



*THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK  
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**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

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***COUNCIL'S COMMITTEE ON AGING HEARS  
GROUNDBREAKING RIGHT-TO-COUNSEL  
LEGISLATION FOR SENIORS***

*Intro 96, introduced by Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, would guarantee legal representation in civil court cases for elderly New Yorkers*

NEW YORK, NY – For the first time, the New York City Council heard legislation that would ensure that seniors are afforded access to legal counsel in eviction, ejection or foreclosure proceedings. Introduced by Council Member Rosie Mendez, the bill, Intro 96, was the subject of a hearing held yesterday by the Council's Committee on Aging.

“Intro 96, Right to Counsel for Senior Citizens, is a bill that I introduced approximately 11 years ago. This legislation would provide our most vulnerable New Yorkers, senior citizens, with an attorney irrespective of whether they rent or own their home. Senior citizens are more apt to be subject to predatory lending or harassment by unscrupulous landlords. The poverty level and the number of seniors in NYC shelters have risen. In NYC, anyone who is about to lose their home should be provided a lawyer, but if we can't do that now, then we should ensure that we do it for the elderly,” said **Council Member Rosie Mendez, prime sponsor of Intro. 96.**

“For too many seniors in my Council District, often the only person standing up for their rights in housing court is a staff member from my office – despite our best efforts to connect them with overburdened free and low-cost legal service providers,” said **Council Member Margaret S. Chin, chair of the Council's Committee on Aging.** “Our seniors must have the legal representation to fight for their right to stay in their homes, to be free of harassment from landlords, and to spend their golden years in housing that is safe and age-friendly. I thank Council Member Mendez for standing up for seniors in my district and throughout our City.”

Seniors make up just over 18% of the city's population, and many senior households are severely rent burdened – spending over 30% of their monthly income on rent.

Several housing programs exist to alleviate the cost of housing for seniors – such as SCRIE and Section 202. However, these programs do not assist seniors who are facing eviction or foreclosure.

"Seniors are especially vulnerable in housing court proceedings because they are more likely to have health issues and cognitive impairments that can cause them to default on their case. Fortunately, none of the seniors we work with have been evicted because we've been able to get them legal counsel or avert legal proceedings by intervening early. We know firsthand that having a lawyer greatly reduces the risk that a senior will be evicted. We are thankful that Councilmember Rosie Mendez is taking the lead in sponsoring this bill," said **Steve Herrick, Executive Director of Cooper Square Committee.**

"MFY Legal Services regularly sees cases where seniors are sued for eviction on baseless allegations because they are long-term tenants paying low rents. Housing court can be an unforgiving forum, requiring knowledge of legal defenses and procedures that cannot be navigated on one's own. For a senior who may be isolated, disabled, fearful of her landlord, and/or have no idea how to respond to an eviction proceeding, a lawyer makes all the difference in whether the apartment is saved or the person is evicted. MFY fully supports a Right to Counsel that includes seniors," said **Jeanette Zelhof, Executive Director, MFY Legal Services, Inc.**

Intro. 96 is designed to fill that gap by requiring the Department for the Aging to establish a dedicated position – the civil justice coordinator – to implement and administer a program to ensure seniors are properly represented in housing court.

At the hearing on Oct. 26, representatives from the de Blasio Administration and advocates discussed opportunities to increase access to legal services for seniors, improve outreach efforts and unravel the complexities of free or low-cost legal representation for elderly New Yorkers.

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