

2025 Tenant RTC Convening

Annotated Bibliography

The [National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel](#), [Right to Counsel NYC Coalition](#), [Strategic Actions for a Just Economy](#), and the [NYLS Wilf Impact Center for Public Interest Law](#) coordinated the 2025 Tenant Right to Counsel (RTC) Convening, held on April 24 and 25, 2025 at New York Law School. Our goal with this convening was to help advance the strength, breadth, and effectiveness of the tenant RTC movement by anchoring it in a vision of a human right to housing and a transformative approach to eviction defense that:

- keeps people in their homes and preserves communities,
- centers community organizing and community leadership,
- disrupts structural racism and imbalance in the eviction courts,
- and advances housing rights principles of security of tenure, affordability, habitability, and safety and security.

To work toward achieving this overarching goal, our programming and delivery aimed to achieve three objectives:

- Relationship building
- Sharing learned lessons
- Building cohesion on the meaning of RTC and stances on issues

This annotated bibliography spotlights key resources connected to the topics we're exploring at the convening:

- Understanding and Defining the Tenant Right to Counsel
- Tenant Leadership and Organizing
- Movement and Community Lawyering as Related to Tenant RTC
- Tenant RTC as a Part of the Broader Housing Justice Movement
- Tenant RTC as a Tool to Further Race Equity

Understanding and Defining the Tenant Right to Counsel

WHY A RIGHT: The Right to Counsel and the Ecology of Housing Justice

This article discusses the importance of having a right to counsel, stressing key points that are crucial in understanding the benefits of this right. A right to counsel would help protect individuals, particularly low-income tenants, from eviction and help families stay together while ensuring that communities remain intact. A right to counsel would help save government money, prevent individuals from suffering the trauma of homelessness, and address the issue of economic inequality. This article explains why a *right* to counsel is significant, while defining the meaning of a *right* for a better understanding. Scherer, Andrew, "WHY A RIGHT: The Right to Counsel and the Ecology of Housing Justice" (2016). Impact Center for Public Interest Law. 17.

https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/impact_center/17

Our Rights! Our Power! The Right to Counsel (RTC) Campaign to Fight Evictions in NYC! – Right to Counsel NYC Coalition

This documentary captures the grassroots movement that led to New York City becoming the first major city to guarantee tenants the right to a free attorney when facing eviction. Through the voices of tenants, community organizers, and advocates, it illustrates how collective power changed the trajectory of tenant rights in the city. The film also serves as a practical resource for building similar campaigns. [Watch the documentary](#) Right to Counsel NYC Coalition. *Our Rights! Our Power! The Right to Counsel (RTC) Campaign to Fight Evictions in NYC!*, 2021. Vimeo. https://www.righttocounselnyc.org/rtc_documentary

No Eviction Without Representation: Evictions' Disproportionate Harms and the Promise of Right to Counsel – ACLU & National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel

This research brief details the severe consequences of eviction and presents compelling evidence on how legal representation reduces displacement and stabilizes communities. It highlights key findings from studies on RTC programs and ends with clear policy recommendations urging governments to institutionalize the right to counsel. [Read the report](#) ACLU and National Coalition for a Civil Right to Counsel. *No Eviction Without Representation: Evictions' Disproportionate Harms and the Promise of Right to Counsel*, 2022. <https://www.aclu.org/publications/no-eviction-without-representation>

NYC’s Floundering ‘Right to Counsel’ Fails to Keep Pace with Eviction Cases – Frank Festa & Annie Iezzi

This article investigates the challenges facing NYC’s RTC program, noting how its impact has waned due to declining legal representation rates amidst high eviction filings. It underscores systemic shortfalls that can derail similar programs in other jurisdictions. [Read the article](https://citylimits.org/2023/01/03/nycs-floundering-right-to-counsel-fails-to-keep-pace-with-eviction-cases/) Festa, Frank, and Iezzi, Annie. “NYC’s Floundering ‘Right to Counsel’ Fails to Keep Pace With Eviction Cases.” *City Limits*, January 3, 2023. <https://citylimits.org/2023/01/03/nycs-floundering-right-to-counsel-fails-to-keep-pace-with-eviction-cases/>

Webinar: Expanding Access to Legal Representation: Right to Counsel & Eviction Prevention – National League of Cities

This webinar provides insight into how cities can expand tenant representation by leveraging federal funding. Panelists discuss the policy landscape and lasting effects of the pandemic on eviction defense, offering lessons for shaping sustainable RTC programs. [View the resource](https://www.nlc.org/resource/from-the-event-expanding-access-to-legal-representation-right-to-counsel-eviction-prevention/) National League of Cities. *Expanding Access to Legal Representation: Right to Counsel & Eviction Prevention*, 2021. <https://www.nlc.org/resource/from-the-event-expanding-access-to-legal-representation-right-to-counsel-eviction-prevention/>

