

**Legal Aid Update**  
*and*  
**Right to Counsel in Housing Court**



*The*  
**Legal Aid Society**  
*of Cleveland*

# Legal Aid's Mission

secure justice, equity,  
and access to opportunity  
for and with people who have low incomes  
through passionate legal representation  
and advocacy for systemic change



*The*  
Legal Aid Society  
— of Cleveland

# Legal Aid's Mission

## *& alignment with Cleveland City Council Goals*

**we are taking care of the people of Cleveland, and:**

- Addressing quality of life issues,
- Responding to needs in our neighborhoods by working with each of the 17 council members and hosting clinics serving each ward, and
- Through our partnership and advocacy work, fighting the public health crisis of racism.



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# Who We Are, Who We Serve

We are one of the largest law firms in Northeast Ohio with 150 staff (including 85 full time attorneys).

In addition to staff, we engage 3000 volunteers (*about 500 of whom are engaged with us on a case/activity annually*)

We serve:

Individuals & families at or below 200% of federal poverty limit:

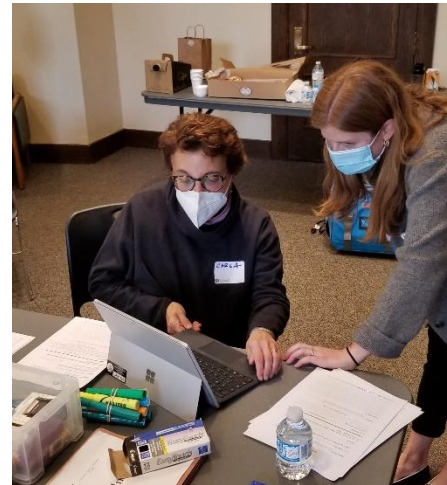
- Family of 4 = ~\$62,400



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# How We Solve Problems

- Legal representation,  
*Pro Se* Assistance & Advice
- Community Engagement,  
Coalitions, Education,  
Partnership
- Advocacy for Systemic Change



# History of Cleveland's Right to Counsel

**2018:**

Community read of Matthew Desmond's Evicted

**Summer 2018:**

Legal Aid was invited by City Council to draft legislation for a Right to Counsel

**November 2018:**

City Club Forum with NYC Council people and Cleveland City Council people

**In 2019:**

Cleveland became a leader as only the 4<sup>th</sup> to legislate a right



# Cleveland's Right to Counsel Legislation

On **August 21, 2019**, a bill was introduced to the Cleveland City Council that would provide a right to counsel for families with children facing eviction who are at or below 100% of the federal poverty line. At the time, Cleveland had roughly 9,000 evictions filed per year and only 1-2% of tenants currently had counsel. The bill asserts that

*lack of legal counsel for tenants during eviction cases is a violation of a basic human right ... his housing emergency destabilizes families and neighborhoods, especially the most vulnerable among us, resulting in homelessness, decreased property values, and harm to social tranquility and the general welfare of the City ... these conditions pose a serious threat to the public health, safety and welfare of the residents of the City, as well as to the City's economic stability, viability and growth.*



# Right to Counsel Operations

Launched **July 1, 2020** – in the middle of COVID

Program focuses on:

- Outreach (*docket notices, door knocking, mailers, other publicity*)
- Docket Screening
- Representation by Legal Aid staff
- Partnership with United Way for outreach/marketing





# Cleveland's Right to Counsel: Results

## **Legal Aid assisted last year:**

- 10,355 people in 3,452 housing cases,
  - 7,285 of those were Cleveland residents in 2,216 housing cases, and
    - **5,372 of those were Cleveland residents who asserted a Right to Counsel in 1,470 housing cases.**

During the intake/interview process, Legal Aid attorneys ask tenants who are asserting their Right to Counsel what are their goals for the case. **Since Right to Counsel began in July 2020, Legal Aid has assisted clients in achieving approximately 85% of their goals.**

**In 2023, approximately 83% of all Right to Counsel clients indicated they had defective conditions in their homes.**

Since July 2020, an increasing percentage of Cleveland residents Helped by Legal Aid indicate defective conditions in their homes, and want to stay in their homes despite the presence of defective conditions.



# Cleveland's Right to Counsel: Results

Legal Aid attorneys were overwhelmingly able to assist clients in achieving their eviction case goals.

The percentage of Cleveland residents facing eviction who were represented has increased 8x since 2020.

In 2023 more Cleveland residents who were eligible asserted their Right to Counsel: **Legal Aid represented approximately 79% of all eligible Cleveland households facing eviction.**

The City and County realized between \$11.8-14 million in financial benefits due to avoided expenditures related to the housing social safety net, foster care, education, health care, and tax base erosion caused by out-migration.

See more at

[www.FreeEvictionHelpResults.org](http://www.FreeEvictionHelpResults.org)



# Cleveland's Right to Counsel: 2024

Legal Aid anticipates helping 7300 Cleveland residents in at least 2,200 housing cases.

Of these, 5,300 will be residents who assert a Right to Counsel in 1,400 cases

Legal Aid anticipates representing 79% of tenants who are eligible for Right to Counsel

Budget is \$3.7 million for Right to Counsel in 2024

