

NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES  
HOMELESSNESS PREVENTION ADMINISTRATION

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IN THE MATTER OF:

NYC OFFICE OF CIVIL JUSTICE'S PROGRAMS TO  
PROVIDE UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES  
FOR TENANTS FACING EVICTION.

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DATE: December 9, 2025

HELD AT: 125 Worth Street, 2nd Floor Auditorium  
New York, NY 10013

BEFORE: MASHA GINDLER,  
Civil Justice Coordinator

ALSO PRESENT: JENNY LAURIE, Housing Court Answers  
SARA WAGNER, The Civil Right to Counsel  
Task Force of the New York City Bar  
Association  
KATHERINE MACRAED, ALAA - UAW Local 2325  
ATUSA MOZAFFARI, ALAA - UAW Local 2325  
ROBERT SORIANO-HEWITT, ALAA - UAW Local  
2325  
ELISE BROWN, Mobilization for Justice  
ROSALIND BLACK, Legal Services NYC  
CHRIS HELWIG, Neighborhood Defender  
Services  
JEROME FRIERSON, BronxWorks  
PHILIP DUNCAN, Northern Manhattan  
Improvement Corporation  
ALFRED TOUSSAINT, CAMBA  
JONATHAN FOX, New York Legal Assistance  
Group  
ADAM MARKOVICS, The Bronx Defenders  
MUNONYEDI CLIFFORD, Legal Aid Society  
TRICIA LENDORE, Build Up Justice  
LESLIE THROPE, Housing Conservation  
Coordinators  
KARLA SAENZ, Right to Counsel Coalition  
GEORGE SOTIROFF, Tenant  
CHRISTINA BROWN, Association of Legal  
Advocates and Attorneys/Right to Counsel  
Worker's Council  
JUAN GIRALDO, CASA Organizer

DIGITALLY RECORDED PROCEEDING, TRANSCRIBED BY:  
GABRIELLE ATKINSON  
ACOLAD

WILLIAM BERSHADSKY, Flatbush Tenant  
Coalition  
BRYAN FOTINO, Catholic Migration Services  
DELIA JOAQUIN, Tenant

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GABRIELLE ATKINSON  
ACOLAD

1 MS. MASHA GINDLER: We're going to start  
2 (inaudible). If everyone could please take your seats so we  
3 can get started with our hearing and make sure everyone has a  
4 chance to be heard. Okay, I think we're good. We're good?  
5 All righty. Good evening everyone. Welcome to the City of  
6 New York's 8th Annual Public Hearing on the implementation of  
7 the City's Universal Access to Counsel Law, also known as  
8 Right to Counsel. My name is Masha Gindler and I'm the Civil  
9 Justice Coordinator for the New York City Office of Civil  
10 Justice at the Human Resources Administration. We have a few  
11 housekeeping matters before we get started. We have Spanish,  
12 Mandarin, and American Sign Language interpretation services  
13 tonight. I'm to ask our language interpreters to introduce  
14 themselves in their assigned language so folks know they're  
15 available.

16 INTERPRETER 1: [00:01:17 - 00:01:26]

17 INTERPRETER 2: [00:01:29 - 00:01:38]

18 MS. GINDLER: Thank you so much. We're very  
19 grateful. Please feel free to sit wherever is most  
20 comfortable. So, once again, welcome to the annual public  
21 hearing on the Universal Access to Counsel Law. As  
22 previously mentioned, my name is Masha Gindler and I'm the  
23 civil justice coordinator for the Office of Civil Justice  
24 (inaudible). This is my first public hearing in this role.

25 We invite anyone who wishes to be heard on today's

1 topics of universal access to counsel and tenant legal  
2 services to speak. We have many speakers who have already  
3 signed up and they'll be called upon in the order in which  
4 they signed up. If you wish to speak this evening and have  
5 not yet signed up please (inaudible) on your phone. Once the  
6 signed-up speakers have spoken then we'll give you a chance  
7 to participate. So, if you're here, you will be able to  
8 participate whether you have officially signed up, previously  
9 or not. This is an opportunity for the public to be heard  
10 and as is typical for these kinds of hearings, I will not be  
11 speaking beyond this introduction, but I will be listening to  
12 the testimony provided by the community.

13 Before we do this, I want to say a few words while  
14 I can. First of all, I'd like to acknowledge and thank the  
15 team at OCJ (inaudible) today. Deputy Civil Justice  
16 Coordinator Peta-Gaye Daniel, Data and Research Coordinators  
17 Anabel de Castro and Chris Belden, and Assistant Coordinators  
18 Zach Sheola, Elliot Yancy, and Zamira Avadyaev. I'd also  
19 like to acknowledge Cheryl Wertz and Carolyn Robledo of the  
20 DSS Office of Refugee and Immigrant Affairs, without whom  
21 this would not have been possible.

22 As you may know, OCJ sits within HRA, a core  
23 division of the largest municipal social services agency in  
24 the country. HRA helps more than three million New Yorkers  
25 annually through the administration of more than 15 major

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1 public assistance programs, including cash assistance,  
2 employment services, rental assistance services, and eviction  
3 prevention. OCJ previously sat under the Office of Legal  
4 Affairs at OLA, but as of September of this year now resides  
5 under the Homelessness Prevention Administration, HPA. Since  
6 OCJ was established in 2015, the office has launched and  
7 operated a range of civil legal service programs for New  
8 Yorkers in need. The centerpiece of our work, all of our  
9 work together, and the reason we're all here tonight is the  
10 City's groundbreaking Universal Access to Counsel program.

11 More than eight years ago, the City of New York  
12 made history in becoming the first city in the country to  
13 provide tenants facing eviction in housing court or  
14 administrative termination of tenant proceedings in public  
15 housing access to free legal services, including  
16 representation for income-eligible tenants. I want to  
17 acknowledge the main sponsors of the bill on the City Council  
18 who now serve as borough presidents, Bronx Borough President  
19 Vanessa Gibson and Manhattan Borough President Mark Levine.  
20 I want to thank them both for their tremendous work and  
21 support of this law. Since 2017 when the Universal Access to  
22 Legal was enacted, access to civil legal services for tenants  
23 in need has dramatically increased as cities and states  
24 across the nation have pursued their own Right to Counsel  
25 initiatives.

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1                   Here in New York City, we have just released OCJ's  
2 annual report, which is available on our website. This was  
3 released on Friday. I encourage folks to go on the website  
4 and check it out and email us if you have any questions. We  
5 try hard to make the information as accessible as possible  
6 and to add more information than ever before and kind of talk  
7 through where we want to go in the future. So, please grab a  
8 copy if you haven't. There's also a QR code to the website.

9                   Last fiscal year, OCJ administrative legal services  
10 reached an all-time high, providing legal assistance to over  
11 110,000 people across 51,000 households. Over half of that  
12 included full representation for clients, another milestone.  
13 As proud as we are of this program's accomplishments, we're  
14 committed to further strengthening and improving tenant legal  
15 services and embodying a continuous improvement mindset  
16 towards the work. Moving forward, the Office of Civil  
17 Justice will be working on a strategic plan for the office.  
18 We look forward to sharing that with you all when it is  
19 ready.

20                  Thank you for joining tonight's hearing, amplifying  
21 your experiences with the UA program, and sharing your  
22 thoughts and ideas on improving the program going forward.  
23 It's important for us as administrators of the program to  
24 hear your experiences firsthand.

25                  So, before we formally begin, I once again like to

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1 remind the attendees of a few points. This is a public  
2 hearing. We invite anyone who wishes to speak to be heard on  
3 the topics of universal access to counsel and tenant legal  
4 services. Again, we won't be speaking beyond this point or  
5 asking any questions of the speakers. This is typical. If  
6 you prefer not to speak in public and would rather submit a  
7 statement in writing, you may submit your statement to us by  
8 email at [civiljustice@hra.nyc.gov](mailto:civiljustice@hra.nyc.gov). OCJ is collecting online  
9 statements and will make them part of the record for this  
10 hearing, which we made available to the public on our  
11 website, [nyc.gov/civiljustice](http://nyc.gov/civiljustice). I will repeat the website  
12 again: [nyc.gov/civiljustice](http://nyc.gov/civiljustice). The hearing is being  
13 transcribed, and the transcription will be made available on  
14 the website as well.

15 In order to ensure that everyone who wants to speak  
16 will have the opportunity to do so, we will be limiting  
17 speakers to three minutes each. We'll alert you when the  
18 three minutes have ended. We will give a little heads up  
19 when you're getting closer. But really, it's to make sure  
20 everyone has a chance to participate. I'm going to call on  
21 speakers one by one. When you hear your name, please come up  
22 to the microphone. Okay, let's start with the first name.  
23 Okay, Jenny Laurie. Oh, and one thing I just want to add, as  
24 I'll be listening, I'll be taking notes. It helps me listen,  
25 but I'm engaged.

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1                   MS. JENNY LAURIE: All right, good evening, and  
2 thank you for the opportunity to testify in person. It's  
3 great to have an in-person hearing for (inaudible) to attend  
4 but the most effective (inaudible) counsel law. My name's  
5 Jenny Laurie. I'm the executive director of Housing Court  
6 Answers. We have information tables in the City's housing  
7 reports as well as run a hotline funded in part by HRA. In  
8 your most recent annual report, we celebrated a milestone of,  
9 in FY25, we're reaching 44% full legal representation for  
10 tenants facing eviction, and this is great. It's not 100%,  
11 which is what we all want, of course, but it's great that the  
12 number is increasing.

13                   I would love it if you would compare filings to  
14 representation in future reports or in the data that you  
15 release. I think it's really helpful to know how the filings  
16 are going up, going down, the number of evictions, how many  
17 people were able to get representation. I think that's  
18 really important. Obviously, we talk to them, whatever it  
19 is, 46% of the people, 56% of the people who don't get legal  
20 representation. So, they call our hotline and they come to  
21 our information tables. And I'm going to say some things  
22 that I've said in previous years about the process of  
23 connecting tenants to attorneys when they come to housing  
24 court in an eviction case. And we hear this over and over  
25 again at our tables and our hotline, and we've heard it in

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1 previous years, and I've said it in previous testimony.  
2 People don't understand the process. They don't connect,  
3 especially in the Bronx and in Queens where it's remote.  
4 They don't understand what they're being screened for. They  
5 don't understand their Right to Counsel. They don't always  
6 understand what happens next. Maybe they were screened, but  
7 they don't understand if they're going to get an attorney or  
8 how they can get an attorney, when the call will come, if  
9 they miss the call. So, more systems in place to explain to  
10 people what it is, how it works, and what to do if you miss  
11 your call. Obviously, if they miss their court date, it's  
12 really clear what happens next, right? They get a marshal's  
13 notice, they get evicted. It would be nice if it would be  
14 really clear at the beginning what the process is.

