

LawHelp.org/NY

Helping low-income New Yorkers solve legal problems

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Harlem Community Leaders Find Answers To Legal Problems At LawHelp Training Hosted By Congressman Charles B. Rangel

Harlem, NY -- Congressman Charles B. Rangel welcomed 40 community leaders of Harlem's 15th Congressional District on Wednesday evening, May 30, 2007, to a LawHelp Forum at City College, for training on the LawHelp/NY website and information about Harlem-based free legal services.

"LawHelp.org/NY is an outstanding website that has been extremely useful in helping my staff serves the legal needs of our constituents," said Congressman Rangel. "Information is power and the more our community leaders and providers are trained to use important tools like LawHelp.org, the more we all will be able fight for what is right and just locally and across the city."

Community leaders are on the front-line responding to urgent appeals for help from constituents, and LawHelp is a crucial tool. As more and more New Yorkers face legal problems, from landlord harassment to domestic violence, the LawHelp/NY website provides hope and answers in many substantive areas of law that can benefit the community, including family and juvenile law, housing, public benefits, immigration, senior law and much more. Elizabeth Barksdale of the Mt. Morris Plaza Tenant's Association said, "With this information, I will now be able to assist tenants with problems we didn't know how to address before."

LawHelp.org/NY is free and easy to navigate. With a few simple clicks of the mouse, this powerful site provides critical legal information and quick and accurate referrals to free civil legal services for low-income individuals and families.

"The training showed me that the LawHelp web site is well organized and easy to use," reported Melissa McDougal of Centro Altagracia de Fe y Justicia, "I will definitely use it for referrals and resources for the community we serve instead of the hard-to-use handwritten notes I've been using. I'm especially excited about all the Spanish and other language resources."

Visitors to LawHelp.org/NY will find more than 2,000 "Know Your Rights" and self-help resources that can be printed out or copied, including downloadable forms and publications, a directory of legal, social services and advocacy providers, and links to government and other helpful websites. LawHelp has a "mirror" website in Spanish, and resources in 31 other languages, including Haitian Creole, Chinese and Arabic, to name a few.

Though the “digital divide” is still a reality, more and more low-income people, minorities and seniors have Internet access. According to the *PEW Internet and American Life Project*, by 2005, 41 percent of people with an annual household income of less than \$30,000 are now online. Sixty-three percent of Hispanics are online, forty-six percent of African Americans go on-line, and twenty-three percent of people 65 and older are online, and these numbers are growing at a rapid pace. A 2006 survey conducted by Harris Interactive showed three times as many U.S. adults turning to the Internet for legal advice than they did in 2000 – making LawHelp.org/NY more valuable than ever. In fact, the family of LawHelp websites (see www.LawHelp.org) recently won the 2007 Webby Award (the “Oscars” of the Internet) for the best law website in the country.

The LawHelp Forum also included presentations and resources from many of the legal service organizations that serve the Harlem Community and are listed on the LawHelp website including Manhattan Legal Services Harlem Office, the Harlem Community Law Office of Legal Aid, the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, the Harlem Community Justice Center and the Harlem Branch of the Office of the Attorney General. The City Bar’s Public Service Network, which provides pro bono legal help to community organizations in need, also presented the services they provide.

LawHelp.org/NY is a collaborative project by a broad spectrum of public interest legal organizations, including City Bar Justice Center; Legal Services for New York City; The Legal Aid Society of New York; Pro Bono Net; Volunteers of Legal Service; Legal Aid Society of Northeastern New York; Empire Justice Center (a merger of the Greater Upstate Law Project and Public Interest Law Offices of Rochester); the New York State Bar Association, Legal Assistance of Western New York, Inc., and Legal Services of the Hudson Valley.

Funding for the LawHelp/NY website is provided by the IOLA Fund of the State of New York, the New York Community Trust, the New York Bar Foundation, and the New York Legal Assistance Fund. A special grant from the Office of the Attorney General is supporting the addition of an Internet Fraud topic area to the website.