
POST-COVID HOUSING EQUITY: A META-ANALYSIS OF NON-PROFIT LEGAL STRATEGIES TO ADDRESS RISING IMMIGRANT DISPARITIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of direct and indirect legal aid in reducing eviction rates across diverse political environments, including Republican, Democrat, and moderate states, as well as cities within these states. Direct legal aid includes legal representation and consultation, while indirect aid encompasses self-help resources, referrals, and educational programs. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced a coordinated strategy of anti-eviction measures, such as eviction moratoriums, rental assistance, and expanded legal aid, demonstrating the synergistic benefits of a comprehensive approach to eviction prevention. However, the removal of these pandemic-era policies has left a significant vacuum, with vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by rising eviction rates. This research evaluates the impact of eviction records on housing stability, as these records often bar tenants, especially the migrant tenants who are at most risk of eviction, from accessing public housing, assistance programs, and private rentals, relegating them to precarious living situations. Analyzing data from cities such as Chicago, Rockford, Philadelphia, Reading, and Asheville, the study finds that direct legal aid consistently produces better outcomes for tenants across political contexts. Nevertheless, access disparities persist in suburban and rural areas, particularly in Republican-leaning regions, highlighting the need for expanded direct legal aid to address systemic barriers and mitigate eviction risks nationwide.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic had long-lasting effects on housing stability across the United States. When the virus first began spreading, government-imposed restrictions aimed at curbing evictions provided temporary relief to tenants. State and federal eviction moratoriums, along with financial assistance programs, allowed millions of Americans to remain housed, even as unemployment soared and income instability worsened. However, as these protections were lifted in 2021 and 2022, eviction rates quickly returned to pre-pandemic levels, raising alarms about housing insecurity, particularly among vulnerable populations like low-income tenants and immigrant communities.

This paper focuses on eviction as a key target of housing access interventions, especially for marginalized groups. One of the clearest indicators of this crisis is the surge in eviction filings in 2023, which, as predicted by housing advocates, reflects the removal of key protections and the expiration of pandemic-era financial aid (Philadelphia, 2021) (Figure 1). Without ongoing government intervention or fresh influxes of financial assistance, many renters who accrued significant rental debt during the pandemic have found themselves at risk of displacement. Evictions serve as a barrier to housing access policies because eviction records often prevent households from qualifying for public housing or housing assistance, exacerbating the housing challenges faced by low-income and immigrant populations (Desmond et al., 2013). Additionally, evicted tenants are frequently classified as “risky” in private housing databases, limiting their access to safe and stable housing options, further isolating them and pushing them into more dangerous neighborhoods (Desmond & Shollenberger, 2015).

This paper examines how the removal of COVID-19 housing protections has led to a resurgence in eviction filings. It also analyzes the effectiveness of two distinct models of housing assistance: direct aid, which includes interventions like rental payment support or legal representation aimed at preventing eviction before it occurs, and indirect aid, which involves policies such as eviction moratoriums or self-help resources that offer tenants temporary relief without direct financial assistance or legal representation. The research compares the outcomes of these two models in states governed by Republican, Democratic, and moderate leadership, providing insights into how political contexts shape the effectiveness of different eviction prevention strategies. The success rate of these interventions, which measures the percentage of tenants who avoid eviction or secure favorable outcomes through legal or financial

assistance, will be used as a primary metric for evaluating their effectiveness. The hypothesis is that direct aid will be most effective in Democratic areas, where policies are generally more supportive of vulnerable populations and where funding for housing support programs is more readily available. This paper also explores how these forms of aid interact with broader housing policies and address housing instability in immigrant communities. In particular, eviction filings tend to increase proportionally with the growth of the immigrant population in certain areas, meaning that as the number of immigrant tenants rises, the rate of eviction filings increases, exacerbating the housing crisis within these communities.

Figure 2. Change in eviction filings relative to historical average from 2022 to 2023

