

Balancing the Scales:

Summary Findings and Recommendations
from LVJI's Study of Landlord – Tenant
cases in Lehigh County



**LEHIGH VALLEY
JUSTICE INSTITUTE**

Findings

1. Tenants win just 0.9% of all cases.
2. Tenants with attorneys had a 1200% better chance of winning.
3. Racial makeup has a stronger relationship to tenant losses than income.

Recommendations

1. Provide tenants with resource information and some form of legal representation.
2. Institute a settlement mediation program with legal advisement.
3. Implementation of Implicit Bias Awareness programs could assist in reducing racial disparities in this and other aspects of the justice system.

The Numbers in Human Terms

Our report “Legal Landscape for Lehigh County Renters” details the data analysis which supports our findings and recommendations. But, what do these numbers mean in human terms, and for all of us as a society?

Our Lehigh Valley is a microcosm of the United States, in the sense that it is representative of the racial and socioeconomic diversity that is reflective of our nation. As our study demonstrates, the inequity in Landlord/Tenant outcomes in Lehigh County are both stark and unsettling. Families won a disproportionate amount of **only .9%** of these cases. While it may be more comfortable for some to view these issues through rose-colored glasses, it’s essential that these problems be addressed; as like a ripple effect in a pond, what affects one individual then affects a family, then a neighborhood, then a city and so on.

What does all this mean from a societal and socioeconomic lens? Eviction contributes to the destabilization of communities in many forms and the social and economic implications of these findings have effects on us all.

From a societal standpoint, evictions can be devastating to Lehigh County Residents. Evictions lead to familial housing instability as well as exacerbate homelessness. And, as it's so often households with children who are facing eviction, housing instability can be devastating to a child's developing mind and mental and emotional maturation. Evictions lead to depression, development of mental health issues, and contribute towards behavioral and educational concerns. I ask us all, what type of world outlook is cultivated in our children when their homes and lives are uprooted?

Economically, high rates of evictions negatively impact communities in a plethora of ways. First, it contributes to tax increases: High rates of eviction contribute to the exacerbation of homelessness and housing instability. This inevitably creates further demand for social relief programs, which increases taxes as well as depletes city and county funds for other issues. Additionally, high rates of evictions contribute to housing blight in our communities: Constant turnover of tenants caused by eviction inevitably leads to wear and tear on houses and leads to property and building deterioration. As these properties lose economic support, neighborhoods falling into disrepair negatively affect other neighborhoods around them, resulting in urban decay. All of these act as contributing factors, lowering property values and belaboring local economies.

What do these quantified calculations mean in real-life situations, for definitively real men, women, and children? These findings reflect systemic and intrinsic inequities in our system. They pinpoint undeniable racial disparities that continue to persist in our policies and institutions. Ultimately, they negatively affect scores of people and families after years of housing and social inequities. We implore everyone to continue to work for policies that promote a "fair and just" society that we all equally wish to cultivate.

References

<https://digital.lib.washington.edu/researchworks/handle/1773/40705>

<https://www.stlouisfed.org/open-vault/2021/march/why-eviction-matters-consequences-individuals-families#:~:text=When%20a%20family%20is%20evicted,result%20in%20additional%20fees%20C%20etc>

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/as-pandemic-eviction-moratorium-ends-households-with-children-face-greater-risk-of-homelessness>

This summary is authored by Lehigh Valley Justice Institute researcher Nicole Levy. The full report, created by LVJI, can be found at www.LVJI.org. Please contact LVJI Executive Director Joseph Welsh for further information at joewelsh@lvji.org.

LVJI is an independent, nonpartisan research, policy, and advocacy organization working toward a re-imagined justice system which is equitable and fair for all communities.