're not getting what we
8 deserve. The landlords are having lawyers so, of
9 course, they're getting the tenants out. We're being
10 displaced, and we're talking about brown, black,
11 Hispanic families, low incomes. It's not just one
12 particular group. It's all of us in New York City to
13 be honest here.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

15 NATHAN MITCHELL: I think that we should
16 demand that HRA or someone, some of these programs
17 come up and fund this money so we can get this done
18 because otherwise we're just going to lose.

19 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Appreciate it.

20 NATHAN MITCHELL: Thank you for
21 everything, everyone, thank you.

22 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

23 ALEJANDRO CORLAT: Thank you so much,
24 Chairs, Committee Members. My name is Alejandro
25 Corlat. I'm a Tenant Organizer with the Goddard

1
2 Riverside Law Project in Council Member Abreu's
3 District. We're a non-profit legal services
4 organization that prides itself in being community
5 based, serving tenants in the Upper West Side,
6 Central Harlem, and single-room-occupancy tenants
7 throughout the West Manhattan. I'm here to speak on
8 behalf of my organization in support of all the
9 different demands that have been made, the
10 Resolutions put forward by this Committee and the
11 demand to increase funding for AHTP, to fully fund
12 Right to Counsel, and to finally implement Local Law
13 53, expanding funding for community organizing and
14 education around tenancy rights and Right to Counsel
15 more specifically. As an organizer, I get to see and
16 am echoing many of the testimonies that were already
17 made, I get to see so many things that do not arrive
18 to the dockets of housing court. Whenever we get to a
19 building, we encounter landlord harassment, legal
20 intimidation, and deliberate neglecting, withholding
21 and warehousing of apartments, rent overcharges, and
22 palpable fear from tenants in fighting these abuses
23 as they do not trust the protection that nowadays
24 only exists on paper, not actually backed or
25 guaranteed by the City or by New York State. Many

1 cases do not get to housing court simply because
2 tenants self-evict before being sued because they
3 start paying illegal rent increases or because they
4 take on unsustainable debt to cover rent arrears that
5 if the cases did go through housing court, if they
6 did get legal rep, and if they could access resources
7 that would not be the case. Working in a community-
8 based organization, I see my attorney colleagues
9 struggling with unsustainable caseloads from housing
10 court assignments leaving us with much less capacity
11 to work with tenants in our surrounding neighborhood
12 whom we could provide with much more comprehensive
13 services and support and organizing just beyond legal
14 representation.
15

16 Lastly, we're also seeing landlords take
17 this as an opportunity to attempt to reestablish
18 their dominance, hiking rents from regulated
19 apartments, withholding essential services, and
20 filing scores of cases with the knowledge that even
21 if a minority of those tenants are not able to get
22 legal rep, they will be able to obtain evictions that
23 otherwise the program should not be allowing.

24 Our demands are quite simple. Enforce the
25 fulfillment of Right to Counsel by fully funding the

1 program, apply pressure on OCJ and OCA to fully
2 adjourn cases and live by the spirit of the law, and
3 finally to expand organizing and educational programs
4 like funding Local Law 53 immediately. Thank you so
5 much.
6

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Our next panel
8 is a virtual panel. Once your name is called, a
9 Member of our Staff will unmute you and then you may
10 begin your testimony once the Sergeant-at-Arms sets
11 the clock and gives you the cue.

12 Virtually, we'll be hearing from Craig
13 Gurion and Shannon Lumpkin.

14 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

15 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Mr. Gurion, can
16 you please check your audio devices? We can't hear
17 you.

18 CRAIG GURIAN: How about now? Can you
19 hear?

20 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: We can hear.

21 CRAIG GURIAN: Thank you. Thank you very
22 much. Apologies for that. I'll start. Quickly again,
23 I'm the Executive Director of the Anti-Discrimination
24 Center and the author among other things of Let Them
25 Rent Cake: George Pataki, Market Ideology, and the

1 Attempt to Destroy Rent Regulation in New York. I
2
3 hope that someone will ask me at the conclusion of my
4 remarks to comment on the gross non-responsiveness of
5 the Administration's representatives and what can be
6 done about that.