15 And then I just want to say we're a proud member of  
16 the Right to Counsel Coalition as many groups here are  
17 tonight. And we support the demand for more funding from the  
18 City for expanded legal services for tenants facing eviction.  
19 We support the statewide Right to Counsel (inaudible) OCJ you  
20 do as well, and we support basically pressuring the court to  
21 slow down the intake system so that tenants who need legal  
22 representation can get it (inaudible). Thank you. Oh, you  
23 take the mic?

24 MS. GINDLER: Yeah, we take the mic. Thank you.  
25 Thank you, Jenny.

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1                   M1: Testing, testing, testing.

2                   MS. GINDLER: Yeah, (inaudible). Okay, up we have  
3                   Timothy Paulso. Is Timothy with us today? He didn't check  
4                   in, so I just want to double check. Okay, let's go to Sara  
5                   Wagner.

6                   MS. SARA WAGNER: Good evening, nice to meet you.  
7                   I am Sara Wagner, I'm the co-chair of the New York City Bar  
8                   Association Civil Right to Counsel Task Force. The task  
9                   force meets with key Right to Counsel stakeholders to monitor  
10                  the City's implementation of the Right to Counsel, and we all  
11                  agree that we could do better to ensure that the Right to  
12                  Counsel program is being effectively administered and  
13                  efficiently administered. There are not enough attorneys  
14                  available to meet the need and thousands of tenants are going  
15                  unrepresented. The crisis is not simply an issue of access  
16                  to justice. Given the vastly disproportionate rate of  
17                  eviction proceedings brought against people of color, it is  
18                  an issue of racial justice as well.

19                  Based on our discussions with stakeholders, the  
20                  task force urges HRA's Office of Civil Justice to take these  
21                  immediate steps. First, OCJ should work with other  
22                  departments in the City's Human Resources Administration to  
23                  streamline and revise procedures that affect the  
24                  implementation of the rights of counsel. Stakeholders report  
25                  that there are delays, rejections, and roadblocks in

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1 processing one-shot deals and housing subsidies like  
2 CityFHEPS. These necessary benefits should be provided at  
3 the earliest possible stage when eviction is threatened. A  
4 streamlined system like the one used during the pandemic  
5 should be put in place to make these benefits available  
6 before eviction petitions are filed. The current approach of  
7 requiring eviction proceedings, rejections after 30 days,  
8 requiring re-applications, requests for documents and  
9 mandatory interviews to get a waste judicial resources and  
10 Right to Counsel attorneys' time. An efficient system would  
11 reduce court violence, cut the red tape, and enable legal  
12 services providers to use their resources to provide legal  
13 addiction prevention rather than spend time chasing after  
14 government benefits.

15 The system for distribution of cases of Right to  
16 Counsel-eligible tenants to legal services providers, which  
17 differs by county, is chaotic and confusing. It's confusing  
18 for tenants, providers, and the courts. OCJ should work with  
19 tenant leaders, providers, and the courts to devise a better  
20 approach that allows for counsel at all stages of eviction  
21 proceedings, not just the new part. OCJ should also work  
22 with all stakeholders to develop plan to assure that all  
23 tenants who are entitled to representation under the Right to  
24 Counsel law are able to secure counsel as soon as possible.  
25 This plan should include concrete steps with a timetable to

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1 grow the plan by providing sufficient funding to hire and  
2 retain enough attorneys and support staff to provide quality  
3 legal representation to tenants. Funding must be sufficient  
4 to ensure that all caseloads are manageable, and that  
5 employee compensation is high enough to support recruitment  
6 and retention of qualified candidates. The City should  
7 support and fund pipeline efforts of the providers and local  
8 law schools to prepare, recruit, and retain attorneys and  
9 other eviction prevention staff. Finally, we greatly  
10 appreciate that OCJ has adopted the term "right to counsel"  
11 and has shifted away from the confusing phrase "universal  
12 access." NYC has inspired a movement to replicate the right  
13 of jurisdictions all across the country. It is time to make  
14 the right to counsel a reality. Thank you for your time and  
15 consideration, and please don't hesitate to call upon the  
16 task force.

17 MS. GINDLER: Thank you so much. Thank you. One  
18 moment, (inaudible). So, both as you come up, just speak  
19 into the mic to make sure everyone can hear you. Okay, so  
20 next up we have Robert Soriano-Hewitt. Yeah, you guys, you  
21 can go in the order you prefer.

22 MS. KATHERINE MACRAED: Good evening, everyone, and  
23 thank you for holding this event. My name is Kate Macraed  
24 and my colleagues and I are members of the Legal Society  
25 (inaudible), a chapter of the Association of Legal Advocates

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1 and Attorneys, UAW Local 2325. ALAA is composed of over  
2 3,000 advocates and attorneys, 1,200 of which are attorneys  
3 at the Legal Aid Society. We fully support the joint  
4 testimony of the Rights of Counsel Legal Service providers  
5 and have (inaudible) request for a fully funded RTC program  
6 without the punitive or restricted contract terms. Through  
7 our written and oral testimony, we humbly offer a frontline  
8 workers' observation on the efficacy and limitations of the  
9 current RTC program.

10                   Tonight my ALAA colleagues and I will highlight  
11 three main issues. The fact that the lack of access to  
12 counsel has given rise to a growing epidemic of preventable  
13 and unmeritorious evictions of unrepresented tenants.  
14 Second, help fully and flexibly funded RTC program to have a  
15 positive impact on struggling tenants (inaudible) workforce  
16 and labor market. And third, the dire need for resources,  
17 allocation, repair, and affirmative HP cases.

18                   First, I'll discuss how insufficient access to  
19 counsel for tenants is causing an epidemic of preventable  
20 unmerited evictions. As a tenant defense attorney in the  
21 Legal Aid Society's Brooklyn neighborhood office, I see the  
22 same pattern of preventable, unmeritorious evictions time and  
23 time again. First, tenants who have paid all of their share  
24 of rent are being evicted for non-payment because there was  
25 no attorney available to identify unlawful arrears. Often

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1 this manifests as a landlord suing for a Section 8 or a NYCHA  
2 subsidy portion not attributable to the tenant or subsidy  
3 payments that have been suspended temporarily due to the  
4 landlord's failure to maintain housing quality standards.  
5 Next, I often see tenants who accrue large arrears to declare  
6 court errors at HRA with halt payments on the tenant's FHEPS  
7 or CityFHEPS subsidies. Such errors are difficult for  
8 tenants to diagnose and correct, but can be easily  
9 investigated because they are all too familiar to my  
10 colleagues and myself, and cured.

11 Third, cases where the landlord failed on the  
12 petition that an apartment is subject to rent stabilization,  
13 under which, as we all know in this room, tend to report  
14 (inaudible). Next, cases where the landlord improperly  
15 claims that they are not subject to the recent good cause  
16 eviction law. And finally, cases where a tenant who has the  
17 right to succeed to a rent-stabilized apartment, which now  
18 more than ever with rising affordability and prices is  
19 imperative that we preserve. After the death of a parent or  
20 family member, (inaudible) of the perceived impracticability  
21 or impossibility of asserting succession rights as a pro se  
22 litigant.

23 The data also shows that about 89% of tenants  
24 represented by counsel remain stably housed. I see this time  
25 and time again. I am assigned a case with issues like I just

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1 outlined, and I'm able to diagnose these problems, correct  
2 them, and my clients luckily and fortunately stayed housed.  
3 And then we see cases where no attorney was available to  
4 represent a tenant or the tenant was not able to go to an  
5 intake session. Those clients very often face eviction over  
6 these same things that are easily curable.

7 This emerging epidemic of avoidable evictions means  
8 that our neighbors, families, and individuals are  
9 experiencing avoidable, destabilizing trauma. It also means  
10 that the City's already overburdened shelter system is  
11 resulting in poor conditions and at the same time adding  
12 exorbitant cost to the City. Newly vacant apartments seeing  
13 substantial increases in the rent, as I discussed with rent-  
14 stabilized buildings that are coming off market, and when  
15 they do remain in stabilization, they are really only  
16 moderately affordable to tenants. It's our opinion, and I'm  
17 sure many of the folks here this evening, that fully funding  
18 RTC would substantially curb this growing epidemic. Thank  
19 you.

20 MS. GINDLER: Thank you very much. Can folks in  
21 the back hear okay? So, (inaudible) switching up the mics.  
22 See if this one's better. Want to try that? (Inaudible)

23 MS. ATUSA MOZAFFARI: Thank you. Can you folks  
24 hear me okay? Thank you. My name is Atusa Mozaffari. I'm  
25 here along with Kate Macrae and ALAA. I'm here on behalf of

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1 (inaudible) attorneys, the LSAU chapter. As my colleague  
2 already described, there's a rising trend in preventable  
3 evictions that cause irreversible harm. An underfunded Right  
4 to Counsel cannot sustain the workforce necessary to fulfill  
5 its mission. Given staffing shortages and systemic  
6 limitations in government agencies such as HRA and the  
7 Department of Social Services, the attorneys and advocates  
8 serve as a critical backdrop and safeguards associated  
9 (inaudible) access to essential benefits and resources.  
10 Simply put, the attorneys, the workers, help the systems run  
11 more efficiently to actually fulfill the Right to Counsel's  
12 mission.

13 Obviously, we hope that by attending Right to  
14 Counsel that comes with higher (inaudible) attorneys to  
15 increase the percentage of eligible tenants who can benefit  
16 and receive representation as well as retain experienced  
17 attorneys (inaudible) as well as training programs  
18 (inaudible) like social workers, housing advocates, and  
19 interpreters, things that are desperately needed in housing  
20 courts, as well as expand the federal Right to Counsel in and  
21 of itself to include complex litigation as well as a prepare  
22 (inaudible) legal and more about and to expand free legal  
23 services to target those tenants in emergency cases rather  
24 than at the beginning of the proceeding purely through a  
25 procedural intake and also (inaudible).

