



Help Center

Pavan V. Parikh, Hamilton County Clerk of Courts

November 1, 2023

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL ONLY (meeka.owens@cincinnati-oh.gov)

Meeka Owens, Council Member
Cincinnati City Council

RE: Access to Counsel Initiative

Dear Council Member Owens:

I am proud to write this letter in support of the Access to Counsel initiative. The Clerk of Courts Help Center of Hamilton County sees significant numbers of people every day that need information and advice on legal issues that are the most common to Cincinnatians. Unfortunately, one of the most prevalent and pressing issues that we encounter is eviction. Tenants receive eviction complaints in the mail with instructions to attend court in a very short amount of time. When the tenant comes to court unrepresented, they encounter an incredibly fast process that normally ends with the landlord being granted a writ of restitution. This puts the tenant on a path to being homeless and does nothing to make the landlord whole on the amount of rent that is behind.

The Access to Counsel initiative will work to provide funding to landlords for tenants that have fallen behind on their rent. Access to Counsel will also provide attorney representation through Legal Aid for tenants that have viable defenses to the landlord's claims. I know that this program will provide assistance to people that need help beyond what we can provide at the Help Center. This also will create a new source of funding that we can direct both landlords and tenants to access in their time of need.

I am happy to provide any additional information that would be helpful to confirm how Access to Counsel would further the Help Center's mission of providing access to justice to every Cincinnatians. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nick Zingarelli
Director and Chief Attorney
Clerk of Courts Help Center of Hamilton County



INTERACT FOR HEALTH

November 27, 2023

Dear Cincinnati City Council,

Interact for Health is grateful for the City of Cincinnati's efforts to support tenants and to address the housing burden in our community. We have participated in Councilmember Meeka Owens Eviction Prevention working group and recognize the critical importance of supporting individuals and families who are housing cost-burdened and at risk for eviction. As an organization, we strive to ensure people in our region have a just opportunity to live their healthiest lives. Supporting access to safe, affordable, stable housing is core to improving the health of our community.

As you may be aware, CityHealth is a national initiative of the de Beaumont Foundation and Kaiser Permanente that supports evidence-based municipal policy solutions that help people live longer, better lives in vibrant, prosperous communities. One of the twelve evidence-based policies that CityHealth promotes is legal support for renters and access to counsel initiatives. These policies have a proven effect on reducing evictions and homelessness - and on promoting health. Specifically, [data from CityHealth](#) indicates:

- **Eviction filings dropped by as much as 30%** in cities with legal support for renters—and **over 80% of people who obtained legal support were able to remain in their homes.**
- Individuals with legal representation were **4x more likely to avoid homelessness.**
- **Avoiding evictions promotes better health**, as eviction is linked to serious negative physical and mental health outcomes, including depression and suicidal thoughts.

Policies such as the Tenants Bill of Rights and Legal Support for Renters help to tackle root causes and support those experiencing health inequities. While landlords generally have legal counsel, over 90% of tenants do not. Typically, those most at risk of eviction are low-income individuals, people of color, women, and families with children. Eviction can lead to homelessness or unstable housing which is associated with poorer health outcomes such as depression, stress-related illness, substance use disorder, and increased emergency department use.

We appreciate the City of Cincinnati's efforts to improve access to safe, affordable and stable housing – and we look forward to our continued collaboration in addressing these issues.

Sincerely,

Kate Schroder
President and CEO
Interact for Health

November 9, 2023

**400 Pike Street
Unit 820
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202**

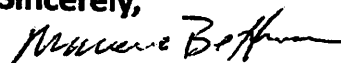
To: Cincinnati City Council

I would like to voice my support for the Access to Counsel Ordinance and all overarching pieces of legislation that have been passed over the last few months by City Council related to the Tenants' Bill of Rights. As chair of the Advisory Committee of the Clerk of Courts Help Center for Hamilton County, I especially appreciate the work of Councilmember Owens on eviction prevention. Her bi-weekly conversations have helped community organizations, local government, realtor associations, and all those who are worried about the eviction crisis help identify solutions for Cincinnati.

Under the leadership of Councilmember Owens, Access to Counsel is before Council for a vote. I strongly encourage all council members to vote yes on this ordinance so that those who are experiencing eviction get proper legal assistance in their eviction cases. While landlords usually have legal counsel at these hearings, over 90 percent of tenants do not. This program will help ensure that when these evictions go to court the tenant is not at a legal disadvantage.

While I see access to counsel as an important first step, I also strongly believe access to counsel should be a right, not just an access. I hope the city continues to move in this direction. I also strongly favor mediation in eviction cases and appreciate Councilmember Owens' interest in this initiative. Hopefully, if this initiative comes to fruition, the city will support this as well.