7 I want at first to take a moment to thank
8 the many Members of both Committees who are early co-
9 sponsors of Intro. 915, the Co-op Disclosure Bill.
10 It's well-known that discrimination thrives in an
11 environment of secrecy, and secrecy is the universal
12 way that the co-op application process is handled.
13 Intro. 915 supported by two dozen civil rights and
14 allied organizations explicitly do not shrink in any
15 way the legal reasons that co-ops currently have to
16 turn people down. It just requires that co-op boards
17 when they reject an applicant, let the applicant the
18 specific reasons why. This is transparency at the
19 most basic level. Further information is available at
20 coopdisclosure.nyc. I hope that those who are not yet
21 on Intro. 915 join their Colleagues as co-sponsors.

22 Turning to today's business, I wanted to
23 urge Members to think about how the assistance that
24 legal services lawyers give by providing eviction
25 protection services can and should be leveraged to

1
2 provide interrelated assistance. Once contact is made
3 between lawyer and client, the lawyer will find out
4 now only about the eviction proceeding but ways in
5 which the landlord has not maintained the apartment
6 or building properly. There needs to be more
7 effective ways for affirmative cases to be brought by
8 others than HPD to challenge failures to abide by the
9 Building Maintenance Code. The client's meeting with
10 the lawyer is an opportunity to learn about the
11 landlord's failure to make...

12 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

13 CRAIG GURION: Reasonable accommodations
14 or modifications to the needs of the tenant or others
15 with disabilities who live in the building. That same
16 meeting is an opportunity to find out about other
17 discriminatory practices the landlord may be engaged
18 in so the provision of eviction protection services
19 can, if the right questions are asked, have great
20 yield even beyond the immediate goal of preventing
21 eviction.

22 Finally, in my humble opinion, private
23 pro bono counsel are not the enemy here. Clearly,
24 most of the work needs to be done by legal services
25 providers and other not-for-profits who need much

1
2 more funding, but it would be silly to spurn
3 (INAUDIBLE) assistance that pro bono private counsel
4 could provide. Thank you very much.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Thank you.

6 We'll now be hearing from Shannon Lumpkin.

7 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

8 SHANNON LUMPKIN: Hi. Not sure if my sound
9 is on here. Sorry.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: It's on.

11 SHANNON LUMPKIN: You can hear me?

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: We can hear
13 you.

14 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: We can.

15 SHANNON LUMPKIN: Okay. My name is Shannon
16 Lumpkin. I am a Tenant Organizer and a permanent, it
17 seems, evictee. I've been fighting against eviction
18 since 2015, 2016. I lost my leg to Ewing sarcoma in
19 2014, and that's the reason that I became I feel very
20 much like a target, and everyone here has been going
21 through the same thing obviously. I just want to
22 bring up the concept of just the double standard
23 between tenants and landlords and the way that we're
24 treated legally and bring into question what is, I
25 mean it's societal discrimination really, but why is

1
2 there such a double standard and maybe there are ways
3 to kind of get ahead of where we obviously need to go
4 as a society to survive what's coming up and the work
5 that we all have to do together. I really want to
6 thank all of you who are here today working on this.
7 It is so important. When we think about landlords and
8 what it is, it's an investment, it's a business...

9 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Time expired.

10 SHANNON LUMPKIN: And what other realm do
11 we allow a negotiation if you will to come down to
12 violence, and eviction is violence. It's life-
13 threatening and so many people are going through it,
14 and why don't we talk about, I was wondering,
15 adhesion contracts and why they're not enforced in
16 the realm of landlording. They are enforced in every
17 other investment realm. Commercial law as well, it's
18 not enforced if it's a business, it's a product, and
19 clearly not living up to the standards that they say
20 that they are going to and then again bringing
21 harassment and violence into the situation...

22 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Miss Lumpkin...

23 SHANNON LUMPKIN: Talking about that as
24 well. Again, thank you all for listening and, again,
25

1
2 just as a neighbor, thank you all for doing what
3 you're doing.

4 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you.

5 SHANNON LUMPKIN: Council Member Sanchez,
6 thank you for doing what you do.

7 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you. Thank you
8 so much.

