

# Eviction Cases in Allegheny County

Findings

Data Sources

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# Eviction Cases in Allegheny County, 2012–2019

*A Joint Publication from the Allegheny County  
Department of Human Services and The Pittsburgh Foundation*



*October 2020*



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[Click here to view the full report.](#)

[Click here to view a guide to the evictions process in Allegheny County.](#)

# Outline

Part I. Findings from Report on Eviction Cases in Allegheny County

Part II. Data Sources, what they contain, and how to get access

Part III. Which data sources support which findings;  
Level of effort required for each piece of report

Goal: To leave you with enough information to decide whether and how to do a similar analysis for your region (Pennsylvania only)

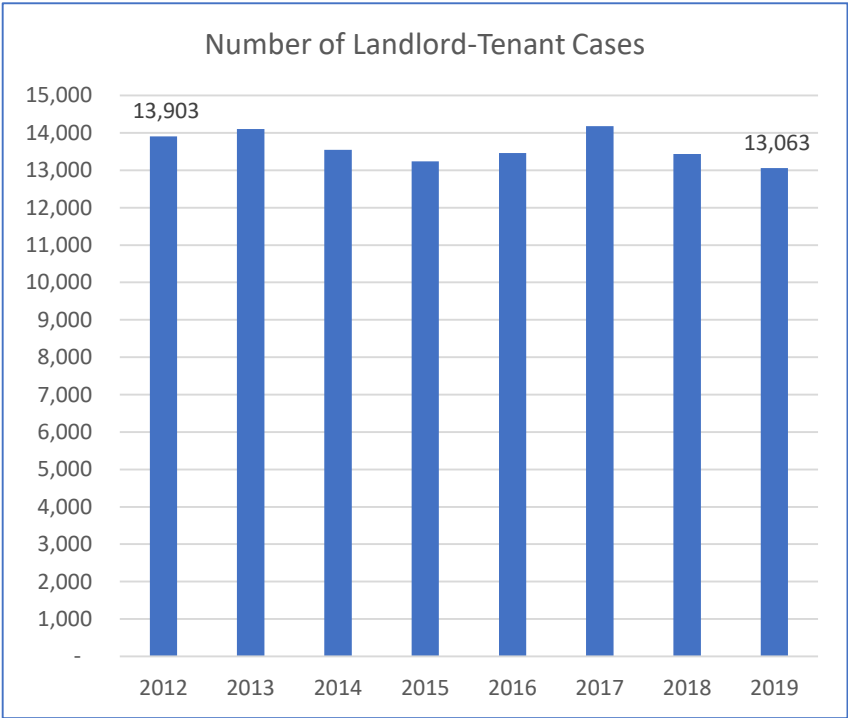
# Part I

Eviction Cases in Allegheny County, 2012-2019

Data from Magisterial District Courts

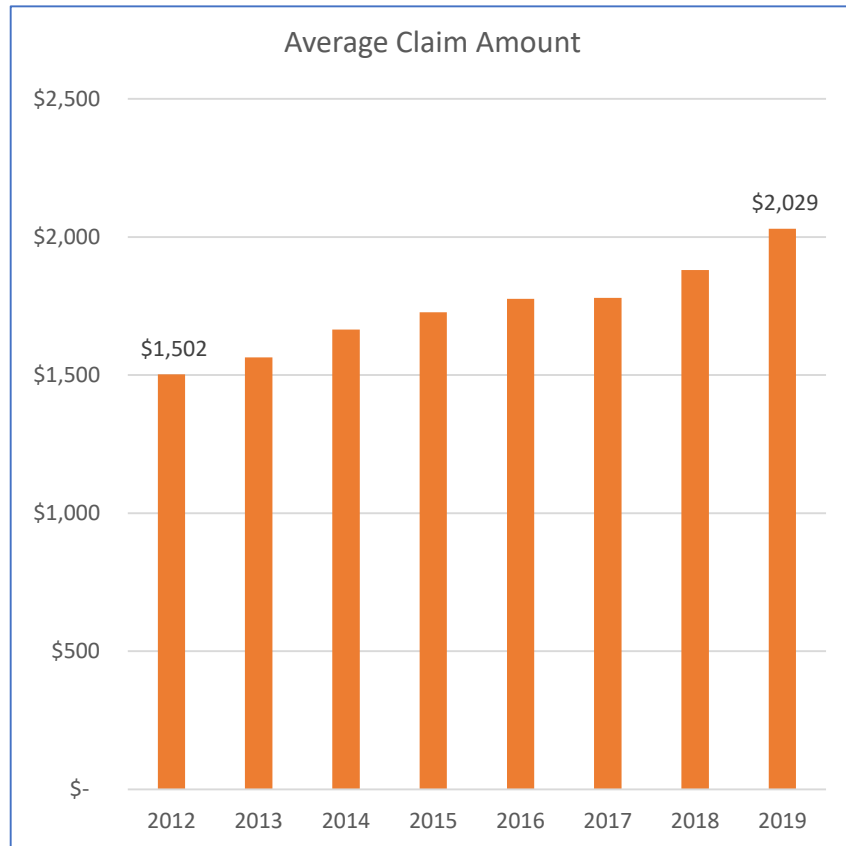
# Scale of the Eviction Landscape in Allegheny County

