



Developing an Equity-Centered Approach to Enforcing Housing Laws in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

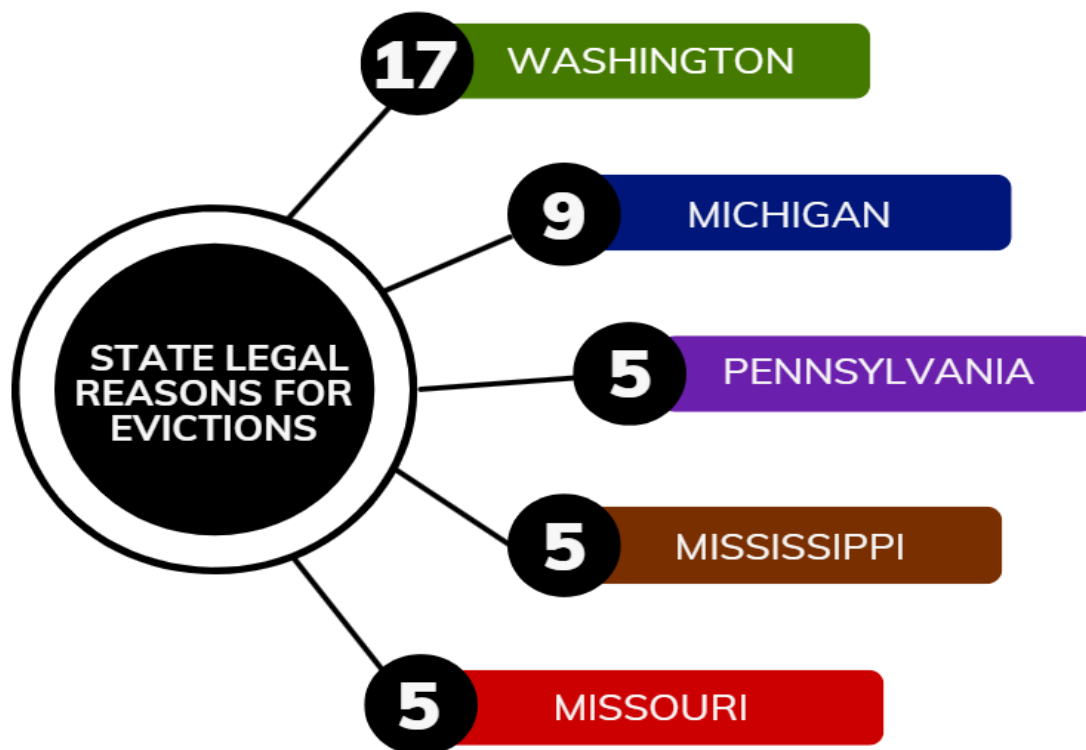
Ruqaiijah Yearby, Debbie Chase, Crystal N. Lewis, Prashasti Bhatnagar, Kemba Noel-London

Before a landlord can evict a tenant in Philadelphia, the landlord must first enroll and participate in the Philadelphia eviction diversion program for at least 30 days, unless there is an imminent threat. Yet, there are still gaps in the equitable enforcement of housing laws. In Pennsylvania, we conducted a data scan, policy surveillance of eviction laws, and stakeholder interviews to understand the gaps in the equitable enforcement of eviction laws. Our primary focus was on the county and city of Philadelphia, but we also reviewed the data and laws for the state of Pennsylvania. Below is a discussion of these laws, including a comparison with the four other jurisdictions we studied: 1) Detroit, Michigan; 2) Jackson, Mississippi; 3) St. Louis, Missouri; and 4) Seattle, Washington.¹

KEY POINTS

Overall, the reasons for eviction vary greatly across and within our study jurisdictions. For instance, across the study jurisdictions (state, county, and city levels), there are only two reasons for evicting a tenant that are the same: 1) nonpayment of rent; and 2) illegal/criminal activity. Otherwise, the number of and type of reasons for eviction vary. Figure 1 shows the different number of reasons for evicting tenants in each state. Figure 2 illustrates the five legal reasons for evictions in **Pennsylvania** as well as the additional reasons for evictions under **Philadelphia (county-city)** law.² Moreover, Pennsylvania and Philadelphia provide notice requirements for the eviction process, which are featured in Figure 3.

Figure 1. Number of reasons for evicting a tenant in each state



Copyright © 2025 by Crystal N. Lewis. All rights reserved.

