

November 8, 2022

## Acting Chief Judge Cannataro Leaves Event After Tenants Demand the Courts Uphold RTC and Stop Evictions

**New York, NY–** Last night tenants from across NYC interrupted an event where Acting Chief Judge Cannataro was giving a talk to ask him why he continues to move thousands of eviction cases forward in NYC without tenants' having Right to Counsel. RTC has proven incredibly successful with almost all tenants getting an RTC attorney and staying in their homes. In the wake of the courts reopening post COVID and the unprecedented labor shortage RTC legal services providers are facing, the Acting Chief Judge has chosen to deny tenants their Right to Counsel instead of using his power to slow down cases and ensure tenants' Right to Counsel is respected. Under his watch, Acting Chief Judge Cannataro has presided over the one of the greatest rollback of tenants rights in history. Since January, more than [16,000 tenants, or 3 out of 5 tenants in court](#), have been denied this crucial right. The vast majority of tenants who are being denied RTC and who are being evicted are Black and brown.

After writing to the judge, meeting with administrative judges, city and state elected officials, taking elected officials on tours of housing court and [so much more](#), last night dozens of tenants took action and demanded that the judge answer one question: **Will he commit to stopping all eviction cases that don't have RTC?**

**As the event was beginning Tenant and CASA Leader Randy Dillard stood up to speak directly to the Judge, saying,** "16,000 tenants are in a crisis right now. They aren't getting a lawyer. And I'm asking Judge Cannataro, why is that so? 7,500 of those tenants live in the Bronx. We fought for this right in 2013. We won this right in 2017. The mayor signed it into law. Since it was signed into law, 82% of tenants stayed in their homes. Now, you all are sending them through the court like cattle and this is not fair. Do you understand? We are coming out a pandemic and these tenants are facing an eviction. I know about that because I went through the court system for two and a half years. I didn't owe my landlord anything. I'm a single parent with 5 kids. I was able to stay in my home because I had a lawyer. And now what you're doing is discriminating against the law by not giving these tenants legal representation. They have a right to an attorney. We fought and we won this right. Why don't you honor that? All you have to do is issue an order to adjourn these cases until they get representation. Will you do that?"

Judge Cannataro said that RTC passed with the full support of the Office of Court Administration and that it's a "good law" but he refused to take responsibility for the court's role in the crisis and instead said the challenge is with the capacity of the legal services providers. When pressed about his ability to pause cases, the event moderator tried to shut down the questioning.

But tenants continued to push for an answer from the judge. Tenant after tenant interrupted the event asking "*Judge Cannataro, 16,000 tenants in NYC are in court facing their eviction alone. You have the power to stop all eviction cases that don't have RTC. You can uphold the law. You have to act now. We can't wait one more day. Will you commit to stopping all eviction cases that don't have RTC?*"

**Corine Ombongo-Golden, tenant leader with the Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition, pleaded with the judge:** "Can you commit to making sure that we aren't going to be evicted in the winter time, in the cold? Could you please be human enough to take action today? Evictions are violent. We are human too." Instead of responding, she was told to sit down.

Tenants kept pushing back. "What you need to do, what you have the power to do, what you have the moral obligation to do is stop those evictions right now," declared **Nicolás Vargas with Brooklyn Eviction Defense.**

**After it was clear tenants would not stop until they got an answer, the judge left and the law firm canceled the event.**

Tenants left chanting Evictions are Violent, We will not be Silent! and No Evictions, No Evictions, Not Today, Not Ever!

"We let them know that we are not to be ignored. If nothing else, Judge Cannataro knows that we mean business. We need to keep the pressure on," said **Flatbush Tenant Coalition Leader Ruth Riddick**.

Outside the event, dozens of tenants held a rally sharing their stories about the violence of evictions and the unjust actions of the courts.

"We are going to let them know really clearly that no one is going to evict us from our homes, no one. COVID is not over. I am a single mother and I've been living in this country for 16 years. It was COVID that threw me for a loop. I've never asked for help and I have kids who were born in this country. Do you know what I tell them--to fight. And who shut the doors on us--COVID. We aren't throwing around blame for this but we are demanding a response from the government."

**-Ana Galvez, CASA Leader**

**\*\*\*\*\*Photos and video from last nights' action are available\*\*\*\*\***

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