

Identifying Zip Codes for Expanding the Right to Counsel Program

This brief presents a zip-code level analysis of need and potential uptake for no-cost legal services for tenants facing eviction in Philadelphia. This is an update to previous analyses and is designed to aid the City's selection of zip codes for expansion of the Right to Counsel program.

Background

In February 2022, the City of Philadelphia began rolling out the “Right to Counsel” program in Landlord Tenant Court as provided for in Section 9-808 of the Philadelphia Code, which was signed into law in December 2019. This section provides for “access to free legal representation to low-income residents facing eviction in Landlord Tenant Court; under certain terms and conditions.”¹

In 2021, the Policy Solutions group at Reinvestment Fund (“Policy”) was retained by the City to analyze data necessary to support a transparent selection of zip codes consistent with the letter and spirit of the Bill and regulations. Those regulations specified the selection of at least two zip codes “based on need as indicated by eviction data from the most recent year for which such data is available,” which we have interpreted to mean data found in the Landlord Tenant Court eviction filing records. The section also references an “uptake rate for counsel,” which we interpret to reference eligibility as defined in the Bill (200% of poverty or less).²

Policy’s analysis led to the selection of zip codes 19121 and 19139 for the initial roll out of Right to Counsel. In 2022, Policy updated that analysis to support the selection of two additional zip codes, 19134 and 19144. This 2023 brief presents updated results using the most recently available data.

Analysis Approach

In 2023 Policy used the same analytic approach as in prior years. We collected and organized the most recent filing data by the zip code location of the rental unit. Using court data, we identified places with large numbers of filings and high filing rates as two separate measures of “need.” Given the regulation’s reference to “uptake,” we included data on family poverty rates by zip code because areas with the highest poverty rates will have the greatest concentrations of “covered individuals” as defined in the regulation.

In 2023 we were able, for the first time, to use one complete calendar year of eviction filings (2022) from Landlord Tenant Court, as the filing volume approached pre-pandemic levels; in 2021 and 2022 we had to select and aggregate multiple years of filings to create a sufficiently large picture of need. We used the 2017-2021 5-year American Community Survey from the U. S. Census (ACS) for the number of

¹ See: <https://phila.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=3943568&GUID=EC5846F5-CECE-414F-A9F4-CA2F49D698B1&Options=ID|Text|&Search=eviction>

² See: <https://r455regulations.phila-records.com/>

renter occupied households (used to calculate the filing rate) and for the family poverty rate, an update from the 2016-2020 estimates used previously.

Thus, the analysis is based on three indicators for each zip code:

- (1) number of eviction filings (2022)
- (2) percentage of renter occupied households subject to an eviction filing
- (3) family poverty rate.

All data sources are governmental and are therefore of known reliability.³

Once the data were gathered and organized at the zip code level, zip codes were assigned a rank of 1 through 46 (the total number of zip codes) on each indicator. For example, the zip code with the greatest number of eviction filings in 2022 (19144 - Germantown) was assigned a 1 and the zip code with the fewest eviction filings a 46 for the first indicator ranking.

Ranks for each indicator were tallied into a combined rank in which each indicator is considered of equal value – that is, family poverty is weighted neither more nor less than the number of eviction filings or the percent of renters facing an eviction. However, because there are two eviction related indicators, evictions will be more determinative of the final ranking score. A top ranking on any one indicator did not necessarily put a zip code in the top ranking in the final combined index (e.g., the zip code with the highest eviction filing rate was 19154 in the Far Northeast, but its combined index rank was 15).

Analysis Results

Table 1 provides the values (and ranks) for each of the indicators as well as the combined rank score for the 10 zip codes with the lowest combined scores, i.e., the greatest combined need/uptake potential (see also Maps 1 through 4). The four zip codes already served by the Right to Counsel program ranked second (19121-Lower North Philadelphia-West), third (19134-Kensington/Harrowgate, which ranked first on filing rate), fifth (19144-Germantown, which ranked first on total filing), and seventh (19139-West Philadelphia – Mill Creek/Haddington). The lowest scoring zip code overall in 2023 was 19132 (Central North Philadelphia-West), which is not currently served by Right to Counsel.