Right to Counsel for Tenants Facing Eviction: Justification, History, and Future – John Pollock

This law review article contextualizes RTC within broader housing justice efforts, emphasizing that while RTC is a major achievement, it should be seen as complementary to other reforms, not a replacement. It discusses the law’s potential and its limitations. Pollock, John. *Right to Counsel for Tenants Facing Eviction: Justification, History, and Future*. 51 *Fordham Urban Law Journal* 1439 (2024).

Tenant Leadership and Organizing

***Organizing is Different Now: How the Right to Counsel Strengthens the Tenant Movement in New York City* – TakeRoot Justice & Right to Counsel NYC Coalition**

This report explores how the Right to Counsel movement reshaped tenant organizing in NYC. It reflects on lessons learned, challenges like digital outreach, and the necessity of intersectional strategies. It also underscores the value of community lawyering and adaptive organizing practices. [Read the report](#)

TakeRoot Justice and Right to Counsel NYC Coalition. *Organizing is Different Now: How the Right to Counsel Strengthens the Tenant Movement in New York City*, 2022. <https://takerootjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Organizing-is-Different-Now-0322.pdf>

***Abolish Rent: How Tenants Can End the Housing Crisis* – Tracy Rosenthal & Leonardo Vilchis**

This podcast episode features tenant organizers discussing the roots of the housing crisis, the role of rent strikes and political education, and their broader vision for transforming housing systems. It presents the idea of abolishing rent as a necessary step toward housing justice. [Listen on Spotify](#)

Rosenthal, Tracy and Vilchis, Leonardo. “Abolish Rent: How Tenants Can End the Housing Crisis.” *Rev Left Radio*, October 29, 2024. <https://open.spotify.com/episode/27SugAChcwclLbwwezEd0L?si=N6JiRvaiSAK-PM32aDQ7gw>

***Tenant Union Law* – Greg Baltz**

This article provides a comprehensive legal analysis of tenant unions, outlining their rights, legal structures, and the challenges they face. It emphasizes how tenant unions serve as collective bargaining tools and advocates for tenant protections and rent control. [Read the article](#)

Baltz, Greg. *Tenant Union Law*. *Yale Law & Policy Review*, Volume 43, Issue 1, Fall 2024. <https://yalelawandpolicy.org/tenant-union-law>

Movement and Community Lawyering as Related to Tenant RTC

***43 Essex Street: A Case Study in Shutting Down Tenant Harassment and Displacement with Community Organizing and Lawyering* – Cynthia Cheng-Wun Weaver & Donna Chiu**

This case study details how tenant-led litigation, paired with organizing and community lawyering, successfully stopped harassment and displacement in a Housing Part (HP) case. The authors argue that attorneys must work alongside tenants and organizers to center tenant power and dismantle landlord-dominated legal structures.

[Read the article](#)

Weaver, Cynthia Cheng-Wun, and Chiu, Donna. *43 Essex Street: A Case Study in Shutting Down Tenant Harassment and Displacement with Community Organizing and Lawyering*. 21 *CUNY Law Review* 326 (2018).

***Lawyers Aren't Rent* – Juliet M. Brodie & Larisa G. Bowman**

This article critiques the current role of tenant lawyers, arguing they are often reduced to rental assistance facilitators. It calls for a restructuring of legal advocacy and for lawyers to align with community organizers to fill systemic gaps and push for broader policy change.

[Read the article](#)

Brodie, Juliet M., and Bowman, Larisa G. *Lawyers Aren't Rent*. 75 *Stanford Law Review* 132 (2023).

***Making Change Together* – Matthew P. Main**

This article explores the multi-pronged legal and organizing strategy that fueled housing justice for tenants of NYC's three-quarter houses. It presents a systems theory framework, encouraging collaboration between tenants, lawyers, and organizers to build power and advocate for structural change.

[Read the article](#)

Main, Matthew P. *Making Change Together: The Multi-Pronged, Systems Theory Approach to Law and Organizing That Fueled a Housing Justice Movement for Three-Quarter House Tenants in New York City*. 27 *Georgetown Journal on Poverty Law & Policy* 31 (2019).

Tenant RTC as a Part of the Broader Housing Justice Movement

“The Rent Is Too Damn High!”—The Rise of a National Tenants’ Movement – Steve Dubb & Tara Raghuveer

This interview highlights the national tenant organizing landscape, focusing on the Home Guarantee campaign led by Tara Raghuveer. It emphasizes the political strategies used to fight for a federal right to housing through coalition building and grassroots power.

