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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 29, 2016
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PROTECTING TENANTS AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING: MAYOR DE BLASIO'S TENANT SUPPORT UNIT HELPS 1,000 TENANTS FIGHT HARASSMENT, SECURE REPAIRS

Part of 10-fold increase in free legal services for tenants under de Blasio administration

Specialists go door-to-door, securing building repairs and bringing free legal help

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio today announced the newly created Tenant Support Unit resolved its 1,000th tenant case since it launched in July 2015, keeping tenants in their homes and protecting affordable housing in fast-changing neighborhoods.

The proactive unit goes door-to-door in neighborhoods across the city, informing tenants of their rights, documenting building violations, soliciting complaints related to harassment and eviction, and making referrals to free legal support whenever necessary.

The Tenant Support Unit is part of a multi-pronged approach Mayor de Blasio has implemented to fight displacement. It includes a ten-fold increase in free legal services for tenants – totaling \$62 million – that will be fully implemented this year. The administration has also pursued an aggressive preservation program, locking more than 26,000 apartments to date into long-term affordability agreements that help low-income families stay in their homes for decades to come.

Evictions by City Marshals have decreased 24 percent since Mayor de Blasio took office, down from 28,849 in 2013 to 21,988 in 2015.

“When it comes to protecting tenants and affordable housing, we don’t wait for a 311 call to come in. We have teams knocking on doors in fast-changing neighborhoods to solve problems then and there. This is a new strategy that’s helping us keep New Yorkers in their homes and fight displacement before it happens,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**.

Modeled after the outreach program for Pre-K for All that successfully enrolled 68,500 children in free, full-day Pre-K, the Tenant Support Unit reaches New Yorkers directly. Since it launched in July 2015, specialists from the unit have knocked on more than 57,000 doors and called more than 23,000 tenants, identifying 2,400 New Yorkers that needed help. 1,000 of those cases have been resolved so far, and agencies and legal service providers are addressing the remainder.

Key efforts of the Tenant Support Unit:

- **Know Your Rights:** Specialists are trained to educate tenants about their fundamental rights in multiple languages, ensuring tenants are not intimidated or deceived into accepting a buyout offer or illegal surcharges on their legal rent.

- **Securing Repairs:** Specialists help tenants document complaints about inadequate heat or hot water, infestations and mold, and work directly with HPD’s Division of Code Enforcement to secure necessary repairs.
- **Referrals to Free Legal Services:** When specialists encounter evidence of harassment or illegal eviction, they refer tenants to a City-contracted, free legal service provider who can represent tenants in housing court. More than 500 such referrals have been made so far. Combined with 311 referrals, the City’s augmented legal services have aided more than 10,000 tenants over the past year.

“Legal services are an essential part of helping tenants stay in their homes, reducing homelessness and preserving affordable housing. The City’s free legal services for tenants have already served 10,000 households,” said **Human Resources Administration Commissioner Steven Banks**.

“The multi-pronged anti-harassment strategy the de Blasio administration has implemented across New York City – which includes the Tenant Support Unit – has been invaluable in helping to protect tenants who are being pressured by bad-apple landlords seeking to push them out through neglect and other tactics. We congratulate the Tenant Support Unit on this impressive first milestone, and their work helping tenants and the City fight property owners who are not playing by the rules,” said **Housing Preservation and Development Commissioner Vicki Been**.

“With fears running high over tenant displacement by unscrupulous landlords, it is great to know northern Manhattan residents, as well as those across the city, have a dedicated team to back them up,” said **Council Member Ydanis Rodriguez**. “Less than a full year in and the Tenant Support Unit is already showing overwhelmingly positive results. The peace of mind for tenants – knowing they have free legal support to fight back, inspectors to keep them safe in their buildings and a dedicated team fighting to preserve housing affordability – is immeasurable. I urge anyone facing harassment, unsafe living conditions or eviction to contact the Tenant Support Unit right away. Every hardworking New Yorker deserves affordable housing. The de Blasio administration is dedicated to this goal, not just through getting this housing built, but by protecting those who already have it.”

“Legal services are vital in combating the eviction epidemic, reducing homelessness and ensuring the voices of vulnerable New Yorkers can be heard,” said **Council Member Mark Levine**. “New York City has implemented a comprehensive strategy to change the game for tenants, level the playing field and bring crucial support directly to their doors. I commend Mayor de Blasio and my colleagues for aggressively fighting displacement in our neighborhoods so more hard-working New Yorkers can live comfortably in their homes.”

“The Tenant Support Unit has partnered with my office to great effect. The initiative’s focus on linking tenants with the legal services they need has been crucial to helping people stay in their homes. I commend Mayor de Blasio for his work on this initiative,” said **Assembly Member Guillermo Linares**.

“Since 1979, the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation has been providing anti-displacement services that are key to keeping families and communities intact. NMIC applauds the Mayor’s efforts to support legal services, and the allocation of additional funds will increase our capacity to provide much needed eviction prevention services,” said **Maria Lizardo Executive Director of the Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation**.

“As an organization fighting day in and day out for low-income tenants, we share the Mayor’s goal of preserving affordable housing and stabilizing communities,” said **Raun Rasmussen, Executive Director of Legal Services NYC**. “The Tenant Support Unit, which connects New York City tenants to the services available to assist them, has already helped prevent hundreds of evictions and stabilize communities citywide.”

“Funding for legal services is essential to keeping low-income New Yorkers in their homes, and increased funding has reduced evictions by 25 percent last year. The Mayor’s leadership on this issue is unprecedented, and The Legal Aid Society is proud to be a critical part of the effort,” said **Adriene Holder, Attorney-in-Charge of Civil Practice at The Legal Aid Society.**

“As a community-based organization serving Inwood’s hardworking families for over 36 years, we share the Mayor's vision of preserving and increasing affordable housing in the community,” said **Charles Corliss, Executive Director of Inwood Community Services.**

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