13,000-14,000 residential Landlord-Tenant Cases filed every year



Pre-COVID, fluctuations of <5% each year with no clear trend up or down

# Average dollar amount claimed by landlords increased 35% from 2012-2019

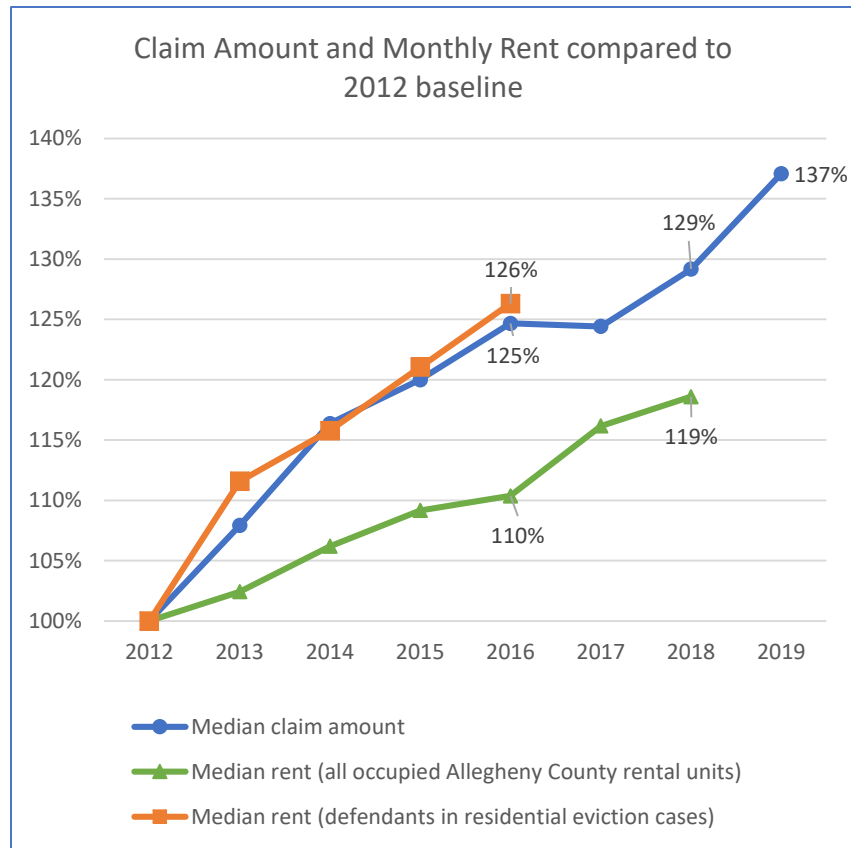


The **Claim amount** includes rent owed, damages, and other landlord costs

Does NOT include court costs or attorney fees

The median claim amount increased 37% from \$1200 to \$1645

# Why did the claim amount increase 37% while the number of cases stayed the same?



The amount claimed by landlords rises in tandem with the amount of rent their tenants pay--

--and **much faster than the median rent for the county overall.**

→ Tenant households who fall behind on rent and face eviction are seeing their rents rise much faster than the county median.

