

Right to Counsel

Annual Report Fiscal Year 2026



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 eight more added as of the end of Fiscal Year 2026. A total of ten zip codes are now covered. Zip code selection is based on need as indicated by an analysis of the most recent available eviction and demographic data.ⁱⁱ

RTC expands equitable access to legal representation and promotes housing stability for Philadelphia tenants. Eviction filings disproportionately impact residents of color and female-headed households, placing families and communities at a greater risk of housing instability.ⁱⁱⁱ Nearly half of households served through RTC this fiscal year included families with children. Preventing eviction can help mitigate the long-term impacts of housing insecurity on children, including increased risks of chronic health conditions and lower educational and employment attainment.^{iv}

Legal representation can also improve outcomes when eviction cannot be prevented. Attorneys may help tenants secure additional time to identify alternative housing, reduce the amount owed, or reach other agreements that lessen the disruption of displacement. These outcomes are particularly important for seniors and people with disabilities, who may face heightened challenges and risks when forced to leave their home, and represent a significant share of tenants served through RTC.

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 2026 were provided by Community Legal Services, Face to Face Germantown, Legal Clinic for the Disabled, SeniorLAW Center, Philadelphia Legal Assistance, 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
19131, 19153	2026 ^v

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 assesses on a case-by-case basis.

Highlights

Right to Counsel Year 5 (July 1, 2025 – June 30, 2026)

- Right to Counsel expanded to zip codes 19131 and 19153.
- **2,280 households** in the RTC zip codes received legal representation or legal advice by a PEPP partner in at least one venue.
- 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 **66 events** where they promoted PEPP programs, including RTC, and fourteen outreach events specific to RTC.
- **461 tenants** received legal representation by a PEPP partner ahead of their court hearing as a direct result of proactive phone and text outreach.

Connecting Tenants with Attorneys Ahead of their Scheduled Court Date

In Fiscal Year 2026, 20% 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 by calling and texting tenants with upcoming court hearings who live in Right to Counsel covered zip codes. This City team successfully reached 924 tenants, resulting in 461 legal representations.

Legal Services

During Fiscal Year 2026, PEPP agencies provided legal services in 2,280 cases in RTC zip codes. 90% of these cases were opened during this fiscal year. Of cases that were closed during Fiscal Year 26, 45% required advice only and 55% 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.^{vi} RTC continues to work to close this gap.

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

19121	739
19139	627
19134	524
19144	1,049
19132	456
19124	541
19141	428
19154	284
19131	309
19153	132
Total	5,089

Representation Rates in Municipal Court in RTC Zip Codes

Unrepresented Tenants	4,035 (79%)
PEPP Represented Tenants	1,000 (20%) ^{viii}
Privately Represented Tenants	53 (1%)

Comparison of Court Outcomes for Tenants in RTC Zip Codes^{ix}

	PEPP-Represented Tenants (1,020)	Unrepresented Tenants (5,215)
Judgment by Agreement	693 (68%)	1,823 (35%)
Case Withdrawn ^x	171 (17%)	1,153 (22%)
Trial (Judgment for Plaintiff)	33 (3%)	100 (2%)
Trial (Judgment for Defendant)	25 (2%)	20 (0.5%)
Default Judgment for Plaintiff	5 ^{xi} (0.5%)	1,995 (38%)
Default Judgment for Defendant	3 (0.5%)	6 (0.1%)

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

Case Outcome ^{xii}	Full Representation: 967 cases with known outcomes ^{xiii}	Advice Only: 92 cases with known outcomes
Housing Preserved or Stabilized^{xiv}	858 tenants, accounting for 89% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.	63 tenants, accounting for 68% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.
Financial Relief Obtained^{xv}	586 tenants, accounting for 61% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.	15 tenants, accounting for 16% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.
Improved Home Habitability^{xvi}	25 tenants, accounting for 3% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.	4 tenants, accounting for 4% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.
Negative Outcomes	17 tenants, accounting for 2% of cases with known outcomes for tenants with full legal representation.	5 tenants, accounting for 5% of cases with known outcomes for tenants receiving legal advice.

