

EVICTION 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 dates:

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- *April 28th/10-12pm* Westchester Children's Association, White Plains
- *April 29th - May 15th* Visit a court in session.
- *May 16th/10-12 pm* Westchester Children's Association, 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.