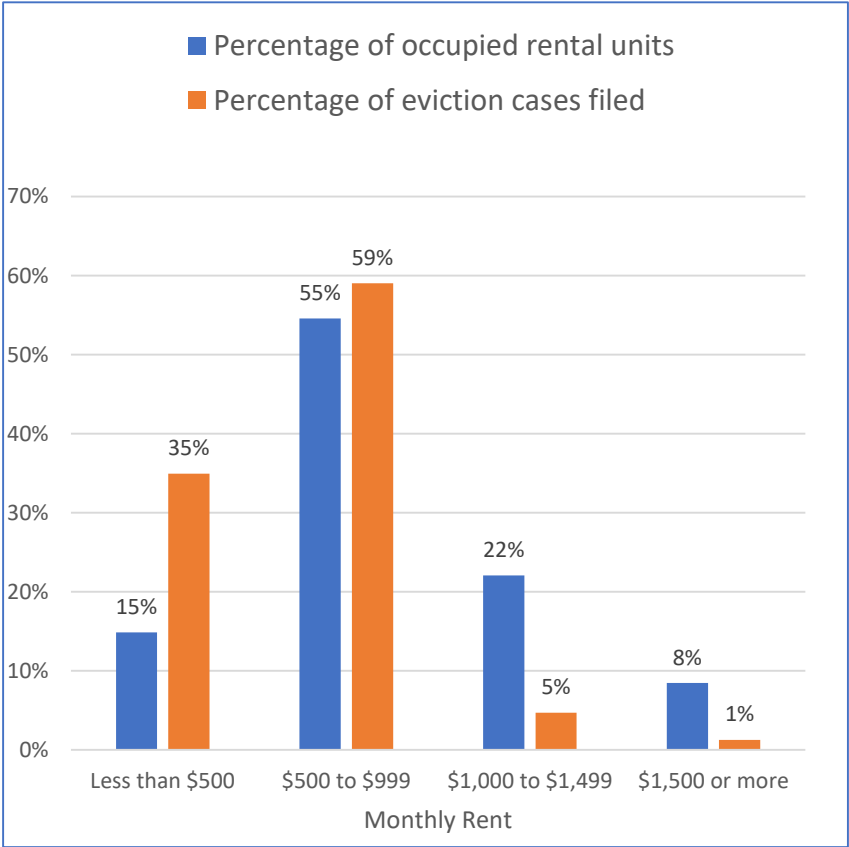
# Low-income Tenants in Eviction Cases

Tenants paying low monthly rent

Landlords operating publicly subsidized rental units



Tenants paying the lowest rents are most likely to be defendants in eviction cases.

