

Right to Counsel

Annual Report

Fiscal Year 2025



Department of Planning and Development
Housing and Community Development
CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

Background

In November 2019, City Council passed Right to Counsel (RTC) legislation guaranteeing a right to legal representation in matters of eviction and housing risk for eligible tenants.ⁱ RTC provides free legal representation to low-income tenants in covered zip codes. In February 2022, RTC launched in two zip codes, with six more added as of the end of Fiscal Year 2025. Zip code selection is based on need as indicated by an analysis of the most recent available eviction and demographic data.ⁱⁱ

RTC provides more equitable access to legal representation and promotes housing stability. In Philadelphia, eviction filings disproportionately impact residents of color and female heads of household, destabilizing families and communities.ⁱⁱⁱ Furthermore, almost half of households included families with children. Helping families avoid eviction limits the long-term impacts of housing insecurity on children, which can include an increased risk of chronic disease later in life and lower educational and employment attainment.^{iv} Even when legal representation cannot prevent eviction, it can still achieve better results for tenants, such as more time to find another home or a reduction in amount owed. These outcomes are especially critical for vulnerable communities, such as seniors and people with disabilities, who face heightened risks when displaced from their homes and who account for a significant number of people served under this program.

Right to Counsel is one program within the Philadelphia Eviction Prevention Project (PEPP), which includes a suite of programs providing legal and supportive services to tenants. Right to Counsel legal services in Fiscal Year 2025 were provided by Community Legal Services (CLS), Legal Clinic for the Disabled (LCD), SeniorLAW Center (SLC), and Philadelphia VIP. Tenants are connected to legal services by the Tenant Union Representative Network (TURN) and Philly Counts. Tenants can also connect with services through an online intake form and in-person walk-in hours and clinics.

Covered Zip Codes	Fiscal Year Roll Out
19121, 19139	2022
19134, 19144	2023
19132	2024
19124, 19141, 19154	2025

Right to Counsel applies to proceedings in four settings:

Municipal Court (MC):

Landlord Tenant complaints filed by a landlord against their tenant.

Fair Housing Commission (FHC):

Administrative proceedings to enforce fair rental practices where tenancy is at risk.

Court of Common Pleas (CCP):

Action in ejectment cases (determinations of who has the better right to possession of a property), appeals from Municipal Court, and appeals from the Fair Housing Commission based on merit.

Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA):

Grievance hearings to dispute a lease termination notice; if a tenant believes PHA has failed to make repairs, transfer a tenant, or recalculate a tenant's rent, then PEPP assess on a case-by-case basis.

Highlights

Right to Counsel Year 4 (July 1, 2024 –June 30, 2025)

- Right to Counsel expanded to zip codes 19124, 19141, and 19154.
- **1,754 households** in the RTC zip codes received legal representation or legal advice by a PEPP partner across all venues.
- PEPP-represented tenants were more likely to enter into a Judgment by Agreement (JBA) were less likely to have Default Judgment, and were more likely to win at trial.
- PEPP partners participated in **68 events** where they promoted PEPP programs, including RTC, and four outreach events specific to RTC.
- **620 tenants** were reached and successfully connected to legal services *ahead of* any court proceeding.

Proactive Outreach

In Fiscal Year 2025, 35% of tenants who received legal services through Right to Counsel were connected in advance of their court dates through proactive outreach. Community Health Workers from the City's Office of Community Empowerment and Opportunity led this effort, reaching out to 4,928 households by phone and text. They successfully reached 1,405 tenants, resulting in 620 receiving legal services.

Legal Services

During fiscal year 2025, PEPP legal services agencies served 1,754 cases in RTC zip codes with either legal advice or full representation. 88% of these cases were opened during this fiscal year. Of cases that were closed during Fiscal Year 25, 41% required advice only and 59% received full legal representation.

Municipal Court

Right to Counsel increased access to justice in Municipal Court by providing more equitable access to legal representation. Historically, more than 90% of landlords in Municipal Court have had a lawyer compared to a representation rate of 14-18% of tenants outside of the Right to Counsel zip codes.^v RTC continues to work to close this gap.