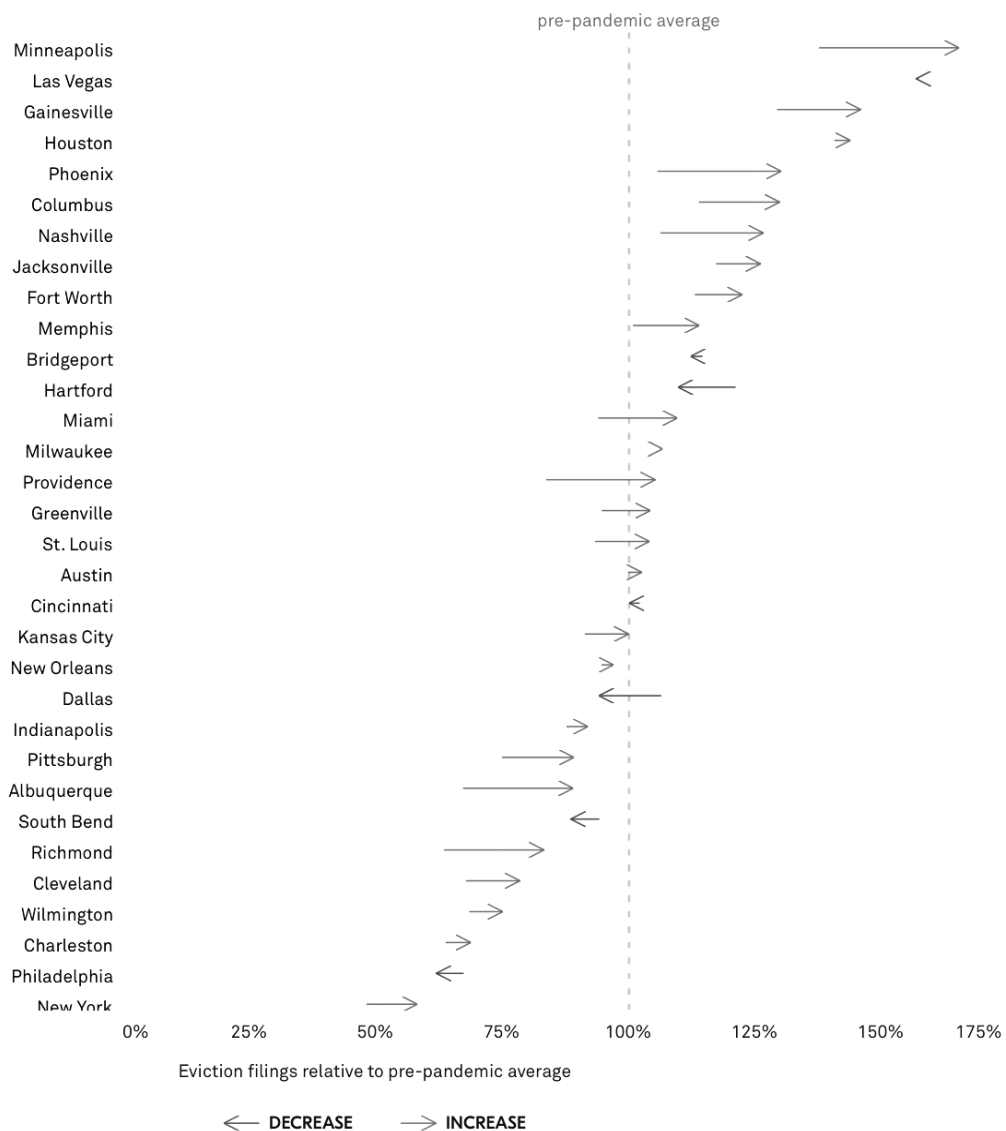


Figure 1

Literature Review

Previous scholarship on non-profit housing interventions has established the critical role of legal assistance and eviction prevention programs in addressing housing instability, particularly for low-income and immigrant populations. Studies by Desmond et al. (2013) and Desmond & Shollenberger (2015) highlight that eviction records significantly impede access to both public and private housing, reinforcing long-term housing insecurity. Non-profit organizations, in collaboration with government programs, have been shown to provide essential support to tenants through resources such as rental assistance, eviction defense services, and legal counsel. These interventions, especially when targeted toward vulnerable populations, have proven effective in preventing evictions and ensuring housing stability.

However, a major gap in existing scholarship lies in the strategic integration of non-profit action, political advocacy, and litigation. While there has been substantial focus on specific tactics—such as rental subsidies or temporary eviction moratoriums—less attention has been given to how these interventions can link together into a strategic program for improving housing equity. In particular, much of the literature tends to focus on immediate, short-term responses rather than addressing the systemic issues that underlie housing instability, such as income inequality, racial discrimination, and the lack of affordable housing. While the COVID-19 pandemic led to temporary housing protections, such as eviction moratoriums and emergency financial aid, these measures were largely short-lived and failed to address the root causes of housing disparities. Recent legislation, though crucial in alleviating immediate pressures, did not include long-term structural reforms that would provide sustainable housing solutions for marginalized communities, particularly immigrants.

Moreover, the political context in which eviction prevention measures are implemented has been insufficiently explored. Despite the success of targeted legal interventions, there remains limited research on how political ideologies and judicial systems influence the effectiveness of these strategies. This study contributes to filling this gap by analyzing eviction prevention efforts across states and cities with differing political affiliations, focusing on the interplay between non-profit actions, political leadership, and legal interventions. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of how political dynamics shape housing access and the efficacy of non-profit initiatives in different regions.

Overall, while existing research has concentrated on tactical solutions, there is a need for a more strategic conversation about how non-profit legal actions, political advocacy, and litigation can work synergistically to address the structural issues that contribute to housing instability. This literature review underscores the importance of integrating these elements to create sustainable and equitable housing policies that go beyond temporary interventions.

Methods

The study analyzes eviction cases from six major cities, each representing a different place on the political spectrum: Chicago, Rockford, Philadelphia, Reading, Buncombe, and Asheville. Data was collected from publicly available eviction records, non-profit organization reports, and governmental eviction prevention program summaries. By employing a comparative analysis of direct and indirect legal aid programs, with a focus on cities' political affiliations and judicial ideologies, this study seeks to establish how political orientation and judicial practices influence the effectiveness of eviction prevention strategies, particularly for marginalized populations.