Figure 2. The Legal Reasons for Eviction in Pennsylvania and Philadelphia County-City¹

REASONS FOR EVICTION	PENNSYLVANIA	PHILADELPHIA COUNTY-CITY	
		When the landlord has violated the law	Good cause required
The lease has ended	✓		
Tenant breached the lease	✓		
Nonpayment of rent	✓	✓	✓
Criminal activity	✓		
Actions of Ejectment	✓		
Tenant permitted waste or nuisance		✓	
Tenant caused the property to be in violation of the law		✓	
Landlord decides to rehabilitate and/or renovate the property to cure a violation for which the property must be vacant		✓	
Landlord can evict a co-tenant who is an abuser or perpetrator of domestic violence or sexual assault, at the request of another tenant		✓	
Any violation of the lease other than acts of violence against a tenant		✓	
Tenant activity substantially affects the health or safety of others on the property			✓
Substantial deterioration of the property caused by the tenant, which is beyond normal repair			✓
Tenant prevents the landlord from accessing the property for lawful purposes, after written notice			✓
Tenant will not extend the lease, which will expire			✓
Owner or their immediate family are moving into the property			✓
Tenant refuses to agree to a proposed rent increase or other changes to the lease but only if certain conditions have been met			✓
Owner does not plan to rent the property while making renovations and certain conditions have been met			✓

Note that if there is no check mark, then that reason for eviction was not found in this jurisdiction's law

Copyright © 2025 by Crystal N. Lewis. All rights reserved.

¹ In Philadelphia, if a landlord violates the law then the tenant can only be evicted if the tenant violates the law for fails to pay the rent. Otherwise, the landlord has to have good cause to evict the tenant.

Figure 3. Notice Requirements for the Court Eviction Process

PENNSYLVANIA	Requires a landlord to provide written notice that includes the date which the tenant must move out. The move out dates are as follows: 1. A 10-DAY NOTICE IS REQUIRED for the following reasons: (1) nonpayment of rent; or (2) illegal use of drugs. 2. When the lease was for one year, less than one year, or an unclear amount of time, a 15-DAY NOTICE IS REQUIRED for the following reasons: (1) end of the lease; or (2) "Forfeiture of the lease for breach of its conditions". 3. When the lease was for more than one year, a 30-DAY NOTICE IS REQUIRED for the following reasons: (1) end of the lease; or (2) "forfeiture of the lease for breach of its conditions".
PHILADELPHIA	Requires a landlord to provide written notice, which includes the good cause reasons for the eviction and date of termination. The landlord MUST PROVIDE NOTICE 60 DAYS PRIOR to the date of termination if the lease was for greater than one year. The landlord MUST PROVIDE NOTICE 30 DAYS PRIOR if the lease was for less than one year. *The tenant can challenge the eviction in court within 15 BUSINESS DAYS of receiving the notice of good cause.

A comparison of tenant eviction protections is featured in Figure 4. Of the five states we studied, the State of Washington offered the most tenant protections. However, Philadelphia offers the most tenant eviction protections of all the places (state, county, and city) we studied for several reasons. First, Philadelphia law provides tenant protections against eviction when a landlord has violated the law. Second, before evicting a tenant, the landlord must provide written notice, which includes the good cause reason for the eviction and date of termination. Third, after notifying the landlord, the tenant can either challenge the eviction in court or file a complaint with the Fair Housing Commission within 15 business days of receiving the notice of good cause.

Fourth, in Philadelphia, the landlord must participate in an eviction diversion program for at least 30 days before being able to file an eviction action in court. The law requires a landlord to notify the tenant of the program. The landlord's failure to participate in the program is an allowable defense for the tenant in eviction court proceedings. Fifth, Philadelphia law provides protections against evictions for being a victim of domestic

abuse or sexual violence, and includes general protections against unfair rental practices. Philadelphia law also provides protections against retaliation. Sixth, Philadelphia law provides that the process for evictions includes a required court order, which is enforced by the sheriff or court-appointed officer.

