

City Council Passes Bill to Protect Tenants from Dangerous Asthma Triggers

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NEW YORK, NY – The New York City Council voted today to pass the [Asthma-Free Housing Act \(Intro385C\)](#), a bill that allows renters to live safely in homes free of mold, pests, and indoor health hazards. Councilwoman Rosie Mendez (D-2) worked for ten years alongside advocates, including New York Lawyers for the Public Interest as part of the Coalition for Asthma Free Housing, to pass the bill that mandates landlords clean up dangerous asthma triggers inside city apartments.

The Asthma-Free Housing Act (Intro 385C) requires New York City landlords to annually inspect and correct indoor allergen hazards, including mold, pests, and underlying symptoms that may cause hazardous conditions, such as water leaks and pest entryways (holes and cracks), in the homes of residents diagnosed with asthma, COPD, or lung cancer.

The bill will now move on to Mayor Bill de Blasio's desk to be signed into law.

"Mold abatement and integrated pest management will be codified after 10 years of diligently working with advocates on the passage of the Asthma Free Housing Act, Intro. 385C," **said Councilwoman Rosie Mendez, the bill's prime sponsor.** "After what appeared to be endless negotiations with several mayoral administrations, we passed this crucial bill that will go a long way to eradicating mold, as well as taking preventative measures to address mold and asthma triggers. Asthma has a debilitating effect on an individual's quality of life and, in New York City, there are approximately one million individuals who have been diagnosed with asthma. This legislation will have a direct benefit for tenants and their health and enables the City to recapture funds expended through its Emergency Repair Program, if the agency determines that such work is necessary. I am proud that my partnership with the advocates will result in ground breaking legislation and I am hopeful that other big cities will follow in our footsteps."

The Coalition for Asthma-Free Housing is comprised of over 30 organizations citywide, including community-based organizations, legal advocates, medical associations, and labor unions. Members were ecstatic to see the bill pass the Council after so many years of advocacy and community organizing.

Peggy Shepard, Executive Director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice, said "Indoor environmental injustices like these lead to more absenteeism from school, hospital visits, and out-of-pocket costs for low-income New Yorkers, especially in communities of color. In East

Harlem, where many WE ACT members live, children under 4 are 2.5 times more likely than those in the city overall to be hospitalized for asthma. We are thankful to Councilwoman Mendez and all our sponsors, and look forward to celebrating the New Year with a new law on the books that keeps all New Yorkers safe from dangerous, unhealthy asthma triggers like mold.”

Matthew Chachère, an attorney with Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation, who has worked closely with prime sponsor Rosie Mendez over the years on refining this bill, said he was pleased to see it finally getting Council approval. “By requiring standards for the appropriate prevention and remediation of asthma triggers, and enhanced enforcement, this bill should greatly help tenants get meaningful relief from persistent vermin and mold issues in their homes.”

Rajiv Jaswa, Staff Attorney, Community Development Project at the Urban Justice Center said, “The Community Development Project works with tenants in hundreds of buildings across the City. Mold, leaks, and pests have been the three biggest problems in these buildings. Until now, they were also the hardest to solve. Intro 385 is landmark legislation that finally provides our City of renters with the legal protections we need to live safely, and in homes free from mold, pests, and indoor health hazards.”

Lauren Zajac, MD, MPH, Pediatrician, Children’s Environmental Health Center, Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai said, “As a pediatrician, I often hear from families who are frustrated about the mold and pest problems that plague their New York City apartments and are worried about how these problems may harm their children. Both mold and pests have been linked to breathing problems, allergy symptoms, and asthma attacks. It has been shown that safe removal of these triggers from a child’s home environment can reduce asthma symptoms, and should be an important aspect of effective asthma care for all of the City’s children.”

Frank Proscia, M.D., President, Doctors Council SEIU said, “We applaud the City Council on the passage of the Asthma Free Homes Act, much needed legislation that will have a meaningful impact on both primary and secondary prevention of asthma attacks and other lung diseases. As front line doctors in New York City’s public hospital system and as school health doctors, we see and treat many adults and children with asthma every day. Some molds, insect and rodent infestations can be very harmful to humans, especially young children, the elderly, and those with compromised immune systems. The vulnerable communities of our City deserve to live in their homes without concern for their public health.”

Aura Mejia, Tenant Advocate and Organizer at Neighbors Helping Neighbors said, “I am very proud that this bill passed with community effort. It is a big victory for our tenant movement. We can now ensue that New York City families will be healthier, and that parents will feel more at ease about children not expending time in the hospital instead of school. Sunset Park tenants with asthma can rest easy that the indoor triggers will be eliminated with a manner of time.”

The Bravo Family, Sunset Park residents and members of Neighbors Helping Neighbors said, “Now our families will have better health and better house conditions. With the new Asthma-Free Housing Act (385C) the landlord will be forced to do repairs, especially with mold. It was thanks to the community unity that we achieve this victory!”

Rachel Spector, Director, Environmental Justice Program, New York Lawyers for the Public Interest said, “By passing Intro 385-C the Council has taken a big step forward toward addressing a key source of the asthma crisis in New York City. New York Lawyers for the Public Interest will work alongside the City and our allies to make sure that the law is meaningfully enforced so that all New Yorkers enjoy the right to healthy housing.”

"The Asthma-Free Housing Act has been a ten-year long fight, and we are thrilled that it's finally being passed into legislation by this City Council," **says Kelly Espinal, member of Make the Road New York and Brooklyn tenant.** "For years, I have lived in a rent stabilized apartment with my son who suffers from asthma. Mold, insect and rodent infestations in my apartment have compromised my son's health, but my landlord has refused to do anything about it. The Asthma-Free Housing Act will change that by requiring my landlord to prioritize prevention of indoor allergens, inspect all homes, and correct any indoor allergen hazards found. We thank Councilwoman Rosie Mendez and the Coalition for Asthma Free Homes for the many years of advocacy and leadership on this issue."

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The Coalition for Asthma-Free Housing advocates for safer and asthma-free indoor environments for all New Yorkers. The coalition is comprised of over 30 organizations citywide, including the following community-based organizations, legal advocates, medical associations, and labor unions:

1199 SEIU United Healthcare Workers East * a.i.r. nyc * American Lung Association in New York * Association of Legal Aid Attorneys – UAW 2325 * American Thoracic Society (ATS) * Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America * CAAAV * CEH * Commission on the Public’s Health System (CPHS) * Committee of Interns and Residents (CIR) SEIU * District Council 37, AFSCME, AFL-CIO * Doctors Council SEIU * Fifth Avenue Committee/Comite de la Qunita Avenida * LiUNA Local 78 * Make the Road New York * Moms Clean Air Force * Neighbors Helping Neighbors * New York Communities for Change (NYCC) * New York Lawyers for the Public Interest * New York League of Conservation Voters (NYLCV) * New York State Academy of Family Physicians * New York State Nurses Association * Northern Manhattan Improvement Corporation (NMIC) * Public Health Association of New York City (PHANYC) * Northwest Bronx Community and Clergy Coalition (NWBCC) * Stabilizing NYC * The Legal Aid Society* Urban Health Plan Inc. * Urban Justice Center * WE ACT for Environmental Justice