Case Study 1: Democratic State PA

Pennsylvania's eviction landscape during and after the COVID-19 pandemic serves as a key example of post-COVID implications, revealing both the benefits of COVID-era housing protections and the challenges that arose with their removal. At the peak of the pandemic, eviction filings plummeted due to state and federal moratoriums. In Philadelphia, for example, eviction filings dropped to a historic low of 1,748 in Q2 of 2020, a drastic reduction from pre-pandemic levels, when filings averaged over 20,000 annually. This reduction can be attributed to the combination of eviction moratoriums and emergency financial assistance, which helped maintain housing stability despite escalating economic hardships, such as rising unemployment and income loss during the pandemic. However, as these protections expired, eviction filings surged, with the state recording a significant increase to 30,142 in Q3 of 2023, approaching 99% of pre-pandemic levels (Figure 2). This surge underscores the temporary nature of the housing interventions implemented during the pandemic, which, while effective in the short term, failed to address the underlying structural issues of housing instability. The expiration of these protections revealed the inadequacy of emergency measures without sustained policy changes. The short-lived relief may have inadvertently exacerbated the problem, as the lack of

long-term housing reforms left many vulnerable populations without the support needed to recover fully. Once protections were lifted, the absence of continued financial aid and legal safeguards put tenants, particularly in low-income and immigrant communities, at heightened risk of eviction, reinforcing the need for more comprehensive and enduring housing policies.

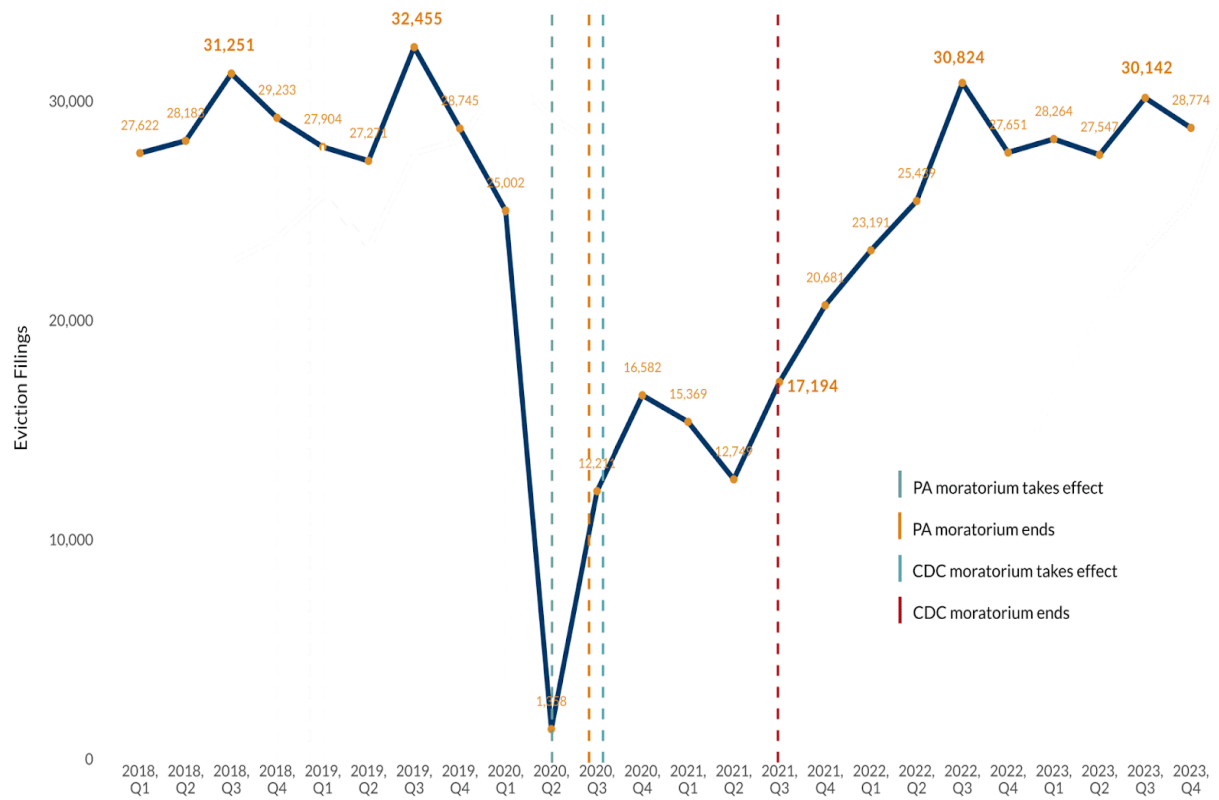


Figure 2

Default judgments—where tenants fail to appear in court—remain a significant driver of eviction lockouts. In Philadelphia, they accounted for nearly half of all eviction-related lockouts in 2019 and 2020 (Philadelphia 2021). These judgments are particularly concerning because they disproportionately impact tenants who lack the resources or legal knowledge to navigate the court system, which can act as a deterrent for appearing in court, further exacerbating housing instability for low-income and marginalized populations.