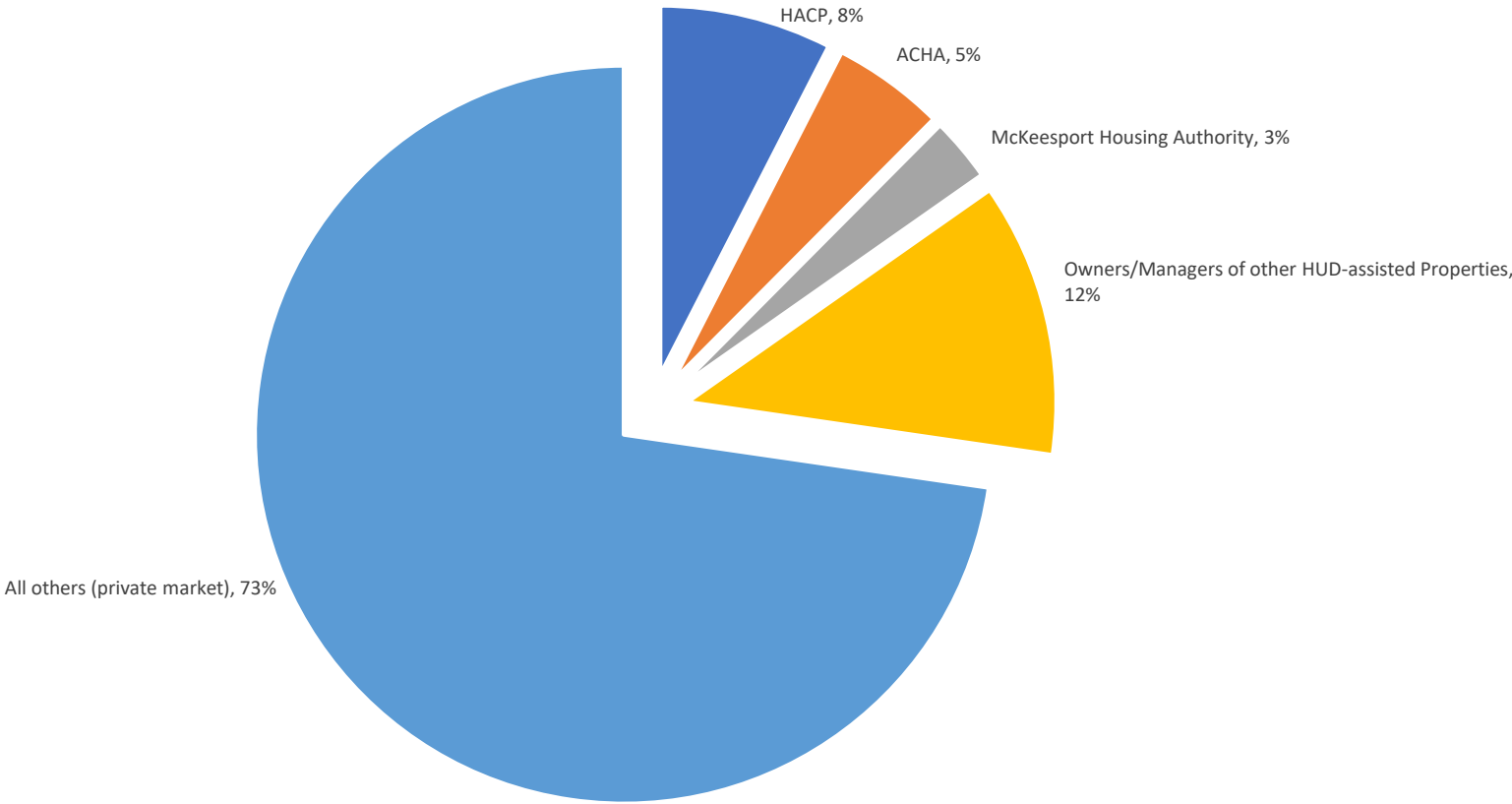


In Allegheny County , eviction cases are filed at a rate of **7 cases per 100 occupied rental units** annually.

For renters paying under \$500 in rent, the rate is more than twice as high: **16 cases per 100 occupied rental units**

(data from 2016)

Almost 3 in 10 eviction cases are filed against tenants of publicly subsidized housing.



Public Housing Authorities  
+  
Other HUD-subsidized properties

- 12% of renter households
- 27% of eviction cases

- NOT including
- Households with tenant-based Section 8 vouchers
  - Affordable units subsidized through LIHTC

# Landlords who file over 100 cases a year

- The three Allegheny County housing authorities

Housing Authority of the City of Pittsburgh (HACP)	985
Allegheny Housing Authority (ACHA)	643
McKeesport Housing Authority	366

