

**Washington State Judicial Branch  
2025-27 Biennial Budget  
Office of Civil Legal Aid  
Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program**

**Agency:** Office of Civil Legal Aid

**Decision Package Code/Title:** 1E – Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program

**Agency Recommendation Summary Text:**

The Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program provides essential legal services to indigent tenants at risk of eviction or displacement, addressing affirmative cases, health and safety concerns, and landlord harassment. This program aims to resolve cases before they reach court, supporting Washington State's homelessness response, and plays a critical role pre-filing. This decision package seeks an ongoing vendor rate adjustment to address the rising operating costs to ensure the same level of program services.

**Fiscal Summary:**

	FY 2026	FY 2027	Biennial	FY 2028	FY 2029	Biennial
<b>Staffing</b>						
FTEs	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
<b>Operating Expenditures</b>						
Fund 001-1	\$129,000	\$264,000	\$393,000	\$407,000	\$556,000	\$963,000
<b>Total Expenditures</b>						
	\$129,000	\$264,000	\$393,000	\$407,000	\$556,000	\$963,000

**Package Description:**

The Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program provides essential legal services to indigent tenants at risk of eviction or displacement, addressing affirmative cases, health and safety concerns, and landlord harassment. Under RCW 59.18.640, the Office of Civil Legal Aid (OCLA) is responsible for oversight of the program. Since its inception, the Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program has been instrumental in reducing the number of eviction filings and improving housing stability for tenants. In FY 2024, OCLA-contracted legal services providers assisted 4,428 tenants with over 900 of those cases receiving full representation or extensive service. By providing early legal intervention, the program empowers tenants to address issues before they escalate to court cases, thereby reducing stress on the judicial system and significantly contributing to the prevention of homelessness. In addition, in FY 2024, the program successfully prevented the filing of 473 unlawful detainer (UD) matters, demonstrating its critical role in Washington State's broader homelessness response.

Over the past two years, cumulative inflation has totaled 7.3%, according to the Consumer Price Index. This has resulted in known and measurable cost increases for the legal service providers contracted by OCLA to administer this program. This decision package seeks a 5% vendor rate adjustment to address the rising operating costs faced by civil legal aid providers across the state to ensure they can continue to provide the same level of services.

**Describe and quantify expected impacts on state residents.**

Since its inception, the Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program has been instrumental in reducing the number of eviction filings and improving housing stability for tenants. By providing early legal intervention, the program empowers tenants to address issues before they escalate to court cases, thereby reducing stress on the judicial system and significantly contributing to the prevention of homelessness.

**Explain what alternatives were explored by the agency and why this was the best option chosen.**

The Legislature has recognized the need for effective legal assistance to prevent evictions and displacements. No alternatives exist within OCLA to supplement this funding. Providing a vendor rate increase to the Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program is the best option to ensure consistent, high-quality legal assistance is available statewide.

**What are the consequences of not funding this request?**

Without this funding, the program will be unable to provide the same level of service for tenants at risk of eviction. This could lead to increased eviction filings, higher homelessness rates, and greater strain on public resources.

**Is this an expansion or alteration of a current program or service?**

No, this decision package ensures the continuation of the existing Pre-Filing Eviction Defense Program.

**Decision Package expenditure, FTE and revenue assumptions:**

**Use Standard Costs?**

No

If No, Explain Additional Costs	Round to Nearest \$1,000				Description/Assumptions
	FY 26	FY 27	FY 28	FY 29	
Contracts	\$129,000	\$264,000	\$407,000	\$556,000	The contractor (vendor) rate adjustment is calculated as 5% of total contracts.

**How does the package relate to the Judicial Branch principal policy objectives?**

**Fair and Effective Administration of Justice**

The program ensures that tenants at risk of eviction receive the necessary legal representation to prevent displacement, address landlord issues, and protect individuals from harassment or deprivation of judicial process.

**Accessibility**

This program enhances access to justice by providing legal resources and representation to indigent tenants. Notably, 41% of pre-filing legal services recipients had a disability, demonstrating the program's effectiveness in increasing access to justice for individuals with disabilities who might otherwise face significant barriers in navigating the legal system.

**Access to Necessary Representation**

This program provides legal advocacy for tenants facing eviction, helping them navigate complex legal challenges and preventing homelessness.

**Commitment to Effective Court Management**

N/A

**Sufficient Staffing and Support**

N/A

**How does the package impact equity in the state?**

**Address any target populations or communities that will benefit from this proposal.**

This package addresses equity by providing legal aid to individuals who have been disproportionately affected by housing instability and eviction threats. Many of these individuals are from marginalized and low-income communities. Data shows that eviction proceedings disproportionately affect communities of color, with 45% of appointed counsel tenants identifying as non-white. By offering targeted legal assistance, the package helps correct systemic inequities and provides these individuals with the tools to secure their housing and prevent homelessness.

**Describe whether and, if so, how the agency received community input and engagement.**

OCLA contracts with several organizations that provide community-directed, trauma-informed legal services. OCLA contractors have community advisory groups to solicit feedback and meet community needs.

**Which target populations or communities would be disproportionately harmed by this proposal. Explain why and how these negative equity impacts will be mitigated.**

No target populations or communities would be disproportionately harmed. Instead, this proposal aims to mitigate existing inequities by providing necessary legal assistance to tenants at risk of eviction.

**Are there impacts to other governmental entities?**

No

**Stakeholder response:**

There is broad support for this request from communities and organizations that assist tenants at risk of eviction.

**Are there legal or administrative mandates that require this package to be funded?**

No

**Does current law need to be changed to successfully implement this package?**

No

**Are there impacts to state facilities?**

No

**Are there other supporting materials that strengthen the case for this request?**

Yes. See attached spreadsheet.

**Are there information technology impacts?**

No

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