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Empire Justice Receives \$25,000 from Anonymous Donor to Help Families Who Don't Qualify for State and Federal Aid Stay in their Homes

Rochester, NY – An anonymous donor has contributed \$25,000 to Empire Justice Center to ensure that homeowners and renters who have been affected financially by the Covid-19 pandemic do not become homeless.

While New York State had an eviction moratorium through February 27th, in many cases landlords are now once again able to move forward with eviction actions. Some tenants will qualify for rental relief through government programs, but that is not true in every situation.

Far too often, it is the most vulnerable members of our community who do not qualify such as families from immigrant and refugee communities.

"People are suffering due to the pandemic and risk being homeless because of their inability to pay their mortgage or rent," **the anonymous donor said.** "I felt compelled to help and sought out an organization that had expertise and that I could trust with my donation. That organization is Empire Justice Center, and I know they will ensure this donation has a meaningful impact on our community." The donor also expressed the hope that this donation would act as "seed money" to encourage others to donate in whatever amount they can.

Empire Justice will use the generous donation to financially assist families in Monroe County who are at risk of being evicted due to their inability to pay rent, focusing on those who do not qualify for other programs. Renters will be identified through the hotline of the Tenant Defense Project, a new collaboration between the four legal services agencies that co-locate in the Telesca Center for Justice. The Tenant Defense Project is an innovative pilot program that guarantees a right to counsel for low-income renters facing eviction; it is the first program of its kind in New York (outside of New York City) and is being looked at as a model in other parts of the state.

Families who call the Tenant Defense hotline who are not eligible for state or federal rental relief or who are ineligible for assistance through the Project, will be referred to Empire Justice for consideration for rental assistance.

“The pandemic has pushed so many families to the brink of homelessness. Government resources are available to help, but those who do not qualify are left behind. This donation is particularly meaningful because it focuses on those families who do not otherwise qualify for assistance primarily due to their immigrant or refugee status,” **said Kristin Brown Empire Justice Center President and CEO.** “We are incredibly grateful for the generosity of our donor.”

Families in Monroe County who are at risk of eviction can call the Tenant Defense Hotline at (585) 504-6195.

Those interested in donating to help additional families can contribute to Empire Justice Center at www.empirejustice.org/donate

About Empire Justice Center

Empire Justice Center is a statewide nonprofit law firm with offices in Rochester, Albany, Yonkers, White Plains, and on Long Island whose mission is to make the law work for all New Yorkers, particularly for those who need its protection most. We take a 360-degree, comprehensive approach to changing systems by engaging in three major and interconnected areas of service. We **teach the law** by providing training, support and technical assistance to legal services and other community-based organizations to strengthen their work; we **practice the law** by providing direct, civil legal assistance to low-income people with a particular focus on those from marginalized communities such as LGBTQ; minorities, immigrants and LEP; and crime victims; and we **change the law** by engaging in policy analysis, research and advocacy and undertaking impact litigation to get at the root of systemic issues.

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