In Philadelphia, the Right to Counsel (RTC) initiative, which provides free legal representation to low-income tenants in specific ZIP codes (19139 and 19121), played a pivotal role in curbing evictions. Legal representation includes advising tenants on potential defenses, working to delay eviction proceedings, and negotiating settlements that may allow tenants to remain in

their homes. Data from 2020 indicates that 38% of tenants in these ZIP codes received legal representation in Municipal Court, compared to the citywide average of 20.6%. Legal representation proved to be a powerful tool in preventing eviction judgments: 63% of represented tenants reached a settlement agreement, while another 19% of cases were withdrawn (Figure 3). These outcomes are considerably better than those for unrepresented tenants, who only reached favorable settlements in 25% of cases, with a much higher rate of default judgments (41%). The significance of avoiding an eviction judgment extends beyond immediate housing stability, as such judgments carry long-term consequences that severely hinder tenants’ ability to secure future housing. Eviction records frequently disqualify individuals from accessing public housing and rental assistance programs and mark them in private landlord databases, effectively stigmatizing tenants and reducing their opportunities in the housing market. These barriers perpetuate structural inequities, disproportionately affecting marginalized populations and forcing many into precarious living conditions or homelessness. While settlement agreements may not always provide ideal outcomes, they serve as a critical intervention to mitigate the adverse effects of eviction judgments. By preventing the lasting harm associated with formal eviction records, settlement agreements offer tenants a pathway to greater stability and help disrupt cycles of poverty and housing insecurity.

FILINGS IN MUNICIPAL COURT		REPRESENTATION RATES IN MUNICIPAL COURT	
19121	241	Unrepresented Tenants	279 (62.4%)
19139	206	PEPP Represented Tenants	161 (36%)
TOTAL	447	Privately Represented Tenants	7 (1.6%)

COMPARISON OF COURT OUTCOMES FOR TENANTS IN RTC ZIP CODES		
	PEPP-Represented Tenants (161)	Unrepresented Tenants (279)
Judgment by Agreement	101 (63%)	70 (25%)
Case Withdrawn	31 (19%)	75 (27%)
Case Pending	25 (15%)	15 (5%)
Trial	4 (1%)	5 (2%)
Default	0 (0%)	114 (41%)

Figure 3

Despite the effectiveness of direct aid programs like RTC, the expiration of pandemic-related protections and the lack of new financial assistance have led to a rapid increase in evictions across Pennsylvania. In 2023, Pennsylvania saw 114,272 eviction filings, an increase of 7,622 compared to the previous year. Notably, 29.4% of tenants involved in these eviction cases were behind on rent by more than three months, a sharp rise from the 26.4% pre-pandemic rate

(Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania 2021). This backlog in unpaid rent highlights the economic strain many tenants continue to face, even as pandemic-era relief programs have ended.

Housing advocates in Pennsylvania have also pointed to the inequities that continue to plague the state's eviction system. Eviction rates are significantly higher in racially and ethnically concentrated neighborhoods, where single mothers and families paying more than 30% of their income on rent are particularly vulnerable.

However, interventions have seen success in combating this rising inequity. For example, in Reading, PA, the Eviction Diversion Program (EDP) has focused on mediation between landlords and tenants, achieving a 20% increase in favorable settlement outcomes compared to pre-pandemic levels. However, this program, which relies more on consultation and negotiation, has not matched the success of Philadelphia's direct legal aid initiatives like RTC, which saw a 38% increase in judgment by agreement compared to without RTC, which is an 18% higher success rate in terms of favorable outcomes compared to EDP at 20%.

The disparities between Reading and Philadelphia illustrate the critical role of direct legal intervention in eviction cases. In Philadelphia, the Right to Counsel (RTC) program, which provides tenants with legal representation, has been instrumental in securing more favorable outcomes. By offering legal expertise, RTC addresses tenants' underlying legal challenges, such as ensuring procedural safeguards and challenging unjust eviction claims. In contrast, Reading's EDP, while helpful in promoting communication and negotiation, does not directly tackle the legal complexities tenants face in court. For example, tenants without legal representation may struggle to understand procedural requirements or effectively dispute eviction claims, resulting in higher default judgments and less favorable settlements.

Political factors also play a critical role in Pennsylvania's eviction landscape. Philadelphia, a predominantly liberal and progressive city, benefits from a judicial system that tends to favor tenants. Judges like Michael Fanning and Bradley K. Moss, who have ruled in favor of tenants, have contributed to more equitable rulings in housing cases. In contrast, Reading, located in Berks County, leans more conservative, and the judicial climate reflects this political orientation. Judges like Madelyn S. Fudeman and Eleni Dimitriou Geishauser, while fair, tend to adhere more strictly to legal procedures, with limited consideration of specific circumstances which can sometimes disadvantage tenants in eviction cases who may not have been aware of

certain laws due to their non-native status. This conservative tilt may explain why programs like EDP in Reading have been less effective than Philadelphia's more progressive RTC initiative.

Conclusion

Despite these regional differences, the overall trend in Pennsylvania points to a significant rise in evictions as COVID-19 protections have been removed. In Reading alone, eviction filings remain concentrated in racially segregated neighborhoods, where single mothers and other vulnerable populations face the highest risk of housing loss. With 87% of statewide filings occurring in just 20 counties, housing advocates are concerned that the state may be on the brink of a homelessness crisis if further protections or financial assistance are not implemented.

In conclusion, Pennsylvania's post-pandemic eviction data highlights the critical need for sustained legal and financial support to prevent widespread housing instability. While programs like Philadelphia's RTC have shown success in reducing evictions and ensuring fairer outcomes for tenants, the state as a whole faces a significant challenge. With eviction filings nearing pre-pandemic levels and the most vulnerable populations at greatest risk, the removal of COVID-19 housing protections has triggered a housing crisis that will require new interventions to resolve.

