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**DE BLASIO ADMINISTRATION ANNOUNCES THAT THE CITY HAS
PROVIDED FREE HOUSING LEGAL SERVICES TO CLOSE TO
250,000 NEW YORKERS SINCE 2014**

New York City releases its first annual progress report on its historic Universal Access to Legal Services law for tenants facing eviction in housing court and launches the second phase of the Universal Access initiative

Department of Social Services Commissioner Steven Banks announced today that nearly a quarter million New Yorkers have received legal representation, advice, or assistance in eviction and other housing-related matters through tenant legal services programs administered by the Human Resources Administration (HRA) since the beginning of the de Blasio Administration. This milestone is reported as part of the first annual progress report on New York City's Universal Access to Legal Services program, the nation's first and largest initiative to ensure that every tenant facing eviction in court or administrative proceedings will have access to free legal services.

"New Yorkers shouldn't have to choose between paying for a lawyer to fight to keep their home and putting food on the table," said **Mayor de Blasio**. "Our unprecedented commitment to ensuring low-income New Yorkers facing eviction in Housing Court have access to legal assistance has already served close to 250,000 New Yorkers and this new expansion to five more zip codes will allow us to reach even more people in need."

In addition, today marks the launch of the second phase of implementation of Universal Access. The first phase of Universal Access provided access to free legal representation in Housing Court to low-income New Yorkers in fifteen zip codes across New York City that were identified as experiencing high risks for eviction and loss of affordable housing. The initiative, which is overseen by the Office of Civil Justice (OCJ) at HRA, is expected to provide legal services to 400,000 New Yorkers facing eviction and displacement each year when fully implemented in 2022.

"We are proud to provide free legal assistance in Housing Court for the most vulnerable New Yorkers", said **Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services Dr. Herminia Palacio**. "As we continue the implementation of this important initiative

we will ensure that no low-income New Yorker is forced out of their home solely because they cannot afford an attorney.”

“With the launch of Universal Access to Legal Services last year, New York City became the first jurisdiction in the nation to guarantee legal assistance to all low-income people facing eviction,” said **DSS Commissioner Banks**. “Now, one year later, this initiative has provided thousands of New Yorkers the fighting chance they deserve to avoid eviction and harassment, having a positive impact not only for those who are able to remain in their homes but for the City overall.”

With the launch of the second phase, five more New York City ZIP codes are being added to the program. The targeted zip codes are:

- Bronx - 10457 in Tremont; 10467 in Williamsbridge; 10468 in Fordham/Bronx Park; 10462 in Parkchester and Pelham Parkway
- Brooklyn - 11221 in Bushwick/Bed-Stuy; 11216 in Bed-Stuy/Crown Heights; 11225 in Flatbush; 11226 in Flatbush (newly added)
- Manhattan - 10026 and 10027 in Harlem; 10025 in the Upper West Side; 10031 in Washington Heights and Sugar Hill (newly added)
- Queens - 11433 and 11434 in Jamaica; 11373 in Elmhurst; 11385 in Ridgewood and Glendale (newly added)
- Staten Island - 10303 in Mariners Harbor; 10302 in Port Richmond, 10314 in Mid-Island; 10310 in West Brighton (newly added)

See full report [here](#).

The Universal Access to Legal Services Implementation Report revealed that by the end of fiscal year 2018, in the fifteen zip codes targeted for legal services in the first phase of implementation, 56% of tenants – more than half of all tenants - who appeared in Housing Court to face eviction proceedings were represented by an attorney. Citywide, 30% of tenants who appeared in eviction cases in Housing Court citywide were represented by counsel, and an additional 4% of such tenants received legal advice or other assistance through OCJ’s tenant legal services programs, meaning that an estimated 34% of tenants appearing Housing Court for eviction cases – *more than one in three* – received legal services for their cases. In 2013, only 1% of tenants facing eviction in Housing Court had legal representation.

The Report further details that City-funded lawyers represented tenants in over 9,000 eviction cases that concluded in Fiscal Year 2018, and in those cases the tenants were able to remain in their homes 84% of the time, meaning approximately 22,000 New Yorkers whose tenancies were threatened by eviction were able to stay in their homes after City-funded lawyers represented them in court.

“This initiative represents Mayor de Blasio’s unwavering commitment to the most vulnerable New Yorkers,” said **HRA Administrator Grace Bonilla**. “Low-income tenants do not need to face the possibility of eviction without access to high quality legal representation just because they cannot afford it.”

"On behalf of HRA’s Office of Civil Justice, we are honored to be working with our legal services provider partners and other stakeholders to take Universal Access into its second year, as we celebrate the important achievements of the first," said **Civil Justice Coordinator Jordan Dressler**.

