

POLITICS > DENVER POLITICS

Denver council members pool leftover office budgets to provide lawyers for some renters facing eviction

Nearly \$124,000 donated by officials will help launch pilot program that Mayor Hancock has resisted



RJ Sangosti, The Denver Post

Tim Wortman packs up his belongings after being evicted from the garage apartment where he was living in the Westwood neighborhood in Denver on Jan. 24, 2017.

By **JON MURRAY** | jmurray@denverpost.com | The Denver Post

Ten Denver City Council members on Thursday took the unusual step of pooling money to help launch a new housing program — one that had faced resistance from Mayor Michael Hancock.

The council members say they will use the \$123,600 raised to work with a nonprofit called [Colorado Legal Services](#) to start a pilot program providing lawyers for low-income renters to fight evictions. The money comes mostly from their 2017 year-end office budget balances, plus a personal contribution from one member. President Albus Brooks, Councilwoman Robin Kniech and other participating members announced their plan during the council's annual policy planning and budget retreat.

“The services are expected to become available in March/April of 2018,” said a statement announcing the pilot program. “Pending positive outcomes, funding to expand and continue the program was among priorities councilmembers advanced” on Thursday.

As part of [the city's affordable housing strategy](#), the Hancock administration in the fall started a [mediation program for tenants and landlords](#) as well as a [temporary financial assistance program](#) to help renters facing crises such as a steep rent hike or eviction.

But some council members, citing [local research estimating](#) that 1 to 3 percent of tenants have legal representation in eviction proceedings involving major landlords, have pushed for the city to spend money on legal defense, as some other cities have done. They say having an attorney safeguards a tenant's rights, increasing the chance of staying in his or her home and, at the least, improving the terms of any resulting agreement.

Hancock [so far hasn't signed on](#). In a recent interview, he said he saw a need for more discussion about the appropriate use of taxpayer money and the sustainability of such a program. A spokeswoman said Friday that Hancock considered the idea worth exploring.

Many of the details of the council-backed program are still being worked out. The statement says the nonprofit CLS, which typically provides eviction assistance to people who live in public housing or who receive housing vouchers, often turns away many low-income renters because of limited resources.

Others on the 13-member council who pledged money from their office budgets were Paul Kashmann, Wayne New, Paul López, Debbie Ortega,