Sincerely,



Marianna Bettman

Retired law professor

November 9, 2023

**DONALD P. KLEKAMP
COMMUNITY LAW
CENTER BUILDING**

**215 East Ninth Street
Suite 500
Cincinnati, Ohio
45202**

Telephone
(513) 241-9400
(800) 582-2682
Facsimile
(513) 241-0047

Dear Cincinnati City Council:

The Legal Aid Society of Southwest Ohio, LLC strongly supports the Access to Counsel ordinance and the other tenant protections related to the Tenants Bill of Rights that have been passed by City Council and supported by Mayor Pureval over the last few months. Legal Aid has worked closely over the past few years in the Eviction Prevention working group that was created by then Councilmember Greg Landsman and has now been assumed by Councilmember Meeka Owens. Our bi-weekly conversations have helped community organizations, local government, relator associations, and all those who are worried about the eviction crisis help identify solutions for Cincinnati.

Stable housing is the foundation for the well-being of all families, and the biggest threat to stable housing felt by low-income people is eviction. Evictions destabilize families, create trauma, and exacerbate poverty. Evictions asymmetrically affect the poorest neighborhoods and have an even more disproportionate impact on Black female-headed households and communities of color. A single eviction on a person's record makes it harder to find safe, affordable housing in the future. As Matthew Desmond stated in his Pulitzer Prize winning book *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*:

“Eviction is a cause, not just a condition, of poverty.”

Eviction prevention is key to maintaining stable housing in our communities. Pre-Covid, eviction filings in Hamilton County were more than 12,000 per year. Unfortunately, post-Covid filings have nearly returned to that level. While most landlords have attorneys in eviction hearings, fewer than 3% of tenants are represented by an attorney in eviction court. Of the tenants who go to eviction court without representation, the vast majority lose and are evicted, often in hearings that last less than 1 minute.

Legal Aid's Eviction Prevention model has proven to be effective in keeping families stably housed. We combine representation in the eviction hearing with emergency rental assistance funds to prevent families from losing their homes. Our Eviction Prevention model is a fair and cost effective way to keep tenants in their homes, while making landlords whole.

Our housing attorneys prevented 1,242 evictions in Southwest Ohio in 2022, more than triple the amount of evictions prevented annually pre-Covid. We collaborated with Community Action Agencies, Departments of Job and Family Services, and faith based

LEGAL SERVICES IN

Brown County
Butler County
Clermont County
Clinton County
Hamilton County
Highland County
Warren County



organizations like St. Vincent de Paul, to recover more than \$5.7 million in emergency rental assistance funds to keep families safe in their homes.

The Eviction Prevention model has proven to be cost effective. A few hundred or few thousand dollars in rental assistance helps a family through an emergency crisis, keeps them in their homes, keeps adults in their jobs, and keeps kids in school. Evicting a family forces them to double up with family and friends, or into an already overburdened shelter system, or worst case, makes them homeless. Rehousing someone at this point is far more expensive than preventing the eviction in the first place. Providing emergency rental assistance to families facing emergencies is not just the moral and right thing to do, it is cost-effective and responsible public policy.

As CARES Act funding dries up, it is crucial for the City of Cincinnati to find additional sources to fund eviction prevention. Under the leadership of Mayor Pureval and Councilmember Owens, Access to Counsel is before Council for a vote. We strongly encourage you to vote for this ordinance so that those who are experiencing eviction get proper legal assistance through their eviction proceeding. This program will help ensure that when these evictions go to court that the tenant is not at a legal disadvantage. We fully support the growth of legal assistance for tenants in Cincinnati and ask for you to vote **YES** on the Access to Counsel Ordinance.

Sincerely,



Nicholas J. DiNardo
Attorney at Law
513.362.2816
ndinardo@lascinti.org



Human Services Chamber of Hamilton County

Cincinnati City Council:

The 100-member Human Services Chamber of Hamilton County endorses CM Meeka Owens' ordinance for access to counsel in eviction cases.

As you may know, our three priority areas are local government funding, issues related to immigrants and refugees, and housing. We feel that CM Owens' ordinance is a great first step to ensuring people can stay in their homes.

Our Public Policy Committee recommended that our Board of Directors endorse this ordinance and they did. Notably, many of the community partners who will help make this happen are also our members.

We urge you to pass this ordinance and allocate the dollars necessary to make it a reality.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mike Moroski', with a stylized, wavy flourish at the end.