Figure 4. Tenant Eviction Protections

EVICTIONS				
LOCATION		TENANT PROTECTIONS	LANDLORD RETALIATION RESTRICTIONS	STORAGE OF TENANT'S PROPERTY
STATE	MICHIGAN		✓	
	MISSISSIPPI	✓		
	MISSOURI	✓		
	PENNSYLVANIA	✓	✓	✓ [*]
	WASHINGTON	✓	✓	✓ [*]
COUNTY	WAYNE COUNTY, MI			
	HINDS COUNTY, MS			
	PHILADELPHIA (CITY-COUNTY)	✓	✓	
	KING COUNTY, WA	✓		
CITY	DETROIT, MI			✓
	JACKSON, MS			✓
	ST. LOUIS, MO	✓	✓	
	PHILADELPHIA (CITY-COUNTY)	✓	✓	
	SEATTLE, WA			

* If Requested by Tenant

Copyright © 2025 by Crystal N. Lewis. All rights reserved.

Figure 5 shows a comparison of illegal lockout protections and consequences. Philadelphia offers the most tenant protections against illegal lockouts of the study places. A tenant may contact the police, and the tenant can immediately regain possession, if their landlord is not able to show verification of an eviction order. Any tenant who regains possession with the help of the police may terminate their lease agreement within 30 days without any penalty. A tenant may also recover damages, fees, and court costs.

Figure 5. Illegal Lockout Protections and Consequences

ILLEGAL LOCKOUTS					
LOCATION		TENANT PROTECTIONS	TENANT REMEDIES	LANDLORD PROTECTIONS	LANDLORD CONSEQUENCES
STATE	MICHIGAN	✓	✓		
	MISSISSIPPI			✓	
	MISSOURI	✓			
	PENNSYLVANIA		✓		
	WASHINGTON	✓	✓	✓	✓
COUNTY	WAYNE COUNTY, MI				
	HINDS COUNTY, MS		✓		
	PHILADELPHIA (CITY-COUNTY)	✓	✓		✓
	KING COUNTY, WA				
CITY	DETROIT, MI				
	JACKSON, MS				
	ST. LOUIS, MO	✓	✓		✓
	PHILADELPHIA (CITY-COUNTY)	✓	✓		✓
	SEATTLE, WA	✓			

Copyright © 2025 by Crystal N. Lewis. All rights reserved.

STUDY FINDINGS

Based on our policy surveillance of eviction laws and stakeholder interviews, we found three main gaps in the enforcement of housing laws in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania that create an inequitable housing enforcement system. Each gap is discussed below.

Housing Enforcement System Gaps

01

The eviction laws, which includes illegal lockout laws, are unclear, and most stakeholders lack familiarity with them.

02

There are inconsistencies in eviction laws and processes, and lack of housing expertise among those enforcing the laws.

03

Broad discretion in the housing system cause structural limitations in the housing system, which foster a power imbalance between tenants and landlords.

Unclear Laws and Lack of Familiarity

A Court order makes the eviction process formal. When places do not make it clear that an eviction order is required before a tenant can be physically evicted, it leads to inequitable enforcement of housing laws. Pennsylvania and Philadelphia laws do mention court orders, but they do not say if it is required before a tenant can be physically evicted. Pennsylvania law says that a judge shall issue an eviction order if the landlord proves that an eviction is warranted.³ For evictions connected to criminal activity, the court shall issue an order for immediate eviction.⁴ Yet, the laws do not specifically say whether a court order for eviction is required before a tenant is physically evicted.⁵

Philadelphia law discusses a court order for eviction in the law that prohibits illegal lockouts.⁶ The law says that the required process for evictions includes a court order, which is enforced by the sheriff or court-appointed officer.⁷

To understand how the eviction laws regarding reasons for eviction were being applied, we showed interviewees in each place, one eviction law that represented the main reason for eviction in that place. After showing interviewees the law, we asked their interpretation of the law, and from their perspective, whether the law for each place was enforced as written. In Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, there was considerable lack of clarity and familiarity with the law covering reasons for evictions, illustrated by the figures 6 and 7.

