

Statewide Housing Coalition Launches Legislative Platform!

For immediate release: February 14th, 2023

Contact: Susanna Blankley, susanna@righttocounselnyc.org, 917-691-0544

Katy Lasell, katy@righttocounselnyc.org, 617-645-5122

Albany, NY - Tenants, legal services providers, advocates, unions and clergy from around the state, working together in Right to Counsel's Housing Courts Must Change! campaign, rallied at the Capitol today to launch their 2023 legislative platform aimed at ending all evictions across New York State.

Member organizations of the [Right to Counsel coalition](#) gathered in the Capitol today for Tenant Love + Power: a press conference to launch their 2023 legislative platform, Statewide Right to Counsel ([A1493/S2721](#)) and Winter Eviction Moratorium ([S1403](#)/same as TK). Right to Counsel aims to end all evictions across New York State, and transform New York State's housing courts from eviction machines to places that hold landlords accountable and uphold tenants' rights.

After years of organizing, in 2017, the coalition [won the first Right to Counsel legislation in the country](#), establishing the right to free legal representation in New York City housing court. In just the first year, the legislation proved successful. In 2018, 84 percent of tenants who had a lawyer through Right to Counsel were able to remain in their homes. Today, the coalition, along with sponsors Senator Rachel May and Assembly Member Latoya Joyner, called on New York State leadership to pass and fully fund the right in FY 2024 with \$172 million in funding.

"It's not right that tenants face eviction alone. I know first hand the fear and anxiety evictions cause. Our fight for Right to Counsel in NYC has stopped thousands of evictions, helped tenants organize and stopped landlords from suing tenants," said **Randy Dillard, CASA Leader and RTCNYC Coalition Steering Committee Member**. "I'm proud to have fought for it and won it. But we can't stop there. It's not right that this right only exists in NYC and not for tenants across the state. It's not right that it doesn't exist for all tenants. NY tenants need this. We are proud to fight for the Right to Counsel and call on our elected officials to pass it now."

"For too long our families have been left to go it alone without legal counsel as they fight in court to protect their homes and keep their families from ending-up in the street," **Assembly Member Latoya Joyner (D-Bronx, 77th AD)** said. "Landlords who can afford access to attorneys have an advantage that leaves many families living under the threat of eviction without any assurance that legal representation will be available to them should they be taken to court."

"The power imbalance between landlord and tenant has cost far too many New Yorkers their homes – often unfairly - and it is time for us to level the playing field and ensure that tenants are not placed at such a tremendous disadvantage," **Assembly Member Joyner** said. "Not only is access to quality affordable housing a basic human right – so is access to the legal counsel our families need to ensure their rights are protected against predatory landlords who use the court system to their advantage."

Sponsors Assembly Member Anna Kelles and Senator Zellnor Myrie also spoke alongside coalition members against the cruelty and inhumanity of evictions, and the need for a Winter Eviction Moratorium. Throughout the pandemic, universal eviction moratoria have proven to be an effective tool at keeping tenants securely housed, preventing homelessness, and protecting tenants from exposure-related health problems and death. Winter Eviction Moratorium ([S1403](#)/same as TK) will ban eviction from November 1st through April 15th each year.

"We are entering the coldest time of the year," **said Fidele Albert, Tenant Leader with the Flatbush Tenant Coalition.** "Already we have thousands of people who are homeless. Due to the pandemic a lot of people are still on the market without jobs. The ERAP program is stopped. People can't even afford to buy food. People have children they need to take care of. Some families apply for affordable housing for years and get nothing. To put people out in the cold is inhuman. All evictions must stop. But until then, we at least need no evictions during the winter. We are human, and we are fighting to have the basic human rights we deserve. To have a home during these cold winters and onwards."

"The devastating consequences of being unhoused are compounded by cold weather and can be lethal in the winter, where unsheltered people face a higher rate of death and exposure-related health problems. By ensuring housing during the winter months, struggling individuals and families will be granted the time and safety necessary for them to negotiate with landlords, apply for rental assistance, secure legal representation, and seek new employment and housing if necessary," **Assembly Member Anna Kelles (D-Ithaca, 125th AD)** said. "A Winter Eviction Moratorium is a crucial step in addressing the public health and human rights issue of housing instability, which has debilitating effects throughout communities."

"In the midst of the worst housing crisis in state history, it's imperative we do everything we can to help people stay in their home," **Senator Zellnor Myrie (D-Brooklyn, 20th SD)** said. "I'm proud to stand today with my colleagues and advocacy partners in solidarity with tenants across the state who deserve access to legal representation and to breathe a bit easier during the winter months."

*The **Right to Counsel NYC Coalition (RTCNYC)** is a tenant-led coalition that formed in 2014 to change Housing Courts, prevent displacement, and stop the eviction crisis that threatens our families, our homes, and our neighborhoods. RTCNYC is made up of tenants, organizers, advocates, legal services organizations and more! In 2017, after a three-year grassroots campaign, the Coalition won the Right to Counsel, making New York the first city in the country to establish a Right to Counsel for low-income tenants facing eviction.*

####