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**Joint Legislative Budget Hearing on Housing  
March 1, 2023**

**Ezra Scollo - Housing 4 All Long Island** Testimony on Funding for a **Statewide Right to Counsel** (S2721/A1493)

To Whom It May Concern,

My name is Ezra Scollo. I am a gay trans man who was recently evicted by my family. The social safety net has huge holes in care for trans people experiencing housing insecurity. Shelters are binary. As a trans man, I cannot be placed in a men's shelter because I will experience violence or a women's shelter because it is inappropriate. LGBT organizations are unfunded to provide adequate resources. We need to stop trans homelessness at (one of) its roots!

I am also an organizer with H4ALI. We are a new coalition of local non-profits focused on the housing crisis on Long Island. Long Island is often purposely removed from tenant protections to favor developers and wealthy landowners. Most of Long Island is made up of tenants and it's time we are taken care of!

In 2017, the [Right to Counsel NYC Coalition](#) won the campaign to establish a Right to Counsel for tenants facing eviction in New York City. The coalition is now working with over 100 statewide partners to pass a Right to Counsel for ALL New Yorkers and transform housing court from an "eviction machine" to a place that holds landlords accountable, upholds tenants' rights, and enables tenants to remain in their homes.

We and other members of the Housing Courts Must Change! campaign collectively represent tens of thousands of tenants across New York State and are honored to be working on permanent and transformative solutions to New York's eviction crisis. Our statewide Right to Counsel legislation (S2721/A1493), introduced by Assembly Member Latoya Joyner and Senator Rachel May, would ensure that every tenant in New York State has the right to a lawyer when facing an eviction and:

- Covers every tenant across the state, regardless of income.
- Covers any legal proceeding that could result in a tenant losing their home.
- Requires that tenants be represented throughout their entire case, not just when they show up in court. This includes legal advice, advocacy, and assistance.
- Requires the State to contract with non-profit legal services organizations to provide Right to Counsel and with non-profit community based organizations to provide tenants' rights education and tenant organizing.

Long Island has its own unique issues within the housing crisis. Many young people cannot afford to leave their parents home well into their forties. This leaves us in a vulnerable place, as one spat with a family member can leave us homeless - as what happened in my case. I came out and was asked to leave the home.

My Family spent \$8,000 on a private lawyer but I didn't have that money laying around, despite working seven jobs. I reached out to pro bono law services but they declined to take my case. I showed up to every court date but had to stand by myself each time to defend myself. I deserved a lawyer.

I urge you to support the full funding and passage of Right to Counsel in the budget this year. As a society, we cannot stand by any longer while New Yorkers are forced into a confusing, overwhelming and traumatizing court system without counsel by their side. No one should have to face something as devastating as eviction without even the most basic right to representation. We know that establishing this right will keep New Yorkers in their homes, prevent an array of long-lasting harms to our families and communities, and save our state money. Our state has every reason to pass and fund S2721/A1493 in the budget this year, and we count on your leadership to ensure this happens.

Sincerely,

Ezra Scollo  
(He/Him)  
Housing 4 All Long Island