Mike Moroski
Executive Director
Human Services Chamber of Hamilton County



**heartfelt
tidbits**

Dear Cincinnati City Council,

Heartfelt Tidbits would like to voice our support for the Access to Counsel ordinance and all overarching pieces of legislation that have been passed over the last couple months by city council related to the Tenants Bill of Rights. Heartfelt Tidbits has worked closely over the past few months in the Eviction Prevention working group that was created by then Councilmember Greg Landsman that has now been assumed by Councilmember Meeka Owens. Our bi-weekly conversations have helped community organizations, local government, realtor associations, and all those who are worried about the approaching eviction crisis help identify solutions for Cincinnati.

Under the leadership of Councilmember Owens, Access to Counsel is before Council for a vote. We strongly encourage you to vote for this ordinance so that those who are experiencing eviction gets proper legal assistance through their eviction proceedings. While landlords generally have legal counsel, over 90 percent of tenants do not. This program will help ensure that when these evictions go to court that the tenant is not at a legal disadvantage. We fully support the growth of legal assistance for tenants in Cincinnati and wish for you the vote YES on the Access to Counsel Ordinance.

Sincerely,

Sheryl Rajbhandari
Executive Director, Heartfelt Tidbits
513-225-0661
www.heartfelttidbits.com



Housing Opportunities Made Equal

2400 Reading Road, Suite 118
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Phone: 513-721-4663

Fax: 513-721-1642

www.homecincy.org

November 9, 2023

Cincinnati City Council,

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Greater Cincinnati (HOME) would like to voice our support for the Access to Counsel ordinance and all of the overarching pieces of legislation related to the Tenants Bill of Rights. HOME is a nonprofit fair housing organization with a mission to eliminate unlawful discrimination in housing in the Greater Cincinnati area. HOME advocates and enforces housing regulations for all protected classes and promotes stable, integrated communities.

HOME has worked closely over the past few months as part of the Eviction Prevention working group that was created by then Councilmember Greg Landsman that has now been assumed by Councilmember Meeka Owens. Our bi-weekly conversations have helped community organizations, local government, realtor associations, and all those who are worried about the ongoing eviction crisis help identify solutions for Cincinnati.

Under the leadership of Councilmember Owens, Access to Counsel is before Council for a vote. We strongly support this ordinance so that those who are experiencing eviction get proper legal assistance through their eviction proceeding. While landlords generally have legal counsel, over 90 percent of tenants do not. This program will help ensure that when these evictions go to court that the tenant is not at a legal disadvantage.

This ordinance comes at a critical moment when many of the pandemic-era rental assistance programs are ending with few to no alternatives offered. These programs proved to be successful and kept many of our neighbors housed over the past few years. At HOME, our clients feel the impact of these policies every day. If you're struggling to pay rent, you certainly can't afford an attorney, and the widespread need for free- and low-cost legal assistance makes that help difficult to access – that is especially so with an ongoing eviction proceeding.

Regardless of your income, everyone deserves a fair process to stay housed. This ordinance is an excellent step toward leveling the playing field. We fully support the growth of legal assistance for tenants in Cincinnati and are eager to see the Access to Counsel Ordinance passed and implemented.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elisabeth Rish".

Elisabeth Rish, Executive Director
Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Greater Cincinnati
513-977-2620 | elisabeth.risch@homecincy.org



CINCINNATI
COMPASS

November 17, 2023

Dear Cincinnati City Council,

Cincinnati Compass would like to voice our support for the Access to Counsel ordinance and all overarching pieces of legislation that have been passed over the last couple months by city council related to the Tenants Bill of Rights. Cincinnati Compass has worked closely over the past few months in the Eviction Prevention working group that was created by then Councilmember Greg Landsman that has now been assumed by Councilmember Meeka Owens. Our bi-weekly conversations have helped community organizations, local government, realtor associations, and all those who are worried about the approaching eviction crisis help identify solutions for Cincinnati.

Under the leadership of Councilmember Owens, Access to Counsel is before Council for a vote. We strongly encourage you to vote for this ordinance so that those who are experiencing eviction get proper legal assistance through their eviction proceeding. While landlords generally have legal counsel, over 90 percent of tenants do not. This program will help ensure that when these evictions go to court that the tenant is not at a legal disadvantage. We fully support the growth of legal assistance for tenants in Cincinnati and wish for you the vote **YES** on the Access to Counsel Ordinance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bryan Wright".