Figure 6. Interview Responses for Eviction Laws from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Laws	Stakeholder Type	Response
Part of Pennsylvania Law 68 P.S. § 250.501 (2024)		
(a) A landlord desirous of repossessing real property from a tenant except real property which is a mobile home space as defined in the act of November 24, 1976 (P.L. 1176, No. 261), known as the "Mobile Home Park Rights Act," may notify, in writing, the tenant to remove from the same at the expiration of the time specified in the notice under the following circumstances, namely, (1) Upon the termination of a term of the tenant, (2) or upon forfeiture of the lease for breach of its conditions, (3) or upon the failure of the tenant, upon demand, to satisfy any rent reserved and due. (b) Except as provided for in subsection (c), in case of the expiration of a term or of a forfeiture for breach of the conditions of the lease where the lease is for any term of one year or less or for an indeterminate time, the notice shall specify that the tenant shall remove within fifteen days from the date of service thereof, and when the lease is for more than one year, then within thirty days from the date of service thereof. In case of failure of the tenant, upon demand, to satisfy any rent reserved and due, the notice shall specify that the tenant shall remove within ten days from the date of the service thereof.	Community	"Am I familiar with [the eviction] law? Yeah. I guess not in a real way, but no. No. I'm going to say I haven't looked at the laws in a long time . . . when I read it, it's like, this is bad, because the notice requirement is so short that's - it's just very unfair. I don't know. I think we have a tighter law in Philly. But I know that in the counties, it's really bad."

Figure 7. Interview Responses for Illegal Lockout Laws from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Laws	Stakeholder Type	Response
Entire Pennsylvania Law 68 P.S. § 250.307 (2024)		
Any court of record or court not of record having jurisdiction in civil actions at law may entertain an action to defalcate by a tenant against a landlord where the landlord has distrained for arrears of rent, to compel the landlord to set-off any account which the tenant may have against the landlord. No such court shall entertain any such action where the rent or set-off claimed is in excess of its civil jurisdiction. Proceedings in such actions shall be the same as in actions of assumpsit. The court shall determine the amount of rent in arrears and the amount of the set-off, if any, and enter judgment in favor of the proper party for the balance due. If such judgment is in favor of the landlord he may, in lieu of issuing execution thereon, proceed with his distress for the amount of such judgment. If the landlord shall sell more personal property than necessary to satisfy such judgment and costs and fail to pay the overplus to the tenant, he shall be liable in trespass to double the amount of the sum so detained, together with the costs of suit. If the landlord shall proceed to sell any personal property after notice of any such proceeding to defalcate and before judgment in his favor thereon, he shall be liable in trespass to double the amount by which the sum realized from such sale exceeds the sum to which he shall be found to be entitled by the final judgment in the defalcation proceeding, together with the costs of suit in the defalcation proceeding, if such judgment be in his favor. If the landlord proceeds with the distress, he shall satisfy the judgment to the extent of the amount realized on the sale, less the costs of the distress, or on his failure to do so, the tenant may proceed by rule to have such satisfaction entered.	Community	"I really haven't looked at [the illegal lockout law]. No. But it [looks] really bad. It seems like it gives the landlord the ability to claim possession of another person's stuff. So, to offset the arrears, the rent arrears, which - I don't know. That's very - I don't know. Oh, my goodness . . . I'm like, is this saying that they're allowed to take the property of a tenant of personal property? I don't - I don't even know. I hope not . . . I guess I don't know what defalcate means, and before the judgment of favor [means]. I guess one of the weird things about our courts is, like, we usually just - like, Philadelphia is its own world. Sometimes, it feels like the state doesn't even matter, because Philadelphia will have its own rules . . . I was telling people, it's like, you got to go to tenant court. Our tenant court is its very own thing."
	Government	"I'm laughing, because this language is so different from the other one [referring to the language of the illegal lockout law being different from the eviction law]. It's very difficult to read. I frankly don't understand this at all . . . There's some keywords in here that I have never heard of and don't understand that . . . So defalcate, I don't know what that means. And there's another one, and there were two keywords that repeated themselves. I didn't understand . . . Obviously, I have so much context of the eviction process and the court process, and I'm looking at court records on a weekly basis, the dockets, but I'm still confused. I don't understand who's bringing who to court. And, yeah, I would have to read that 10 more times to have a sense."

