



## PRESS RELEASE

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### NCCRC CELEBRATES NYC'S "HISTORIC" DECISION TO GUARANTEE COUNSEL FOR LOW-INCOME TENANTS IN HOUSING CASES

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On Sunday, New York City Mayor Bill de Blasio announced that the City would provide a right to appointed counsel for indigent tenants in housing court, capping an extraordinary campaign by local and national advocates over the past 2 years to enact such a bill. The bill, Intro 214-a, has enjoyed a veto-proof majority of the City Council since its introduction in 2014, and led the City to increase its eviction legal defense spending over the past two years to \$62 million. According to news reports, the City will increase its eviction legal aid funding by \$93 million more over 5 years, meaning that all tenants earning less than 200 percent of the poverty level will receive counsel.

"This is a historic day for New York City and the civil right to counsel movement," said John Pollock, the Coordinator of the National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel (NCCRC). The NCCRC assists efforts all over the country to establish a right to counsel in civil cases implicating basic human needs, and worked with the Right to Counsel Coalition for NYC to advance Intro 214-a ever from the time it was introduced. "Right now, all the states provide a right to counsel for a few types of civil cases, like child welfare and guardianship of adults, but no state or city does so for housing," Pollock explained. "So by becoming the first place to guarantee tenants counsel, New York City has both become a national leader on access to justice and validated the idea that housing is a basic human need."

Other jurisdictions, however, may be joining New York City soon. Last month, Boston Mayor Marty Walsh announced the introduction of a bill to the Massachusetts Legislature, *An Act to Promote Homelessness Prevention in Massachusetts*, that would require a court to appoint the public defender to represent all indigent tenants in evictions. The Mayor's announcement pointed out that "only seven percent of tenants brought to Boston Housing Court receive some type of legal assistance while a majority of landlords have representation." And in the District of Columbia, Councilmember Kenyan McDuffie has introduced the *Expanding Access to Justice Act*, which would increase legal representation for certain kinds of housing cases with a stated goal of "mov[ing] toward a right to counsel for low-income eligible individuals or groups in civil cases involving fundamental human needs."

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