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1                   Tenant (inaudible) staff attorneys have to be their  
2 own social worker, their own investigator, their own  
3 paralegal. They're responsible for not only substantive  
4 legal work (inaudible) cases on which they work on the  
5 tenants and their households, but time-consuming often  
6 arduous benefits (inaudible) agencies that administer  
7 requests (inaudible) for example, FHEPS, CityFHEPS and  
8 working along with charity organizations like (inaudible) for  
9 the Homeless (inaudible). Staff attorneys (inaudible) crisis  
10 (inaudible) issues that stem beyond the housing crisis alone  
11 that need care and attention. They're stemming from systemic  
12 oppression, mental health struggles, disabilities, loss of  
13 access to benefits like SNAP, if we all remember that, in  
14 early November, on top of harassment from their landlord, as  
15 well as the administrative work that goes into procedurally  
16 every case.

17                   We already know, OCJ already knows that when a  
18 tenant is connected with a Right to Counsel provider with one  
19 of the staff attorney workers, they are far more likely to  
20 remain housed. The work is not merely about preventing  
21 evictions. The work is also about preserving affordability.  
22 As my colleague explained earlier, when those apartments are  
23 lost to the market they will never be found by the households  
24 who are most in need of the affordable housing that was  
25 provided under rent stabilization.

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1                   While many young attorneys are entering legal  
2 services fields with a passion for advocating for tenant  
3 rights, we also observe that so many of them are leaving not  
4 purely because of lack of competitive pay but that certainly  
5 doesn't help. The ever-changing advocacy pathways, the  
6 public benefits agencies dealing with their own turnover  
7 attrition makes it incredibly difficult for staff attorneys  
8 to full represent clients as they deserve. Along with  
9 unmanageable caseloads and the aforementioned lack of  
10 resources. It's an ongoing and recurring theme. There's the  
11 inherent vicarious trauma of representing tenants who are in  
12 the most vulnerable position that they will likely ever face  
13 in their lifetime.

14                   All of this calls for the Right to Counsel on for  
15 OCJ to fully support its mission and stand by it to include  
16 funding that's adequate enough that not only are we hiring  
17 new attorneys who are ready to do this work, but also that  
18 we're retaining the skilled attorneys who remain in this  
19 sector, defending New York City's most vulnerable tenants.  
20 As someone mentioned earlier, this is not purely an issue of  
21 access to justice. This is as much an issue of economic  
22 justice as it is racial justice. And zealous advocacy alone  
23 is insufficient to bridge the gap between the vast number of  
24 tenants who are eligible and the very limited number who  
25 actually end up with full representation.

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1                   It's obviously also important to know we are here  
2 on behalf of ALAA 2325. Insufficient Right to Counsel  
3 funding fuels the growing tide of labor disputes between  
4 fighters as well as the unionized staff, even accounting for  
5 other disputes stemming from organizational leaders, the  
6 common route across all providers is the insufficient rate of  
7 funding for eviction defense services. When providers are  
8 put in a position to ask more of their labor force without  
9 adequate compensation, labor disputes will inevitably  
10 increase in duration, frequency, and intensity.

11                  We are here as workers because we don't believe  
12 that the Right to Counsel mission is just anti-homelessness,  
13 that it's just eviction prevention. We truly do believe that  
14 the Right to Counsel is preserving affordability to make sure  
15 that no individual, no household loses their home, whether it  
16 be a home that they've had for less than a year or a home  
17 that they've had for 30 years that they hope a family member  
18 may succeed to in the future. We hope that following this  
19 testimony, and we will provide written testimony as well,  
20 that OCJ humbly accepts some of the positive recommendations  
21 that we believe would overall help the Right to Counsel model  
22 on behalf of tenant communities. Thank you.

23                  MS. GINDLER: Thank you so much. One second. I'm  
24 just going to text to see if we can someone to put the volume  
25 louder. Still not loud enough. One second. One moment

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1 (inaudible). Thank you so much. I just wanted to see if we  
2 could get someone to make the volume louder, but in the  
3 meantime, please begin.

4 MR. ROBERT SORIANO-HEWITT: Good evening. My name  
5 is Robert Soriano-Hewitt, staff attorney at the Legal Aid  
6 Society. The last point I'm here to focus on is the dire  
7 need for resources to be allocated to cases dealing with  
8 repairs or what we refer to as HP cases. I started--my  
9 experience as a tenant defense attorney started in 2014. For  
10 the early and middle part of my career, our funding allowed  
11 for us to take affirmative cases. I think an indirect  
12 consequence of how the program is structured now, it severely  
13 limits or has completely eliminated our ability to take those  
14 cases.

15 I think there's some deep and profound subtext to  
16 how the courts are structured. In the Bronx, there are no  
17 less than 12 court parts that are allocated for what we call  
18 resolution parts, which essentially are parts allocated to  
19 facilitating potentially someone's displacement. There's  
20 only a singular part that is allocated towards addressing  
21 issues with repairs, and I understand that may not be  
22 particularly OCJ's issue. But what happens with the typical  
23 experience of what I've seen is that tenants come in trying  
24 to represent themselves. By some accounts, more than half of  
25 the cases that come in pro se are kicked out of court for

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1 service issues because tenants are forced to navigate the  
2 nuances of effectuating service on their own.

3                   Virtually no cases that survive a service challenge  
4 get an order to correct on the first appearance without some  
5 advocacy from an attorney. And what that looks like is,  
6 especially a season like now, somebody might have been living  
7 with no heat or hot water for weeks, or at times have been  
8 months in between the date of filing and the first return  
9 date. It's not abnormal to see people without essential  
10 services for months. And right now, the HP part is wholly  
11 inadequate to service tenants, especially without legal  
12 representation.

13                   I want to point to a tragic occurrence in the  
14 Bronx, just to give an example of how our presence could  
15 maybe help alleviate some of these issues. I think some of  
16 you may recall in early 2022, there was this massive building  
17 fire. The New York Times did an exposé, 17 people died. And  
18 I remember when I saw the headline, before reading of the  
19 exposé, I knew I could build out the profile of what this  
20 building was like. I knew that it was the winter, that  
21 because code enforcement was inadequate, that people were  
22 using electric heaters, there's a chance that electrical  
23 wiring was not up to code, and it turns out that their self-  
24 closing doors in this central corridor were not up to code,  
25 which allowed the smoke to go from one of the lower floors

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1 and that's what caused a lot of deaths. Having resources  
2 allocated to supporting individual cases because we recognize  
3 that there is support for group practice, but putting us in a  
4 position to identify these issues before they become dire and  
5 before they are a systemic issue would potentially help  
6 prevent tragedy, in addition to, of course, allowing tenants  
7 to have a decent, habitable home.

8 I will just conclude by saying that although the  
9 bulk of our testimony primarily is a critical lens about the  
10 program, we understand that New York City is a national  
11 leader in taking meaningful steps to provide tenants with  
12 resources in housing court and representation, and we look  
13 forward to being in continued partners in helping New  
14 Yorkers. Thank you.

15 MS. GINDLER: Thank you. Thank you very much.  
16 Sounds like holding the mic is the answer, so let's do that.  
17 Thank you so much. Okay, let's go--so, now we're going to  
18 have a series of our providers testify in one go. I have the  
19 order that was submitted at some point, but you might know  
20 the order better. So, please.

21 MS. ELISE BROWN: Thank you. I will start. I'm  
22 Elise Brown from Mobilization for Justice, and there are a  
23 group of us here today speaking on behalf of the not-for-  
24 profit legal services providers who represent tenants  
25 pursuant to New York's Right to Counsel anti-eviction

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1 program.

2                   The Right to Counsel program boasts an extremely  
3 high success rate in preventing evictions and ameliorating  
4 other collateral consequences. 89% of tenants who have an  
5 attorney remain in their homes, and eviction filings and  
6 default judgments have dropped by 30% since the advent of the  
7 Right to Counsel program. But unless all the stakeholders  
8 are equally invested in the program, the Right to Counsel  
9 will not live up to its promise of equal access to justice  
10 for New York City tenants. And we hope that the points  
11 discussed below will provide a roadmap and hopefully ready  
12 solutions for the Office of Civil Justice to continue to work  
13 with the City and the housing court to protect this  
14 invaluable program.

15                   So, I'm to talk about four different areas that my  
16 colleagues are going to discuss more fully. First, as you've  
17 heard tonight, adequately funding the program is essential to  
18 provide our New York City tenants the services they deserve,  
19 and it does right now does not provide funding sufficient to  
20 ensure that the more than 50,000 tenants eligible for  
21 representation each year actually receive that service.  
22 While tenants eligible for representation increased 110%  
23 between 2022 and 2024, spending on the Right to Counsel  
24 program grew only 33%. The second is that provider capacity  
25 is severely strained because Right to Counsel funding has not

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1       kept pace with the rising cost of providing eviction defense  
2       to eligible tenants. Between 2019 and 2023, there was a  
3       greater than four-fold increase in the number of housing  
4       cases which took longer than a year to resolve. And they're  
5       taking longer because of tenant protective legislation, the  
6       HSTPA, the Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act of  
7       2019, and more recently the Good Cause eviction law. This is  
8       good news for tenants, but for the tenants who get lawyers,  
9       who can raise the defenses and enforce the provisions of  
10      those tenant protective statutes.

11           The program has ceased allowing--despite all these  
12       great new laws, the program has ceased allowing providers to  
13       report lengthy cases from one fiscal year to the next.  
14       Instead, we litigate cases two, three, four years to get them  
15       resolved in the tenant-favorable manner, yet we had to  
16       receive a one-time payment where in the past we were allowed  
17       to at least certain percentage of our cases roll them over to  
18       the next to provide the vigorous defense that tenants  
19       deserve. And OCJ has acknowledged the challenge of the  
20       funding and recently shared positive news with providers that  
21       there will be some progress in improving and equalizing the  
22       case rate. But the stark truth remains that Right to Counsel  
23       providers cannot subsidize the work at scale and remain  
24       solid.

25           Third, the current contract structure includes

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1 draconian, 10% penalty that further undermines providers  
2 ability to manage operation costs and provide an effective  
3 Right to Counsel. And finally, for the Right to Counsel to  
4 work for all tenants, all stakeholders need to communicate  
5 regularly and partner in efforts to improve implementation of  
6 the program. There's always room for improvement and we  
7 would ask that the Office of Court Administration, the Office  
8 of Civil Justice meet with the providers regularly and work  
9 through implementation and challenges to ensure that the New  
10 York City tenants receive all the benefits of the City's  
11 landmark Right to Counsel program. Thank you very much, and  
12 I'm going to turn it over to my colleague at Legal Services  
13 NYC, Ros.