Bryan Wright
Executive Director
Cincinnati Compass



Dear Cincinnati City Council,

I am asking you to support the free legal representation to low-income families facing eviction. - Access to Counsel being introduced by Muea Owens. In a system that is quite complicated in English, much less in another language, many immigrants + refugees have an additional hurdle when it comes to understanding and navigating the law and evictions. I ask that you support this support to build a Stranger Cincinnati for everyone who makes this a great place to live.

Thank you,
Megan McClendon

CINCINNATI CITY COUNSEL,

I'M WRITING TO YOU ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF THE ACCESS TO COUNSEL ORDINANCE. IT IS VITAL TO SUPPORT THIS FOR THE DIGNITY OF THOSE WITH LESS. PLEASE CONSIDER GIVING THIS AFFORDABLE HOUSING SOLUTION (JUST ONE SOLUTION) YOUR FULL SUPPORT. HOUSING IS ABSOLUTELY A VITAL HUMAN RIGHT YET IT IS NEAR IMPOSSIBLE FOR FAR TOO MANY TO ACCESS AN AFFORDABLE PLACE TO LIVE. LET ALONE FIGHT UNFAIR EVILTIONS. THE PEOPLE OF CINCINNATI WANT AND NEED THE ACCESS TO COUNSEL.

CHRISTINE SHI
2831 LEHMAN RD.
CINCINNATI, OH 45204

Dear Cincinnati City Council,

I am writing to you today asking for your support on providing free legal representation to low income families in Cincinnati. I believe this especially important for families who have migrated here from another country. I am currently a renter who have lived in the United States my whole life, and never faced an eviction. However, I would not have the first clue how to fight an eviction. I also know that tenants face increasingly hard odds against a much more knowledgeable and powerful landlord. I can't even imagine how challenging it is for families who don't speak English. They can't even understand the proceedings against them let alone know how to they have the possibility of fighting this proceeding. If it is for an illegal reason, they have little knowledge of what constitutes a legal versus illegal eviction. These families need an advocate, free legal counsel, to all families who are low income ~~and~~ including migrants because they have an incredibly unfair advantage against a landlord.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter.

Mackenzie Doyle

785 NECD RD.

Cincinnati, OH 45233

Dear City Council,

The ordinance brought forth by Meeka Owens that would provide free legal representation to low-income families facing eviction should be supported because it is a huge issue that arises especially for low-income and/or immigrant families in the Greater Cincinnati area. I have seen friends and loved ones affected by this issue so it is near + dear to my heart. I urge you to consider passing this ordinance to help these communities in Cincinnati.

Sincerely,

Ana Maria E.

138 Kinsey Ave

Cincinnati, OH 45219

11-15-23

Cincinnati City Council

I am writing to endorse Meeky Owens proposal to provide a lawyer to help and represent families facing eviction. Low income families especially are taken advantage of when facing landlords who many times unfairly hide behind them. This proposal meets a real need in our community as so many residents and newcomers to our city face obstacles, confusion, and misunderstanding about their legal recourse in dealing with an intended eviction. Please find a way to go ahead and implement this resolution

Thanks

Steve Harbold
11707 Hinkley Dr
Cint., OH 45240

Dear Council members,

WIS

I am writing today to ask you to support Council person
Medina Owens's Ordinance ~~to~~ ^{Legal Council} As you are
aware, there is a significant shortage of affordable housing
in this city and the best way to help people in
hurry is to ensure they are not evicted. However the
power imbalance between landlords and tenants is not
in the interest of the long term health of the city
to make sure we can keep people in their homes.

Access to legal council will support all low-income
residents of Cincinnati, including ~~many~~ low-income immigrants,
but also will contribute to the long term health of
the city.

Justin Levy
1522 Winkind Terr
CMT: 011 45224

November 15, 2003

To: Mayor Farrow, + the Cincinnati City Council.
Re: Access to Counsel - proposed Ordinance

I urge you to support Wacker Ovens' proposal to provide free legal counsel to help +

represent families who have low incomes + the frequency

of their own. It is a volunteer with the St. Vincent de Paul

Society, but see so many people who are in danger of

eviction - some discouraged by so, but others through no fault

Sincerely

John Wittberg Sr.
3200 West Liberty St.
Cincinnati 45204

11/15/2023

Dear Cincinnati Council Members,

I write as an ally to several immigrant families living in our neighborhoods who fear eviction. They are new to our city and do not have a clear understanding of our laws and/or their rights with respect to fair housing, rents, and evictions. I ask that you add your support to Councilperson, Meeka Owens, who has introduced a bill to provide free legal representation to low-income families facing eviction.

I appreciate your serious consideration of my request.