Next Steps

The preceding case study on Pennsylvania has illustrated how political and judicial climates—specifically in more liberal urban areas like Philadelphia—can significantly impact the effectiveness of eviction prevention interventions. Philadelphia's success with direct legal aid programs such as the Right to Counsel (RTC) contrasts with the more limited impact of mediation-based programs in conservative areas like Reading, where indirect approaches have not sufficiently addressed tenants' underlying legal challenges.

To further explore the complexities of eviction prevention, the next case study will shift focus to a more politically moderate state, which offers an opportunity to examine how these dynamics play out in a politically ambiguous environment. This shift sheds light on a crucial aspect of the direct versus indirect aid debate: the influence of political composition and judicial ideology on the success of eviction interventions. Specifically, this case study will

explore how states with a balance of political orientations—neither predominantly liberal nor conservative—approach eviction prevention, and whether a hybrid model of direct and indirect aid proves more effective in these contexts. By comparing the experiences of tenants in a moderate state, this analysis will illustrate whether mixed political climates produce more nuanced outcomes, where elements of both direct and indirect approaches complement one another to address housing instability holistically.

Case Study 2: Moderate State II

Illinois presents a nuanced landscape for eviction prevention, particularly when comparing two distinct regions: Cook County (Chicago) and Rockford (Winnebago County). Both areas exhibit differing political climates and judicial approaches, which affect eviction outcomes and the role that legal aid plays in tenant protection.

In Chicago, eviction-related inequities are significant, with Cook County representing 78% of the eviction cases assisted by CARPLS, a non-profit organization that provides legal consultations and advice, and with half a million renter households in Illinois at risk of eviction as a whole (Rockett 24). In 2023, CARPLS provided 85,600 consultations. An impressive 90% of these cases were resolved in-house by CARPLS attorneys, highlighting the effectiveness of early legal advice and intervention in eviction proceedings. The remaining 10% were referred to other legal services when cases required more in-depth litigation.

Political and judicial landscapes in Cook County lean strongly toward tenant protection. In the last presidential election, 74.2% of voters in Cook County supported the Democratic candidate, reflecting a progressive stance in local policies. This political orientation is mirrored in the judicial system, with judges like Celeste Jones and Judith Rice taking a tenant-friendly approach in eviction cases. Judge Celeste Jones is known for consistently ruling in favor of tenant protections, reflecting the county's liberal political climate. In contrast, Judge Marcia Maras has been relatively even with her rulings between supporting tenants or landlords. However, there is a difference between neutrality and equity: a neutral opinion, by default, allows a landlord's eviction to proceed against marginalized individuals who are disproportionately affected by housing instability.

In 2023, eviction filings in Cook County sharply rose, nearing pre-pandemic levels, largely due to the expiration of pandemic-related protections and the growing economic strain on tenants.

Legal assistance organizations like CARPLS were essential in preventing default judgments, which disproportionately impact tenants who fail to appear in court, often due to a lack of resources or understanding of the legal process, an issue that CARPLS's resources rectify. CARPLS, which provided over 85,600 consultations in 2023, plays a crucial role in reducing these default judgments. By offering free legal consultations and connecting tenants with attorneys, CARPLS ensures that tenants are not left without representation, thus mitigating the risk of eviction without a fair trial. This proactive intervention helped thousands of families retain their homes by preventing cases from defaulting and ensuring tenants understood their legal rights.

The right-to-counsel initiative guarantees low-income tenants access to free legal representation in eviction cases, which has been shown to substantially increase their chances of securing favorable outcomes. The right-to-counsel initiative in Chicago, similar to Philadelphia's, has shown how direct legal intervention can significantly improve tenant outcomes. For example, 63% of tenants who received legal advice through CARPLS managed to negotiate settlements or have their cases withdrawn, a much higher rate than for unrepresented tenants. In cases where tenants were represented, they were more likely to secure favorable outcomes, such as payment plans or reduced rent, allowing them to avoid eviction and retain their homes.

In the same state but in contrast to Chicago, Rockford presents a different political and judicial climate. Rockford is located in Winnebago County, which leans conservative. In the 2020 presidential election, 50.1% of Rockford voters supported Trump, while 47.7% voted for Biden, illustrating the area's political divide. This political diversity is also reflected in the judicial system, where judges tend to adopt a more conservative approach to eviction cases.

Prairie State Legal Services (PSLS), a non-profit organization based in Rockford, provides direct legal representation to tenants facing eviction. In 2023, PSLS provided free legal services to more than 14,000 clients, closing nearly 16,000 cases. However, compared to Chicago, the Rockford region's legal landscape is less favorable to tenants. Judge Eugene Doherty, for instance, is known for his conservative rulings in civil cases, including housing disputes, where he often emphasizes the rights of property owners. Similarly, Judge Lisa Fabiano, tends to apply existing laws strictly, leaving little room for tenant protection measures like the ability to withhold rent that may be perceived as lenient.

This more conservative judicial approach may explain why eviction rates in Rockford remain higher than in Chicago. With the absence of a dedicated right-to-counsel initiative similar to Cook County's, tenants in Rockford are more vulnerable to default judgments and evictions. PSLS, while effective in providing direct legal services, operates in a more challenging political and judicial environment, where tenant-friendly rulings are less common, and landlords are often given more legal support in eviction proceedings.