Multiple stakeholders involved in the housing enforcement system reported lack of clarity and familiarity with eviction and illegal lockout laws. A community stakeholder in Philadelphia highlighted landlord's lack of understanding of the laws, stating:

“We’ve definitely encountered landlords who will just put out tenant stuff as part of the illegal eviction. So a tenant will come home, and the landlord will have put all their stuff out on the lawn or in the trash or something like that . . . I would say that landlords definitely feel they have the right to take tenant stuff or move tenant stuff or throw tenant stuff out if the tenants are not paying, but they’re really not supposed to. ” (Community Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

This lack of housing law knowledge extends beyond landlords. As illustrated in Figure 7, many of the legal stakeholders we interviewed did not recognize the illegal lockout law from their jurisdiction, with one governmental housing enforcement officer noting that the law confusing. Even mediators tasked with helping landlords and tenants resolve cases outside of court often lack basic knowledge of housing law and eviction processes. In explaining the out-of-court diversion program process for tenants and landlords, one legal stakeholder in Philadelphia noted:

“. . . A lot of times through the [eviction] diversion program, you’ll wind up in a mediation . . . you’ll meet with a volunteer mediator who is usually an attorney. Usually [the volunteer mediator] has no idea how the landlord tenant process works . . .” (Legal Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

The equitable enforcement of eviction laws is further eroded by some stakeholder's inconsistent application of the law.

Inconsistencies in Eviction Laws and Processes

The inconsistent application of housing laws was present in every place that we studied, including places that enacted tenant friendly laws (Washington and Pennsylvania) because judges still often defer to landlords. Specifically, even when there are tenant friendly laws, many judges either do not apply tenant friendly laws or apply the laws in a

way that benefits landlords. Thus, the power imbalance between landlords and tenants still remains regardless of the adoption of tenant friendly laws.

A legal stakeholder in **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania** likened the eviction court process to a game of chance, highlighting the built-in variability in eviction processes and how outcomes depend heavily on which judge, or legal service provider is present on a given day:

“No, not at all [responding to whether all 12 judges on the roster have the same knowledge base of housing law]. I often explain to clients that coming to municipal court is a lot like coming to a casino. There are many, many, many luck factors here that determine the outcome that you're going to get on any particular day. Which judge is sitting, which attorney from community legal services is there that day, or which commissioner, can affect the outcome you're going to receive. Basically, different people will approach things in different ways, which will affect the outcome.” (Legal Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Other stakeholders in Philadelphia also highlighted inconsistent enforcement of certain laws because judges do not agree with the law. For instance, a legal stakeholder described that *“three quarters of the judges in [the Pennsylvania] system don’t believe in the validity of [the lead] law [which requires landlords to provide lead-safe certificates to tenants].”* The law says that a landlord without a lead-safe certificate cannot collect rent. Because some judges feel the law is invalid, in eviction cases, the judge will not allow tenants to argue that a landlord has not fulfilled this standard, and thus the tenant did not need to pay rent. According to the legal stakeholder, instead of applying the lead law, the judges rule in favor of the landlord and evict the tenant.

Structural Limitations

Our interviews of key stakeholders illustrate the broad discretion housing enforcers have and how it can negatively impact tenants. While landlords are often granted leniency and permitted to “slip through” procedural requirements, tenants report facing arbitrary or punitive decisions from judges. These structural limitations in the eviction process are in

large part a result of the wide discretion judges and law enforcement have in following and applying the laws.

A legal stakeholder in **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania** described the challenge of arguing unlawful eviction cases before judges unfamiliar with housing law, who may impose inappropriate standards or focus on irrelevant factors such as tenant behavior:

“ . . . Sure, I’ve seen [the law on unlawful evictions]. And I got news for you. Just because you go [see] a judge and try to say, hey, this person got locked out, let her back in. They’ll say, ‘I’m not convinced. The other side had a better argument than you did. The other [side] said they were a crappy tenant.’ [And then] you’re saying, ‘Your Honor, that’s not the measure of this thing. We had a contractual relationship with this person. They deliberately breached it.’ And then you have to go to take that to [the] Superior Court, because the judges are scholarly and all that, but they’re pretty much like the next 30 people you’re gonna meet on a bus, no two are alike. Some of them were gifted criminal lawyers, and that’s how they got made judges. Doesn’t mean they know what a lease is” (Legal Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

These structural limitations, as well as unclear laws, stakeholder unfamiliarity with the laws, and inconsistent application of the laws are systems-level problems that cannot be fixed with individual level solutions. To create an equitable housing system, we suggest legal stakeholders (legislators, judges, government officials, lawyers, and law enforcement) partner with tenants and tenant advocacy groups to implement system-level changes, using the Health Justice Framework.