14 MS. ROSALIND BLACK: Hi, everyone. Good evening.  
15 I'm Rosalind Black, the Citywide Director of Housing at Legal  
16 Services NYC. For over 50 years, our organization has been  
17 fighting poverty and seeking racial, social, and economic  
18 justice for low-income New Yorkers. For over 50 years, we  
19 have also been protecting the tenants at risk of eviction and  
20 fighting for tenants' rights. Thank you for holding today's  
21 hearing on the status of Right to Counsel in New York City  
22 and for bringing us back in person.

23 I'm going to focus my comments on the need for the  
24 City to substantially increase Right to Counsel funding so  
25 that all eligible tenants receive representation in their

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1 eviction proceedings. Since at least 2020, providers have  
2 been sounding the alarm that while Right to Counsel is  
3 amazingly effective, the funding level has left tens of  
4 thousands of tenants each year without lawyers.

5 The disparity has only continued and in fact  
6 increased over time. In June we finished the first fiscal  
7 year of three-year contracts between providers and the City  
8 where Right to Counsel was funded about \$136 million a year.  
9 The average case rate to providers was about \$4,100, and  
10 doing this math means that about 33,000 cases a year can  
11 receive representation by lawyers and while 33,000 is a big  
12 number and sounds like a big number the report that the  
13 independent budget office came out with in September 2025  
14 starkly underscores the disparity between the demand for  
15 services and the services that are funded. This report found  
16 that 50,000 tenants are eligible for Right to Counsel  
17 representation each year. So, this guarantees that at least  
18 one third of those eligible have to navigate housing court  
19 alone. In reality, due to the provider case rates being  
20 insufficient, which my colleagues will address, later on this  
21 evening, the numbers were much more dire with only one third  
22 of tenants having representation in housing court. The  
23 report also highlighted the failure of funding to keep up  
24 with the increasing demand. I think Elise had mentioned  
25 while eligibility for representation increased 110% in the

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1 two years from 2022 through 2024, spending only grew 33%.

2                   With about 104,000 eviction filings so far this  
3 year in 2025, the eviction rates at the highest level since  
4 the pandemic, the City is severely underfunding a program  
5 that is objectively successful in moral and terms. We have a  
6 program that is valued by every stakeholder, tenants and  
7 tenants' attorneys, the court system, landlords and  
8 landlords' attorneys, government agencies, elected officials,  
9 advocates for those experiencing homelessness, health  
10 advocates and more. A program that saves money by avoiding  
11 costs of shelter, sheltering those who become homeless  
12 without it, yet we haven't seen the financial commitment  
13 necessary to fully roll out this program. This needs to  
14 happen urgently. Every year we don't increase funding for  
15 Right to Counsel is another year when tenants pay rent that  
16 are too high, suffer a lack of repairs, or become homeless  
17 for the lack of legal representation. We can do better. OCG  
18 states should work with the City to immediately increase  
19 funding so that every eligible tenant gets representation.

20                   MR. CHRISTOPHER HELWIG: Good evening, my name is  
21 Christopher Helwig. I'm at Neighborhood Defender Services,  
22 I'm the managing attorney for our Right to Counsel practice  
23 and I don't have much of a voice today, so sorry about that.  
24 I will not use all three minutes. So, I definitely don't  
25 need to tell you guys, but RTC works, right? The program is

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1       incredibly successful, it makes incredible strides to keep  
2       tenants in their homes. Like Ros was just saying, it's cost  
3       effective, everybody loves it.

4           But as you also know, legal service providers are  
5       facing a real fiscal problem. Our costs continue to rise  
6       year over year, but our funding doesn't. And so, I do want  
7       to start by thanking you guys, thanking OCJ and the City for  
8       reasonably securing additional funding to help equalize every  
9       provider's case rate, the amount we're paying to represent  
10      each tenant, at a level that's at least closer to the average  
11      for all providers. That's great, especially for smaller  
12      providers, for those providers that are more community-based  
13      and have lower rates. That is an incredible first step, but  
14      my job today is to explain why that should be the first step  
15      and not the last.

16           So, as you know, for the case rate funding system  
17       to be sustainable, each provider must be paid an amount that  
18       is at least the amount that they spend representing that  
19       tenant. If we don't do that, if we're not getting paid at  
20       that rate, what will happen is that we have to subsidize the  
21       program. Eventually providers will no longer be able to do  
22       that and we will begin to fold. Since our current contracts  
23       were negotiated, the cost of representing tenants has gone up  
24       significantly. In part, this is a great problem to have.  
25      The Good Cause Eviction Law of 2024 extended brand new

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1 protections to the 48% of New Yorkers who live in market rate  
2 apartments. The Good Cause Eviction Law also created a ton  
3 of new opportunities for all tenants to defend their homes by  
4 imposing notice requirements in almost every eviction case.  
5 That's incredible, but it also means that every case has more  
6 defenses, that it requires more analysis, and that every case  
7 is taking longer to litigate.

8 Add to that the fact that each of our providers  
9 have a collective bargaining agreement, or at least the vast  
10 majority of us do, and those require us to give our staff our  
11 raise every year, a well-deserved raise. That plus the  
12 increasing costs of healthcare really is just showing that  
13 every case we take today is more expensive than it was when  
14 we negotiated our contract.

15 So, I'm going to focus on my office for a second,  
16 Neighborhood Defender Service. We've been providing Right to  
17 Counsel work in Manhattan since 2021. We're a small office,  
18 a small team. We have 10 attorneys, two benefit specialists,  
19 and two support staff and they really do incredible work.  
20 And one of things I'm really proud to say is that for the  
21 last two years we've had essentially perfect consistency. We  
22 haven't lost staff. The retention and attrition issues that  
23 are so common amongst my fellow organizations, we've largely  
24 been able to avoid. But that also came with a curse.  
25 Everybody gets a raise every year, which is great. Their

1 experience level increases, they're able to handle more, but  
2 also I have to pay them more. If my case rate doesn't  
3 increase, we run into a problem and at the current moment,  
4 our Right to Counsel funding at the Defender Service funds  
5 about 50% of the cost of my team. That means for every  
6 dollar that I get from Right to Counsel, I have to go find  
7 another dollar, whether that's from a private source or  
8 another contract. My team is there ready to do Right to  
9 Counsel the right way, but every year, every month, it's  
10 stressful. We're freaking out about making payroll. We're  
11 freaking out about getting the work done and work paid for.

12 So, this newly announced funding is incredible, but  
13 given the huge gulf between providers' costs and our current  
14 funding, it's simply not going to be enough. And so I ask  
15 that you continue to look for funding to achieve parity for  
16 among providers not at the current average case rate, which  
17 is sort of an arbitrary number, but at the actual cost of  
18 providing representation. The last large-scale analysis of  
19 the true cost of doing eviction defense work was \$7,500 per  
20 case. That's nearly double the current average case rate of  
21 4,100. If we're going to achieve a true Right to Counsel in  
22 New York legal services, we must be funded at that true cost  
23 of representation. So, I encourage you to continue to seek  
24 the new funding for that critical program so that we can do  
25 what we've all been working so hard to do and guarantee a

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1                   lawyer for every New Yorker facing eviction. Thank you.

2                   MS. GINDLER: Thank you.

3                   MR. JEROME FRIERSON: My name is Jerome Frierson,  
4 Vice President of Legal Services at Bronx Works. Bronx Works  
5 is a human services agency that has served Bronx residents  
6 for over 50 years. We have 1,200 staff across 65 locations  
7 in the Bronx, providing a variety of services, including but  
8 not limited to homelessness prevention services through Home  
9 Base, shelters, supportive housing, and job skills trainings,  
10 programs that families rely on every single day and I oversee  
11 the legal department. Our legal team has about 40 attorneys,  
12 legal professionals across housing, immigration, domestic  
13 violence, public benefits, and crime victims assistance. Our  
14 housing team is on the front lines of Right to Counsel,  
15 fighting every single day to keep families in their homes.

16                   Tonight, I'm going to speak about case rates,  
17 funding, and the quality of representation that tenants are  
18 receiving. Right now, some providers are pressured to assign  
19 more than six cases per person per month just to hit  
20 milestones. What does that mean? That means for our staff,  
21 daily court appearances, rapid turnaround, motion drafting,  
22 constant client communication. It's a treadmill that never  
23 stops and it is burning out the very attorneys who want to  
24 stay and do this work.

25                   While caseloads climb this high, we see a perverse

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1 incentive. The system rewards volume, not depth. But  
2 eviction defense cases are not a quick transaction. These  
3 are complex, especially after the HSTPA, especially under  
4 good cause. They demand investigation, motion practice,  
5 creative legal strategies. They demand time. And when the  
6 system rewards speed and volume, attorneys have less time to  
7 do affirmative motions, less time to build strong cases, less  
8 time for trauma-informed advocacy. Tenants deserve  
9 representation that can win, not representation that is just  
10 trying to survive. And supervisors feel the same pressure.  
11 Instead of training, mentoring, coaching, they often spend  
12 their days putting out fires. That hurts retention, it hurts  
13 quality, and ultimately, it weakens the very purpose of Right  
14 to Counsel.

15 Now let's talk about the numbers. The average case  
16 rate is about \$4,000 per case. But the true cost of a fully  
17 litigated eviction defense case, about \$7,500 per case. That  
18 gap forces providers to subsidize the program or cut corners,  
19 and neither is sustainable, and inequitable case rates make  
20 it even worse. Some providers are paid more per case than  
21 others even though we all do the same exact work. Equal pay  
22 for equal work must be the standard. I'll say that again.  
23 Equal pay for equal work must be the standard. If the City  
24 is serious about Right to Counsel, then it must equalize the  
25 pay rates across all providers at \$7,500 per case. Fund the

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1 true cost of ethical effective representation and allow  
2 complex cases to be reported across fiscal years. Bronx  
3 Works and every partner here is committed to the mission, but  
4 we need the City to meet us halfway. Thank you.