Filings in Municipal Court in RTC Zip Codes^{vi}

19121	719
19139	698
19134	541
19144	1,218
19132	430
19124	354
19141	258
19154	199
Total	4,417

Representation Rates in Municipal Court in RTC Zip Codes

Unrepresented Tenants	4299 (79%)
PEPP Represented Tenants	978 (18%) ^{vii}
Privately Represented Tenants	127 (2%)

Comparison of Court Outcomes for Tenants in RTC Zip Codes

	PEPP-Represented Tenants (978)	Unrepresented Tenants (4299)
Judgment by Agreement	722 (73.8%)	1567 (36.5%)
Case Withdrawn ^{viii}	188 (19.2%)	1091 (25.4%)
Case Pending	5 (0.5%)	12 (0.3%)
Trial (Judgment for Plaintiff)	26 (2.7%)	74 (1.7%)
Trial (Judgment for Defendant)	15 (1.5%)	25 (0.6%)
Default Judgment for Plaintiff	17 ^{ix} (1.7%)	1524 (35.5%)
Default Judgment for Defendant	5 (0.5%)	6 (0.1%)

Right to Counsel Legal Services Outcomes (Across All RTC Venues)

Case Outcomes ^x	Full Representation: 876 cases with known outcomes ^{xi}	Advice Only: 92 cases with known outcomes
Housing Preserved or Stabilized^{xii}	<p>667 tenants who received full representation from PEPP partner had their housing preserved or stabilized.</p> <p>This accounts for 76% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.</p>	<p>34 tenants who received legal advice from a PEPP partner had their housing preserved.</p> <p>This accounts for 37% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.</p>
Financial Relief Obtained^{xiii}	<p>431 tenants who received full representation from a PEPP partner saved money through a reduction of a legal judgment or other.</p> <p>This accounts for 49% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.</p>	<p>9 tenants who received legal advice from a PEPP partner saved money through a reduction of a legal judgment or other.</p> <p>This accounts for 10% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.</p>
Improved Home Habitability^{xiv}	<p>21 tenants who received full representation from a PEPP partner experienced improved home habitability.</p> <p>This accounts for 2% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.</p>	<p>9 tenants who received legal advice from a PEPP partner experienced improved home habitability.</p> <p>This accounts for 10% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.</p>
Negative Outcomes	<p>25 tenants who received full representation from a PEPP partner experienced a negative outcome.</p> <p>This accounts for 3% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.</p>	<p>9 tenants who received legal advice from a PEPP partner experienced a negative outcome.</p> <p>This accounts for 10% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.</p>

Demographics of Households Served Under Right to Counsel^{xv}

The demographics of tenants receiving legal services in all the Right to Counsel zip codes were generally reflective of the wider renter population in those same zip codes.

	RTC Participants	Renter Population of All RTC Zip Codes ^{xix}
Ethnicity: Hispanic	6.2% ^{xvii}	15.3%
Race: Black	67.4%	64.6%
Race: White	11.4%	14.8%
Race: Asian	0.4%	2.3%
Female Headed Households ^{xvi}	25%	31.1%
Federal Poverty Level: Less than 200% ^{xvii}	100%	17.9%

Right to Counsel Serves Philadelphia's Most Vulnerable Communities

Right to Counsel is reaching populations with heightened vulnerability to eviction and housing instability, including persons with a disability, seniors, and families with children. Out of the 1,754 households served in this program:

46% of households served included at least one individual with a disability.

People with disabilities have more limited housing options because of a shortage of accessible housing and the inability for fixed income sources, such as SSI or SSDI, to keep up with increases in the rental market. These factors make individuals with a disability particularly vulnerable when experiencing housing insecurity and eviction.

46% of households served were families that included at least one child present in the home.

In total, 1,793 children benefited from legal services under the Right to Counsel program.

25% of households served had a female head of household.

Among households with only one adult and at least one child, women-led households made up 86%, far outreaching those led by men or other genders.

21% of households served included at least one older adult.

Older adults face particular risks in the face of housing insecurity and eviction including limiting ability to "age in place," access home and community-based health and support services, secure storage for life-saving medications, avoid institutionalization, and remain in one's beloved community near family, doctors, spiritual resources, and other comforts.

Fair Housing Commission

- This data relates to Fair Housing Commission administrative hearings.
- 51 complaints were accepted by the Fair Housing Commission in RTC zip codes.
- PEPP provided legal services in 5 cases. Of these 5 cases, 2 cases resulted in housing preserved. 2 outcomes are unknown and 1 experienced a negative outcome.

PHA Grievance Hearings

- This data relates to Grievance Hearings on Notices of Termination, which is the primary hearing type that RTC serves.
- There were 15 Grievance Hearings in the RTC zip codes and 8 received full representation, with 2 cases receiving advice only.
- Out of these cases, 1 household preserved their housing voucher.
- Housing was preserved in 2 of these cases.