9 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: We have now
10 heard from everyone who has signed up to testify. If
11 we inadvertently missed anyone who would like to
12 testify in person, please visit the Sergeant's table
13 and complete a witness slip now.

14 If we inadvertently missed anyone who
15 would like to testify virtually, please use the raise
16 hand function in Zoom, and I will call on you in the
17 order of hands raised.

18 Seeing no one, I would like to note that
19 written testimony which will be reviewed in full by
20 Committee Staff may be submitted to the record up to
21 72 hours after the close of this hearing by emailing
22 it to testimony@council.nyc.gov.

23 Deputy Speaker Ayala, we have concluded
24 public testimony for this hearing.

1
2 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You may begin. Go
3 ahead.

4 GREG LEE: Good afternoon. My name is Mr.
5 Greg Lee from Brooklyn, New York. I'm with all
6 groups, and I was one of the children who was born
7 when the country was protesting President Nixon, June
8 23, 1973, also before they elected Vice President
9 Gerald Ford and around the time that former President
10 Lyndon Johnson died. I've been helping with Right to
11 Counsel court watches, and I saw with my own eyes
12 everything that everyone else said was true. I also
13 am disappointed that Right to Counsel that we fought
14 so hard for and won in 2017 has been overturned and
15 no longer exists and seemingly it'll never exist
16 again, and we're trying to get them to pass it on the
17 State level. They won't pass it on the State level
18 seemingly. I also can't get all my needed repairs
19 done. Several times, my hot water would disappear. No
20 one would say anything. Several times my ceilings had
21 leaked, but yet landlords want to raise rents and
22 evict because they want to raise the rents on the new
23 tenants, and it seems that today more merchants,
24 including landlords, they feel they shouldn't have to
25

1 do the work even if they're getting paid. Is my time
2 up? All right, thanks.

3
4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

5 PAMELA ASHWOOD: Good afternoon. My name
6 is Pamela Ashwood. I am here today representing my
7 mother. She would be 100 years old this year. She
8 passed away six years ago. She fought for tenants'
9 rights when I was a child up until the day she passed
10 away, and I'm here to represent her and also
11 represent the community which is being displaced. My
12 mother, she fought, and we didn't have all of these
13 things around when she was fighting, so I'm here
14 today on her behalf to continue to fight.

15 When I was a child, my mother, she paid
16 out of her own pocket to keep heat and hot water in a
17 building that a landlord neglected. The landlord did
18 not provide heat, hot water (INAUDIBLE) provide the
19 care of his building, the maintenance of his
20 building. My mother spent money out of her own pocket
21 to have people come in and fix the boiler and get
22 heat and hot water into the building. She tried to
23 form her own tenant association, but the people of
24 the building didn't help her or assist her with it
25 and so she had to spend her own money in order to get

1
2 the heat and hot water into the building, and that
3 was going to benefit everybody, not just her. She
4 spent the money, got the heat and hot water running,
5 but the tenants didn't want to contribute so the
6 pipes went cold again so we had to go to the hydrant
7 in the street in order to get heat and hot water, and
8 now here it is, I'm six decades old and I'm still
9 fighting for the same things that my mother fought
10 for. In 2005 or 2006, I had to go to court for my
11 mother. She was 80-something years old, and I had the
12 opportunity and the pleasure of taking care of her
13 until she passed away six years ago. I went to court
14 for her because they said that she owed over 2,000
15 dollars' worth of rent so when I went to court for
16 her, I didn't have an attorney represent me, I didn't
17 have anybody represent me for my mother so she wasn't
18 able to go because her sight was failing so I was the
19 one that was helping her the most so when I did
20 happen to go to court, my mother kept such good
21 records and at the time it wasn't pay by card, pay by
22 this, pay by phone. It was pay by money order, so my
23 mom had her drawer full of rent receipts and for the
24 money orders so I took all of the money orders, and I

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went to court, and when I got to court I had every
money order that my mother paid rent with...

4

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Miss Ashwood, we need
to wrap up.

