



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
CONTACT: Lourdes Centeno
centenolo@dss.nyc.gov
929-221-5131

CITY REPORT REVEALS THAT LEGAL REPRESENTATION FOR TENANTS IN TARGETED AREAS FOR UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO LEGAL SERVICES TRIPLED SINCE 2015

More than 180,000 New Yorkers have received legal assistance since 2014

Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks today announced the findings of the Office of Civil Justice’s second annual report, which shows that in 2017 48% of tenants in Housing Court from the ten zip codes targeted for expanded legal services had legal representation in Housing Court – up from 16% percent in 2015. The report also revealed that the Human Resources Administration’s tenant legal services programs served more than three times the number of households in need in Fiscal Year 2017 — over 23,000 households, including over 70,000 New Yorkers — as these programs did in Fiscal Year 2014. Over 180,000 New Yorkers have received legal assistance through HRA’s tenant legal services programs since 2014.

“For far too long tenants in Housing Court were unnecessarily evicted simply because they didn’t have legal representation,” said **Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks**. “The fact that the number of evictions by marshals has decreased dramatically in the last few years at the same time that legal assistance programs have expanded demonstrates the critical impact this initiative is having by leveling the playing field and allowing thousands of New Yorkers to remain in their homes”.

In August 2017 New York became the first city in the nation to establish a program for universal access to eviction defense legal services in Housing Court and in New York City Housing Authority administrative termination of tenancy proceedings. The program, which is overseen by the Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) at HRA, is expected to provide legal assistance to 400,000 New Yorkers facing eviction and displacement each year when fully implemented in 2022.

“Universal Access to Counsel is both good fiscal policy for preventing homelessness, and just social policy for protecting families and their housing,” said **HRA Administrator Grace Bonilla**. “At a time when tenant displacement has become so prevalent, the City has made an unprecedented commitment to fight back against unlawful evictions.”

“With increased attorney representation for tenants in the neighborhoods where we have targeted legal resources, Universal Access is on the right path to implementation across the City,” said **Civil Justice Coordinator Jordan Dressler**. “The staff and partners of HRA’s Office of Civil Justice are proud to be administering this historic initiative serving New Yorkers in need.”

The first phase of the Universal Access initiative was started by OCJ through a program that provided access to legal representation in court for low-income tenants facing eviction from their homes in ten zones across the City, targeted because they include the most households at risk of eviction and homelessness as reflected in rates of shelter entry. The zip codes are Bronx: 10457, 10467; Brooklyn: 11216, 11221; Manhattan: 10026, 10027; Queens: 11433, 11434; and Staten Island: 10302, 10303. The City added five more zip codes to the program in Fiscal Year 2018, identified based on factors including high numbers of shelter entries, the prevalence of rent-regulated housing and the volume of eviction proceedings. The zip codes are Bronx: 10468; Brooklyn: 11225; Manhattan: 10025; Queens: 11373; Staten Island: 10314. Five additional zip codes will be added to the program in Fiscal Year 2019 for the second phase of implementation.

The City increased funding for legal assistance for tenants facing eviction and displacement from approximately \$6 million in Fiscal Year 2013 to over \$77 million in Fiscal Year 2018, more than a twelve-fold increase in total.

Other findings of the report include:

- Evictions decreased 27 percent in 2017 compared to 2014, representing an estimated 70,000 New Yorkers across all five boroughs who were able to remain in their homes.
- Eviction filings in Housing Court declined by 7 percent over the same four-year period.
- The Administration’s immigration legal services programs provided legal representation and advice to immigrant New Yorkers from over 170 countries last fiscal year, and in cases in which immigration authorities rendered decisions on status applications, clients saw their applications granted in approximately 96% of cases.

As part of this report, OCJ is issuing a strategic plan that lays out next steps for the City to address key areas of civil legal need for low-income New Yorkers.

See the [full report here](#).

The Office of Civil Justice was formally created in June 2015 when Mayor de Blasio signed Local Law 61 into law and placed the office under HRA, the agency in charge of addressing poverty, income inequality and reducing homelessness. Its main focus is to provide coordination, planning, and oversight of city resources and programs providing civil legal services.

###