



Recommendations for creating a local eviction prevention system

In spring 2021, The Pittsburgh Foundation published the report, [Eviction in Allegheny County: a mixed-methods study](https://pittsburghfoundation.org/evictionreport). The report offers recommendations for how a local eviction prevention system could be created for our region. Those recommendations are listed in an abbreviated fashion here. The full report is available on the Foundation's website, <https://pittsburghfoundation.org/evictionreport>.

1. Work with partners to create coordinated eviction prevention/diversion/housing stabilization programs in Allegheny County. The core elements to prevent evictions and potential homelessness should include:

- **Coordinating publicly funded rental-assistance** that is humanizing and respectful, and available quickly to tenants at all stages of the eviction process, including pre-filing, particularly if a mediation settlement is reached; at the Magisterial District Court hearing; upon appeal of the Judge's ruling; and before the landlord takes possession of the apartment. Also required is developing uniform eligibility standards for all rental assistance programs.
- **Encouraging landlord-tenant mediation** options to assist in early intervention and resolution of issues before an eviction filing occurs.
- **Establishing and evaluating a legal representation program for tenants facing eviction.** Include coordination of legal representation, mediation, a tenant hotline for accessing resources, a Magisterial District Court help center, community trainings and educational materials created in collaboration with legal aid organizations *pro bono* attorneys from the law schools.
- **Offering resource navigation, education and incentives for landlords and tenants. This includes:**
 - Supporting community mediation programs and training community members to help divert the eviction process away from the courts.

- Evaluating eviction prevention efforts during COVID-19 to see which are the most effective in sharing eviction prevention resources with low-income tenants and the providers who serve them.
- Supporting efforts to encourage landlords and tenants to seek assistance before a problem arises that might cause an eviction filing. This includes providing information on housing, utility and rental assistance programs that help tenants navigate crises.
- Supporting efforts by local government to develop housing anti-discrimination policies and training, including programs that increase understanding of anti-discrimination protections and understanding important clauses in leases.
- Supporting and expanding the Allegheny County Department of Human Services' Landlord Risk Mitigation Fund and encouraging landlords to apply for loans through the Urban Redevelopment Authority's Small Landlord Fund.

2. Increase the supply of affordable housing units by advocating for increased public funding to create more units of affordable housing, focusing on rehabilitating existing housing stock rather than building new units.



3. Revise/evaluate/reform court policies and procedures to reduce the impact of evictions on the most vulnerable populations. This includes:

- Creating a uniform eviction filing system and standard operating procedures that integrate demographic information and details on actual evictions.
- Eliminating court fees and fines or advocating for a sliding scale for court costs.
- Sealing and expunging court records of eviction filings from tenants' records unless the landlord retakes possession of the property.

4. Reform public housing administrative processes and procedures, including the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Assess and document how the Housing Choice Voucher Program is carried out in Allegheny County, the city of Pittsburgh and McKeesport to identify best practices and assess how these practices are impacting eviction by housing authorities and the top five private landlords who use vouchers. In addition to making policies and procedures transparent, areas to explore include:

- Piloting local, evidence-based strategies that make it easier for tenants to identify affordable and voucher-accepting units and landlords.
- Improving communication by streamlining the eviction warning and notification system by collecting emergency contacts to notify when a tenant is at risk of eviction, making the process less stigmatizing and providing receipts for monthly rent payment in real-time.

- Making it easier for tenants to report income changes, requiring only annual income recertifications, and adopting an online reporting system for rapid system response and adjustments.
- Reforming and regulating eviction policies to align with those used in tax credit-financed units.

5. Advocate for procedural, policy and legislative changes to make eviction policies fairer and more equitable. This includes:

- Changing the Landlord and Tenant Act to eliminate the waiver clause for the "notice to quit" in private leases.
- Endorsing and proposing bills that forbid discrimination against tenants based on source of income to prevent landlords from refusing to rent to people with housing vouchers.
- Advancing eviction sealing and expungement to distinguish between eviction filings and actual orders of possession/evictions and to prevent discrimination by landlords against people who have been evicted previously.
- Advocating for increased state funding for legal representation at the Magisterial District Court level and rental assistance to prevent evictions.
- Supporting a statewide analysis on the impact of eviction-related fees and fines on low-income families.

For more information on The Pittsburgh Foundation's work in affordable housing and eviction prevention, please visit www.pittsburghfoundation.org.