Linda Ford
866 Ludlow Ave
Cincinnati 45220



Monday, December 4, 2023

City Council
City of Cincinnati
801 Plum Street
Cincinnati, Ohio 45202

Dear Cincinnati City Council:

As your Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, I lead an office of 200 employees who serve as the nerve center of the courts we work alongside. From this perspective, we are able to see trends of legal issues occurring in our community as they arise and we continue to see the persistence of evictions and ancillary concerns due to the eviction process. Given the risks these cases pose to the very fabric of our community, I am steadfast in my support of this access to counsel ordinance.

As you know, the cost of housing in our city and region is rising. As a consequence, eviction filings continue to rise as well. The primary driver of filings has been and continues to be nonpayment of rent. With COVID-19 relief programs that pumped federal rental assistance dollars into our community drying up, we know this trend will continue and will likely accelerate in the coming months and years. We also know that these stressors do not impact all members of our community the same: the impact is significantly more acute amongst lower income individuals and the Black community, especially in the City of Cincinnati where over 60% of households rent and Black homeownership hovers around 33%. Addressing this reality is an economic and racial justice issue.

Making any process that occurs in the courts fairer to vulnerable populations, especially those of limited means, is critical to eradicating injustice in our society. Access to courts and achieving justice are bedrock tenets of American constitutional law. In the context of criminal cases, the US Supreme Court affirmed the right to counsel in both state and federal cases in 1963 in *Gideon vs. Wainwright*. However, in civil cases, no such right exists. While the Seventh Amendment does guarantee a right to civil trial by jury, it has not yet been incorporated to the states (although most state constitutions independently affirm the right). But even if we grant a right to trial, even more fundamental is the right to counsel, without which any “right” to trial cannot be fully exercised. And of utmost importance is early access to counsel, in order for individuals to be appropriately advised of their options before it is too late.

Courts and judicial processes have become more complex over time. Many of us know, intrinsically, that the rules and procedures have become so cumbersome and complicated that any individual attempting to avail themselves of the judicial system without an attorney or receiving legal advice, does so at their own peril. Compound that peril with facing an adversary who is represented by counsel, and the individual can merely pray for justice that they will likely not obtain. This was the impetus for the founding of our Help Center in 2017 and it informs their work to this day. For those of us focused on achieving justice and breaking down barriers in accessing it, the right to counsel is therefore fundamental.

Civil laws, like landlord-tenant codes, have become a mechanism to oppress vulnerable populations. While not necessarily designed as such, the operational reality is that the exercise of legal options is directly linked to one's ability to employ an attorney to fight on their behalf. To this end, those with the resources can use legal process or the threat of legal processes to coerce compliance to unfair and unconscionable terms, because the collateral consequences for even having an eviction filed against you are so severe. And then there are the large institutional investors, many of whom use their scale to their advantage, and ignore fundamental responsibilities of due process because the consequences against them are proportionally inconsequential.

With all of these factors in play, I believe this access to counsel ordinance will be an invaluable first step to alleviating some of the burdens facing vulnerable populations at risk of evictions. In particular, it is designed to be flexible, so that it can address needs of the community as those needs shift and/or additional funding resources become available. It is also designed to be comprehensive and leverage government and non-profit organizations to ensure collaboration and to break down silos. I want to commend Councilmember Owens and all of those she has worked with so diligently to bring this ordinance forward.

We know a comprehensive access to counsel ordinance can and does work. We need only to look at the results in Cleveland. Prior to their right to counsel legislation, only 1-2% of tenants facing eviction were represented by counsel, but within 18 months that number rose to 18%. In 2021, the right to counsel program allowed 93% of residents represented through the program to avoid an eviction judgment or involuntary move. And that same year found state and local governments in the region realizing economic benefits of around \$4.5 million. This framework not only assists individuals and families facing eviction, it represents a net positive for the taxpayers as well.

Finally, there are other pilot programs that may be considered in the future to follow best practices already occurring in other major Ohio cities. In Columbus, for example, parties to an eviction must meet with a mediator to resolve issues like nonpayment of rent before moving forward on a case. This structural change to the procedure allows both parties to seek resolution before appearing before the magistrate and setting actions in motion that cannot easily be undone – reducing the collateral implications of the filing of an eviction. From conversations with Councilmember Owens, I know she is aware of these additional opportunities, is working towards their fruition, and will have my support and the support of my office as she seeks to level the legal field for tenants in the City of Cincinnati.

At its core, this ordinance is about accomplishing more equal access to justice through more equal access to counsel. As your Hamilton County Clerk of Courts, I am proud to support this ordinance to seek to build a more just and equitable Cincinnati.

Sincerely,



Pavan V. Parikh
Hamilton County Clerk of Courts