³ We note that ACS data are not available for postal zip codes; instead, the Census creates a “generalization” of zip codes in *Zip Code Tabulation Areas* (ZCTA). Although we reference zip codes, in fact the data are for ZCTAs. For a more complete comparison of zip codes and ZCTA, see: <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/zctas.html>.

Zip	Count of Eviction Filings 2022	Count Rank	Eviction Filing Rate 2022	Rate Rank	% Families in Poverty 2017/2021	Poverty Rank	Combined Index	Combined Index Rank
19132	537	9	7.5	3	33.1	3	15	1
19121	667	4	6.7	6	30.2	5	15	2
19134	644	7	6.6	8	36.1	1	16	3
19124	650	6	7.0	4	26.4	9	19	4
19144	1131	1	9.0	2	20.4	16	19	5
19131	663	5	6.9	5	26.2	10	20	6
19139	732	3	6.5	9	25.2	11	23	7
19120	547	8	6.0	11	28.2	8	27	8
19141	452	12	6.4	10	28.2	7	29	9
19143	777	2	5.8	12	21.4	15	29	10

Table 1: Need Indicators, Rank, and Combined Index Rank For 10 Highest-Ranked Zip Codes, 2023

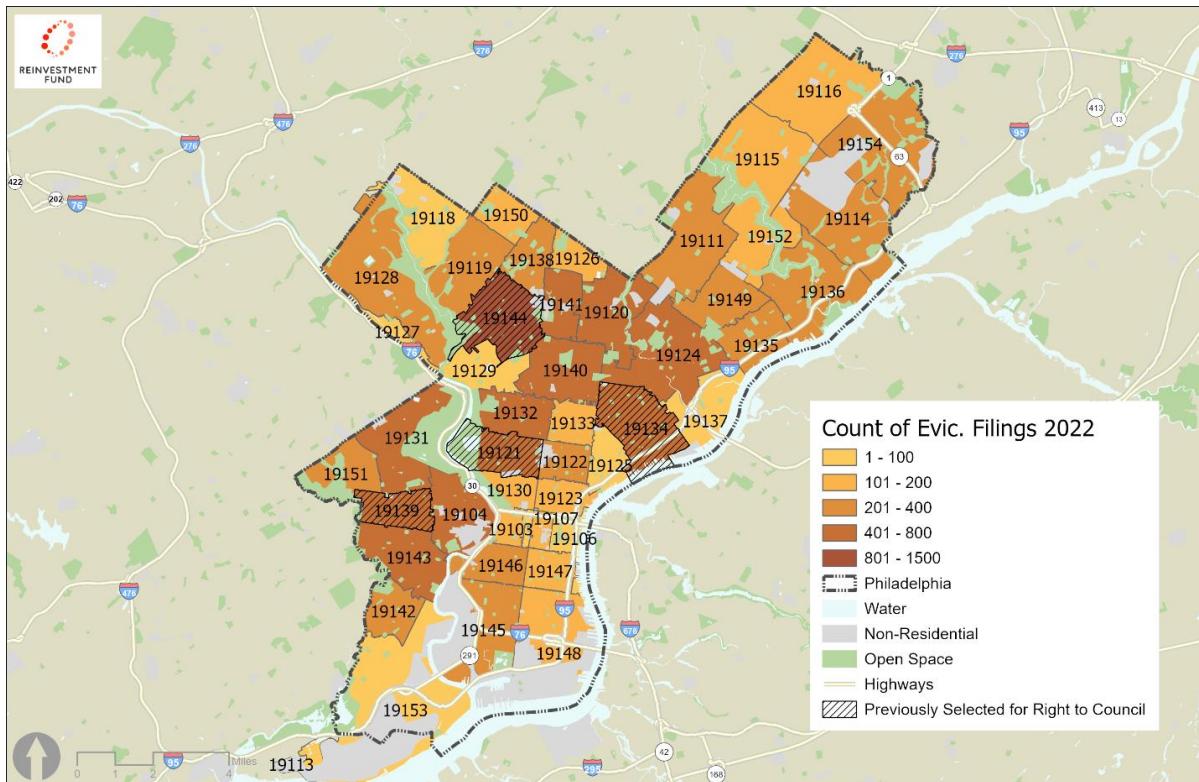
Currently Served by RTC

Top Ranked Unserved Zips

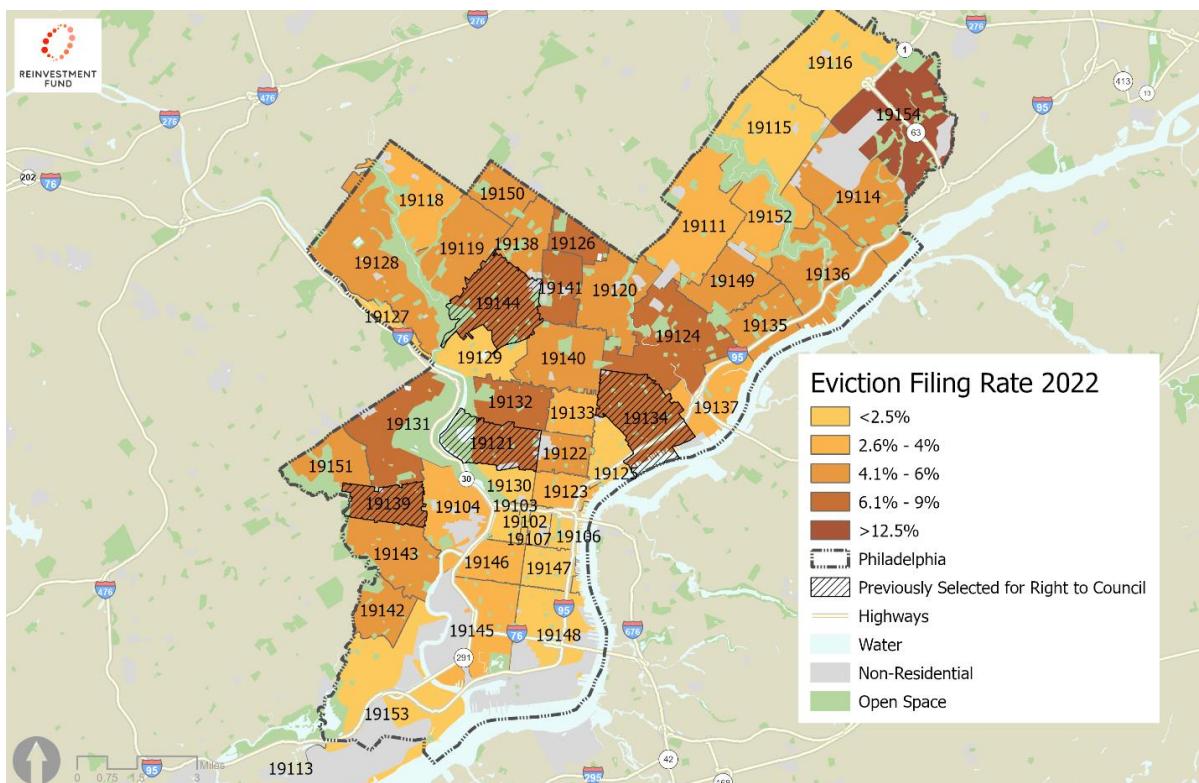
Zip code 19132, spanning parts of Western North Philadelphia including Strawberry Mansion, had 537 eviction filings in 2022 (ranking ninth out of 46 zip codes). Of its 7,199 renters, 7.5% faced an eviction (ranking third out of 46 zip codes). Additionally, 33.1% of families residing in this zip code had incomes below the poverty line – a family poverty rate substantially above the 18.3% citywide rate. The demographics of renters in 19134 were 90.2% Black, 3.2% Hispanic, 2.9% White, and 0.6% Asian. The median renter household income in 19132 was \$22,718, well below the citywide median of \$39,741.