- Three private companies managing HUD-subsidized properties

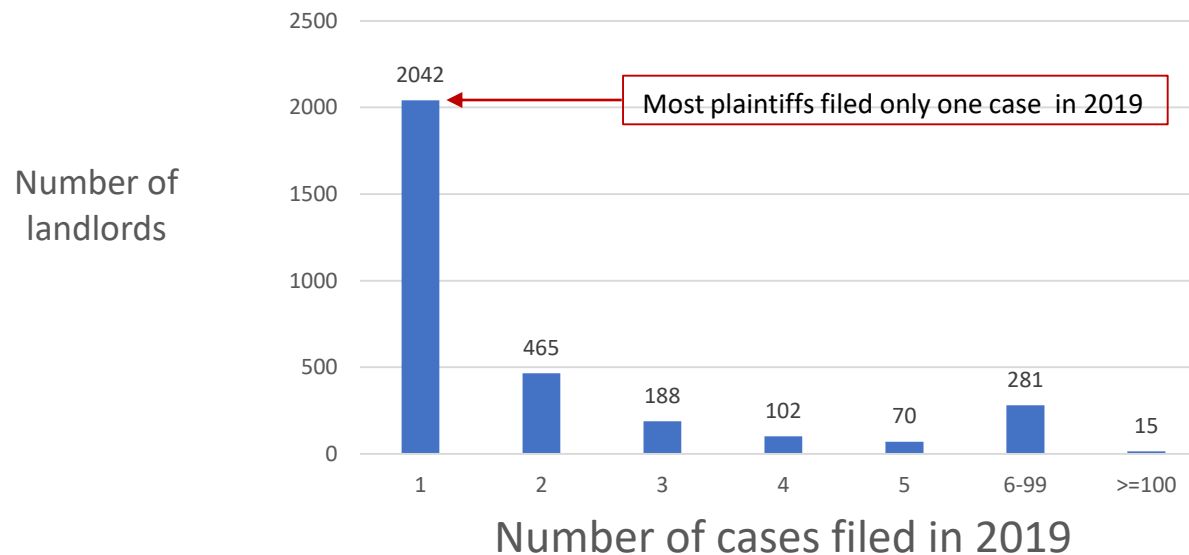
Brandywine Agency	444
AHRCO	234
Arbors Management	115

- Nine other private owners and management companies

These 15 plaintiffs accounted for 31% of the cases filed in 2019.

# Most landlords file only a few cases

- There were about 3200 distinct plaintiffs in landlord-tenant cases in 2019.
  - About 2900 (over 90%) filed between one and five cases.



The 2900 plaintiffs who filed 1-5 cases accounted for 32% of the cases filed in 2019.

# Eviction Case Outcomes

What we know

and

What we don't

At the county level the disposition of eviction cases varies little from year to year.

- Landlords win about 85% of landlord-tenant cases.
- Tenants win about 1.5% of cases.
- The remaining 13.5% of cases are withdrawn, settled or dismissed.

Underneath the uniformity of outcomes at the County Level, different practices produce widely different outcomes.

Example 1.

Across magisterial districts, number of cases withdrawn or settled ranges from less than 1% to 36%.

Example 2.

Among the 15 landlords who filed over 100 cases in 2019

The percentage of cases won by the plaintiff ranges from 50% to 96%.

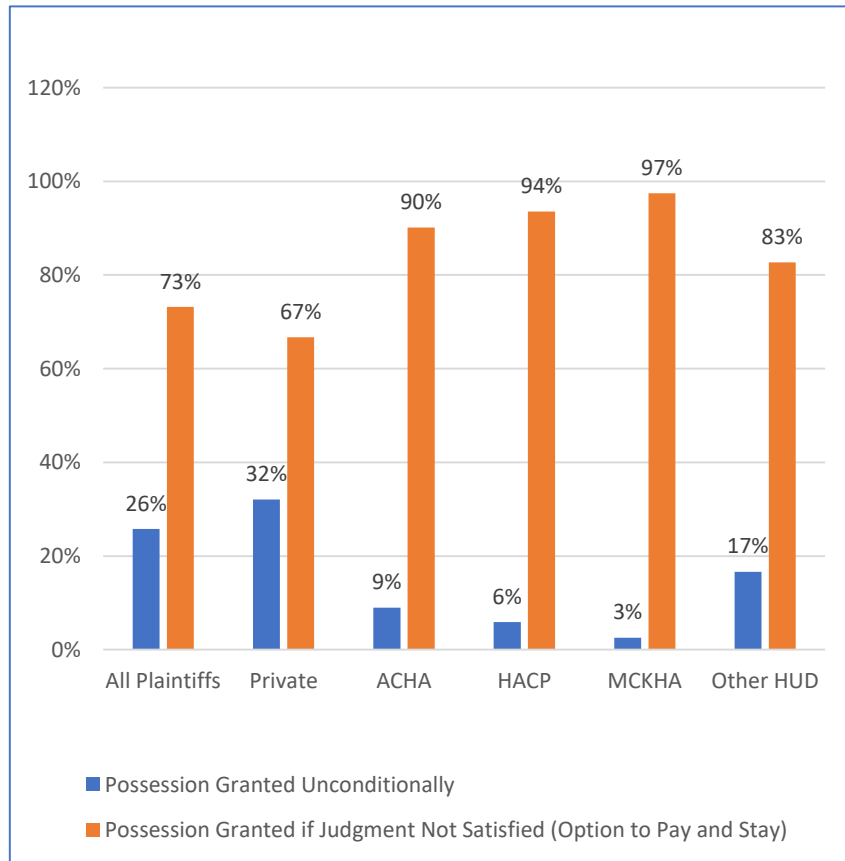
The percentage of cases withdrawn or settled ranges from 1% to 41%.

