

## Q&A on RTC

### 1. Why a right is important and what this means for tenants?

We know that landlords will try to evict 260,000 tenants a year and that most of them wouldn't be evicted if they had attorneys. Because people---our neighbors, family, friends--have been unjustly evicted for decades, we've learned that the court isn't a place for us. We've learned that landlords have unmitigated power, so why fight? The power that landlords have inside and outside the court affects us. Our neighbors are less likely to organize, to fight their case, to challenge their rents, because we've all learned that the law benefits the landlords. Now, i know that's not true, that there is a ton of law that protects tenants, but it isn't used to the full extent of its power. For us, housing court is a center of displacement and has been a key arena of struggle in the fight against gentrification.

Knowing that this will change---that this is now law---that we have new rights, means that we can stop unjust evictions, it's a message to all tenants that they have power and should organize and it's a message to landlords that we won't let evictions be easy, after all they aren't easy for the thousands of tenants who are devastated by them.

### 2. What does this mean for communities and organizing?

YES!!! We are so excited about this! THIS is the key. This is not just a housing court based model! This is a tenant organizing tool!!! If everyone in a building knows they will be defended when the landlord retaliates, landlords will be less likely to retaliate, but also tenants will be MORE likely to take bold action, like rent strikes, and 7As, and marches and protests. As a CASA Leader, one of the key reasons that I've seen tenants not want to organize, is fear of being displaced. Tenants are vulnerable both because rents are so high but also because of how much power landlords have. We have to let all tenants know, every single tenant who lives in the zip codes, regardless of whether or not they have a case in court, that they have so much more power now!!!

We all know that evictions aren't the sum of a bunch of individual problems—they are a reflection of a larger political problem. They don't exist because of poverty, they help exacerbate and create poverty. They are an epidemic. But because of the larger narrative, one that mostly benefits landlords, that says that evictions are tenants fault, that poverty and high rents are their fault, we have a lot of work to do to create space for tenants to know and claim their rights and their power. That's why this work has to be done by community

groups—because fighting displacement can't be done in isolation, it has to be done in Community with each other. That's why the coalition's work is centered around neighborhood based community organizing groups, who work in the neighborhoods who have RTC in year one. We are developing curriculum, outreach materials, etc, so that tenants learn about this new right in the context of Community and all of the power that Community has.

### **3. What will this mean for the balance of power between landlords and tenants?**

Landlords tell us that we don't have the right to repairs because we are behind in rent. That's not true. Tenants are denied access to the vast amount of housing law that governs their tenancy, their building, their rent, etc. That's not right and landlords take advantage of that. So this is a powerful tool that takes away one of the most powerful tool landlords have had ownership of—evictions.

At the same time, we need to be vigilant. Landlords want us out. If they can't get us out in housing court what will they do next? That's why tenants need to be connected to and members of community groups so that they can continue to organize.