



News for Immediate Release

JULY 1, 2020

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RIGHT TO COUNSEL— CLEVELAND LAUNCHES, PROVIDING FREE LEGAL HELP TO LOW-INCOME TENANTS FACING EVICTION

*Co-Led by The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and United Way of Greater Cleveland,
Right to Counsel - Cleveland supports right to counsel ordinance enacted on behalf of tenants in need*

CLEVELAND: Right to counsel is now a legal right for tenants in Cleveland with one or more children living at or below the federal poverty line who are facing eviction. Through Right to Counsel-Cleveland (RTC-C), a partnership between The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland and United Way of Greater Cleveland, eligible tenants facing eviction can receive access to free legal help, effective today.

Official RTC-C work began in October 2019 after Cleveland City Council passed legislation, championed by Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley, making these resources and support a legal right. Cleveland is only the fourth city in the nation, and the first midwestern city, to pass this legislation.

“The ordinance passed in October 2019 and today’s launch of right to counsel are a direct result of the efforts and commitment of many individuals and organizations across this community, including Cleveland City Council, Legal Aid Society and United Way. Those in the deepest need across our community deserve -- and will now have -- legal representation in Housing Court. I’m proud to work with these two organization to help ensure that a stable, safe home for every family is protected,” said Kelley.

RTC-C aims to reduce evictions in Cleveland by promoting housing stability and helping families avoid the negative consequences of eviction, which include homelessness, job loss and decreased academic performance and school attendance. Evictions are often the result of living in poverty, however, evictions can also become the cause of poverty for so many. Those at especially high risk of eviction include low-income, single mothers with young children, particularly African American women.

In addition to helping families, RTC-C is estimated to provide at least a 300% return on investment to the community, according to Stout Risius Ross, LLC., “Stout,” the global, independent data analysis firm contracted to evaluate the effectiveness of RTC-C.





RTC-C's launch comes after the state of Ohio lifted its' moratorium on evictions last week. In 2018, nearly 9,000 evictions were filed in Cleveland alone, according to data from Case Western Reserve University. The number of evictions filed in 2020 are expected to dramatically increase due to the economic hardships individuals and families are facing as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recent survey data from the Census Bureau, analyzed by Stout, indicates that in Cuyahoga County alone, there may be 55,000 to 86,000 renter households that are unable to pay their rent next month. Many of these households have not been able to pay their rent in more than two months and are at a high risk for eviction, which will likely result in a spike of eviction filings.

"The launch of Right to Counsel-Cleveland is a major step forward because it levels the playing field for families living in poverty and facing eviction with free legal counsel. The legislation, effective today, and RTC-C partnership with Legal Aid provides those in the deepest need across our community with essential advocates and resources to preserve the dignity and stability that a safe and secure home affords," said Augie Napoli, President and CEO of United Way of Greater Cleveland.

United Way supports RTC-C's behind-the-scenes operations through the organization's Housing Stability Solution Center within its' Impact Institute, a think tank with an action plan, focused on addressing the root causes of poverty, including racism and housing instability.

Through the RTC-C partnership, Legal Aid provides vital legal services to eligible clients during their eviction proceedings. Legal Aid recently secured a \$2.25 million, three-year grant from the Cleveland Foundation to support their right to counsel efforts.

"The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland has worked to bring the right to counsel model to Cleveland for more than three years now," said Colleen Cotter, Executive Director of Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. "What began as a fellowship for Hazel Remesch, a Legal Aid attorney, with the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland is now a strong example of what public and private partnerships can accomplish when our focus is to support the community. Legal Aid is proud to work alongside our partners at United Way to continue this success."

Beyond the representation by Legal Aid in Cleveland Housing Court, RTC-C will aid families with the additional resources they need, including rental assistance, through CHN Housing Partner's Family Stability Initiative, which United Way of Greater Cleveland has funded since 2014. RTC-C further connects clients to wraparound services, including food and shelter, through 2-1-1 HelpLink, United Way's free and confidential 24/7 service.

Families who would like to find out if they qualify for RTC-C should call (216) 687-1900, visit www.FreeEvictionHelp.org, or call 2-1-1 HelpLink 24/7. All conversations are free and confidential.

About RTC-C: Housing instability, often caused by eviction, is a root cause of poverty in Cleveland. The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland began researching ways to address this issue in partnership with the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Innovation Mission. On October 1, 2019, Cleveland City Council passed historic legislation making legal representation in eviction cases a right for tenants with at least one child in the household living at or below the Federal Poverty Level (\$21,300) and naming United Way of Greater Cleveland Lead Partner Organization. Cleveland is the fourth city in the nation to enact such a right and the first to leverage a public-private partnership to do so.

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