Zip code 19124, encompassing Frankford and parts of Juniata and Summerdale, had 650 eviction filings in 2022 (ranking sixth). Of its 9,292 renters, 7.0% faced an eviction (ranking fourth) and 26.4% of families had incomes below the poverty line (ranking ninth). The demographics of renters in 19124 were 48.9% Black, 35.0% Hispanic, 13.5 % White, and 1.4% Asian. The median renter household income in 19124 was \$27,689.

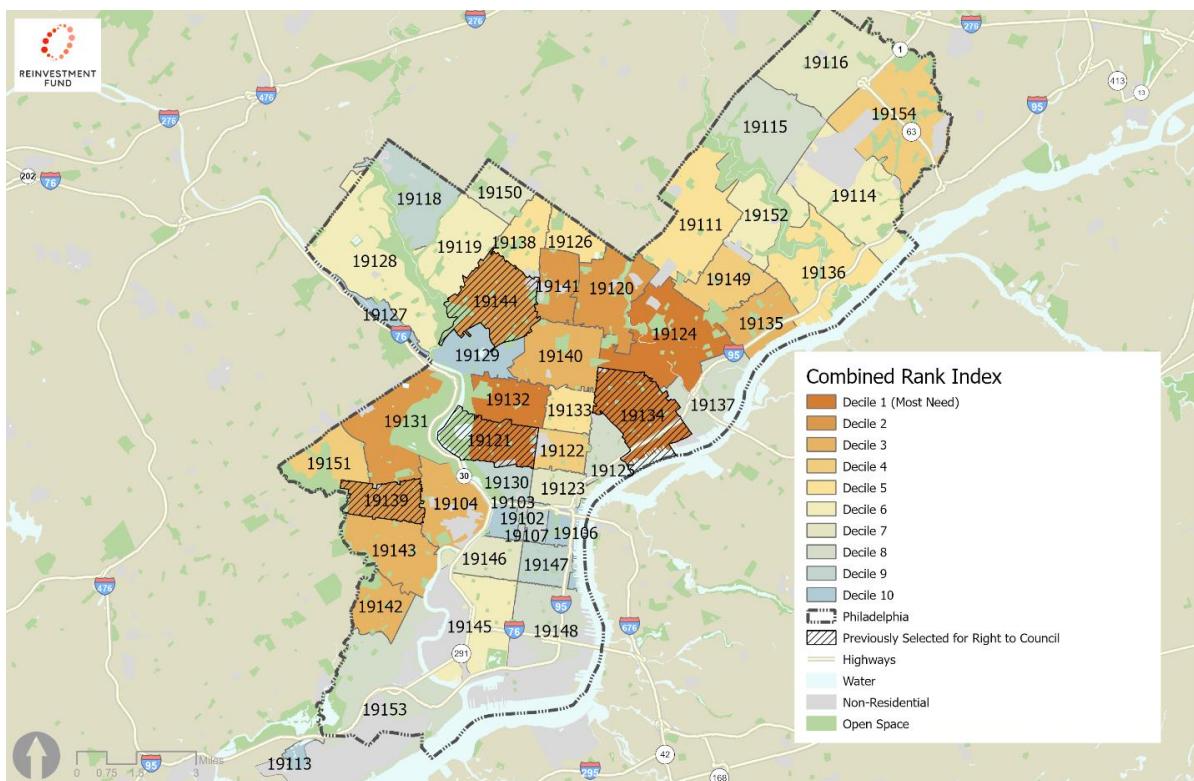
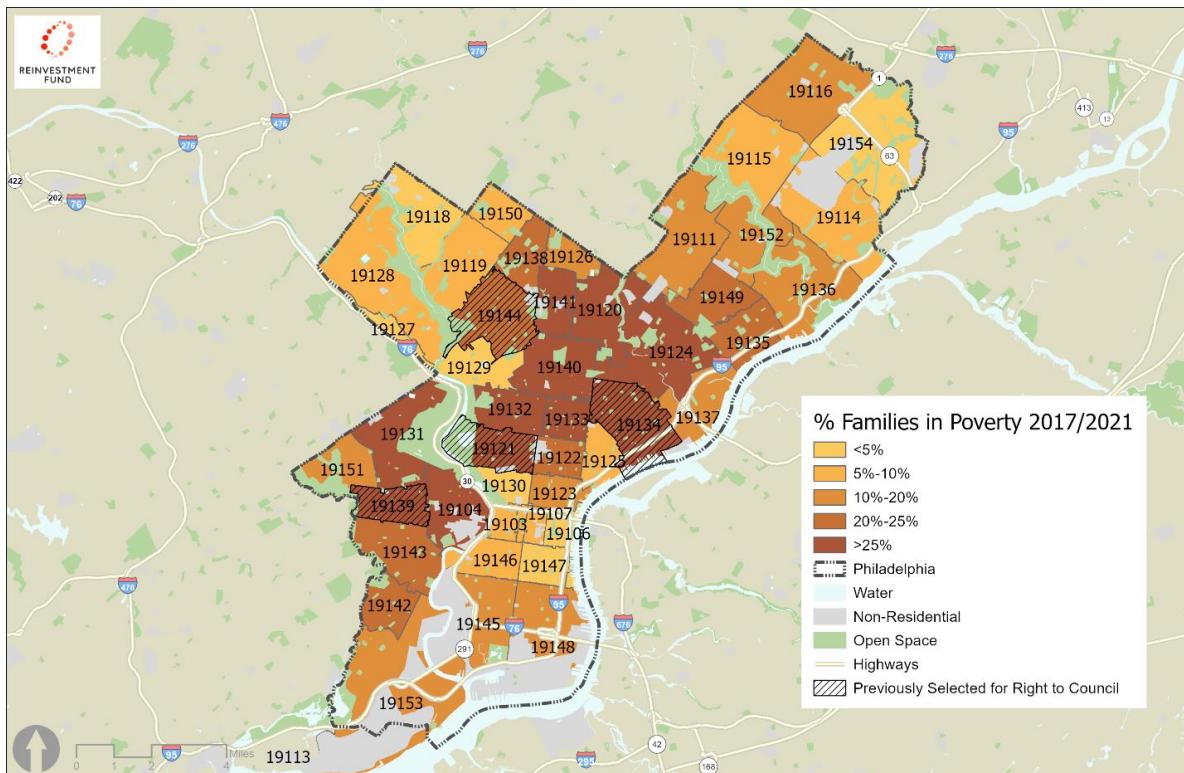
Zip code 19131, covering Wynnefield, Carroll Park, and other West Philadelphia neighborhoods, had 663 eviction filings in 2022 (ranking fifth). Of its 9,552 renters, 6.9% faced an eviction (ranking fifth) and 26.2% of families had incomes below the poverty line (ranking tenth). The demographics of renters in 19131 were 71.6% Black, 3.8% Hispanic, 13.3% White, and 7.8% Asian. The median renter household income in 19131 was \$35,955, just below the city median.



Map 1: Count of Eviction Filings, 2022, Reinvestment Fund analysis of court records.



Map 2: Estimated Percent of Renter Households Subject to an Eviction Filing, 2022, Reinvestment Fund analysis of court records and U.S. Census American Community Survey 2017-2021.



Appendix I: Top Zip Codes for Individual Indicators

<i>Zip</i>	<i>Count of Eviction Filings 2022</i>	<i>Eviction Rank</i>
19144	1131	1
19143	777	2
19139	732	3
19121	667	4
19131	663	5

<i>Zip</i>	<i>Eviction Filing Rate 2022</i>	<i>Eviction Rate Rank</i>
19154	12.5	1
19144	9	2
19132	7.5	3
19124	7	4
19131	6.9	5

<i>Zip</i>	<i>% Families in Poverty 2017/2021</i>	<i>Families in Poverty Rank</i>
19134	36.13	1
19140	33.82	2
19132	33.14	3
19133	32.24	4
19121	30.15	5