

Unjust Outcomes in Lehigh Valley Landlord/Tenant Cases

A Comparative Report

Summary of Findings:

1. Tenants won just 0.9% of cases in Lehigh County and 1.7% of cases in Northampton County.
2. Having lawyers raised the proportions of tenant-won cases by 1200% and 470% in Lehigh and Northampton Counties, but only 1.3% and 2.1% of cases respectively had tenant lawyers involved. Tenants in wealthier districts were more likely to secure a lawyer.
3. In Lehigh County, the district's racial makeup was a better predictor of the proportion of cases decided in favor of the tenant than the district's income was. This correlation was not found in Northampton County.
4. Litigated tenants in 11 of 14 Northampton County districts and 8 of 14 Lehigh County districts had an average monthly rent greater than 30% of their district's per capita income, indicating rent burdening.

Recommendations:

1. Provide tenants with information on representation and rental assistance programs before their hearing to help them navigate the complex process.
2. Provide landlords with information on rental assistance programs as an alternative to filing an eviction case.
3. Institute settlement mediation programs to focus on equitable agreements which avoid and prevent evictions.
4. Perform a cost/benefit analysis deriving the most practical way to provide legal services to unrepresented tenants.

LEHIGH VALLEY JUSTICE INSTITUTE

This summary was created by Victoria Wrigley, M.S., data scientist and researcher for LVJI, on September 14, 2022.

