

2024 Evaluation Executive Summary Right to Counsel – Cleveland



In its fourth full year of implementation, Cleveland’s Eviction Right to Counsel (RTC-C) continues to demonstrate impact for high-risk families renting in Cleveland, actionable insights into the housing rental market, and outsized public economic and fiscal benefits. Cleveland Legal Aid also implemented several recommended changes to improve and demonstrate program impact.

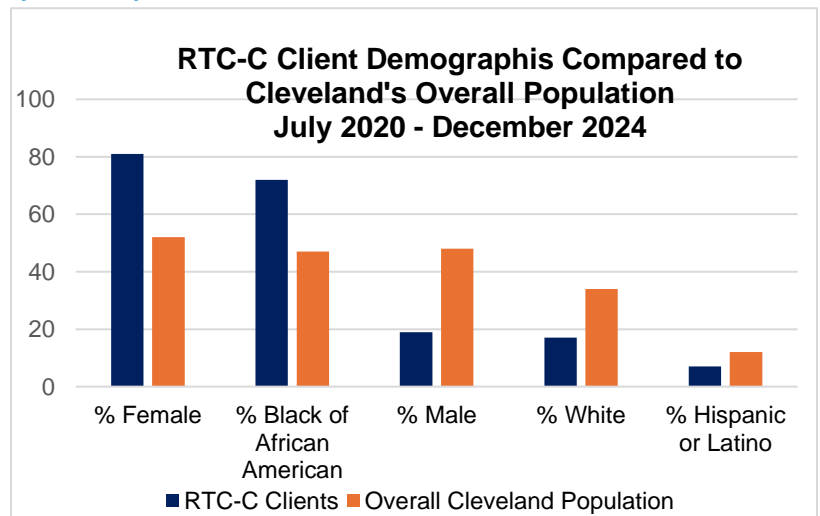
RTC-C Prevents Disruptive Displacement and Helps Client Achieve Their Goals

- In 2024, Cleveland Legal Aid assisted 3,034 Cleveland residents in 1,051 eviction RTC-C cases.
- In 2024, approximately 90% of RTC-C clients received extensive service, and approximately 10% received counsel and advice. Clients’ five most frequently cited goals focus on housing and economic stability. Clients may have more than one goal per case.
- Some changes in the frequency of goals being achieved is associated with decreased availability or access to rent assistance. If a client is unable to achieve their stated goal, Cleveland Legal Aid attorneys often assist in securing other resolutions to reduce disruptive displacement.

Goal Metrics for RTC-C Clients from January through December 2024				
Client Goal	Frequency Goal Was Achieved	# of RTC-C Clients with Goal ⁱ	# of RTC-C Clients with Goal Achieved	% of RTC-C Clients with Goal ⁱⁱ
Prevent eviction or involuntary move	80%	992	792	94%
Secure 30+ days to move	86%	585	506	56%
Secure rent assistance	63%	221	139	21%
Mitigate damages	95%	75	71	7%
Secure monetary relief	92%	48	44	5%

RTC-C Assists Clients Who Disproportionately Identify as Female and Black

- Since it began in July 2020, RTC-C has assisted more than 4,500 eligible Cleveland tenant households.
- RTC-C clients are disproportionately female and Black or African American compared to Cleveland’s overall population.



2024 Evaluation Executive Summary *Continued*



RTC-C Identifies and Responds to Poor Housing Conditions

- An overwhelming majority of RTC-C clients continue to indicate the presence of defective conditions in their homes. In 2024, approximately 80% of all RTC-C clients indicated they had defective conditions in their homes, and approximately 54% of RTC-C clients who indicated the presence of defective conditions in their home said they wanted to move.
- This is the first time since 2021 that RTC-C clients who indicated the presence of defective conditions in their home were more likely to want to move than stay.

RTC-C Leverages Rent Assistance, When Available

- RTC-C attorneys guide clients through a patchwork of rent assistance programs that vary substantially in their processes for application and the disbursement of their funding.
- Attorneys representing tenants in eviction proceedings note the lack of sufficient rent assistance, particularly for tenants without legal defenses, where rents are increasing faster than wages, and where vacancy rates are low, like in Cleveland.
- Narrowing eligibility for rental assistance results in rent assistance being deployed as a response to potential imminent homelessness or housing instability as a result of eviction rather than a preventative resource that could be leveraged to avoid an eviction filing.

RTC-C Creates Public Economic and Fiscal Benefits

- Stout estimates that Cleveland and Cuyahoga County likely realized economic and fiscal benefits of approximately \$35.1 million from July 1, 2020 through December 31, 2024. During the same period, the total expenses associated with RTC-C were \$14.3 millionⁱⁱⁱ, resulting in an estimated return on investment of approximately \$2.46 for each dollar invested in RTC-C.

RTC-C Increases Access to Justice

- In prior independent evaluations, Stout estimated that Cleveland Legal Aid likely represented between 60% and 80% of all households in Cleveland eligible for RTC-C in 2021 and 2022.
- Overall, the percentage of all tenants who are represented in landlord-tenant proceedings in Cleveland has increased from approximately 2% to 3% before RTC-C to approximately 16% since RTC-C was implemented.^{iv} Increases in tenant representation is attributable to RTC-C.

Progress on 2023 Recommendations.

- Stout's 2023 independent evaluation of RTC-C included 10 recommendations for continuing to demonstrate the impact of RTC-C and to deepen and refine analyses related to Cleveland's eviction ecosystem. Cleveland Legal Aid has completed or made progress on all recommendations, paving the way for continued program refinement and impact.

ⁱ Clients can have more than 1 goal for their case.

ⁱⁱ Total will be greater than 100% because clients can have more than 1 goal for their case.

ⁱⁱⁱ The current annual appropriation for RTC-C is \$750,000, less than one quarter of Cleveland Legal Aid's estimated cost of operating RTC-C in 2024. Cleveland Legal Aid has used a variety of other funding sources, including United Way's direct support, grants from the City of Cleveland and Cuyahoga County, and other sources of support to supplement this annual appropriation.

^{iv} Stout appreciates the Legal Services Corporation's partnership and willingness to share the court docket data it is collecting. Analyses of court docket data were enabled by LSC's data collection processes.