

The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania Presents Promising Practices: Landlord-Tenant Mediation

April 2021



We hope you learn the following from this report:

- Landlord tenant mediation keeps people stably in their homes
- It is important to maintain the landlord tenant relationship
- Landlord tenant mediation can be used to disrupt the eviction process at different points, though the earlier in the process the more likely a successful outcome
- There are different models and approaches for setting up these programs
- Landlord tenant mediation can be used in any community

Landlord Tenant Mediation Programs in Pennsylvania

Landlord tenant mediation programs are relatively new in Pennsylvania. Before the pandemic, Good Shephard Mediation had an existing landlord tenant mediation program in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh had started planning to create one through Just Mediation Pittsburgh.

The pandemic and its impacts did not create the need for landlord tenant mediation but they did create the impetus for creating landlord tenant mediation programs at this time. Today, there are 12 landlord tenant mediation programs across 15 counties.

- Allegheny County
- Blair County
- Centre County
- Dauphin County
- Fayette County
- Lackawanna County
- Lancaster County
- Lycoming, Clinton and Tioga Counties
- Monroe County
- Northampton County
- Philadelphia County
- Union and Snyder Counties

A list of the 12 programs and their contact information is included at the end of this document.

What is Mediation?

Mediation explores a conflict from both sides and empowers the parties to resolve the conflict. The mediator, a specially trained neutral party, does not resolve a dispute for others, but helps the disputing parties resolve it themselves by supporting their constructive dialogue and interaction towards a mutually agreeable resolution.

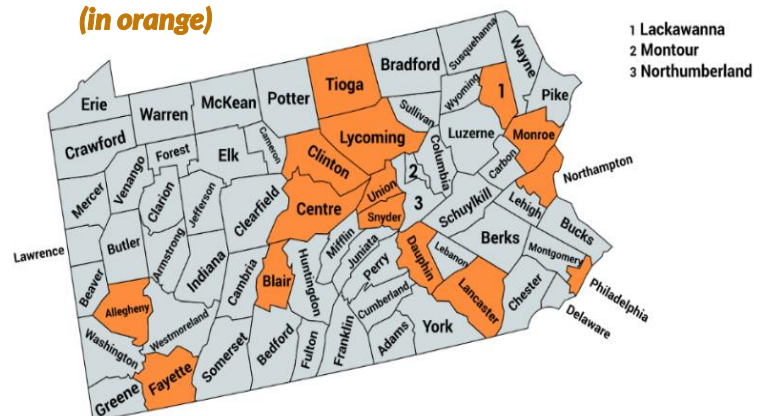
Success in mediation is often defined as the creation of a plan to which both parties agree and adhere. Mediation differs from other court-based dispute resolution processes, such as litigation or arbitration, in that the disputing parties make their own decisions and craft their own agreement. Mediation offers significant advantages over other processes by saving time and money, preserving valued business relationships, and reducing stress.

“Mediation is often an art rather than a science, but it requires organization, clarity of process, and the assembly of the best practices for effective mediators. The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania convened established and nascent mediation programs in a truly remarkable way, willing a collective network into existence that helped make Pennsylvania a leader in housing mediation. Just Mediation Pittsburgh benefitted from the newfound connection with mediation programs around the state, and was able to help new programs find their footing thanks to the connecting power of this network.”

~Aaron Erb, Executive Director
Just Mediation Pittsburgh



Counties with Landlord Tenant Mediation Programs (in orange)



Source: <https://mapchart.net/usa-counties.html>

A Community Driven Solution to Disrupt the Eviction Process

Landlord tenant mediation can disrupt the potential escalation of a landlord tenant dispute. The ideal is to have landlord tenant mediation at the first sign of a tenant’s potential housing crisis. These mediation programs are typically community-based mediation programs.

When a person faces financial struggles and has difficulty making their rent payments, landlord tenant mediation, especially when paired with needed rental assistance, can disrupt evictions at many points throughout the process.



Landlord tenant mediation programs can be classified into general groups based on how and when the mediation program is accessed. These classifications include, but are not limited to:

- Community based mediation
- Court mediation partnerships
- Court mediation referrals
- Day of mediation clinics

Mediation as a Promising Practice

Too often the relationships between tenants and landlords can seem adversarial and crisis experienced by either can add tension to this relationship. But the reality is that before the COVID-19 pandemic and especially now, tenants and landlords need each other to be successful. We are all in this together.

The Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania is working to prevent eviction by promoting mediation programs to stabilize renter households and prevent evictions. This effort is especially important and timely due to concerns that COVID-19 related job losses will result in mass evictions when eviction moratoria are lifted.

Mediation, historically used in other contexts such as divorce, child custody, or foreclosure proceedings, is a proven and effective tool to address landlord-tenant disputes as an alternative to court involvement. Mediation is nimble and flexible to meet the complexity of landlord tenant disputes, and it is flexible in the communities and scale in which it can operate. It is a model that is used at the community level across the country. Prior to the pandemic, communities reported disputes came to positive resolution rates in up to 80% of cases.

Mediation as an intervention is adaptable and can achieve reconciliation between disputing tenants and landlords at any point in the eviction process, though research shows that the earlier the intervention is utilized in the conflict to prevent further escalation, the more likely both sides will report a satisfactory outcome. When combined with emergency rental assistance, landlord tenant mediation, is a holistic approach to stabilize landlord-tenant relationships and preserve a tenant’s rental housing, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Housing Alliance Launches into Action

With massive layoffs and furloughs early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, we knew our communities needed practical solutions to keep families stably housed in the midst of a public health crisis and to keep landlords whole so that the supply of rental housing can be maintained and not lost. We surveyed landlords; housing, social, and legal service providers; and tenants to better understand the challenges people were facing in maintaining their housing.

Landlord Toolkit

With that feedback, on April 1, 2020, the Housing Alliance released the [Landlord Toolkit](#), to provide initial tools and resources for small- and large-scale landlords as they faced unprecedented loss of rental income and uncertainty. The toolkit also included a list of resources that were available at that time to assist tenants. The toolkit is meant to encourage early, clear, and respectful communication between landlords and tenants with example messaging and a fillable payment plan form for tenants financially impacted by the pandemic.

Building Blocks of Landlord Tenant Mediation

With the initial eviction moratorium set to expire in September 2020 to be followed by the ending of the state's CARES Rental Relief Program, we knew many households were in a precarious situation regarding their housing stability. In August 2020, the Housing Alliance released [Building Blocks of Landlord Tenant Mediation](#). This resource outlines four building blocks to create a successful landlord-tenant mediation and also highlighted existing programs and best practices in program creation.

Landlord Tenant Mediation Grants

In August 2020, with funding from Regional Housing Legal Services, the Housing Alliance awarded \$10,000 grants to six different organizations to start landlord tenant mediation programs in their communities across seven counties.



The six grantees were:

- Advoz – Mediation and Restorative Practices (Lancaster County)
- Dauphin County Bar Association and MidPenn Legal Services
- Fayette County Community Action Agency, Inc.
- Lackawanna County
- Poconos Mountains United Way (Monroe County)
- Susquehanna Valley Mediation and Union-Snyder Community Action Agency

Peer Mediation Group

The Housing Alliance has been convening the administrators of the existing landlord tenant mediation programs and those that wish to start one through its Peer Mediation Group to discuss implementation, share successes, and brainstorm solutions to challenges. Participants represent 23 counties in various stages of creating a program or eager to understand the practice better.

New Landlord Tenant Mediation Programs Supported by Grants Awarded by the Housing Alliance

The Housing Alliance followed the progress of the six organizations to which it awarded grants to create landlord tenant mediation programs. As these programs are still in the early stages of operating, we have highlighted strengths of their implementation efforts.

Community Outreach and Coordination of Services



Lancaster County: Advoz – Mediation and Restorative Practices

The three partners in this program developed a webpage for mediation intake: <https://advoz.org/landlord-tenant-mediation/> Together, the partner organizations will coordinate their collective services on mediation, budgeting assistance, and fair housing.

Monroe County: Pocono Mountains United Way

They developed onsite and virtual mediation programs. Their mediator is trained in both housing and eviction issues. They have been doing outreach to courts and realtor associations to advertise the mediation program.

Union and Snyder Counties: Susquehanna Valley Mediation and Union-Snyder Community Action Agency

They introduced the program through several different community groups and meetings. They have done outreach to local judges and courts regarding legally binding mediated landlord-tenant agreements.

Partnering with Courts



Dauphin County: Dauphin County Bar Association and MidPenn Legal Services

They reached out to their president judge, magistrate district judges, and courthouse staff to discuss implementing mediation. Together, they developed a Notice/Information Sheet to be given when an eviction hearing is scheduled to provide the option of mediation.

