



Dear Friends and Neighbors:

COVID-19 has been called the great equalizer that infects people regardless of race, class or country. Certainly, we all have seen media reports of many famous people with the virus including Tom Hanks, Christopher Cuomo, Boris Johnson and many others, but the majority of those dying are disadvantaged people including people of color. Thus, while COVID-19 attacks us all in practice, the virus is disproportionately impacting vulnerable populations, people of color, service workers, and rent burdened households. Poor people who are still employed are more exposed to COVID as they fill jobs in the service industry where they cannot work from home and must travel on crowded mass transit and then interact with the public. Many who have been fired/furloughed or had hours cut cannot escape COVID either. These displaced workers are likely to reside in overcrowded conditions where they are exposed to family members and roommates who are still going to work. Staying isolated at home is not a privilege people can afford when they are poor and reside in crowded apartments.

Low-income, working-class residents in Hell's Kitchen have been served by Housing Conservation Coordinators (HCC) from our founding almost fifty years ago. Our clients include many people of color, who have been historically disenfranchised, victims of economic injustice and structural racism.

Our legal services, organizing support, advocacy and building weatherization programs remain fully staffed albeit working remotely to address immediate issues. We are also beginning to prepare for the more severe housing crisis that is surely going to arise as a result of the COVID-19. Clients and prospective clients are already calling – they cannot pay their rent. They are afraid of catching COVID-19; many are high-risk individuals who are elderly or have underlying health issues. Our staff members are helping to operate a city-wide tenant hotline to disseminate accurate information about tenant rights, such as the temporary moratorium against legal evictions, as well as referrals to other agencies that can provide food and other vital services.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic will reverberate for months and likely years. Our constituents, the most vulnerable residents of our community, were already struggling before the COVID outbreak. Now the level of pain and suffering is sure to increase. While worrying about the health of our staff and ongoing funding we are continuing to serve our clients. We expect:

- Increased evictions as tenants are unable to pay rent as so many have been fired/furloughed, or their family has been directly impacted by illness or death.
- Increased pressure from landlords who have suffered financially due to the crisis.
- Increased financial strain on organizations that provide essential support services coupled with increased need for their services.

HCC is already working to respond to each of these needs and is prepared to step up to the plate even more. It is incumbent upon us to maintain and possibly grow the high-quality, free legal services, organizing support and advocacy going forward.

HCC provides services in the following areas:

**Legal Services:** HCC's legal services include full legal representation, pre-litigation advocacy and advice in areas such as housing, immigration, elder law, consumer rights, domestic violence and government entitlements. HCC lawyers represent members of tenant associations and defendants in eviction proceedings who, pursuant to the 2017 right to counsel law, are afforded an attorney without charge. In the course of our legal representation we focus on such matters as eviction prevention, anti-harassment, fair housing claims, repairs and essential services.

**Weatherization:** HCC's Weatherization Assistance Program has been operating since 1981 to install new heating systems, refrigerators, windows and roof insulation at no cost to low-income residents. In turn tenants and owners benefit from efficiencies and spend less money on electric, gas and heating bills.

**Community Education, Advocacy and Organizing Campaigns:** HCC collaborates with other service providers, non-profit coalitions and tenant groups to support initiatives that promote safe and affordable housing in its catchment area and across the city, and to coordinate service delivery. HCC advocates for clear policies that protect affordable housing and the rights of low-income residents, resolves issues as they arise through legal and advocacy case work and offers workshops such as the annual Westside Tenants' Conference that address these issues for tenants, landlords and elected officials. HCC organizes tenant associations in buildings to allow tenants to confront unscrupulous landlords as a cohesive group that know their rights.

Until health officials advise us to reopen our offices at 777 10th Avenue we will remain closed. However, this is not an interruption of our services; HCC remains open for business remotely. We are serving clients and conducting intake for new clients through phone and video lines. We are hosting advocacy meeting and Q&A sessions through online conferencing services.

You can find more in-depth information, links and alerts about HCC's work and community resources by visiting our website at <http://www.hcc-nyc.org/> and by following us on social media: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter.

We know this is a challenging time for you, your family and all New Yorkers. We care deeply about your wellbeing and that of the at-risk communities we serve.

Sincerely,

**Leslie Thrope**  
**Executive Director**  
**Housing Conservation Coordinators**