



CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE

To be a place where everyone thrives

Human Rights Commission
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December 23, 2024

Dear Mayor Wade and City Councilors,

In [April](#) and [August](#) 2021, we wrote to you in support of an effort to provide universal counsel to tenants in eviction proceedings. We were pleased that City Council recognized this was an important means of protecting tenants and allocated funds toward this effort.

However, as we understand it, the funding allocated was temporary COVID funding and was never sufficient to provide coverage for all, or even most, tenants in eviction proceedings. Having a lawyer changes matters dramatically for tenants. Most landlords have lawyers, but the research also reflects that landlords do not need representation to prevail in court in eviction cases.¹ But tenants absolutely do. Tenants are significantly – up to 19 times – more likely to avoid eviction if they have legal representation.²

Eviction has lasting economic consequences for families. An eviction makes it dramatically harder [to find housing in the future](#). The children of families who face evictions are far more likely to be forced to live in substandard housing, which [can imperil the health of children](#) and other family members. Families with children are [twice as likely to face eviction](#) than families without children.

Nationally, 90 percent of landlords are represented by legal counsel in evictions, but fewer than 10 percent of tenants have representation. Black women are [1.4 times more likely](#) to be served an eviction notice across all renter groups. This issue disproportionately affects people of color, and thus, the Human Rights Commission considers this an urgent matter of racial justice that our City must confront.

As of 2023, three states and 15 cities nationwide established right-to-counsel policies and programs. Two cost-benefit analyses in [New York](#) and [Pennsylvania](#) of right-to-counsel programs found that the programs saved localities money while preventing evictions and displacement of families. In September 2024, Richmond passed a resolution and a recent

¹ Ericka Petersen, *Building a House for Gideon: The Right to Counsel in Evictions*, 16 Stan. J. C.R. & C.L. 63, 85 (2020).

² *Id.*

budget allocation of \$500,000 to [create a pilot program](#) to serve an expected 450 tenants facing eviction.

Preventing unnecessary evictions is good for tenants and good for our community. As one scholar [stated](#): “a right to counsel in eviction proceedings means tenants, and society at large are more likely to avoid persistent homelessness, drains on material and emotional wellbeing, increased emergency room use, and increased risk of mental health hospitalization.”

Eviction is a gender justice issue, a racial justice issue, an economic justice issue, a children’s rights issue, and a civil liberties issue. The research on right-to-counsel programs demonstrates that it prevents the serious harms of eviction, gives families a fighting chance to stay in their homes and communities, and is a budgetary gain for localities. Ensuring a right to counsel for renters in eviction proceedings is vital to address systemic inequity and our nation’s inexcusable failure to invest in affordable housing.

Thank you for your service to our community and for your attention to these issues. Please contact the Human Rights Commission if you have questions or would like to discuss this topic further.

Sincerely,

Ernest S. Chambers

Ernest S. Chambers
Chair
Human Rights Commission