

## Right to Counsel for Tenants in Housing Court: Fact Sheet and Guide for Small Group for Facilitators

### Why Right to Counsel:

- More than 90% of landlords who bring eviction cases are represented by lawyers.
- More than 90% of tenants aren't.
- Landlords are aware of the unbalanced nature of the housing court. They often initiate cases knowing that low-income tenants will probably not be able to afford an attorney.
- Nearly 30,000 families were evicted in New York City last year; this is more than a 20 percent rise in the past decade.
- We know that evictions are the #1 reason why people go into the shelter system.
- Homelessness in New York City has recently reached the highest rates since the Great Depression of the 1930s.
- Money spent on legal representation to prevent eviction would reduce annual shelter costs.
- Keeping families in their homes and avoiding homelessness will also avert long term costs associated with homelessness in health, education, employment and other areas.
- **The price of full legal representation in Housing Court is estimated at \$2,000- \$3,200 per case.**
- If we don't invest in lawyers for tenants, *it will cost us much more* to find housing for tenants who have been evicted: each bed in a New York City municipal shelter costs **\$36,000** per year; developing a single affordable housing unit costs over **\$250,000**.
- Elected City Council officials have introduced legislation that would provide legal counsel to low-income tenants facing eviction.
- The Mayor has made affordable housing and economic equity central themes of his administration.

So, RTC is both about justice in housing court but also about preserving affordable housing and neighborhood stability.

### What we've done so far:

- There is a bill (Intro 214) in city council that would give tenants a right to have an attorney if they can't afford one. There are enough sponsors on the bill in city council, to make it veto proof!
- The main issue is that it's an expensive bill. It would cost the city close to \$300 million. It needs to be in the mayor's budget.
- For the bill to become a law, we need the housing committee to ask for a hearing. We aren't pushing for that right now because we first want to develop a legal services model and also come up with proposals for funding.
- We formed a city-wide coalition made up of attorneys, academics, tenant advocates and tenant organizing groups across the city
- We held a huge forum on December 5<sup>th</sup> that more than 400 people attended.
- We've gotten amazing press coverage!
- We've developed a website
- We are collecting petitions to the mayor

- We are trying to get the Speaker as well as other elected officials to tour the Bronx housing court so they can see the craziness for themselves.
- We are trying to do outreach to get more tenants involved in this campaign. The town halls are one thing we've used to do outreach.
- We have organized Town Halls in Every Borough
- We are working on Getting a Hearing at City Council at the End of April

**Facilitator Questions:**

- Any questions about Right to Counsel? What it is or what it isn't?
- Any questions about the Campaign?
- Given the opposition, what are some things you think we should do to help engage more tenants and move the campaign forward?

**Report Back:** Someone from your group should report your conversation back to the larger group. You can write up key points on the butcher paper. When thinking about what to report back, think about the things you learned from this discussion about the campaign for a right to counsel that you want to share back with the larger group as well as important ideas for the campaign to move forward.