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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **United Way of Greater Cleveland Named Lead Partner Organization for Right to Counsel Program Legislation Introduced by Cleveland City Council**

*The First Effort of its Kind in Ohio and Across the Midwest is Designed to Stabilize People in Need  
and Prevent Eviction to Break the Cycle of Poverty*

CLEVELAND: United Way of Greater Cleveland was named Lead Partner Organization within legislation introduced by Cleveland City Council today, establishing a right to counsel in eviction cases.

The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland's Housing Justice Alliance effort, initially funded by the Sisters of Charity Foundation's Innovation Mission and now led by United Way, will be first of its kind in the state of Ohio and across the Midwest. Right to counsel in housing cases will reduce eviction rates and restore long-term housing stability for Clevelanders.

Approximately 9,000 evictions are filed in the City of Cleveland each year, 60% of which include households with children. Eviction can cause costly and traumatic instability issues and is a root cause of poverty leading to homelessness, job loss and decreased academic performance and school attendance.

Based on this legislation, United Way will serve as Lead Partner Organization collaborating with a designated organization – such as The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland – to provide legal representation to households with children facing eviction and living at or below 100% of the poverty line at no cost to them.

For decades United Way has invested heavily in housing stability and emergency housing. This partnership with Legal Aid's Housing Justice Alliance is one of the main initiatives within United Way of Greater Cleveland's Impact Institute, which creates meaningful solutions to key issues facing Clevelanders.



“The Impact Institute will play a vital role in this city-wide effort to restore effective, long-term housing solutions for our Cleveland-area neighbors,” said Augie Napoli, president and CEO of United Way of Greater Cleveland. “This legislation is not about tenant versus landlord; it’s about stabilizing the person in need to prevent eviction, which is one of the first steps in permanently breaking the cycle of poverty, and we applaud Council President Kevin Kelley for his leadership and determination to quickly advance this important legislation.”

Legal representation is not a guaranteed right in civil cases like eviction, and often tenants lack the resources necessary to obtain counsel, resulting in legal representation for less than two percent of tenants.

“We are excited to partner with United Way and the City of Cleveland on this important work. This is an example of what the Cleveland community can create through collaboration,” said Colleen Cotter, Executive Director of The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland. “By investing in housing stability, we are also preserving all the other important community investments in social services: funds directed to education, health and other needs cannot be successful if people do not have a home.”

Through legal counsel in eviction cases and additional housing-related resources, United Way and other partners within the Housing Justice Alliance work to stabilize housing for individuals and families while generating a significant, long-term cost savings for the community.

“It is not only the right thing to do, it is the moral thing to do,” said Cleveland City Council President Kevin Kelley, lead sponsor of the ordinance. “This is an opportunity to restore a basic human right to families in our city and stabilize our neighborhoods -- one family at a time.”

In Cuyahoga County, 80% of landlords cited non-payment of rent as the primary cause for their eviction filing, and 40% of homeless families cited eviction as their primary reason for living in a shelter.

An average of \$1,200 in rental support would have prevented eviction, according to preliminary research from Case Western Reserve University -- a fraction of the cost of a stay at an emergency shelter for a family, which can cost more than \$16,000 on average, according to the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Right to Counsel is a proven model that has saved millions of dollars in U.S. cities, including New York City, which experienced an 84% decrease in evictions for tenants with legal representation and an estimated cost savings of \$320 million per year by preventing issues like family homelessness.

With United Way as Lead Partner, in addition to access to legal counsel, individuals will also receive access to United Way’s provider network of health and human services nonprofits to connect wrap-around care, including food, childcare, education and employment opportunities and more.

The program will provide legal representation to eligible tenants -- households with children at 100% of the federal poverty level – beginning in June 2020. Tenants can seek more information by contacting United Way of Greater Cleveland’s 2-1-1 HelpLink, a 24-hour lifeline with referral specialists or The Legal Aid Society of Cleveland’s tenant hotline at 216-861-5955.



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*Founded in 1913, United Way of Greater Cleveland is a local, independent nonprofit organization dedicated to fighting poverty in the Greater Cleveland area. The largest private-sector funder of health and human services, United Way is dedicated to addressing the root causes of poverty, including health, financial stability, developing children to their full potential, employment barriers, housing stability and other basic needs. For more information, visit <https://www.unitedwaycleveland.org/>.*