The impact of the City’s tenant legal assistance programs has been remarkable:

- Since 2014 almost 250,000 New Yorkers have received legal assistance through tenant legal services programs.
- In Fiscal Year 2018 alone 33,000 households representing 87,500 New Yorkers received legal representation and advice, including over 25,000 households representing 69,000 New Yorkers facing eviction in Housing Court.
- From 2013 through 2017 residential evictions by city marshals dropped by 27% - an estimated 70,000 New Yorkers remained in their homes.
- During the same period, eviction case filings dropped by 7% - 17,000 fewer cases filed by landlords in 2017 compared to 2013.

The Universal Access initiative also provides free legal services to New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA) tenants in administrative proceedings to terminate their tenancy. In Fiscal Year 2018, 312 households facing administrative termination proceedings, comprising 796 NYCHA residents, received legal services through OCJ’s eviction defense legal programs.

“As we fight displacement and homelessness in our city, it is important that we do everything we can to keep New Yorkers in their homes. ‘Access to Counsel’ provides tenants with the resources they need to stand on equal footing with their landlord in housing court, and these newly released statistics show this program is clearly working. I remain as proud as ever to have been a leader in the movement for this critical resource. As we prepare to see this important tool expanded I want to thank Mayor de Blasio, Council Members Levine and Gibson, and so many of the advocates and organizations that worked to make ‘Access to Counsel’ a reality in New York City,” said **Bronx Borough President Ruben Diaz Jr.**

“As a practicing attorney who has handled a number of *pro bono* cases involving housing issues, I can fully appreciate the city’s free legal housing services program, and its continuing expansion, especially the latest into a portion of my state Senate district. Keep on expanding, and keep up the great work!,” said **Senator Luis Sepulveda**.

"Low income New Yorkers facing eviction should not lose their housing simply because they cannot afford the steep legal fees to defend themselves. By increasing access to free legal services, the City has helped thousands of people remain in their homes," said **Assemblymember Andrew Hevesi**.

"Housing is undoubtedly a huge problem in New York City; from the availability of housing inventory, to the affordability for low to middle income residents, to the level of stability one has in their home", says **Assemblymember Rodneyse Bichotte**. "I would like to commend Mayor Bill de Blasio, Commissioner Steve Banks and the de Blasio Administration for their efforts in implementing and effectively executing the Universal Access to Legal Service program. I am pleased to see that part of my district, zip code 11226, is an area that has been newly added to the program. Having to deal with the possibility of eviction from one's home is stressful enough. Trying to navigate the complex legal system without support should not be an issue that New York residents should have to face. I encourage Commissioner Banks to continue to monitor and maintain a program that provides quality representation to our New Yorkers."

"As a result of Universal Access to Legal Services, thousands of New Yorkers have received legal assistance through tenant legal service programs, where previously only 1% of tenants facing eviction in Housing Court had legal representation, said **Council Member Vanessa Gibson**. Now, by the end fiscal year 2018, more than half of all tenants who appeared in Housing Court to face eviction proceedings were represented by an attorney in the participating zip codes. We are well on the way in achieving our goal of providing legal services to 400,000 tenants when fully implemented by 2022. We are keeping New Yorkers in their homes and helping them fight back against unscrupulous landlords.

"The passage of the Access to Counsel law last year was an historic step towards justice in NYC's housing courts, where for generations the vast majority of tenants faced the threat of eviction alone," said **Council Member Mark Levine**. "After just a year, we are already seeing the incredible impact of what happens when we guarantee tenants an attorney. As legal representation has gone up, evictions have gone down, the number of cases filed by landlords has gone down, and the number of shelter entries from evictions has gone down. I look forward to continuing to work with the City's Civil Justice Coordinator to ensure we are reaching every tenant facing an eviction. This report is welcome news, but our work is not yet done. We need to continue making improvements to the program to keep New Yorkers in their homes, off the streets, and out of the shelter system."

"Access to Counsel is making New York City a fairer place, and giving tenants a chance to fight eviction and harassment from landlords. I am pleased to see this landmark program expand into Ridgewood and Glendale so more Queens residents can receive free legal representation in Housing Court." said **Council Member Rory I. Lancman**.

"Having representation in housing court is vital to New Yorkers struggling to stay in their homes against the backdrop of increasing cost of living and displacement that occurs as a result of landlord harassment. The massive increase in utilization of legal representation made possible by these free legal services is an encouraging sign that we are making a positive impact on helping New Yorkers stay in their homes against the odds," **said Council Member Robert Cornegy.**

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