5 MR. PHILIP DUNCAN: Sorry for the laptop, I'm used  
6 to Zoom. So, I'm Philip Duncan, I'm the Assistant Director  
7 for Housing at the Northern Manhattan Improvement  
8 Corporation. We are an A1 counsel provider located in upper  
9 Manhattan. To give you a little context to the discussion  
10 regarding case rates and (inaudible) cases, I'm here to  
11 really focus on what's required for in-depth housing  
12 representation. Housing is an extremely complex area of the  
13 law. Eviction cases may last years and may require  
14 appearances in multiple fora. These cases implicate city,  
15 state, federal, and common law, multiple bodies of civil and  
16 court procedure, and administrative rules and regulations,  
17 each particular to many different types of housing. So, each  
18 different type of housing or subsidy, of which there are  
19 many, has its own rules, its own body of case law and  
20 regulations, and law applying to each frequently changes.  
21 Often the defenses present to preserve a tenant's housing  
22 require extensive investigation and skillful litigation.  
23 Recent developments in the case law around rent stabilization  
24 give greater ability for tenants to engage in discovery to  
25 challenge the amount that the rent set at. However, the

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1 discovery process is often itself complex, often requiring  
2 multiple motions and lasting months for even years.

3                   Generally, tenants must also engage in the  
4 discovery process to succeed to a rent-regulated tenancy,  
5 meaning to obtain tenancy rights after the death or departure  
6 of the tenant of record. Skilled representation over an  
7 extended period is vital to success in these processes. So,  
8 I'm going to brag a little bit. My organization is only now  
9 reaching the end of the non-payment proceeding that commenced  
10 in 2016, which was assigned to me as a staff attorney in  
11 2017. The central issue in the litigation was a challenge to  
12 the regulatory status of the apartment (inaudible). During  
13 the course of the proceeding, I made dozens of court  
14 appearances, made multiple pretrial motions, conducted a  
15 trial, submitted multiple post-trial memoranda, briefed and  
16 argued the landlord's appeal, and made multiple post-trial  
17 motions, including motions for sanctions and contempt. They  
18 were held in contempt twice for failing to respond to  
19 (inaudible) subpoenaed to seek access to their assets. As a  
20 result of this work, the court dismissed the petition, found  
21 that the landlord had fraudulently deregulated the apartment,  
22 awarded my client almost \$200,000 in overcharge damages, and  
23 reduced her rent in half. Yet under Right to Counsel, the  
24 funding for a case like this is the exact same as for a case  
25 where a provider settles the case on the first appearance.

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1                   Despite our contract's emphasis on volume of cases,  
2 RTC providers continue to provide this high-quality  
3 representation to all of our clients. We know that the best  
4 outcomes are only possible with diligent, dedicated, and  
5 knowledgeable representation, and we are committed to  
6 providing (inaudible). I will now hand it over to my  
7 colleague from CAMBA.

8                   MR. ALFRED TOUSSAINT: Good evening, everyone. My  
9 name is Alfred Toussaint. I'm from CAMBA Legal Services. We  
10 have offices in Brooklyn as well as Staten Island. Tonight  
11 I'm going to discuss the RTC contract's draconian 10% penalty  
12 which further undermines providers' ability to manage  
13 operational costs. The current iteration of the RTC contract  
14 contains a new penalty for providers who cannot meet 100% of  
15 contract goals. Sub-providers are ineligible to receive 10%  
16 of the allocated funding and OCJ may reduce funding for those  
17 providers in future years. Operationally, the City only  
18 reimburses 90% of providers' expenses until and only if it  
19 determines that the providers achieve its performance  
20 milestones.

21                   This review occurs twice during the contract year  
22 and sometimes well after the expenses have been incurred.  
23 This method of implementation unduly burdens the nonprofit  
24 providers who are incurring these actual expenses most of the  
25 time in real time. The uncertainty of this 10% funding also

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1 makes it impossible for organizations to do the necessary  
2 planning and investment in staff hiring and retention to  
3 combat and plan for attrition. Receiving only 90% on the  
4 dollar with the risk of never receiving reimbursement for the  
5 other 10% also destabilizes the program and agencies. This  
6 destabilizing practice is not in the best interest of the  
7 City, the providers, or New York City tenants.

8 In the context of a deeply underfunded contract in  
9 the economy where staff hiring and retention are difficult,  
10 meeting 100% of the is unrealistic unless providers can  
11 obtain and contribute vast additional resources to subsidize  
12 the work. Equally problematic, it jeopardizes the very  
13 nonprofit sector that the program relies upon to implement  
14 and maintain this critical program.

15 So, our colleagues, providers collectively have  
16 made a recommendation that the City must cease imposing the  
17 10% penalty when providers fail to meet certain performance  
18 metrics and cease withholding reimbursement for 10% of the  
19 actual expenses because it undermines the Right to Counsel  
20 program and harms provider agencies. Thank you very much.

21 MS. GINDLER: Thank you.

22 MR. JONATHAN FOX: Thank you and good evening. My  
23 name is Jonathan Fox. I'm the Director of the Tenants'  
24 Rights Unit at the New York Legal Assistance Group, and we  
25 represent clients in Brooklyn, Queens, and Manhattan through

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1 the Right to Counsel program. And many thanks to OCJ for  
2 having this hearing in person for the first time in six  
3 years. It's great to see everyone.

4 I'm going to be talking about some of the  
5 implementation challenges focusing on intake at first, and  
6 some of my colleagues will talk about other implementation  
7 challenges after me. The promise of the Right to Counsel  
8 program is that all eligible tenants will get an attorney.  
9 Unfortunately, this promise remains unfulfilled as there have  
10 been a number of serious implementation challenges in each  
11 and every borough which thwart legal services providers from  
12 connecting with clients. Over the last eight years of Right  
13 to Counsel and many decades before, legal services providers  
14 have been helping vulnerable clients navigate the bonding and  
15 the complex landscape that is housing court and housing law.

16 As a result, we are well positioned to suggest and  
17 assist with implementing a program that best meets the needs  
18 of New York City tenants. While providers, OCJ, and the  
19 court had a recent productive and collaborative meetings, and  
20 there's promise for more meetings, what we need is a  
21 systematic approach, a systematic approach to implementation  
22 in which legal service providers, the Office of Court  
23 Administration, and the Office of Civil Justice meet  
24 regularly to work through implementation challenges citywide  
25 and in each borough and which would help dramatically improve

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1 the and efficiency of the Right to Counsel program and enable  
2 more tenants to connect with lawyers for legal  
3 representation.

4 I want to turn our attention to Queens because it  
5 illustrates the negative consequences that can occur for  
6 tenants when there is a lack of collaboration between the  
7 court, OCJ, and the legal services providers. On June 11th  
8 of this year, with no prior notice to legal services  
9 providers, the court announced that all intake would become  
10 virtual effective July 5th, 2025, such that court attorneys  
11 would hold virtual intake where they would collect and  
12 contact information and then pass it along to OCJ for  
13 screening and assignment to providers. This shift to virtual  
14 intake was not due to space constraints or programmatic  
15 improvements, but because the court wanted to give court  
16 attorneys something to do on the day that they work remotely.  
17 While the Queens legal services providers wrote a letter to  
18 the court raising concerns about technological accessibility  
19 and language access, it was too late to provide any  
20 meaningful input because notices with the virtual adherence  
21 information were already in the process of being sent out.

22 Five months later, it is evident that virtual  
23 intake in Queens has been highly problematic. Every day in  
24 housing court, unrepresented tenants roam the halls, unclear  
25 about which legal services provider they were referred to and

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1 multiple legal services providers are sometimes referred to  
2 the same tenant. Most concerning, providers have seen the  
3 number of clients who have limited English proficiency drop,  
4 drop persistently, indicating that virtual intake likely has  
5 a profound disparate impact of LEP individuals who are  
6 particularly at risk of evictions, to connect with counsel.  
7 The court documents provided to tenants in housing court with  
8 the information for their virtual appearance is too often in  
9 a language inaccessible to LEP tenants. Providers are  
10 staffed with lawyers who speak multiple languages, but if  
11 clients cannot access our services because the virtual intake  
12 process is impenetrable for LEP individuals, providers will  
13 not be able to connect with LEP clients until it is too late.

14 Many of the tenants screened virtually are not able  
15 to retain RTC counsel despite providers best efforts to  
16 connect with them by phone and email following virtual intake  
17 screening. This does not happen when providers meet tenants  
18 in court for intake at their court appearance. The Queens  
19 remote intake hampers providers' ability to form effective  
20 attorney-client relationships efficiently and quickly gather  
21 the requisite document and evidence to mount an effective  
22 defense.

23 The written testimony talks about examples of  
24 intake challenges in all the other boroughs. And I'll turn  
25 it over to my colleague Adam.

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1 MR. ADAM MARKOVICS: Thank you. My name is Adam  
2 Markovics. I'm Director of the Right to Counsel team at the  
3 Bronx Defenders. We're a small team of attorneys, benefits  
4 advocates, and social workers. My piece of the testimony  
5 tonight is to propose some modest solutions.

In 2024, there were over 126,000 eviction filings, the vast majority being non-payment evictions. Rent arrears, unpaid rent, that remains the primary driver of housing court cases, which demonstrates the critical importance of timely access to HRA programs in preventing eviction. When administrative barriers delay one-shot deals, cash assistance, FHEPs, CityFHEPs, or APS interventions, tenants fall into non-payment, not because they're ineligible, but because the systems designed stabilize them are too complex to navigate without support. To address this systemic gap, we urge HRA to establish a fully empowered ombudsperson or small team. This team should have the authority to resolve administrative blockages, coordinate cross-program units,

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1 correct errors quickly, and ensure that eligible households  
2 receive rent assistance before the arrears escalate. Just  
3 this week, I represented a tenant with arrears over \$130,000.  
4 The numbers in Bronx Housing Court, which I can speak to, are  
5 astronomical.

6 Providers spend substantial time attempting to  
7 troubleshoot HRA issues, despite lacking the authority to  
8 resolve them. And this work, which takes up so much of our  
9 time, day in, day out, and we're lucky at the Bronx Defenders  
10 to have a dedicated benefits team working closely with our  
11 RTC attorneys. This work isn't funded by OCJ, and it's not  
12 credited toward our deliverables, and these benefits outcomes  
13 are critical to resolving the cases. A centralized  
14 ombudsperson would significantly reduce unnecessary  
15 adjournments, shorten court timelines, and substantially  
16 enhance the effectiveness of the City's investment in RTC.

17 In addition, and this is number two, the City  
18 should formally implement a structured early intervention  
19 model that activates HRA support as soon as a household shows  
20 indicators of instability, ideally before a housing court  
21 case is filed. Early intervention could include automatic  
22 outreach when rent arrears appear in HRA data systems, rapid  
23 pre-screening for one-shot deals or rental assistance, and  
24 direct coordination with legal providers as soon as a  
25 petition is served. When tenants receive assistance early,

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1 arrears remain manageable and the risk of eviction drops.  
2 Extended support earlier in the process would increase the  
3 success rate overall and reduce the volume of cases entering  
4 the court system.

