October 25, 2019

Dear Members of City Council,

At Project HOME, we are committed to vigorous advocacy on behalf of and with homeless and low-income persons for more just and humane public policies. We are writing today in support of Bill 190386—a measure that will help prevent homelessness and honor the dignity of Philadelphia’s tenants by ensuring a right to counsel during the eviction process.

As Council is already aware, eviction is a leading cause of homelessness. For many tenants, legal representation makes the difference between staying in their home or becoming homeless. Meeting with an attorney provides tenants with the chance to be heard and educated about the law, while avoiding bad agreements and evictions. Extending a right to counsel is expected to provide stability for thousands who likely would otherwise enter a homeless shelter or end up living on our streets.

As both a social service provider and landlord, Project HOME is committed to justice and respect for tenants at home and in court. Over the past 30 years, we have developed and operated almost 900 units of affordable housing with supports for persons who have experienced homelessness and low-income persons at-risk of homelessness in Philadelphia. We work closely with our tenants to prevent eviction, but sometimes the court process is unavoidable. When this happens, we know the value of connecting our community to legal support and frequently refer our participants to Community Legal Services, Homeless Advocacy Project, and Legal Clinic for the Disabled. These connections are crucial when individuals are at risk of losing their homes. Without stable housing, access to education, employment, and health care is lost or compromised. Access to legal counsel is essential to the work of ending homelessness in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia has an opportunity to join New York City, San Francisco, and Newark as a leader in protecting tenants’ rights. We urge you to pass Bill 190386 to ensure legal counsel for Philadelphia’s most low-income tenants.

Sincerely,

Joan McConnon
Associate Executive Director & CFO

S. Mary Scullion
Co-Founder and Executive Director