

Renters avoid evictions when they have a lawyer, MD report states

Ian Round//January 24, 2025//

It pays for the state to prevent homelessness, according to a new report on Maryland's program that offers lawyers to renters facing eviction.

Maryland's Access to Counsel in Evictions program, created in 2021, served about 21,000 residents, including 9,100 children, in fiscal year 2024, [the state-commissioned report, published this month by Stout Risius Ross](#), states. It prevented thousands of evictions and won renters time to secure new housing.

About three-quarters of the renters represented by the ACE program were able to stay in their home. Of the 87% of renters who wanted to stay in their home, 88% were able to do so.

The program serves households at or below half of the state's median income. About 73% of clients in the program were Black; about the same percentage were women. More than a third of tenants said they would have nowhere to go if they were evicted.

"ACE is not only about keeping families housed and communities stable; it is about ensuring that justice is accessible to all Marylanders, regardless of race, gender, or income," Reena Shah, chair of the ACE Task Force and executive director of the Maryland Access to Justice Commission, said in a press release. "This program is a national model on how to implement humane, but also cost-effective solutions."

Renters facing eviction rarely have a lawyer, but landlords almost always do.

"ACE attorneys significantly leveled the playing field in eviction proceedings," the press release stated.

As Gov. Wes Moore and the General Assembly figure out how to plug a \$3 billion budget hole during the legislative session with a combination of taxes and programmatic cuts, the report emphasizes the economic impact reaped by the state by offering lawyers to people facing eviction.

It estimates that for each dollar spent on the program, the state realized an economic impact of a few cents more than \$3, for a total of about \$46.7 million in a year.

The biggest chunk of that estimated economic benefit is due to preventing homelessness. Stout estimated that about 2,229 households avoided homelessness because they had a lawyer, and therefore didn't have to use emergency shelters, supportive housing or other housing safety-net resources.

State spending on Medicaid, unemployment and the foster care system was lower than it would have been if the residents were evicted, the report states. It also says more than 200 households would have left Maryland if they had been forced to move.

But many of the benefits of eviction prevention cannot be calculated, and the report says its "estimate of fiscal impact is likely significantly understated." It notes juvenile justice and child welfare costs, the impact of eviction on credit scores, law enforcement, and family and neighborhood instability.

"While homelessness may not always be experienced immediately following an eviction, eviction remains a leading cause of homelessness," the report states.

Among the organizations providing lawyers through the program are CASA, Disability Rights Maryland, the Homeless Persons Representation Project, Maryland Legal Aid, Public Justice Center and the University of Maryland School of Law.

Many states and cities have funded legal help for renters in recent years following similar research showing the costs of homelessness and the value of preventing it.

Baltimore Mayor Brandon Scott, for example, sponsored a bill to give renters the right to counsel in 2020, when he was City Council president. According to the Public Justice Center, Baltimore was the seventh jurisdiction in the country to enact a right-to-counsel law for eviction.

Meanwhile, lawmakers are considering legislation this session requiring landlords demonstrate "just cause" to evict renters, in an effort to prevent arbitrary and wrongful evictions. Progressives have introduced the bill at least eight times, according to Maryland Matters, but it hasn't become law amid pushback from property managers and developers.