



Victory! Mayor de Blasio Signs into Law Two Bills to Expand and Strengthen Right to Counsel for NYC Tenants Facing Eviction

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City Hall, NY – Today, Mayor de Blasio signed into law two critical pieces of legislation to expand and strengthen Right to Counsel for NYC tenants.

"My rent-regulated building was 1 of 80 bought by a predatory equity landlord fifteen years ago," said **Lauren Springer, tenant leader at Catholic Migration Services in Queens**. "But Catholic Migration Services, helped me, my neighbors, and fellow tenants organize and successfully fight back against the predatory practices which targeted the most vulnerable. Later, we joined the fight to ensure the passage of landmark legislation guaranteeing legal representation to all eligible tenants facing an eviction in housing court. That right is even more critical given our current housing crisis made worse by the COVID pandemic. It is truly momentous that the Mayor has signed into law two bills that would not only make the right to counsel immediately accessible citywide, but would also fund community-based organizations to get the word out."

Two years ago, we worked with Council Member Levine and Council Member Gibson, to introduce [Local Law 53](#), **legislation that would strengthen the landmark Right to Counsel law by requiring the City of New York to work with trusted tenant organizing groups to engage and educate tenants about their rights.**

Right to Counsel has proven powerful. Evictions in NYC have plummeted, landlords are suing tenants less and almost everyone who fights their eviction with a Right to Counsel attorney stays in their home. But we know that the fight against evictions isn't just in the courts. Landlords intimidate and threaten tenants before ever starting a court case. While Right to Counsel is powerful, this critical legislation will make it even more powerful by ensuring that all tenants know about the Right to Counsel law, understand it, and use it as a tool to enhance and enforce their rights. We know that trusted tenant organizing groups are the best positioned to do this work. We are excited that this law recognizes that. We will be working hard to make sure the council and the administration fully funds this law and works to set up the infrastructure to support tenant organizing groups as soon as possible.

"If it wasn't because of organizations like CASA, I'm not sure if me and my daughter would have a roof over our heads now," says **Ana Galvez, CASA Leader**. "NYC residents need security and support in these times of crisis. We need a lawyer in Housing Court and we need to be informed about it. When tenants don't know they have a Right to Counsel, they might decide not to appear in court, decline representation, sign agreements with their landlord's lawyer prior, decide not to ask for repairs in fear of being evicted, or face a variety of other serious consequences. Intro 1529 requires the city to support organizers who would work to ensure that tenants know about their Right to Counsel and feel supported using it. More tenants will be prepared to defend their homes against eviction and fight for their right to a safe, affordable home."

As Right to Counsel gains national [attention](#), we hope this also sets a precedent for cities and states across the country that the success of Right to Counsel depends on the power of organized tenants.

The Mayor also signed [Local Law 54](#) into law, which we worked to get introduced in the early fall of last year, in response to the devastating impacts of COVID-19. When Right to Counsel was first passed, the city had five years to fully implement it, or by no later than July 31, 2022. Recognizing that moving eviction cases forward while some tenants have

attorneys and some don't during a pandemic would be severely unjust, this bill accelerates the implementation of Right to Counsel by more than a year, making it fully in effect by June 1st of this year. This is a major victory for all NYC tenants.

"This day truly calls for celebration. Getting here was daunting, but well worth the fight! It was as if we were in a ring taking punches from every direction but never backing down. Now, they see the spark that never died out and the will to fight for the forgotten that is the majority. Intro 1529 and Intro 2050 is just the beginning! Expect more to come from coalitions that are growing in numbers as we continue to educate and eradicate those that do not have our best interest." said **N'Jelle Murphy, tenant leader with the Flatbush Tenant Coalition**

We want to celebrate all of the work of all of the coalition members who had the vision, strength and commitment to work to implement RTC and expand it, especially during these unprecedented times.

"This is a tremendous victory for tenants across New York City and a true testament to the power of organizing. Due to the public health and economic crises wrought by COVID-19, tenants need the Right to Counsel now more than ever. With the signing of these two bills, more tenants facing eviction will have and know about their right to counsel — a critical step towards stopping evictions and keeping New Yorkers in their homes," said **Malika Conner, Director of Organizing at the Right to Counsel NYC Coalition**.

The fight is not over. We must:

- Allocate \$5 million in the City budget towards Local Law 53.
- Ensure the implementation of Local Law 54 means that no case moves forward without a Right to Counsel lawyer. Judges can and must adjourn cases until Right to Counsel lawyers have capacity.
- Do NOT take back tenants' rights! Everyone, regardless of income, has Right to Counsel right now, during the pandemic. We must maintain this into the future.
- Pass [Intro 1104](#), which would double the income threshold for Right to Counsel and expand it to all venues where evictions happen
- Close the courts and keep them closed.
- Expand Right to Counsel across New York State.

When we fight, we win!

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