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Assemblymember 74<sup>th</sup> District

THE ASSEMBLY  
STATE OF NEW YORK  
ALBANY

**Testimony on the Implementation of the Universal Access Law  
Office of Assemblymember Harvey Epstein  
November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

My name is Harvey Epstein and I am the Assemblymember representing New York's 74<sup>th</sup> Assembly District, which includes the neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, East Village, Stuyvesant Town/Peter Cooper Village, Murray Hill, Tudor City and the United Nations. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

The Office of Civil Justice's Fall report shows a remarkable increase in the provision of legal services to tenants who are faced with eviction since the Universal Access Law went into effect. I am thrilled to see how many tenants have had access to legal representation or been given advice to help them stay in their homes. The data in the Fall report demonstrates that the OCJ has developed a successful model that has contributed to a decline in evictions over the past year. Expanding the program to additional zip codes will be a vital way to reduce homelessness in our city by stopping it before it starts and helping tenants maintain a stable family life.

New Yorkers in all parts of the state face the same struggles that New York City residents face when it comes to evictions. While it's difficult to accurately report the number of evictions statewide due to the nature of record-keeping in the state and the high number of smaller town and village courts, in the last year of available data in 2016 it's estimated that as many as 126,657 eviction filings were made, with the actual number likely even higher. We must replicate the success of the Universal Access Law at the state level so all New Yorkers can have access to the human right of justice.

We need to focus on expanding the right to counsel in eviction proceedings and beyond. There is a critical need for legal representation in a variety of civil proceedings, including deportation defense. As a city and state of immigrants, this is essential as we face up to a president bent on attacking immigrant New Yorkers. Access to counsel in these instances can be the difference between maintaining a stable family life and tearing a family apart.

I applaud the Mayor, Councilmembers, and the Office of Civil for making positive step in the right direction. I look forward to opportunities to work with you to fill in the gaps that exist in our justice system both at the city and state levels so we can create a more equitable New York for all. Thank you once again for the opportunity to testimony.