



RIGHT TO COUNSEL WESTCHESTER WEEK OF ACTION
Participate in the Westchester Right to Counsel movement by urging the
County Government to Carry out an already funded feasibility study.

Westchester County's 2021 budget includes funds to conduct a study on the cost of a county-wide program providing a right to counsel in eviction proceedings. Currently, low-income tenants in Westchester County do not have a right to an attorney in eviction proceedings. In normal years, when more than 10,000 eviction proceedings are filed in Westchester County Courts, 93% of landlords are represented by counsel, while only 7% of tenants have attorneys.

Feasibility studies have routinely shown that programs providing attorneys to low-income tenants in eviction proceedings are significantly less expensive than expected, sometimes even saving the jurisdiction money.

Why would a right to counsel program save the county money?

- If attorneys stop evictions, fewer people enter homeless shelters. The cost of housing a family in a homeless shelter is often higher than preserving a tenancy. Additionally, evictions interrupt children's schooling, and the cost of transporting children from shelters to their school district is relatively high. In 2019, Westchester spent approximately \$38 million on homeless shelters, spending roughly \$39,000 to house a family for one year.
- Right to counsel programs reduces the number of eviction filings, which reduces the strain on local courts.
- Attorneys can help connect low-income tenants to financial assistance when necessary.
- Attorneys can help tenants raise defenses based on poor housing conditions. This ensures that financial assistance does not go towards delinquent landlords who do not maintain their properties. This can reduce the financial assistance needed to keep tenants housed, and compelling necessary repair helps preserve the housing stock.
- Attorneys can make sure landlords do not overcharge tenants by including illegal fees. This also reduces the financial assistance necessary to preserve a tenancy.
- These cost savings need to be deducted from the total cost of a right to counsel program to determine the actual cost if any.

In other jurisdictions, studies have shown that similar programs pay for themselves. A similar study done in Baltimore determined that "[f]or every dollar invested in a right to counsel for

low-income tenants facing eviction in Baltimore City, there is a cost savings or value of those services estimated to be at least \$3.06 that would be recognized by Baltimore City alone." If a study in Westchester reaches similar conclusions, it may be that Westchester is losing money by not providing attorneys for low-income tenants. Westchester will not know until it carries out the study.

Other issues:

- Undocumented tenants are not eligible for the same safety nets as citizens. Currently, only three attorneys are available to represent Westchester's undocumented population. According to US Census ASC 5 year estimates, 109,142 undocumented individuals reside in Westchester.
- According to the New York City Right to Counsel Coalition, 220,000 evictions are pending in New York courts, including town, village, and justice courts, which are harder to track.

YOU CAN HELP!

Join the Westchester County Right to Counsel Coalition in a week of action. **During the week of August 16-20, call, email, or write (or all three!) the County Executive and your legislator** and ask the county to carry out the feasibility study.

Interest in participating in our social media campaign as well? Check out [this document!](#)

CALL/VOICEMAIL

Find your legislator [here](#).

See [here](#) for your legislator's number.

Call the County Executive at (914) 995-2900.

Call/voicemail Script:

My name is _____, a constituent who lives in _____. It is imperative to me that all Westchester County residents have equal opportunities for safe and stable housing. An eviction is a stigma which follows a family forever by cutting off access to safe, stable housing from reputable landlords and perpetuating the cycle of poverty for generations. This is why I support the Right to Counsel in Westchester County for families facing an eviction proceeding. As many community members are at risk of eviction, especially now in the aftermath of the pandemic, it's critical to have county-wide right to legal counsel to prevent eviction. I'm so glad that the final county budget includes funding for the Right to Counsel cost-analysis study. I want to request more information on the status of the study as this was included in the county budget.

LETTERS AND EMAILS

Find your legislator [here](#).

Find your legislator's email address [here](#).

Email the County Executive at CE@westchestergov.com.

Send a letter to:

Legislator _____ OR County Executive Latimer

800 Michaelian Office Building

148 Martine Avenue, 8th Floor

White Plains, New York 10601

Letter/email Template:

Dear [Legislator _____/County Executive George Latimer],

My name is _____, a constituent who lives in _____. I am writing to urge you to begin the right to counsel feasibility study that was allocated money in this year's county budget.

INSERT sample talking points:

- Housing is a basic human right. Rights should be protected.
- 93% of landlords have attorneys, but only 7% percent of tenants do.
- Eviction judgments are made on average in about 4 minutes, and settlements are often determined in the hallway, away from the judge.
- Without representation, tenants are often evicted on false premises of lease violations they didn't commit or excess rent that they do not legally owe.
- NYC passed Right to Counsel legislation in 2017, which planned to phase it in over five years and has seen a 77% reduction in evictions so far!
- Evictions make it harder to rent another apartment, help lock in long-term poverty, and cause psychological trauma that spans generations – especially for kids who lose the security of believing their parents can provide a home.
- An eviction is often the first step towards becoming homeless. In the Fiscal Year of 2019, 4,960 people entered the Westchester Homelessness System. Of those 4,960 people, 2,911 people were new to the Westchester Homelessness system. In 2019 the county spent over \$38 million to house homeless families and individuals.

Sincerely,

INSERT NAME

EVENTS

Want to join with others to make your calls/emails/letters? Need more guidance or want more information? Join our events!

Monday @7pm - Zoom calling event

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82842203752?pwd=Y2s3Y0VSd3JFckhScDVYWWplRVZ6UT09>

Meeting ID: 828 4220 3752

Passcode: 878121

Friday @2pm - Zoom letter-writing event

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86072364082?pwd=ZEdYdE1UZ01nYzhsa1llano5SVoydz09>

Meeting ID: 860 7236 4082

Passcode: 224084