Despite these challenges, PSLS has made significant strides in protecting minority tenants, who make up a substantial portion of those facing eviction in Winnebago County. In 2023, PSLS provided free legal services to more than 14,000 clients, and closed nearly 16,000 cases, ensuring that minority tenants, who are disproportionately affected by eviction filings, received the legal representation they needed. However, without the broader political and judicial support seen in Cook County, PSLS's impact, while meaningful, is more limited in scope.

Conclusion

When comparing Chicago and Rockford, two distinct approaches to eviction prevention and legal aid emerge. In Chicago, CARPLS focuses on early intervention through legal consultations, which has proven effective in reducing evictions and improving tenant outcomes. Supported by a progressive judicial and political environment, tenants in Cook County benefit from stronger protections and more tenant-friendly rulings, with judges often prioritizing fairness and socioeconomic considerations in their decisions.

In contrast, Rockford presents a more challenging environment for tenant protection. PSLS provides direct legal services but faces a more conservative judicial system, where tenant protections are not as robust, and landlords often have the upper hand in eviction cases. Despite this, PSLS continues to play a critical role in preventing housing loss by providing free legal services, particularly for minority tenants, although the conservative climate limits the organization's ability to replicate the success seen in Chicago.

In summary, the effectiveness of legal aid and eviction prevention strategies in Illinois is heavily influenced by the political and judicial climate. While Cook County benefits from a liberal environment that supports tenant rights, Rockford operates within a more conservative framework, making it more challenging for tenants to avoid eviction. Both CARPLS and PSLS play essential roles in addressing these challenges, but the disparity in outcomes between the

two regions highlights the need for coordinated, statewide legal protections to ensure that all tenants, regardless of their location, have access to the legal resources they need to prevent housing instability.

Case Study 3: Republican State NC

The landscape of eviction prevention in North Carolina presents unique challenges, particularly given the scarcity of non-profits and legal aid services in such predominantly conservative states.

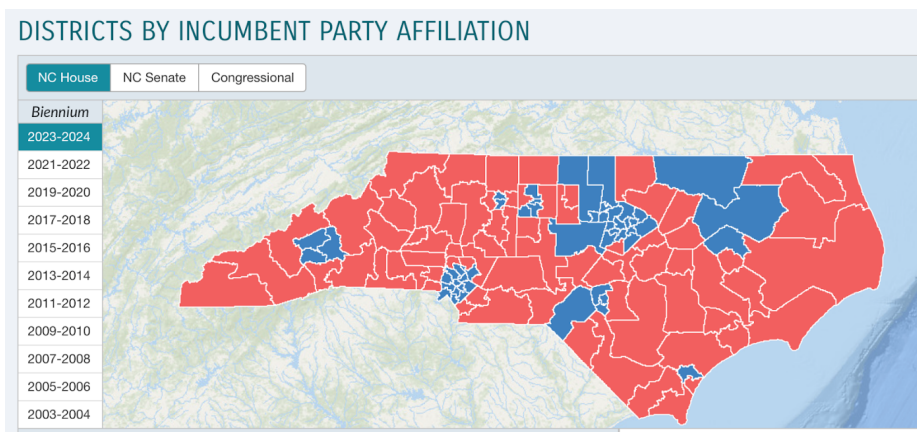


Figure 4

The political climate has a significant influence on the availability and effectiveness of tenant protections, as well as on how legal aid is administered. The data from North Carolina, while valuable, is limited in scope due to the smaller number of eviction-related non-profits compared to more liberal states, where tenant protections are more robust. The skewed data from Republican-leaning states like North Carolina can make it difficult to draw direct comparisons to states with stronger infrastructure for housing justice (Figure 4).

This section analyzes the impact of two major non-profits in North Carolina—Pisgah Legal Services and Legal Aid NC—and highlights the broader implications of limited eviction protection services in more conservative regions.

Pisgah Legal Services (PLS), based in Buncombe County, focuses primarily on direct legal assistance to tenants facing eviction. In 2022, PLS handled 1,857 housing-related cases, a 14% increase from the previous year, with most of the caseload concentrated in Buncombe County, a Democratic-leaning area in an otherwise predominantly Republican state. Pisgah’s Tenant Emergency Response Program (TERP) has proven to be particularly effective in preventing

evictions by positioning staff attorneys at the Buncombe County Courthouse during eviction court days. This allows attorneys to provide immediate legal support, negotiate settlements with landlords on the spot, and keep families in their homes.

The political climate in Buncombe County, which voted 59.7% Democrat and 38.6% Republican in the last presidential election, has been a critical factor in enabling Pisgah Legal Services to operate effectively. The county's relatively progressive political environment means that tenants are more likely to receive legal aid and support in eviction cases. Judges in Buncombe County tend to be more tenant-friendly, which has contributed to the success of programs like TERP, as there is more room for negotiation with landlords and a greater willingness to consider tenants' socioeconomic challenges.