Court of Common Pleas

- There were 36 Court of Common Pleas cases related to a housing issue where PEPP provided legal services.
- 32 cases received full legal representation.
- 4 cases received advice only.

Cases with No Venue

- 863 households received legal services in situations where there was no tribunal or judicial venue.
- 618 received advice only,
- 105 received full representation, or extensive service.

- i City of Philadelphia. (2014, January). [The Philadelphia Code and Home Rule Charter](#).
- ii Reinvestment Fund. (2022, October). [Identifying Zip Codes for Expanding Implementation of Section 9-808 of The Philadelphia Code: Legal Representation in Landlord Tenant Court](#).
- iii City of Philadelphia. (2018, June). [Mayor's Taskforce on Eviction Prevention and Response](#).
- iv Jones, et.al. 2019 Identifying and Preventing Adverse Childhood Experiences; Implications for Clinical Practice *JAMA*. 2020;323(1):25-26. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.18499.
- v Reinvestment Fund. (2023, June). [Implementing Right to Counsel in Philadelphia: An Evaluation of the Program's 2022 Rollout](#)
- vi The total in this chart is lower than in the adjoining "Representation Rates" and "Comparison of Court Outcomes" charts because this chart counts filings whereas the other two charts counts individual tenants. Since a filing can have multiple tenants the total in this chart is lower than in the other two.
- vii In Fiscal Year 2025, while the percentage of PEPP represented tenants decreased, the total number of tenant representations increased by almost 100 tenants. Furthermore, representation rates increased in other covered venues, including Philadelphia Housing Authority Grievance Hearings and the Court of Common Pleas.
- viii In some cases where tenants know a case will be withdrawn, the tenant will not request or need representation. This may explain why the withdrawal rate is higher for unrepresented tenants.
- ix In these cases, the default judgment was entered prior to the PEPP representation and PEPP representation was an attempt to resolve the case post-default judgment.
- x This chart breaks out case outcomes by level of service provided. The total number of cases that are either designated as "Full Representation" or "Advice Only" is lower than the total number of cases served during this fiscal year, because 140 cases were too new to determine service level at the time this report was created.
- xi Cases often receive more than one outcome and, as a result, there are a greater number of outcomes than there are cases.
- xii Housing Preserved or Stabilized includes the following outcomes: Housing Preserved, Time in Housing Extended, Vouchers/Subsidies Preserved, Housing: Barrier to Admission to Housing Removed, Housing: Subsidized/Public Housing Transfer Obtained, Barrier to Housing Removed, Housing: Subsidized/Public Housing Transfer Obtained.
- xiii Financial Relief Obtained includes the following outcomes: Money Judgments Avoided, Judgments Reduced, Housing: Rent Reduced, Housing: Lump Sum Avoidance, Housing: Lump Sum Recovery, Housing: Security Deposit Returned.
- xiv Improved Home Habitability includes the following outcomes: Housing: Habitability Improved, Housing: Habitability Improved in the Home, Improved Habitability, Housing: Lead Related Outcome.
- xv ACS data are not available for specific postal zip codes. Rather, the Census creates a "generalization" of zip codes in what they term Zip Code Tabulation Areas (ZCTA). Although we reference zip codes, we use data from the ZCTAs. For a more thorough explanation of the comparison of zip codes and ZCTA, see: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/zctas.html>.
- xvi Tenants are not asked to define their household status during the RTC intake process. This report uses the following criteria to determine female head of household status: 1) gender as female, 2) minors present in the household, and 3) only one adult in the household. This definition is designed to identify women who are likely to be the primary caregivers and economic providers for the family. However, this definition has limitations, specifically in the potential to undercount households with more than one adult but where the second adult cannot contribute due to age or disability. This definition changed in 2024 and was used again this year. Previous RTC Reports used a broader set of criteria to capture the total number of female head of household.xvii
- xvii RTC uses the Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) poverty guidelines to determine program eligibility. Figures in this report are pulled from the Census' poverty thresholds, which are similar in amount to 100% of the Federal Poverty Level produced by HHS. They both vary by size of family, but the poverty threshold also varies by age of family members. (Poverty Guidelines | ASPE (hhs.gov)).
- xviii In 2025, the number of Hispanic households served under RTC saw a small increase.
- xix U.S. Census Bureau. 2016-2020 American Community Survey 5-year estimates.