[Read the article](#)

Dubb, Steve, and Raghuveer, Tara. “The Rent Is Too Damn High!—The Rise of a National Tenants’ Movement.” *Nonprofit Quarterly*, December 13, 2023. <https://nonprofitquarterly.org/the-rent-is-too-damn-high-the-rise-of-a-national-tenants-movement/>

In the US, Tenants Are Usually on Their Own. Can a New National Tenant Union Change That? – Thomas Birmingham

This article introduces the Tenant Union Federation (TUF), a national organizing effort to build tenant power. It discusses TUF’s role in pushing for federal rent control and its broader vision of renters as a political force capable of reshaping housing policy.

[Read the article](#)

Birmingham, Thomas. “In the US, Tenants Are Usually on Their Own. Can a New National Tenant Union Change That?” *The Nation*, December 4, 2024. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/tenant-union-organizing-rent/>

Eviction Abolition – Larisa G. Bowman

This article presents an abolitionist critique of eviction, framing it as part of a system of racial and gender-based social control. It argues that RTC is a crucial reform but must be accompanied by a deeper reimagining of housing as a public good and eviction as a practice that should be eliminated entirely.

[Read the article](#)

Bowman, Larisa G. *Eviction Abolition*. 55 *Loyola University Chicago Law Journal* 541 (2024).\

Tenant RTC as a Tool to Further Race Equity

The Case Against Summary Eviction Proceedings: Process as Racism and Oppression

This Article argues how summary eviction proceedings privilege landlords and disadvantage tenants, stemming from a structurally unfair system. Furthermore, the summary eviction process perpetuates a racially imbalanced framework that is manifested in the landlord-tenant relations. Historical reference points to how eviction has disproportionately impacted the Black community and how the detrimental effect of race influences the right to housing. The need to eliminate the shortcut summary eviction process is stressed to even out the playing field between landlords and tenants. Scherer, Andrew, "The Case Against Summary Eviction Proceedings: Process as Racism and Oppression" (2022). *Articles & Chapters*. 1537.

https://digitalcommons.nyls.edu/fac_articles_chapters/1537

The Disproportionate Burden of Eviction on Black Women – Cleo Bluthenthal

This article explores how Black women face disproportionately high eviction rates due to structural racial and gender inequality, a situation worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. It advocates for policies like eviction diversion programs and tenant protections to address these disparities and emphasizes the urgency of supporting Black women in order to break cycles of poverty and housing instability.

Read the article

Bluthenthal, Cleo. "The Disproportionate Burden of Eviction on Black Women." *Center for American Progress*, August 14, 2023. <https://www.americanprogress.org/article/the-disproportionate-burden-of-eviction-on-black-women/>

Advancing Racial and Health Justice Through a Right to Counsel for Tenants – Human Impact Partners

This document argues that RTC is not just a housing policy but a public health and racial justice imperative. It explains how eviction disproportionately harms marginalized communities, especially Black women, and how RTC can reduce racial disparities, promote tenant empowerment, and improve health and stability for those most affected by eviction.

[Read the report](#)

Human Impact Partners. *Advancing Racial and Health Justice Through a Right to Counsel for Tenants: A Primer for the Public Health Field*, March 5, 2024.

https://humanimpact.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Advancing-Racial-and-Health-Justice-Through-a-Right-to-Counsel-for-Tenants_HIP_03-05-24.pdf

Racial and Gender Disparities Among Evicted Americans – Peter Hepburn, Renee Louis & Matthew Desmond

This study uses millions of eviction records to show that Black and Latinx women are disproportionately targeted in eviction proceedings. It also finds that these groups are more likely to be serially evicted, highlighting deep-seated racial and gender-based inequalities in housing.

[Read the article](#)

Hepburn, Peter, Louis, Renee, and Desmond, Matthew. “Racial and Gender Disparities Among Evicted Americans.” *Sociological Science*, Vol. 7, No. 27 (2020).

<https://sociologicalscience.com/articles-v7-27-649/>

This annotated bibliography was researched and drafted by current students in the New York Law School Housing Rights Clinic (Sheila Barrios, Madeline Clavin, Meir Gewirtz, Rheagan Jeter, Anshu Khadka, Phoebe Lopez, Olivia Moore). Former clinic students, who are this year’s Research Assistants to the clinic director, Andrew Scherer (Jessica Chan, Anya Patterson, Maya Moskowitz), edited and designed the bibliography. Many thanks go to all of these students for their work.

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