However, even with these localized efforts, the Pisgah Legal Services operation is small relative to the state's needs. PLS managed to help hundreds of individuals avoid eviction or foreclosure, but the scale of the housing crisis in North Carolina, with over 149,000 eviction cases far exceeds the resources available. The limited data and legal support provided in Buncombe County show that, while eviction prevention programs can work effectively in small Democratic enclaves, they do not address the larger structural issues that persist across Republican-leaning regions in the state. These structural issues include limited access to legal aid, particularly in more rural or conservative areas, where tenant protections are often not as robust. This disparity leads to an imbalance in eviction rates, as tenants in Republican-leaning regions may lack the support and resources available in more progressive areas (Desmond et al., 2013). Furthermore, political resistance to stronger tenant protections in these regions exacerbates the problem, as policies that could safeguard vulnerable renters, such as rent control or more extensive eviction moratoriums, are less likely to be implemented in conservative areas (Gold, 2016). Consequently, while eviction prevention programs may succeed in areas with favorable political climates, they do not address the broader systemic issues that hinder housing stability in less progressive regions.

While Pisgah Legal Services focuses primarily on Buncombe County, Legal Aid of North Carolina (LANC) provides broader coverage across the state, offering critical support to tenants who might otherwise face displacement without stepping foot in a courtroom. In 2022, LANC handled 25,000 cases, of which approximately 10,000 were related to tenant disputes. The bulk of their clients were minorities, many of whom live in Republican-leaning regions where the

political and judicial climates are less favorable to tenants. In these areas, judges are often less inclined to side with tenants, and the local government may not prioritize tenant protection.

North Carolina's political climate plays a significant role in shaping how tenant disputes are handled. LANC operates in a state that is predominantly Republican, with conservative views often dominating the judicial interpretation of landlord-tenant disputes. While Buncombe County leans Democratic, much of the rest of the state does not. For example, areas like Wake County and Durham have stronger tenant protections due to their more progressive leadership, while rural counties, which are predominantly Republican, offer little in the way of tenant protections. The state's political makeup affects the outcomes of eviction cases, as tenants often have less access to legal aid, and landlords are more aggressive in pursuing evictions.

Furthermore, the sheer scale of the housing crisis overwhelms the efforts of organizations like LANC, despite their best efforts. While LANC resolved 25,000 cases in 2022, this represents less than 18% of the eviction cases filed across the state, which amounted to nearly 149,000 in the same year (Dukes, 2023). The lack of widespread right-to-counsel programs, combined with a conservative legal framework, means that many tenants go unrepresented in court, leading to a higher number of default judgments and evictions. In Republican-leaning states like North Carolina, where eviction prevention is not prioritized at the state level, organizations like LANC are essential, but they are also severely under-resourced compared to the need.

Limitations

One of the key takeaways from the analysis of North Carolina's eviction prevention efforts is the scarcity of eviction-focused non-profits in red states. States with predominantly Republican leadership often lack the infrastructure and funding necessary to provide widespread eviction prevention services, making it harder for organizations like PLS and LANC to meet the growing demand for tenant protection.

This scarcity skews the data, as fewer eviction cases receive legal representation in Republican states compared to more progressive regions. Without a statewide right to counsel or substantial government investment in housing justice programs, tenants are left to navigate the legal system on their own, which disproportionately impacts low-income individuals and minorities. Republican-led states, including North Carolina, often place a greater emphasis on property

rights and less on tenant protections, creating an environment where landlords are more likely to win eviction cases, and tenants are more vulnerable to displacement.

This lack of support leads to a disparity in eviction rates between red and blue states. In Democratic-leaning states like New York or California, where there are stronger tenant protections, eviction rates have been more effectively curbed through legal aid and state intervention. However, in Republican states like North Carolina, tenants have fewer resources to rely on, and eviction rates remain stubbornly high, particularly in rural areas where legal aid services are scarce. This structural inequality is a significant driver of housing instability and highlights the need for federal intervention or broader statewide initiatives that can ensure access to legal aid for all tenants, regardless of political climate.

Conclusion

The eviction prevention landscape in North Carolina is shaped by political realities that limit the availability and effectiveness of legal aid for tenants. While Pisgah Legal Services and Legal Aid NC are doing critical work, they are operating in a hostile environment where tenant protections are often an afterthought, particularly in Republican-leaning regions. The scarcity of non-profits dedicated to eviction prevention in red states skews the data and creates an uneven playing field for tenants. Without stronger statewide protections or increased funding for legal aid, eviction rates in North Carolina will likely continue to rise, leaving thousands of vulnerable families at risk of homelessness.

The case of North Carolina illustrates the broader challenges of addressing eviction in conservative states, where political and judicial systems are often stacked against tenants. While efforts in Democratic-leaning Buncombe County show that legal aid can make a difference, the state as a whole lacks the infrastructure necessary to ensure that all tenants have access to the legal support they need to prevent housing instability. By investing in indirect aid as a primary strategy, North Carolina demonstrates how non-profits and local governments can work together to reduce evictions in challenging political environments. This approach, while imperfect, offers a scalable model for other Republican-led states seeking to navigate the constraints of limited tenant protections and judicial conservatism.

Discussion

This study sought to evaluate the effectiveness of direct aid and indirect aid models in preventing eviction, with a focus on how political landscapes—both at the state and city levels—affect outcomes. The hypothesis proposed that direct aid would be most successful in Democratic areas where policies tend to be more supportive of vulnerable populations and where housing-related funding is more readily available. However, findings reveal that the success of direct aid is not solely dependent on political affiliation, but rather on a combination of judicial environments, procedural barriers, and the specific challenges tenants face in eviction proceedings. Expanding access to direct legal consultation, particularly in conservative or suburban areas, could ensure better housing stability across diverse political and judicial landscapes.