5 These recommendations are practical and  
6 administratively achievable now. They do not require  
7 legislative overhaul, but they instead represent targeted  
8 improvements that align with the City's stated priorities:  
9 stabilizing families, reducing shelter entries, strengthening  
10 RTC, and ensuring that public benefits reach the people they  
11 are designed to protect. By adopting both an empowered HRA  
12 ombudsperson and a coordinated system, the City can  
13 significantly reduce avoidable evictions.

14 One further, I submit, modest proposal. HRA should  
15 create offices in all the New York City courthouses that are  
16 able to process issues just as a full benefits access center  
17 does. Ensuring that HRA offices in all New York City  
18 courthouses are able to process everything that the DACs can  
19 process would help ensure more seamless and efficient  
20 engagements with HRA by tenants and help them access benefits  
21 they're eligible for to help them remain in their home. In  
22 the Bronx, there is a small HRA office that can, for example,  
23 provide benefits printouts. But if a tenant wants to apply  
24 for assistance, apply for a one-shot deal, apply for anything  
25 at all, they're sent to a benefits access center.

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1           Having these centers in the courthouses will not  
2 only support access to housing for New Yorkers, but will also  
3 help mitigate the protracted nature of housing proceedings by  
4 enabling someone to apply immediately while they're in court.  
5 Something like this exists in Brooklyn, but Brooklyn is the  
6 only one that has a fully functional office of this kind.  
7 For tenants with mobility issues, less familiarity or access  
8 to tech, limited English proficiency, or for whom taking  
9 additional days off to go to their local BAC would mean  
10 another day unpaid from work or childcare costs. OCJ should  
11 partner with providers in advocating with HRA to implement  
12 the ability to apply for benefits in court at access centers  
13 that are as fully effective and operational as the ones that  
14 are located in the neighborhoods our clients live in.

15           Thanks, and with that, I'll turn it over to the  
16 next speaker.

17           MS. GINDLER: Thank you.

18           MS. MUNONYEDI CLIFFORD: Good evening and thank you  
19 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Munonyedi  
20 Clifford and I'm the attorney in charge of the Citywide  
21 Housing Practice at the Legal Aid Society. Tonight I want to  
22 focus on one central idea. OCJ is uniquely positioned to  
23 spot trends early, strengthen the Right to Counsel program,  
24 and play a critical role in preserving affordable housing  
25 across New York City. If you want to understand the housing

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1 crisis in New York City, just stand in the housing court  
2 hallway for 10 minutes. You'll see every trend, long before  
3 any official report does, and probably hear three languages,  
4 (inaudible) emergencies, and at least one sidebar  
5 (inaudible). Every day, our attorneys see patterns  
6 developing: spikes in specific case types, recurring issues  
7 with certain landlords or managing agents, gaps in access to  
8 benefits and procedural barriers that make it harder for  
9 families to remain stably housed. But these patterns emerge  
10 case by case, borough by borough, and often take months for  
11 providers to fully piece together.

12 OCJ, however, sits at the one point where all the  
13 data converges. With its city-wide visibility and close  
14 engagement of providers, OCJ can synthesize on-the-ground  
15 reports into an early warning system, one that identifies  
16 pressures on the housing system before they escalate into  
17 full-blown crises. This work is not merely administrative.  
18 Early intervention is one of the most effective tools we have  
19 to preserve affordable housing and prevent eviction-driven  
20 displacement. When OCJ uses its data to identify emerging  
21 trends, families remain housed. Cases resolve more  
22 efficiently, and the City's deeply affordable units remain  
23 stable.

24 Supportive housing tenants illustrate why this role  
25 is so essential. Providers are seeing a deeply concerning

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1 pattern. Growing numbers of supportive housing tenants  
2 receive marshal's notices without ever having been connected  
3 with a Right to Counsel attorney. These tenants represent  
4 some of the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and the units they  
5 occupy represent some of the City's most precious affordable  
6 housing. With timely legal intervention, many of these cases  
7 would never reach the brink of eviction.

8 HRA is well positioned to identify tenants at risk  
9 within its own supportive housing programs, but coordination  
10 alone is not enough. OCJ, OCJ, and RTC providers must work  
11 together to track trends, troubleshoot failures, and ensure  
12 supportive housing tenants receive timely trauma and  
13 (inaudible) representation. Stabilizing supportive housing  
14 placements is a direct act of housing preservation and is  
15 essential to preventing homelessness.

16 We also urge OCJ to support two targeted procedural  
17 reforms that would strengthen RTC and help safeguard housing  
18 stability. First, requiring petitioners in non-payment cases  
19 to provide a clear, zero-balance strike breakdown at the  
20 first court appearance. This would prevent unnecessary  
21 delays, reduce court congestion, and ensure accurate  
22 assessments of arrears. Second, ensuring that DHCR rent  
23 histories are readily available in court would allow  
24 attorneys and judges to promptly evaluate regulatory status  
25 and resolve overcharge issues; critical steps in protecting

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1 rent-stabilized housing.

2                   In all these areas, the theme is the same. OCJ's  
3 leadership is indispensable in fighting the housing crisis  
4 and preserving the homes of low-income New Yorkers. By  
5 embracing a proactive, data-driven, (inaudible) role and  
6 addressing structural barriers in the court's process, OCJA  
7 can strengthen RTC implementation, stabilize communities, and  
8 keep the most vulnerable tenants safely housed. Thank you  
9 for your time this evening, and I look forward to continuing  
10 this important work together.

11                  MS. TRICIA LENDORE: Hi, good evening. My name is  
12 Tricia Lendore. I'm the Director of (inaudible) Equal  
13 Housing at Build Up Justice NYC. Thank you for the  
14 opportunity to testify on behalf of not-for-profit legal  
15 service providers who represent him is under the Right to  
16 Counsel anti-eviction program. This evening I'll share with  
17 you two additional recommendations on how to improve the  
18 collaboration between OCJ, OCJ, and legal service providers.

19                  MS. GINDLER: We can't hear you. Can you speak up  
20 a little bit?

21                  MS. LENDORE: Would you like me to start over? My  
22 name is Tricia Lendore, Director of the (inaudible) Equal  
23 Housing Program at Build up Justice NYC. Thank you for the  
24 opportunity to testify on behalf of the not-for-profit legal  
25 service providers who represent tenants under the Right to

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1 Counsel anti-eviction program. Tonight I'll share with you a  
2 couple recommendations on how to improve collaboration  
3 between OCJ, OCJ, and legal service providers.

4 My first recommendation is the duration. Make the  
5 one-track (inaudible) application process more efficient and  
6 convenient for applicants. The majority of non-payment  
7 proceedings are resolved by (inaudible). The rental  
8 assistance program (inaudible) which pays most, if not all  
9 arrears owed by a tenant. In theory, it should take  
10 approximately 30 to 45 or even 60 days from settlement for  
11 the tenant to receive rental assistance in order to  
12 discontinue a non-payment case. In reality, it can take much  
13 longer than that due to the challenges tenants face in  
14 actually applying to the one-shot deal program.

15 To remove the frustration and inefficiencies of  
16 navigating the one-shot deal application process, HRA should  
17 allow tenants to upload documents in all image formats such  
18 as JPG, TIF, et cetera, as well as the PDF format. HRA  
19 should also allow tenants and/or advocates to upload their  
20 records to a file share program that is accessible to not  
21 only applicants, but also to all units and departments  
22 throughout HRA.

23 Additionally, one of the many challenges faced by  
24 tenants is that HR rate will close out one-shot deal  
25 applications after 30 days without seemingly justification or

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1 notice to tenants. Tenants are left in the dark, in some  
2 cases for months, and only learn more about their case when  
3 they contact a legal services provider who can confirm that  
4 their applications were either closed or never processed by  
5 HRA. In sum, HRA should provide updates to tenants about  
6 their applications and ensure that they are processed in a  
7 timely fashion. Finally, HRA should not require a hardship  
8 letter from both the tenant and their advocate as they are  
9 redundant and do not seem to make a difference as to HRA's  
10 final determination on an application.

11 My second recommendation is that OCJ should partner  
12 with providers in asking OCJ to mandate early engagement on  
13 repairs, including setting access dates and issuing orders  
14 too. Many families appear in court with long-standing  
15 hazardous conditions in their homes. Protracted proceedings,  
16 limited access, and a lack of accountability often leads to  
17 them suffering with these harmful housing conditions  
18 throughout the months' to years' long proceedings. By  
19 opening an additional HP part and requiring early structured  
20 engagement on repairs in every part, including setting access  
21 dates and issuing in order (inaudible) litigation, could  
22 better resolve habitability concerns. The court can foster  
23 faster resolutions, improve habitability, and advance the  
24 broader goals of housing stability that the Right to Counsel  
25 program was built to achieve. Thank you. Next you'll hear

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1 from my colleague at HCC.

2 MS. LESLIE THROPE: Good evening, and thank you for  
3 the opportunity to testify tonight at this public hearing in  
4 person. It is nice to be back in person. My name is Leslie  
5 Thrope and I am the executive director of Housing  
6 Conservation Coordinators, a 50-plus-year-old community based  
7 organization anchored in Hell's Kitchen, primarily doing  
8 tenant legal services. My time will be spent wrapping up the  
9 testimony of my colleagues of RTC providers that just  
10 presented to you.

11 So, in conclusion, I begin stating the obvious.  
12 The urgency for the Right to Counsel program has never been  
13 more critical. As we strive to safeguard low-income New  
14 Yorkers, we must stand resolute in ensuring their ability to  
15 maintain stable housing. The current federal political  
16 landscape poses a dire threat to vital affordable housing  
17 programs and essential public benefits which countless of our  
18 clients rely on. In light of these alarming threats, it's  
19 absolutely imperative that every eligible tenant embroiled in  
20 eviction proceedings is equipped with legal assistance. Yet,  
21 amidst these challenges, we continue to see a resurgence of  
22 hope at both the state and city levels. The strong tenant  
23 movement fueled by unwavering advocacy has championed  
24 significant reforms to protect tenants and preserve the  
25 tapestry of affordable housing. Landmark legislation has

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1       emerged over the past five years that serves as shining  
2       beacons of progress. However, we must acknowledge that even  
3       the most robust tenant right laws are only impactful if  
4       enforced diligently. Unfortunately, many landlords are  
5       employing unscrupulous tactics to evade these protections.

