

# THE HOUSING JUSTICE ALLIANCE

## THE INNOVATION MISSION

Fighting poverty with big ideas.

### INVESTING IN THE COMMUNITY BY PROVIDING TENANTS THE RIGHT TO LEGAL COUNSEL

Picture a young mom living in poverty, working hard to make ends meet to provide for her family, to keep them healthy and safe. Now, imagine just ONE thing goes wrong, and that one thing changes the course of her life — her landlord files an eviction. **She can't**



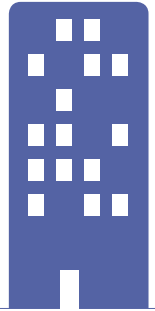
**9-10K EVICTIONS** ARE FILED EVERY YEAR IN CLEVELAND.

**2% OF TENANTS** HAVE LEGAL REPRESENTATION IN EVICTION CASES.



**afford to hire a lawyer to defend her family; she has no voice, no right to counsel. Standing before the judge, landlords are usually represented by counsel, and tenants almost always are not. The trial lasts less than five minutes and most tenants lose.**

MORE THAN **1/2** OF ALL TENANTS DO NOT SHOW UP IN COURT.



TENANT VS. LANDLORD REPRESENTATION

### Consequences of evictions

- Employment loss (missed work due to attending trial and moving)
- Health issues (greater hospitalizations, depression, other illnesses)
- Increased use of all social service systems (homelessness)
- Less stable communities
- School instability (lower achievement and higher drop outs for children in school)
- Barriers to future housing with an eviction on record

*"You have the right to an attorney, if you can't afford an attorney one will be appointed to you."*

Everyone is familiar with Miranda rights. But, Miranda rights only apply in criminal cases, NOT civil cases. Eviction cases are civil cases. The stakes are extremely high.

**PHASE 1 GOAL:** Increase legal representation for tenants to **10%** and show that right to counsel, where all tenants have the opportunity to be represented, will positively impact Cleveland in the areas of **HEALTH, EDUCATION & ECONOMIC OUTCOMES.**

**THE END GOAL:** Establish a right to counsel for **ALL** Cleveland low-income tenants.

## Why a right to counsel?

Just a few years ago in New York City, the rate of legal representation in housing cases was similar to Cleveland at about 1%. In the summer of 2017, New York City became the first U.S. city to pass historic "right to counsel" legislation, guaranteeing tenants under 200% of poverty guidelines facing eviction the right to have legal representation.



NEW YORK CITY EVICTIONS  
HAVE DROPPED **34%**  
AND THE CITY IS EXPECTED TO  
SAVE **\$320 MILLION**  
BECAUSE OF AN INCREASE IN  
TENANT REPRESENTATION IN  
EVICTION CASES.

**84%** OF NYC TENANTS  
REPRESENTED AVOIDED  
DISPLACEMENT.

## What can a lawyer do?

- Remove barriers to employment and economic opportunity:  
That young mother might be able to stay out of the shelter system, keep her job, and keep her children in school.
- Improve housing conditions.
- Reduce housing instability, evictions and homelessness.
- Level the playing field for tenants and create a more efficient judicial system.

## The Approach: Phase 1

Increase legal  
representation  
to 10%

Eviction  
diversion

Community  
outreach

Evaluation

## Project Timeline

### 2018

- Established an advisory committee to garner community support and provide guidance
- Site visits (New York & D.C.)
- Commissioned a research study with Case Western Reserve University: "Estimating the Downstream Costs of Evictions on Homelessness and Human Services"
- Branding & promo video: [www.housingjusticealliance.org](http://www.housingjusticealliance.org)
- Eviction sealing advocacy to ensure evictions do not pose barriers to future housing.
- Fundraising
- Program design

### 2019-2023

- Release research study
- Fundraising
- Launch a three year "Phase I" project with increased legal representation in Cleveland, aiming to increase the legal representation of tenants in housing court to 10%
- Collect data and complete an evaluation of "Phase I"
- Continue advocacy to support a full right to counsel

The Housing Justice Alliance will be a Legal Aid Program: Legal Aid's mission is to secure justice and resolve fundamental problems for those who are low income and vulnerable by providing high quality legal services and working for systemic solutions.

Founded in 1905, Legal Aid is the only nonprofit specifically addressing the civil legal needs of Northeast Ohio's poor, marginalized and disenfranchised. With more than a century of expertise in poverty law and housing advocacy, Legal Aid is poised to halt the cascade of consequences that inevitably flow from eviction and homelessness. [www.lasclev.org](http://www.lasclev.org)

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The  
Legal Aid Society  
of Cleveland  
Since 1905

Fellow of The Innovation Mission, an initiative  
of the Sisters of Charity Foundation of Cleveland