Fayette County: Fayette County Community Action Agency

They developed their landlord tenant mediation program in conjunction with their rental assistance program which included multiple state and federal rental assistance funding sources. Their program also includes financial coaching for tenants.

Lackawanna County

One of their magistrate's offices is reaching out to eviction cases on the docket to offer mediation as an alternative to a court hearing. As an incentive to encourage mediation, the mediation program holds the landlord's eviction filing fee in escrow while mediation is being explored.

About the Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania



Housing Alliance of Pennsylvania

We are a statewide coalition working to provide leadership and a common voice for policies, practices and resources to ensure that all Pennsylvanians, especially those with low incomes, have access to safe, decent and affordable homes. We promote commonsense solutions to balance Pennsylvania's housing market and increase the supply of safe, decent homes for low-income people.

Landlord Tenant Mediation Programs in Pennsylvania

Contact a Landlord Tenant Mediation Program Today

Today, there are 12 landlord tenant mediation programs in Pennsylvania operating in 15 counties. A directory of the 12 programs and their contact information is included on the next page. The Housing Alliance encourages all landlords who have access to mediation programs in their counties to use them before considering to file an eviction.

Learn More About Landlord Tenant Mediation in Pennsylvania

If you are interested in starting a landlord tenant mediation program in your community or learning more about our efforts to prevent and reduce evictions, reach out to the Housing Alliance.

Visit: <https://housingalliancepa.org/eviction-prevention/>

Email: info@housingalliancepa.org

Call: 215-576-7044

Thank You!

For landlord tenant mediation to be successful, it takes strong partnerships across many sectors. The Housing Alliance thanks all of the mediation programs, mediators, advocates, courts, legal service providers, housing counselors, community organizations, housing providers, participants in our peer learning exchange, and so many others for promoting and implementing landlord tenant mediation across Pennsylvania.



Housing Alliance
of Pennsylvania

Directory of Landlord Tenant Mediation Programs in Pennsylvania

Allegheny County


Just Mediation Pittsburgh

-  justmediationpgh.org
-  412-228-0730
-  info@justmediationpgh.org

Eligibility: Must have an income level below 80% Area Median Income




Lancaster County

Advoz – Mediation and Restorative Practices

-  <https://advoz.org/landlord-tenant-mediation/>
-  717-397-2404
-  info@advoz.org




Blair County

Family Services, Inc. – Landlord Tenant Mediation

-  <https://www.blaircap.org/landlord-tenant-mediation-program/>
-  814-944-3583 ext.324
-  info@familyservicesinc.net




Lycoming, Clinton and Tioga Counties

Lycoming Law Association Foundation – Presently Inactive

-  Contact via phone number or email address
-  570-220-5136
-  Contact Danna Rich-Collins at DRich-Collins@northpennlegal.org




Centre County

Center for Alternatives in Community Justice

-  https://www.cacj.us/about_us
-  814-234-1059
-  cacj@cacj.us or contact Evelyn Wald at ewald@cacj.us

Monroe County




Pocono Mountains United Way

-  <https://poconounitedway.org/new-free-eviction-mediation-program-for-monroe-county/>
-  570-261-8023
-  Contact Linda Paugh at mediation@PoconoUnitedWay.org

Eligibility: People with incomes below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level




Dauphin County

Dauphin County Bar Association

-  Contact via phone number or email address
-  724-437-6050 ext. 3213
-  Contact Sandy Ballard at sandy@dcba-pa.org

Northampton County

Community Mediation and Eviction Diversion Program

-  City of Easton: call Project of Easton at 610-248-1100 ext.13
-  Bethlehem area: call New Bethany Ministries at 610-691-603 ext. 217
-  All other municipalities of Northampton County:
Third Street Alliance at 610-438-1244 or
Easton Area Neighborhood Center at 610-253-4253


Fayette County

Fayette County Community Action Agency, Inc.

-  Contact via phone number or email address
-  724-437-6050 ext. 3213
-  Contact Rita Masi at rmasi@fccaa.org




Philadelphia County

Good Shepherd Mediation Program

-  <https://www.phillymediators.org/>
-  215-843-5413
-  intake@phillymediators.org

Lackawanna County

Lackawanna Cares Mediation Program

-  Contact via phone number or email address
-  570-963-6830 ext. 1375
-  Contact Sandra Opshinsky at opshinsky@lackawannacounty.org

Union and Snyder Counties

Susquehanna Valley Mediation

-  <https://www.svmediation.org/landlord-tenant-mediation>
-  570-274-1718
-  casecoordinator@svmediation.org