Demographics of Households Served Under RTC^{xvii}

Tenants receiving legal services in all the Right to Counsel zip codes were similar to the wider population in those same zip codes racially and ethnically and were substantially lower income.

	Ethnicity: Hispanic	Race: Black	Race: White	Race: Asian	Female Headed Households	Federal Poverty Level: Less than 200% ^{xviii}
RTC Participants	6%	73%	11%	0.5%	24%	100%
Renter Population of All RTC Zip Codes ^{xix}	13.1%	66%	15%	2.6%	27.6%	51.2%

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 2,280 households served in this program:

46% 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.

45% were families that included at least one child in the home.

In total, 2,134 children benefited from legal services under the Right to Counsel program.

24% had a female head of household.

Among households with only one adult and at least one child, women-led households made up 87%, far outnumbering single, male-led households with children (13%).

26% of households served included at least one older adult.

Older adults served increased by 5 percentage points compared to last year. Older adults face particular risks in the face of housing insecurity and eviction including limited 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

- 72 complaints were accepted by the Fair Housing Commission in RTC zip codes.
- PEPP provided legal services in 2 cases. Of these 2 cases, both resulted in financial relief. One resulted in improved habitability and the other resulted in housing being preserved.

PHA Grievance Hearings

- 12 PHA households participated in Grievance Hearings on Notices of Termination in the RTC zip codes.
- 11 of these households received PEPP legal services.
 - 8 households received full representation and 3 received advice.
 - Housing vouchers were preserved in two of these cases and housing was preserved in three of these cases.

Court of Common Pleas

- 47 Court of Common Pleas cases related to a housing issue where PEPP provided legal services in a Right to Counsel Zip Code.
- 11 of these cases received advice.
- 35 of these cases received full legal representation.
- 1 household received a service level that is unknown.

Cases with No Venue

- 1,298 households received legal services in situations where there was no tribunal or judicial venue.
- 851 of these households received advice.
- 266 of these household received full legal representation.
- 181 of these households received a service level that is unknown.

Endnotes

- 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. (2026, January) <https://www.phila.gov/media/20260209112246/RTC-Zip-Code-Analysis-January-2026.pdf>.
- vi** Reinvestment Fund. (2023, June). [Implementing Right to Counsel in Philadelphia: An Evaluation of the Program's 2022 Rollout](#).
- vii** The two new zip codes added in Fiscal Year 2026 were added in January and, therefore, the number of filings in these zip codes was counted from January through June 2026.
- viii** In past reports, Representation Rate was calculated by the total number of tenants represented. This year, we use total cases to calculate representation rate. Using cases rather than tenants helps to draw a better comparison with Municipal Court filings.
- ix** This year we decided to include "Cases Pending" in a footnote because these cases do not have known outcomes. This year's number of cases pending is much higher than last year's because last year's report was finalized later in the year and therefore cases had more time to resolve. In Fiscal Year 2026, at the time this report was being worked on, there were 90 cases pending where a PEPP partner was providing representation, and 118 cases pending where the case had no representation.
- x** 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.
- xi** 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.
- xii** This chart breaks out known case outcomes by level of service provided.
- xiii** Cases often receive more than one outcome and, as a result, there are a greater number of outcomes than there are cases.
- xiv** 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.
- xv** 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.
- xvi** Improved Home Habitability includes the following outcomes: Housing: Habitability Improved, Housing: Habitability Improved in the Home, Improved Habitability, Housing: Lead Related Outcome.
- xvii** 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>.
- xviii** RTC uses 200% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) as the income threshold for service; therefore, 100% of tenants served in this program were under that threshold. Because there is no data source that captures renter households who also fall at or below 200% FPL, we've updated the comparison figure to reflect all residents, regardless of housing tenure, who fall under 200% FPL.
- xix** Data source: American Community Survey 2020-2024. This data was accessed through IPUMS NHGIS, University of Minnesota, www.nhgis.org.