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COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ PROPOSES HISTORIC LEGISLATION TO HELP KEEP LOW-INCOME SENIORS IN THEIR HOMES

posted by [gov_wire](#)
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****FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****
November 15, 2007

COUNCIL MEMBER MENDEZ PROPOSES HISTORIC LEGISLATION TO HELP KEEP LOW-INCOME SENIORS IN THEIR HOMES
Bill Will Provide Free Legal Counsel to Seniors Facing Eviction and Foreclosure

City Hall, November 15th, 2007 * Council Member Rosie Mendez announced pioneering legislation today to protect New York City's low-income seniors from eviction and foreclosure. The Right to Counsel Bill will provide free legal representation to seniors with household incomes of less than \$27,000 who are in jeopardy of losing their home. With evictions and foreclosures threatening many New Yorkers, The Right to Counsel Bill has garnered considerable support, with 21 Council Members and 80 community groups in support. Councilwoman Mendez was joined by several of the Council Members and supporting groups.

"It is unconscionable that senior citizens continue to be evicted from their homes without knowing their legal rights," said District 2 Council Member Rosie Mendez. "By providing free legal support for our city's most vulnerable population, Right to Counsel will eliminate a tremendous social injustice. This is the right thing to do, both morally and financially."

The details of Right to Counsel are as follows:

- In order to be eligible, the senior must be 62 years old or older and have a disposable household income of \$27,000 or less.
- If an eligible senior is facing eviction, a civil justice coordinator appointed by the Commissioner of the Department of Homeless Services will assign legal counsel to the senior upon receiving the request of services from either the senior, a judge, or a designated organization.
- The coordinator will select an organization that has met the quality standards set out in the legislation and the organization will be adequately compensated for their work.

Before accounting for savings, The Right to Counsel Bill would cost the city approximately \$10 million/year, according to the Independent Budget Office (IBO). However, considering that sheltering a senior costs \$23,000 and homeless seniors are far more likely to place a strain on the healthcare system, there would be significant cost savings. IBO estimated that approximately 8,000-10,000 seniors would utilize the Right to Counsel legislation on an annual basis. Studies have shown that a very small percentage of tenants who obtain representation in Housing Court eviction proceedings actually lose their homes.

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