

EVICTION COURT WATCH PROJECT WESTCHESTER COUNTY



What is court watching?

Eviction Court Watching is a program of Westchester Children's Association. Volunteers observe court proceedings and note observations and outcomes of cases. It was established to study and uphold fair and honest practices in the justice system. Court Watching and the data that is reported is a powerful tool that tests whether proceedings are fair and impact key decision makers. The focus on "Landlord-Tenant" Court is intended to protect the rights of Tenants 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 happens outside in the hallway.

Questions for a Court Watching Observation:

- Demographics of client.
- 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 target in the Court Watchers program.

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: Volunteers will be provided training with Information on what to look for in court; understanding legal language terminology, information on how to collect data, cultural sensitivity, sampling of cases, etc.

Our Court Watcher volunteers are expected to volunteer a minimum of 5 hours a month.

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.