6

PAMELA ASHWOOD: You know what, I want to
say that I've been in the streets as well, I was
evicted from my home as well. I was in court, and my
children were in the house, and I was in court, and
they came to my house and they put my kids in the
street and I was in housing court in the Bronx, and
they came to my house and my children at home and
they put my children in the street, and I told them
come over to the court where I was so we were in the
street. You know what, I would like to say that, you
know what, we need Right to Counsel because if we
would have Right to Counsel a lot of people would not
be in the street, and, you know what, the people that
we vote into office, you guys make a lot of money so
you are not in jeopardy of being evicted because you
make so much money and, you know what, you don't have
to have affordable housing, but we do, we need
affordable housing. We need Right to Counsel so we
won't be evicted, so we won't be...

25

CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

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2 PAMELA ASHWOOD: Evicted, we won't be
3 homeless.

4 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

5 PAMELA ASHWOOD: And I just want to thank
6 you for your time. You know what, we need Right to
7 Counsel, and, you know what, if we were criminals,
8 criminals have right to counsel, why can't tenants
9 have Right to Counsel?

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: I agree. Thank you so
11 much. Thank you.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL ROMERO: Next we have
13 Karen Adams and Claristine Gardner.

14 CLARISTINE GARDNER: Good afternoon. My
15 name is Claristine Gardner, and I've been living in
16 my apartment for more than 30 years. Many turned
17 over, but I'm still there. My landlord is fighting to
18 get me out of there into a nursing home which I'm not
19 ready to go. Repairs in my building, living standard,
20 and because of that I have to join with this
21 organization to help me stay in my apartment. Repairs
22 (INAUDIBLE). I'm asking, please, for the Right to
23 Counsel so that when we go to the court, we have
24 somebody to represent us. Thank you very much.

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2 KAREN ADAMS: Hi. My name is Karen. I had
3 an illegal eviction. Landlord did foul things to put
4 me out. Never received an eviction notice. The
5 landlord lied to the courts in Section 8. (INAUDIBLE)
6 living in the streets and buildings, on the floor, on
7 the trains and buses, whatever to survive. What did I
8 write here? After living on the street, I know
9 people. I asked can I please stay with them. I did
10 not tell them my situation because I was embarrassed.
11 I'm sorry (INAUDIBLE) I have to leave them because
12 they were getting abusive so I had to leave. What did
13 I put over here? I have stayed with people that I
14 knew then I had to leave because I was being harassed
15 by gun. Then I've been moving from place to place.
16 I've been trying to find a place but don't have my
17 Section 8 voucher. We need attorneys to represent all
18 tenants in need so they don't get displaced and lose
19 everything just like me.

20 In 2019, I went to housing court to
21 vacate the decision. They denied me several times. In
22 2022, I found out the landlord withheld all my mail.
23 I am so sorry (INAUDIBLE) because I was not served..
24 In 2019, I went to vacate the decision because I was
25 not served. The court denied. I continued (INAUDIBLE)

1
2 to get a place. I don't have my voucher. I just need
3 a place to stay. My health has deteriorated now from
4 them.

5 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Ma'am, I need you to
6 wrap.

7 KAREN ADAMS: RTC should be enforced so
8 tenants have the same rights to be heard just as
9 landlords.

10 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: Thank you.

11 KAREN ADAMS: Okay. I am done, people. No
12 more.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: You did good. Thank
14 you. Thank you so much.

15 We have no one else registered to testify
16 today.

17 Before we conclude this hearing, I just
18 want to thank all of the advocates who came and who
19 stayed and who shared their stories with us and with
20 New Yorkers who are viewing the Zoom and many other
21 ways that we're able to share our messages these
22 days. I think that we understood. The takeaway is
23 that there is still obviously a lot of work that has
24 to be done. We will follow up with the Administration
25 to get answers to questions that we were not able to

1
2 get today. Again, thank you so much, and I will pass
3 it over to Council Member Pierina Sanchez to close us
4 out. Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON SANCHEZ: Thank you, Deputy
6 Speaker, and thank you to everyone who participated
7 today and especially those who have stayed. (Speaking
8 Foreign Language)

9 We will follow up with the Administration
10 for answers and thank you, everyone, so much
11 including our team who helped us to prepare for
12 today. Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON AYALA: With that, this
14 hearing is adjourned. [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date April 19, 2023