

De Blasio names Steven Banks commissioner of the Human Resources Administration

Steven Banks, who headed the Legal Aid Society, will oversee billions of dollars in spending for the poor in his new position as commissioner of the Human Resources Administration. Mayor de Blasio says Banks will bring a fresh perspective to City Hall.

By [Corinne Lestch](#)



SUSAN WATTS/NEW YORK DAILY NEWS

New Human Resources Administration head, Steven Banks (right), says he is on the same page with Mayor de Blasio (center).

A legal aid attorney who spent 30 years suing City Hall is switching sides and will run an agency he long castigated.

Steven Banks, who has headed the Legal Aid Society for the last decade, will become commissioner of the Human Resources Administration — overseeing billions of dollars in spending for the poor.

“I’ve been waiting my entire professional life to have a mayor who embraced HRA’s mission in the way that this mayor does,” Banks said alongside de Blasio Friday.

The two men were once rivals — Banks, who lives in Windsor Terrace, Brooklyn, lost to de Blasio in 2001 in the mayor’s first campaign for City Council.

De Blasio lauded his former competitor Friday, saying Banks would bring a fresh perspective to City Hall.

“I admire that Steve has been fighting for what he believes is right,” said de Blasio. “He’s been a voice for the voiceless in this city, and a lot of times he challenged government policies that didn’t make a lot of sense.”

Banks has sued the city over its homeless policies since the mid-80s — assailing the use of welfare hotels and barracks-style shelters in that era, and more recently challenging the Bloomberg administration on a 2011 plan to place tighter restrictions on homeless single adults.

The new regulation would have turned away single adults from city shelters unless they could prove that they had no other housing options.

The state appeals court ruled last year that the plan violated the law.

Advocates for the city’s neediest said the choice of Banks signaled a sea change in mayoral thinking.

“Steve Banks has been a tireless friend to and fierce advocate for New York City’s most vulnerable citizens for decades,” said Mary Brosnahan, president of the Coalition for the Homeless. “In tapping Banks for HRA commissioner, Mayor de Blasio will have one of the great legal minds of a generation and a potent agent of change.”

But experts said it will be a challenge for Banks to make the switch from City Hall critic to insider.

“He’ll have to determine how many degrees of freedom he’s really got managing New York administration,” said **Jack Krauskopf of Baruch College’s School of Public Affairs**, a former HRA commissioner during the Koch administration.

Meanwhile, de Blasio said he is “satisfied” with the trickling pace of his appointments.

Along with Banks, he named Nisha Agarwal to head the Office of Immigrant Affairs, and he reappointed Lorraine Grillo as head of the School Construction Authority.

A number of major posts remain vacant, including fire, parks and correction commissioners.

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