6                 The monumental victories achieved through these  
7       tenant protection laws will falter if we fail to empower  
8       dedicated tenant lawyers ready to uphold these laws and  
9       defend tenants rights vigorously. It is vital that the City  
10      steps up to the plate and increases funding for the Right to  
11      Counsel to meet the increasing demand for representation,  
12      both for the influx of new eviction cases and the looming  
13      backlog that continues without reliable legal support. Thus,  
14      first, the City must increase and equalize funding for RTC  
15      providers to reflect the true cost of this crucial work, and  
16      I applaud your effort to begin those, that process.

17                 Additionally, the City must--should immediately  
18      abolish the unjust 10% penalty placed on providers who fail  
19      to hit certain performance metrics, which undermines our  
20      commitment to providing effective representation. Finally,  
21      it is imperative that all stakeholders, OCJ, and OCJ convene  
22      regularly with RTC providers to collaboratively navigate the  
23      implementation that you heard tonight of strategies that will  
24      ensure every eligible New York City tenant is given the  
25      rightful opportunity to connect with legal counsel and

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1 achieve meaningful resolutions in their eviction proceedings  
2 as promised by this RTC program. Let us unite in this  
3 critical fight for justice, safeguarding the rights and homes  
4 of our vulnerable communities. Thank you.

5 MS. GINDLER: Thank you so much. And thank you to  
6 all the providers. I'm going make some quick announcements,  
7 and then we'll continue our hearing. So, there is a water  
8 fountain on the first floor if anyone is thirsty, and there's  
9 a gender-neutral bathroom on the right on this floor, and  
10 there's a men's bathroom on the left on this floor as well.  
11 And please folks, feel free to go, come in, come back,  
12 whatever is needed. Okay, without further ado, we'll  
13 continue. So, I think up next, I wanted to see if we have  
14 Karla Saenz with the Right to Counsel Coalition here. Karla?  
15 It works, just you've got to speak into it.

16 MS. KARLA SAENZ: Okay. Can everyone hear me?

17 MANY: Yes.

18 MS. SAENZ: Great. Good evening, everyone. My  
19 name is Karla Saenz. I'm testifying as representative for  
20 the steering committee of the Rights of Counsel Coalition.  
21 Thank you for the opportunity to testify about New York  
22 City's Right to Counsel law. The Right to Counsel Coalition  
23 is a tenet-led coalition (inaudible) 14 to disrupt housing  
24 court as a center of displacement and to end the eviction  
25 crisis through our families, neighborhoods, and homes. After

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1 a hard fought three-year grassroots campaign, we made history  
2 with New York City becoming the first city in the nation to  
3 establish a right to counsel for tenants facing eviction.  
4 Since then, RTC success has been undeniable, with evictions  
5 plummeting, landlords suing tenants less, and 84% of tenants  
6 who have had RTC attorney stay in their homes.

7 Evictions do more than displace people. One recent  
8 study found that access to counsel reduces adverse birth  
9 outcomes among Medicaid-insured mothers, showing that  
10 eviction prevention is also a matter of public health. We  
11 also know that eviction disproportionately impacts people of  
12 color, especially Black women and children. With one in  
13 eight children in New York City experiencing homelessness,  
14 the stakes could not be higher.

15 But today, the Office of Civil Justice, the City  
16 agency charged with enforcing RTC, is falling short of its  
17 mandate. Since January 22, more than 110,000 households have  
18 faced evictions alone, and the majority of them were eligible  
19 for RTC. Thousands of New Yorkers are being forced from  
20 their homes, being denied their rights, and losing cases they  
21 should have won. This is a violation of due process and a  
22 moral failure of the City. With OCJ's new leadership, Masha  
23 Gindler and (inaudible) Daniels, we are hopeful that the  
24 agency will rebuild a strong partnership with the tenant  
25 movement and recommit to ensuring the full success of RTC.

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1 To achieve this, OCJ must act now to enforce and strengthen  
2 the law. One, provide zealous oversight and partnership with  
3 tenants to strengthen RTC. We encourage that OCJ has  
4 resumed--we are happy that they resumed in-person meetings  
5 and we hope that (inaudible) a meeting with us. We hope that  
6 this continues on in the future.

7 We also ask once again that OCJ must act as an  
8 advocate for tenants, not as an arm of the court bureaucracy.  
9 We also ask too to join us in demanding that the City fully  
10 fund RTC. Local Law 136 is not fully funded. While the City  
11 has increased funding over time, current funding levels still  
12 do not cover the full cost. Legal service providers face  
13 untenable caseloads and unsustainable retention rates,  
14 conditions that undermine RTC's effectiveness and threaten  
15 their sustainability. OCG must join us in calling the City  
16 to one, increase RTC funding by at least \$350 million  
17 immediately to ensure that every eligible tenant has zealous  
18 representation, establish a mechanism to adjust funding as  
19 the volume of cases changes, and proactively plan for higher  
20 costs when the caseload of cases increases. We also ask that  
21 OCJ most publicly support our demands for OCJ upheld tenants'  
22 rights in housing court ask we ask that to reduce the volume  
23 of eviction cases in court calendars so that the number of  
24 cases matches the capacity of legal service providers.

25 We ask to work in true partnership with OCJ to

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1 ensure that all eligible tenants receive the Right to Counsel  
2 that they're entitled to. And we ask to adjourn cases when  
3 no (inaudible) courtesy attorney is available until a tenant  
4 secures counsel and their attorney has adequate time to  
5 prepare. OCJ's public support and pressure were crucial to  
6 making this happen.

7 We also asked the public to support and urge the  
8 state to pass statewide Right to Counsel. In that, we ask  
9 for RTC to expand to cover all tenants in New York City and  
10 across the state. We asked to require courts to notify  
11 tenants of their right to counsel and provide information on  
12 how to contact an attorney and mandate adjournments until  
13 tenants have secured counsel.

14 We encourage you to treat the crisis with the  
15 urgency it deserves. The Right to Counsel is only powerful  
16 at keeping tenants housed if it is upheld. New Yorkers  
17 fought for this right and we continue to fight until every  
18 tenant can exercise their right to counsel. Thank you.

19 MS. GINDLER: Thank you, Karla. Thank you. Okay,  
20 up next we have (inaudible) from CID NYC. Going once, going  
21 twice. (Inaudible). Okay, I'll keep going. Do we have  
22 Grace Torres? Going once, Grace Torres, going twice. Okay.  
23 George Sotiroff? Hi, George.

24 MR. GEORGE SOTIROFF: Good evening. My name is  
25 George Sotiroff from the Bronx, a member of CASA, Community

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1 Action for Safe Apartments. I will not be before you long.  
2 I just want to assure you that I am not a lawyer, I'm not an  
3 economist, and I'm not a preacher. I'm just going to speak  
4 from my perspective as a layman. In our society we want  
5 young couples to have children but we don't provide any help  
6 for them to raise those children. That's a problem we have.  
7 Okay. We want a workforce but we don't pay the workforce.  
8 \$15 an hour is New York State, federal is \$7.25 an hour. I  
9 don't have a word for it. And we want tenants who can pay  
10 rent yet we don't pay enough wages for them to afford the  
11 rent. There are areas in the USA right now, people are  
12 living in RV communities, believe it or not. I feel like  
13 Cassandra, the prophetess, when I prophesize about neglecting  
14 our obligations to care for each other, we're sewing the  
15 seeds of the next French Revolution. We're asking for at  
16 least an additional \$350 million to run this whole problem  
17 that we're having. That's a drop in the bucket. And no one  
18 can claim that there isn't enough money, because if you want  
19 to get it done, the money will miraculously appear.

20 So, I'm not asking that you address any or all and  
21 resolve any of these problems. What I am urging is that OCJ  
22 will publicly commit to fighting for Right to Counsel and  
23 join us in demanding that the state legislature pass  
24 statewide Right to Counsel legislation which would expand and  
25 strengthen the right, and New York City and create rules for

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1 the courts that hold and implement RTC. And fully fund the  
2 Right to Counsel by adding at least \$350 million to the  
3 budget to ensure that there's enough attorneys to represent  
4 everyone entitled RTC. \$350 million just for those of you  
5 who are thinking that that's a lot of money, the City budget  
6 I believe is over a hundred billion dollars. So, \$350  
7 million is again as I said dropping the bucket. So, I'm  
8 urging you and I urge you to fight to protect the right to  
9 counsel so tenants can continue to use this powerful right to  
10 defend their homes. Thank you and good night.

11 MS. GINDLER: Thank you. Thank you, George. We  
12 also turned the volume up. Some folks want it higher. Let  
13 you know we found the button next (inaudible). Okay,  
14 Christina Brown.

15 MS. CHRISTINA BROWN: Hello, good evening. I'm  
16 Christina Brown representing ALAA's Right to Counsel Workers  
17 Council. We are a body of delegates representing the  
18 unionized workers across New York City who do the labor of  
19 carrying out the Right to Counsel law. The Workers Council  
20 is made up of tenant defense attorneys, paralegals, and  
21 social workers from every unionized provider conducting RTC  
22 intake. Our purpose is to coordinate the demands of Right to  
23 Counsel workers and develop improvements to the current RTC  
24 process.

25 As RTC providers have already expressed this

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1 evening, issues that stand in the way of our best RTC program  
2 include a lack of full funding, limited provider capacity,  
3 penalties, and delays in bureaucratic complications with  
4 housing-related public benefits. Our number one goal, as the  
5 unionized workers that carry out Right to Counsel is to keep  
6 New Yorkers in their homes, and we look forward to working  
7 with OCJ to guarantee no New Yorker facing eviction is left  
8 without legal representation.

9                   The Right to Counsel does not exist without the  
10 workers who ensure tenants receive both substantive and  
11 procedural justice in housing court. We believe that in  
12 order for there to be housing justice in New York City,  
13 tenants facing eviction must have access to fierce advocacy,  
14 both legal representation in court and support from  
15 paralegals and social workers in the government benefit  
16 system. The difference between being left to fend for  
17 oneself and having a dedicated advocate on your side cannot  
18 be overstated.

19                   This summer, the workers of five RTC providers went  
20 out on strike to demand higher wages and workload  
21 protections, demands that address the poor working conditions  
22 that directly affect the quality of service we are able to  
23 provide to our clients. As workers on the front lines of  
24 tenant defense, the RTC Workers' Council is one of your most  
25 powerful partners in identifying issues with RTC and finding

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1 creative solutions to ensure Right to Counsel truly means  
2 right to counsel. Thank you.

