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18 August 2016

Attention: Stephanie Happold
Data Dissemination Committee
Administrative Office of the Courts
PO Box 41170
Olympia, WA 98504-1170

RE: Inclusion of Financial Information in Data Request

Dear Members of the Data Dissemination Committee,

Although housing costs have soared in recent years, basic policy-relevant questions about eviction remain unanswered. We do not have a national estimate of the prevalence of eviction in America, nor do we know how evictions matter to communities and the influence landlord-tenant laws have on eviction rates. This study is designed to answer those questions, informing law and public policy related to affordable housing and displacement.

Accordingly, we are gathering court data from all around the country to measure the prevalence of eviction or unlawful detainers. We also hope to use these data to answer three research questions:

(1) What is the prevalence of eviction in the United States, and how does it vary geographically?
(2) What impact, if any, do eviction rates have on local communities?
(3) How do certain landlord-tenant laws affect a municipality's eviction rate?

We submitted a request for bulk data for eviction cases in Washington State to the Data Dissemination Administrator, Stephanie Happold, who informed us that JIS/SCOMIS financial data are typically withheld from release, pending a decision by the Judicial Information System Committee.

Therefore, we are requesting authorization from the Data Dissemination Committee for the release of the money judgments and associated court fees relevant to unlawful detainer cases in Washington State.

We seek the inclusion of financial information in our dataset because it will allow us to evaluate the material costs of eviction levied upon defendants in court. Moreover, with these data from within Washington and in counties and states across the country, we will be able to analyze the impact of and variation in court fees and money judgments on a national-level.

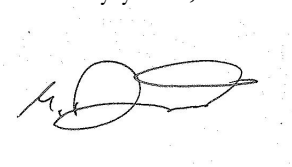
By analyzing the costs associated with eviction cases, we may consider, for example, how many individuals are being evicted for relatively small amounts of money. A recent evaluation of evictions in Washington, D.C. by the Washington Post, showed that over twenty percent of evictions in the nation's capitol were for cases wherein unpaid rent amounted to less than $100. Further research on these patterns in the state of Washington and across the nation will generate critical policy implications for housing preservation, assistance, and stability.

We are aware concerns may exist regarding the security and confidentiality of the data. The IRB at Harvard determined that this study was exempt from further review and classified the research information security as Level 2 Data. According to this determination, all raw data retrieved from Washington will be stored on secure and encrypted servers, accessible only to our research team. I have attached our IRB approval for your review.

Please let me know if I can answer any questions you might have about this study.

Thank you very much!

Sincerely yours,



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