

RTCNYC Tips for Speaking to Press about Implementation
Additional Talking Points
Current as of 2/13/18

On how RTC fits in with other organizing campaigns like housing court reform, reforming the rent laws and rezonings:

- We are really excited about RTC--it's a major victory and an important tool in the fight against displacement and gentrification!
- Displacement is a massive issue and therefore happens in many ways---eviction being just one of them. But there are lots of places where people are being displaced because of speculation, increased investment because of the rezonings, abuse of the rent laws, etc., where evictions don't take place. We need other tools to fight displacement.
- With more tools, like stronger rent laws, RTC will be even *more* effective than it is now!
- Right to Counsel isn't just about fighting evictions and landlord harassment--it's also about fighting to stay to help create the kind of city we need. We hope that tenants who learn about their rights and who become more involved in neighborhood based groups because they've been able to defend their home in the courts or because they've been emboldened by this new right, will join the larger tenant movement!

General Court based Implementation Challenges:

- We are really excited about RTC and all of its potential.
- Attorneys can really make a difference in eviction cases (examples).
- Having this right has already changed the landscape and culture in the court, for example here are a few success stories...
- We are in the early stages so there are a lot of implementation challenges, like space, a clear referral process, etc., but we are hoping that once those challenges are resolved, tenants won't need to come to court to find an attorney, there will be confidential space to meet with folks, etc. and the threat of eviction won't hold as much power.
- Once RTC is fully implemented, not only will we see a reduction in cases, but housing court will be transformed and we hope to see more tenant initiated cases.

Talking points on tenants deciding not to use counsel (in case this comes up/not something that should be initiated on our end right now):

- Housing court has long been dominated by landlord attorneys. For years, tenant advocates and organizers have told tenants *not* to talk to attorneys in the hallways of the courts. Now, it's tenant attorneys who are in the hallways approaching tenants! It can be really confusing. It's hard to know who is a tenant attorney and who is a landlord attorney, so we have to work hard to build trust and work to change that. A lot of that is also about the space constrictions of the court, which we hope will change.
- Eviction is a very scary thing, that also can bring a lot of shame. We saw that in the foreclosure crisis. Asking for help and fighting to stay, means you first have to believe that evictions aren't your fault and that you have a right to fight to stay. That is really hard to do, and that's why the work of

the coalition is so important to help challenge the narrative that says we only have rights that we can pay for or when someone else says our case is worthy of representation.

- The other narrative we have to counter is that evictions are easy and it's a simple math calculation about how much rent is owed. We are not in the business of making evictions easy when they make life very hard for tenants. Housing law in NYC is incredibly complicated and complex---tenants have a right to access it to defend their homes. But that takes time to get used to when all tenants have been told is “do you have the rent or not--it's that simple--you don't need an attorney.” The only person that argument benefits is the landlord.
- We also have to remember that housing court is a battleground. Many tenants have been told by their landlord or their representative, that if they fight their case, it will turn out worse for them. Landlord threats and retaliation should not be underestimated. They are worried about what will happen when they go home, what threats they'll get from their super, etc.
- All of this underscores the need for strong tenant organizing in neighborhoods where RTC is being rolled out. It also underscores why RTC is so important in the first place!