

## **Pro Bono**

### **Support Full Funding For Neighborhood Preservation Programs**

With no relief in sight from the pressures of the New York City real estate market and the dire effects of a lack of affordable housing, low income, senior and disabled New Yorkers face drastic cuts in a state program designed to help them withstand the pressure.

The Neighborhood Preservation Programs are funded throughout the state (along with parallel Rural Preservation Programs) pursuant to the Private Housing Finance Law. Under the statute, grants are provided to community based not-for-profit organizations. These groups work with individual tenants, or groups of tenants within designated neighborhoods. Among the groups cut are MFY Legal Services, Inc., whose lawyers assist besieged low income tenants in Chinatown, the Lower East Side and East Harlem. A profile of MFY and some of its programs can be found in our August issue. The organizations provide counseling, advice, technical assistance and legal representation. The goal is to help vulnerable tenants resist the effects of neighborhood destabilization resulting from a range of factors: deteriorating housing conditions, increasing rent costs and market forces which result in intensified incentives for owners to evict long-term or elderly tenants.

This year, Governor Pataki sent the legislature a budget which slashed funding for this program by fifty (50) per cent. The leg-

islature in turn restored the funding. In response, the Governor vetoed the funding restoration. The NPP organizations now await the actions of the state assembly and senate, and hope that Pataki's veto can be overridden. Despite a recent failure to marshal the full roster of Democratic members for an override vote, Assembly Speaker Sheldon Silver continues to express both a commitment to restoration of the funding and expectation of a successful overriding of the veto. It is not clear where Senate Majority Leader Joseph Bruno stands, and his decision appears to be the most important one in determining the future of the funding.

In New York City, with alternative affordable housing virtually non-existent, the sources of assistance for low income tenants are critical. The loss of a long-term affordable apartment too frequently results in homelessness or institutionalization. According to Adele Bartlett, a Supervising Attorney at MFY, which is funded in part by the NPP grant, "MFY's ability to provide basic advice and assistance, be it in understanding the law, or how to negotiate through city agencies for help, or full legal representation in the event of an eviction action, can mean the difference between maintaining a stable home and the dire consequences of its loss. We hope that the legislature acts to restore full funding to the Neighborhood Preservation Program.