3 MS. GINDLER: Thank you. Thank you, Christina.

4 Next up we have Mayra Leda. Mayra Leda, are they here?

5 Okay. Next we have Juan from CASA.

6 JUAN: Hi, folks. How're you doing? My name is  
7 Juan. I'm with CASA. I'm an organizer of CASA. I'm  
8 actually testifying on behalf of our tenant leader, Mercedes  
9 Escoto. I love Mercedes and she sends the funniest  
10 testimonies all the time. And the funny is, it's difficult  
11 to read, so please stand with me for a while. So, Mercedes  
12 starts with, "My name is Mercedes Escoto. I'm a CASA leader."  
13 And she goes straight to the point. "I realize OCJ after a  
14 year," after her testimony last year, that no one had  
15 followed up on her report, neither contacted her regarding  
16 her testimony or her case. And she goes on saying that she  
17 had reported unstable situations with her landlord, Emerald  
18 Equity for lack of repairs, no heat, no hot water. She said  
19 she's fortunate to have the assistance of Right to Counsel  
20 and that her case in her building, 1187 Anderson, is very  
21 lucky actually because of Right to Counsel. Mercedes's story  
22 doesn't actually start there, it starts one day in housing  
23 court where she has to be taken away in a stretcher in an  
24 ambulance because she a stroke because she went to housing  
25 court without an attorney and the pressure of that was

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1 immense. Not entirely just for herself, but because she had  
2 her elderly mother living with her. This was even  
3 exasperated over the years and eventually she kind of found  
4 us over CASA and then organized her building and through  
5 Right to Counsel, being able to represent the tenants in an  
6 HP case was able to win a huge abatement, I believe, of half  
7 a million dollars for her whole building because they were  
8 overcharging. This is the power of this law. This is the  
9 power that tenants organized for many years ago. This is the  
10 power that OCJ has to continue to be able to implement.  
11 These are, Mercedes (inaudible) because she sent me the text.

12 Either way, Mercedes goes on by saying a lot of the  
13 same demands that my fellow colleague Karla testified about.  
14 OCJ needs to provide zealous oversight and partnership with  
15 tenants to strengthen Right to Counsel, release timely public  
16 reports each year, maintain regular meetings with the  
17 coalition, which we're very happy about, thank you, and to  
18 ensure Right to Counsel implementation reflects the needs of  
19 tenants facing eviction, and uses full authority to work with  
20 OCJ to ensure that every eligible tenant receives right to  
21 counsel.

22 There's many other demands from Mercedes, she was  
23 very explicit with me and told me please say this exact  
24 demand. Mercedes is very happy that the public hearings are  
25 in person. Again, thank you, she says that is great but we

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1 have to be conscious of all New York City tenants, of all the  
2 people in New York City who are suffering through this  
3 eviction crisis and that maybe we shouldn't be having  
4 meetings in one single place like right here in the heart of  
5 our city government, but we should be having hearings at  
6 everybody's doorstep. We should be having hearings in all  
7 the boroughs, public hearings, just like in RGB, which was  
8 actually something that was fought for by tenants a long time  
9 ago as well. And Mercedes says that it will help with  
10 accessibility, will help for tenants to create a relationship  
11 with OCJ, for OCJ to see tenants face to face and for the  
12 City to realize that tenants don't come out just for  
13 (inaudible) work, but they come out for evictions as well.  
14 And that is all she wrote. Thank you.

15 MS. GINDLER: Thank you, Juan. Okay, next up we  
16 have William Bershadsky. Bershadsky, yep.

17 MR. WILLIAM BERSHADSKY: Hello, everyone. My name  
18 is William. I'm with the Flatbush 10 Coalition and also the  
19 Right to Counsel Coalition. With the Flatbush 10 Coalition,  
20 we actively help poor people fighting their cases in housing  
21 court. My main point here is that housing court is viciously  
22 unfair towards tenants. HRA is 10 times worse. I personally  
23 had experience on both ends and luckily with my coalition  
24 families they've been helping me and we also help other  
25 people. I'm not an attorney but every time we're in court

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1 for some reason people come up to me crying asking for help  
2 and I help them. And some people in the hall say, oh, but  
3 you're not a lawyer. I'm still going to help them because  
4 the court system creates viciously unfair tactics to abuse  
5 tenants, all the tenants. Rich, poor, it's mostly poor  
6 tenants. I would like to network with OCJ. A lot of people  
7 in this auditorium mentioned the details of the issues. I  
8 would like to try and see if we can like ally or form some  
9 sort of a group so we can have one or two or three, numerous  
10 meetings to discuss the details and brainstorm different  
11 ideas on how we can take action to stop the abuse. I  
12 personally have a ton of ideas that are realistic and can  
13 implement and I would like to create a team. Let's see,  
14 because we're all here, let's say after this meeting, put  
15 together some people, make a date, and meet again to discuss  
16 different ideas where we can actually take action in health.  
17 I think our new mayor will probably be on board with us  
18 because I think it's either now or never. So, I'm going to  
19 stick around, I'm going to ask whoever else wants to be part  
20 of the team to stick around and maybe we can network and  
21 start some sort of action. Thank you.

22 MS. GINDLER: Thank you. Thank you, William. Next  
23 up we have Delia Joaquin. Delia (inaudible)? She's coming?  
24 Great, great, great. No rush, we're here.

25 MR. BRIAN FOTINO: We're going to provide joint

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1 testimony, if okay?

2 MS. GINDLER: Yeah, of course.

3 MR. FOTINO: Amazing. So, my name is Brian Fotino.  
4 I'm a tenant organizer at the Queens Tenant Coalition,  
5 specifically Catholic Migration Services.

6 MS. DELIA JOAQUIN: My name is Delia Joaquin. I  
7 live in Queens. I'm here with him, okay?

8 MR. FOTINO: Thank you. Thank you so much for  
9 allowing us the chance to speak with you tonight. The Queens  
10 Tenant Coalition organizes tenants across Queens, but we have  
11 like the greatest presence in Sunnyside, Jamaica, and  
12 Flushing. And we're here today because the Queens Tenant  
13 Coalition has decided that fighting for Right to Counsel is a  
14 priority. We have a lot of tenants who have been in housing  
15 court without an attorney, and also have lot of tenants who,  
16 if they were to end up in housing court, would want to have  
17 that right, or have had community members, family members who  
18 have been through housing court without having the right to  
19 counsel. Actually today, I was speaking with a tenant from  
20 Jamaica who lives in the basement of the house with her two  
21 kids and she was in housing court yesterday. She showed up,  
22 she didn't have an attorney, the court didn't provide her  
23 one, and fortunately they gave her more time. They adjourned  
24 her case to January 12th, but really that's a little more  
25 than a month and she in all likelihood is not going to be

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1 able to get an attorney within that timeframe. And  
2 unfortunately, I've been doing this work for over three years  
3 now, and I get calls like this on a regular basis, maybe  
4 every few weeks or more. There are, as Karla mentioned, more  
5 than 110,000 households have had to eviction alone. So, this  
6 woman is just one. And I've gotten close to tenants over the  
7 years who have been evicted because they have been denied an  
8 attorney. We've had tenants in Queens who ended up living in  
9 shelters in the Bronx because they've been evicted without  
10 having the right to counsel. I had one tenant I was working  
11 with who didn't have her right to counsel. She was evicted.  
12 One of my colleagues told me like a week later, a week after  
13 that had happened, that they saw her sleeping on the 7 train.  
14 So, this is really important. This is truly a matter of life  
15 or death. And we really look forward to working with you to  
16 to pass our statewide legislation and to get the City to  
17 fully fund the Right to Counsel. We really need your help in  
18 pushing Governor Hochel and state legislators to pass the  
19 Right to Counsel, which would create that enforcement  
20 mechanism that would require the courts to slow down, advance  
21 cases until tenants get connected with the Right to Counsel.  
22 And we really urge that you work with us to push Mayor  
23 Mamdani and other city council members to fully fund Right to  
24 Counsel. Because if we can't get that enforcement mechanism,  
25 at least in the meantime, we can get more attorneys. We can

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1 get more legal representation for tenants. So, we're asking  
2 for at least \$350 million, and we look forward to working  
3 with you to pass that statewide legislation and get more  
4 funding.

5 MS. JOAQUIN: No, really this is my first time  
6 here. I have a lot of things to say but now I'm a bit  
7 nervous. I think as a tenant I can (inaudible) my landlord,  
8 the freezing. He wouldn't take me out because he said he  
9 didn't send the--I didn't sign the list. I sent it on time.  
10 Thanks God I sent it together with my check. They cashed the  
11 check but they said they didn't receive the list. That's so  
12 weird because I sent everything together. But thank God I  
13 found them and they were teaching me a little bit more about  
14 this. I hop in the future I can be the best testimony, but  
15 for me to have a legal representation or to find somebody who  
16 helps us is really important. I hope you can help, okay?

17 MS. GINDLER: Thank you. You can email us  
18 testimony. You can come talk to us afterwards too if you  
19 don't want to talk in front of everyone.

20 MS. JOAQUIN: Okay, okay, thank you very much.

21 MR. FOTINO: Thank you.

22 MS. GINDLER: Thank you. Okay, and then--that's  
23 it? Oh. I think that's everyone unless there's someone that  
24 has not testified and wants to now that has not signed up.  
25 The floor is open. You can come up and testify. I see a

1 baby over there in the corner. Anyone testifying on that  
2 side of the room? No? No? No? Okay, with that, I'll  
3 conclude the hearing. Thank you guys so much for coming out  
4 on this cold day and testifying. If you have any more  
5 copies, take a look at our report. We really want to work  
6 from one source of truth, and so I've tried to put more  
7 information there, and we'll do that moving forward. Feel  
8 free to email us with any feedback about the hearing. Thank  
9 you again.

10 FEMALE VOICE 2: Thank you. Thank you very much.  
11 Thanks.

12 (Proceeding Concluded.)

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C E R T I F I C A T E

2

I, Gabrielle Atkinson, certify that the foregoing transcript  
3 of proceedings of New York City Department of Social  
4 Services, Homelessness Prevention Administration, Matter of  
5 NYC Office of Civil Justice's Programs to Provide Universal  
6 Access to Legal Services for Tenants Facing Eviction was  
7 prepared using the required transcription equipment and is a  
8 true and accurate record of the proceedings.

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