Key Findings

The analysis highlights that direct aid, particularly legal representation (e.g., Right to Counsel initiatives), tends to be more effective in cities with liberal judicial systems that support tenant-friendly policies. In Philadelphia, where the RTC program provides free legal representation, tenants experienced favorable outcomes, such as settlement agreements or case withdrawals, at much higher rates than those without representation. However, the study also revealed that direct aid can be effective in conservative areas as well, as demonstrated by the potential for success in Rockford, a region that has not typically prioritized direct legal consultation but could benefit greatly from expanded services.

Conversely, indirect aid programs such as mediation or rental assistance are beneficial in addressing certain barriers but do not fully address the legal hurdles tenants face. These programs are often seen in more conservative regions or in areas where the judicial system is less tenant-friendly. In Rockford, for example, high eviction rates persist despite the existence of such programs, pointing to the need for more comprehensive legal intervention to address the root causes of eviction.

The results indicate that direct legal consultation is an effective eviction prevention strategy, regardless of a city's political leaning. For instance, Chicago, a predominantly Democratic city, had similar success rates in preventing evictions as Rockford, which leans conservative. Cities with dedicated non-profits offering direct legal consultation, such as Philadelphia, showed

higher tenant success rates compared to areas relying on indirect services, as observed in Reading. Furthermore, suburban and rural areas with conservative leanings demonstrated untapped potential for implementing direct consultation models.

Another significant finding is the urban-centric focus of most eviction prevention programs. Non-profit legal services typically concentrate on cities with stronger tenant protections, overlooking suburban and rural areas where eviction rates are rising. While direct legal services have been shown to be more effective in urban settings, Rockford and other suburban areas present opportunities for expanding these services. By focusing on regions where eviction risks are compounded by access barriers—such as difficult court procedures and lack of tenant education—non-profits can help broaden the scope of eviction prevention efforts.

Moreover, as eviction rates are increasingly correlated with immigrant population growth, expanding direct legal services into suburban areas can help mitigate the disproportionately high impact evictions have on immigrant communities.

Implications for Models

We explored two models: direct aid and indirect aid. Direct is aid that includes interventions like rental payment support or legal representation aimed at preventing eviction before it occurs, Indirect is aid that involves policies such as eviction moratoriums or self-help resources that offer tenants temporary relief without direct financial assistance or legal representation. We found that these models are effective in very different contexts.

Direct aid is most effective in urban areas with progressive judicial systems and supportive policies. Legal consultation and representation provide tenants with tools to challenge evictions and negotiate favorable settlements, especially when procedural barriers to housing access exist (Desmond et al., 2013). However, direct aid's success depends on access to legal representation and judicial support. For example, Philadelphia's RTC program has proven effective due to its strong integration with judicial support and a proactive legal framework.

Indirect aid (such as mediation programs or financial assistance), while showing some reductions in tenant evictions, often lacks the direct impact on eviction cases seen in direct legal aid. These programs can mitigate some housing instability by offering resources to both tenants and landlords but fall short in providing tenants with the legal resources needed to

prevent eviction orders from being enforced. Reading’s Eviction Diversion Program, for instance, saw a 20% increase in favorable settlements, but it didn’t match the outcomes seen in Philadelphia, where direct legal intervention provided more robust protections for tenants.

Table: Synthesis of Findings by Political Environment

State Political Leaning	City Judicial Leaning	Direct Aid Success Rate	Key Challenges
Liberal	Liberal	High (e.g., Philadelphia’s RTC)	Strong judicial support, but need for comprehensive outreach to underserved areas
Liberal	Conservative	Moderate to Low (e.g., Reading)	Lack of tenant-friendly judicial support; need for more education and legal access
Moderate	Liberal	Moderate	Strong support for tenants, but may still lack full funding or resources
Moderate	Conservative	Low to Moderate (e.g., Rockford)	High eviction rates; procedural barriers and limited legal access
Conservative	Conservative	Low	Limited tenant protections, high barriers to legal access, need for education and outreach

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that direct legal consultation is a highly effective strategy for preventing evictions and transcending political affiliations or judicial leanings. While urban areas with tenant-friendly judicial systems, such as Philadelphia, showcase the highest success rates, the findings highlight significant untapped potential in suburban and rural regions. These areas, often overlooked by non-profits, face unique barriers, including procedural challenges and limited access to legal resources, as seen in Rockford.

The research underscores the importance of tailoring eviction prevention efforts to local

contexts. Conservative or suburban areas, where procedural hurdles and limited tenant protections prevail, present opportunities to expand direct legal consultation services. Moreover, the growing correlation between eviction rates and immigrant population growth calls for targeted interventions to address systemic disparities and ensure housing stability for marginalized groups.

Future research should delve deeper into the factors influencing the scalability of direct legal aid in underrepresented regions. Investigating partnerships with local governments, community organizations, and pro bono networks could reveal innovative strategies to bridge service gaps. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the long-term impact of expanded legal aid on housing stability and mobility, particularly in immigrant and low-income communities, are crucial for building a more equitable housing system.

By broadening the reach of direct legal services to encompass diverse geographies and populations, non-profits and policymakers can address the root causes of housing instability. This holistic approach will not only prevent evictions but also promote long-term social and economic equity nationwide.

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