DEVELOPING AN EQUITY-CENTERED APPROACH

The housing enforcement system is fraught with confusion, inconsistencies, and power imbalances that are fostered by enforcement official’s broad discretion. As a result, tenants remain unprotected, even in places with tenant friendly laws. This inequitable system can only be improved by giving tenants power and opportunities to participate in

the enforcement of housing laws. The Health Justice Framework provides a roadmap for these changes. Below is a summary of the three principles that guide the framework⁸ and how they should be applied to the housing enforcement system.

Health Justice Principles



Truth and Reconciliation Process: Legal stakeholders acknowledge the inconsistent application of laws and tenants tell legal stakeholders about the harm tenants have suffered as a result



Community-Driven Structural Change: Legal stakeholders work with tenants and tenant advocacy organizations to deter evictions and limit the harm of evictions



Financial Supports and Accommodations: Policymakers and housing regulators provide tenants with *financial supports*, such as rental assistance, instead of giving the money to landlords

By using these principles, legal stakeholders can improve their efforts to illuminate the inequitable enforcement of housing laws, support community-driven change, and provide financial supports and accommodations. Below is a discussion of the Health Justice principles using promising practices and recommendations proposed by Philadelphia stakeholders. The Health Justice Impact Tool we created provides steps legal stakeholders (legislators, judges, government officials, lawyers, and law enforcement) can use implement the three Health Justice principles.

Truth and Reconciliation

To transform the housing enforcement system, legal stakeholders should work with tenants and tenant advocacy groups to undertake a *truth and reconciliation* process that gives tenants information and acknowledges the inequities in the enforcement system.

Some governments have adopted a *truth and reconciliation* process to address racism and fix inequitable systems. For instance, Providence, Rhode Island adopted a truth and reconciliation process to address racism. The Rhode Island process began with the mayor of Providence and a group of advisers meeting to develop “a plan for sharing the state’s role throughout history in the institution of slavery, genocide of Indigenous people, forced assimilation and seizure of land; followed by city leaders reviewing laws and policies that resulted in discrimination against Black and Indigenous people; and concluded with community discussion about the state’s history and the ways in which historical injustices and systemic discrimination continue to affect society today.”⁹ This promising practice should be used as a model for the housing system.

A *truth and reconciliation* process for housing enforcement would require legal stakeholders to be honest about their lack of knowledge of the laws and inconsistent application of laws, which harms tenants, particularly tenants from marginalized racial and ethnic communities. Then, in partnership with tenants and tenant advocacy organizations, legal stakeholders should create a truth and reconciliation process. At a minimum, the process must provide opportunities for tenants to tell legal stakeholders about the harm tenants have suffered. The process should also include information collected by community partners and community-based participatory research, which evidences the harmful impact of the inequitable enforcement of the housing system.

After this process, legal stakeholders need to work with tenants and tenant advocacy groups to create and implement structural changes to the enforcement system.

Community-Driven Structural Change

Community-driven structural change enables tenants to directly hold landlords and legal stakeholders accountable for the inequitable enforcement of housing laws. A promising practice for community-driven structural changes is the creation of a publicly accessible website with best and promising practices for the equitable enforcement of housing laws. Street Democracy, a legal services organization in Detroit, provides both direct legal service and legal advocacy to help prevent evictions. For this study, Street Democracy created a [website](#) for community activists, attorneys, and judges, listing best and

promising practices for the enforcement of housing laws before, during, and after the eviction court process. The website also allows participants to quickly share advocacy ideas, while activists and legal practitioners can score and compare their place.

In addition, many of the stakeholders we interviewed recommended that housing laws and the enforcement of the laws must be changed to support the life and family circumstances of those facing evictions. Below are some representative quotations:

- *"I think one [thing] that often frustrates me . . . is [that] the law often tries to operate in a vacuum, and it doesn't work that way. People have lives." (Community Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)*
- *"[If] I was gonna change the law itself, I would make it easier for a tenant to enforce [or] require a landlord to make repairs to a property. This is a huge problem that often ends in eviction or a tenant leaving because there isn't really a great way to force the landlord to make repairs . . . a tenant has a right to withhold rent, but it's kind of complicated. I would like to change the laws around withholding rent to make it more simple for a tenant to actually follow. I'd like those laws to be codified. Like right now our habitability and withholding rent laws all exist in a court case from the seventies, and it's a great court case. It lays out all the steps, but how is a tenant gonna read this Pennsylvania Supreme Court case?" (Community Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)*

