

EVICTON COURT WATCH PROJECT

WESTCHESTER COUNTY

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What is court watching?

Court Watching allows the public to view court proceedings, therefore upholding fair and honest practices as the justice system operates. Court Watching remains a powerful tool that may change the behaviors of decision makers. "Landlord-Tenant" Court is one example of where Court Watching can be implemented to improve outcomes in Westchester County.

Many factors can influence outcomes in court. These include:

- Who is present at a negotiation?
- How much time a judge spends on a case.
- Full understanding, which can be supplemented with the addition of a translator in some cases.
- The presence of children in an occupied space
- Power imbalances
- If negotiation is limited to the courtroom, or if it can happen outside in hallway,

Potential Questions for a Court Watching Template:

- Demographics of client (Perceived leads to discrimination)
- How long did the case take to be determined?
- Was an attorney present during the negotiation to provide counsel?
- If needed, was there a translator present?
- Was there a child present, either at the negotiation or in the residence
- Did conversation about this case extend beyond the court room?
- Do the people (especially those without representation) understand what actually happened in court?
- Did judge speak in non-legalese?

Town and villages courts are usually small, and don't often have lawyers present. **However, several jurisdictions have accessible courts**, which we plan to target as we pilot eviction court watching in Westchester County. These include:

- Greenburgh, which has a large court and covers various housing types.
- Ossining, which may have a night court.
- New Rochelle, which may have a municipal housing day.
- Port Chester, which offers a small court and provides a manageable start.
- Yonkers court would be in the second phase of the pilot.

Court Watchers Training: Information on what to look for in court; Understanding legal language terminology; Information how to collect data; Cultural Sensitivity; Sampling of cases

The implementation of Court Watching will require training, through the collaboration of attorneys, community organizations, and volunteers. Join us for these **TENTATIVE** dates:

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- *April 28th/10-12* Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, White Plains
- *April 29th – May 18th* Visit a court in session.
- *May 2023 (date TBD)* Legal Services of the Hudson Valley, White Plains

If you are interested in volunteering for our Court Watcher Program or would like additional information, please contact to Angel Gray at agray@wca4kids.org.