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## **City Council Enacts Legislation to Protect Three-Quarter House Residents**

### ***Four-Year Battle by Tenants and Advocates Wins Vital Tenant Protections***

NEW YORK, NY, February 1, 2017—After years of organizing and advocacy by the Three-Quarter House Tenant Organizing Project (TOP), MFY Legal Services, Neighbors Together, VOCAL-NY and other advocates in the Three-Quarter House Reform Coalition, the New York City Council passed a package of five bills to protect tenants' rights and rein in abusive three-quarter house operators.

As New York City's housing crisis intensified in recent years, adults re-entering society after incarceration or recovering from addiction were recruited to three-quarter houses with the promise of treatment, employment assistance, and help finding permanent housing. Instead, they were given a bunkbed in a crowded apartment and compelled to attend a treatment program chosen by the operator. When residents completed a six- or nine-month treatment program, operators routinely locked them out or illegally evicted them.

MFY Legal Services began providing legal assistance to three-quarter house tenants in 2009, and helped residents organize the Three-Quarter House Organizing Project.

“These were once among the most marginalized, forgotten tenants in the city. But they organized and, with the support of MFY and other advocates, brought their struggles and ideas to City Hall. Today, their voices and their solutions are becoming the law. MFY is proud to have worked and stood alongside them to take another step towards safe, stable housing for all,” said MFY attorney **Tanya Kessler**.

City Council members heard tenants' voices and worked with them to craft a package of bills. “This industry has operated in the shadows for far too long and is overdue for regulation,” said **Council Member Jumaane Williams**, Chair of the Council's Committee on Housing. **Council Member Stephen Levin** added, “Instead of safe shelter and medical care, our most needy were shaken down to fill the coffers of bad actors. These bills lay the groundwork to ensure our residents receive the attention and shelter they deserve.”

Among the bills passed by the City Council was one introduced by Council Member Ritchie Torres [1168-A], making it illegal for landlords to force tenants to attend medical treatment, interfere with tenants' medical treatment, or discriminate based on whether tenants received medical treatment or

not. It is widely alleged that operators receive kickbacks from treatment programs, and some operators have been indicted for Medicaid fraud.

“My second bill [1167-A] eliminates time limits for a person to apply for relocation services when a vacate order is in effect for the location where the person lives,” said **Council Member Torres**. “These bills confront the two major problems faced by three-quarter house residents.”

Although the extent of Medicaid fraud within the three-quarter house industry is not yet known, preventing operators from forcing residents to attend certain programs has been a key demand of tenants. “Too many predatory and unscrupulous landlords are taking advantage of New Yorkers who are on the verge of homelessness, relapse, or recidivism, and simultaneously scamming taxpayers out of millions of dollars. With the passage of these bills, we will finally be doing more to protect the rights of tenants in three-quarter houses, while ensuring the responsible use of tax dollars,” said **Public Advocate Letitia James**.

Additional bills passed by the City Council requires the city’s Department of Housing Preservation & Development to accept alternative forms of documentation from people who apply for emergency relocation services and do not have leases [1171-A], requires the City’s Human Resources Administration (HRA) to provide all shelter allowance recipients with information about their rights against illegal evictions [1164-A], and mandates that the City’s Task Force on Three-Quarter Housing report information publicly [1166-A].

City **Council Member Corey Johnson**, said “This package of legislation is going to restore justice to many tenants in New York and ensure that they’re informed of their rights against illegal eviction. At a time when our nation’s affordable and public housing stock is in jeopardy, New York City must stand up for the rights and dignity of our tenants.”

“Packing vulnerable New Yorkers into small rooms is an abomination and the existence of these houses says that we need to do a lot more as a city and state to ensure that they have a safe and secure place to lay their head at night,” said **Council Member Donovan Richards**, co-chair of the Progressive Caucus. “I’d like to thank MFY Legal Services and the Three-Quarter House Tenant Organizing Project for helping us keep the focus on the needs and rights of these individuals.”

Tenants and advocates praised the City Council for taking action:

“Three-quarter houses have existed for years and no one talked about them. Now the biggest operators - Yury Baumblyt, NRI, Narco Freedom - are being held accountable, we have an inter-agency Task Force investigating houses, we have a rental subsidy dedicated to helping single adults get permanent housing, and today we have these bills to give people more protections. Three-quarter house tenants across the city applaud the City Council for taking a very important step in the right direction,” said **Corey Bates, Three-Quarter House Tenant Organizing Project (TOP) Leader**.

“Thank you to the City Council for passing this important legislation. For far too long, three-quarter house tenants have endured illegal evictions, mistreatment, and unsafe housing conditions. We hope this is one of many steps towards providing safe, permanent, and affordable housing to vulnerable populations on the brink of homelessness,” said **Bobby Tolbert, VOCAL-NY Board Member**.

“Neighbors Together is proud of the work that The Three-Quarter House Tenant Organizing Project and our members have done to raise awareness about three quarter housing, and to work with our allies in City Council to create laws that help provide greater stability for three quarter house tenants. Even on this exciting occasion, we are aware that there is more work to be done; until the city and state invest greater resources into affordable housing for extremely low income New Yorkers, the three quarter house industry will continue to exist,” said **Amy Blumsack, Community Action Program Director, Neighbors Together.**

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