When cases are withdrawn, settled, or dismissed, they remain a part of the court record.

Tenant screening companies report involvement in past eviction cases regardless of outcome.

Post-judgment outcomes: Most cases won by landlords are Pay and Stay.  
Tenants have the right to pay the full amount of the judgment and not be evicted.

Type of possession granted after a judgment for the landlord (2019)



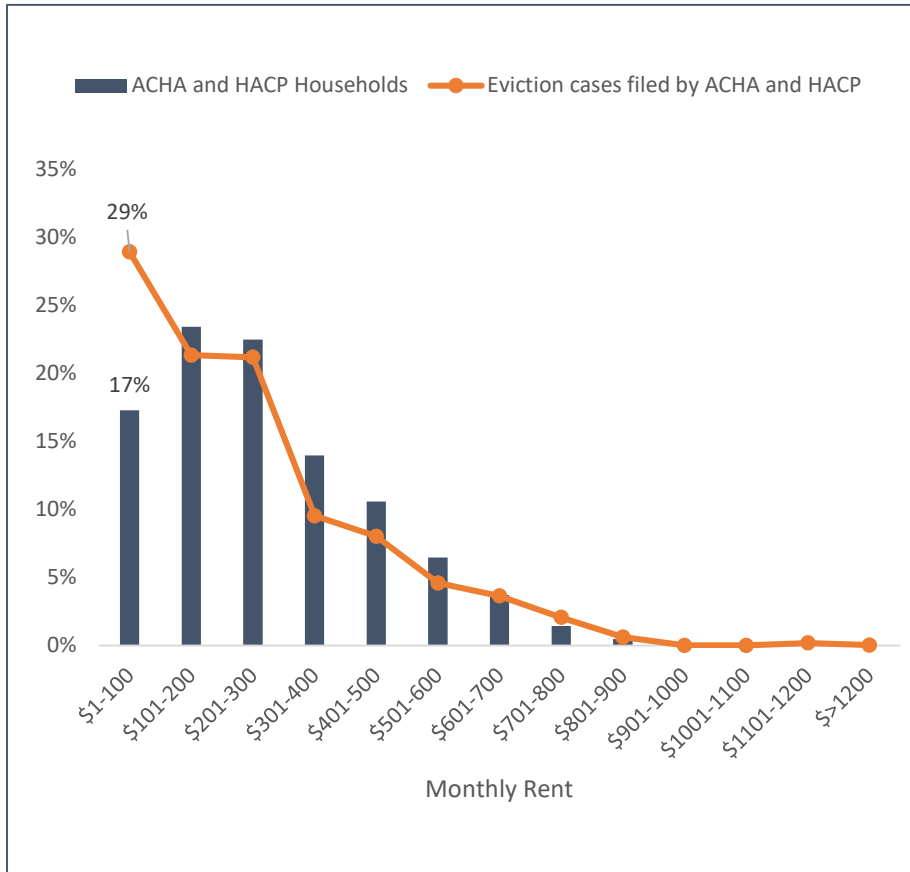
73% of all cases won by landlords are Pay and Stay cases.

90%-97% of cases won by housing authorities are Pay and Stay cases.

Many of these cases are filed as a way to collect the rent, not in order to evict the tenant.



The cost of using eviction cases as a way to collect rent is highest for tenants paying the least rent.