Furthermore, legal stakeholders should work with tenants and tenant advocacy organizations to deter evictions and limit the harm of evictions. For example, the stakeholders we interviewed pointed out that social services should work directly with tenants to deter evictions. Moreover, interviewees highlighted that the notice requirements for evictions were often too short. Thus, some Philadelphia stakeholders recommended giving tenants more time and flexibility for a physical eviction:

"Those agreements [mediation] are often broken... [because] there's no enforcement behind the mediated agreement. It's just like, essentially, a handshake deal. So, if somebody says they'll pay \$500 a month in addition to

their rent, a lot of times, they don't pay anything, and it's just a tactic to buy more time.” (Legal Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Many tenants have already suffered harm because of the inequitable enforcement of housing laws. Hence, policymakers and housing regulators should provide financial supports and accommodations directly to tenants to repair this harm.

Financial Supports and Accommodations

Based on the experience of those we interviewed in specific places, we recommend that government stakeholders provide tenants with *financial supports*, such as rental assistance, instead of giving the money to landlords. The funds could still be in the form of a voucher, as with SNAP benefits, but the funds would go directly to the tenant to ensure that tenants harmed by the housing system actually receive the benefit. Philadelphian interviewees also highlighted the importance of rental assistance going directly to the tenant:

“ . . . Sometimes we [as a community organization funded by the government] end up paying money through targeted financial assistance to people who are really crappy landlords who the tenant was trying to withhold rent from because the landlord wasn't making repairs and the place is just in really terrible shape. And paying out that targeted financial assistance from the landlord's perspective solves the problem because now they've gotten the money for rent and now they can kind of move forward and they're not going to evict the tenant. But for the tenant, they still don't have those repairs made . . . ” (Community Stakeholder, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania)

Additionally, Philadelphia stakeholders noted that the inequitable enforcement of housing laws was in large part due to the lack of affordable housing.

Health Justice Impact Tool

Based on the Health Justice Framework¹⁰ and Health in Partnership's Root Cause Test,¹¹ the [Health Justice Impact Tool](#) provides questions to answer to ensure that the three

guiding principles of Health Justice (truth & reconciliation; community-driven structural change; and financial supports & accommodations) are fulfilled. Figure 8 is a visual representation of the tool.

Figure 8. Health Justice Impact Tool Visualization¹²



In partnership with tenants and tenant advocacy groups, legal stakeholders should use the tool to identify enforcement gaps in order to create an equitable housing system. An equitable housing system would not only foster all individual's ability to thrive, particularly individuals from racially and ethnically marginalized groups, but also provide tenants with equal power and resources to hold housing enforcement actors accountable.

ENDNOTES

¹ For a detailed summary of the eviction and illegal lockout laws in Detroit, Michigan; Jackson, Mississippi; St. Louis, Missouri; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and Seattle, Washington see [Appendix B](#) of the full report.

² Pennsylvania does not have any laws preempting local governments from enacting laws about evictions or illegal lockouts.

³ 68 P.S. § 250.503 (2024).

⁴ 35 P.S. § 780-156, 780-160, 780-162 (2024).

⁵ *Id.*; 68 P.S. § 250.503 (2024).

⁶ PA Ordinance §9-1603 (2024).

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ Yearby, R. (2022). The Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, and Health Justice. *The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 50(4), 641-649. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jme.2023.3>

⁹ List, M. (2020). Providence mayor signs order to pursue truth, reparations for Black, Indigenous people. *The Providence Journal*. <https://www.providencejournal.com/story/news/2020/07/16/providence-mayor-signs-order-to-pursue-truth-reparations-for-black-indigenous-people/42496067/>

¹⁰ Yearby, R. (2022). The Social Determinants of Health, Health Disparities, and Health Justice. *The Journal of Law, Medicine, and Ethics* 50(4), 641-649. <https://doi.org/10.1017/jme.2023.3>

¹¹ Dominie, W. and Huerta, M. (2025). *The Root Cause Test: A Public Health Guide for Transformative Housing Solutions*. Health in Partnership. https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/67caf6ff6880dabe1f2342b0/689d1ab81ed73019b54a3a00_Root%20Cause%20Test%20August%202025.pdf

¹² Copyright © September 2025. Permission is granted for reproduction of this report with attribution to Crystal N. Lewis and Ruqaijah Yearby “Housing Justice Impact Tool Visual Representation”, September 2025