ACHA and HACP households by monthly rent: percentage of eviction cases filed vs. percentage of households, May 2014–April 2017

The lowest-income tenants ACHA and HACP tenants paying no more than \$100/month in rent

- are filed against at the highest rate
- owe an average of **73%** over rental arrears after an eviction case is filed

Comparison: the average increase over rental arrears in Allegheny County is **12%**.

What percentage of landlord-tenant cases result in eviction?

Court data does not answer this question

## How can we tell whether a tenant exercised the option to Pay and Stay?

“Entry of Satisfaction of Judgment” declares that a tenant satisfied a money judgment.

However, this mechanism is optional, little known, and rarely used.

An entry of satisfaction means the tenant was not legally evicted.

Legislation introduced but not voted on in the last session of the PA General Assembly would make it mandatory to record satisfaction of money judgments in landlord-tenant cases.

Without any legislative change, tenants may request entry of satisfaction, and the landlord is then required to comply. This gives tenants a way to prove they have paid the money judgment in full and there is no outstanding debt.

# Data Sources

Ways to Obtain Data  
Resources and Effort Required

# Categories of Court Data

## **Publicly accessible as bulk electronic data from MDJS**

Landlord-tenant case participants, including lawyers; case events, dates, and disposition; money claimed and awarded; monthly rent; type of possession awarded; orders for possession; entries of satisfaction...

Not available for routine bulk requests: tenant addresses

## **Publicly accessible but not as bulk data:**

Docket sheets online: Most of the above, but not all of the other fields in MDJS

Paper records stored as digital images:

- landlord complaint forms with tenant address and reason for complaint;
- constable returns: paper forms recording service of complaints, hearing notices, and orders for possession; execution of orders for possession and results (whether the eviction took place and why; money collected and distributed in Pay and Stay cases; property levees)

## **Not Collected in Civil Cases**

Demographics (gender, race, ethnicity, date of birth)

# How to get access to electronic court data

## MDJS

- Allegheny County DHS has a large integrated data warehouse with feeds from external sources including the county courts. This set-up requires extensive infrastructure and long-term negotiation with data holders.
- A one-time data extract can be requested from AOPC for a fee. This will give you a snap-shot of the time period and data fields you specify. Request forms can be found at <http://www.pacourts.us/public-records> .
- Protected fields such as tenant address may be shared with researchers and other non-profit organizations acting in the public interest, but this requires approval and agreements about what level of data may be disclosed.

## Docket Sheets:

- Individual docket sheets can be accessed at <https://ujportal.pacourts.us/DocketSheets/MDJ.aspx> .
- A good programmer can write code to scrape data from the website and load it into a database.
  - Advantage: the website can be scraped as often as you wish, even nightly.
  - Disadvantages: Too much code (or badly designed code) scraping the same website can slow it down and make it less functional for ordinary users; the courts may not be happy with this and could make changes to the site to make it harder to scrape data.
- Resources required: a programmer dedicated to running the code, making updates and maintaining the database; database software.
- For help and advice about how to do this, contact Anne Wright, Project Scientist, CMU CREATE Lab, [anne@createlab.org](mailto:anne@createlab.org)

# Other Data Sources

## Census Data

The American Community Survey (ACS) has extensive housing data, including the number of occupied and vacant units, number of owner-occupied units, and number of rental units by amount of rent. Available in ACS 1-yr., 3-yr. and 5-yr. estimates, Table DP04.

## HUD

- Annual list of subsidized properties, including owners and managers
- Website with inventory of residential and Section 8 units for all Public Housing Authorities

## Real Estate Company Websites

Real estate portfolios for companies identified as filing large number of evictions. (Useful because the plaintiff in landlord-tenant cases is sometimes identified by the property, not the owner or manager).

## PA Code and Bulletin

Complete, accessible text of all court rules governing landlord-tenant cases at the MDJ level. Guide and links can be found [here](#) .

## AOPC Website

Copies of forms; information about MDJ offices; lists of filing fees and other costs

## Housing Authorities

All public housing authorities have databases with complete information about tenants' monthly rent, address, voucher type if any, and demographics. Allegheny County has data-sharing agreements with two of the three housing authorities in the county. For this report we used data on monthly rent paid by tenants.

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