

Shriver Projects Produce Better Results for Many Low-Income Tenants in Eviction Cases

WHAT IS SHRIVER? The Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act (AB590; 2009) established pilot projects to provide legal services to low-income people in cases involving critical livelihood issues like housing, child custody, and family guardianship. This fact sheet describes the six housing pilot projects, launched in 2011, that involved collaborations between legal services agencies and local superior courts. Projects' goals are to improve access to the legal system, increase court efficiency, and improve the quality of justice dispensed by California's courts.

WHAT IS UNLAWFUL DETAINER (UD)? Unlawful detainer (UD; commonly called *eviction*) is the fast-track legal process for landlords to remove a tenant from their property. Historically, over 90% of landlords in UD cases have attorneys, but very few tenants do.

WHAT TYPES OF SERVICES ARE AVAILABLE?

Shriver services are intended for **low-income** people who face an **opposing party with an attorney**. Each project offers a range of legal services, including:

- **representation** (an attorney represents the client and manages all aspects of the case) and
- **unbundled services** (staff helps with discrete legal tasks such as brief legal advice, preparation of forms, or trial preparation).
- Most projects **expanded court self-help assistance**.

Projects could serve tenants and landlords. Because tenants more often met the eligibility criteria, the Shriver pilot projects overwhelmingly serve tenants.

ARE THE PILOT PROJECTS SUCCESSFUL?

NPC Research was hired by the Judicial Council of California to conduct a comprehensive, multi-year study of the Shriver pilot projects. The study used data from multiple sources collected over 6 years and included a random assignment component that compared outcomes of cases with tenants who were **represented by a Shriver attorney** and cases with tenants who were **self-represented** (did not have an attorney). Study results are shown on the reverse side.

Who Received Shriver Services?

Between 2011 and 2016:

19,231 low-income tenants served
56,000 household members impacted

Of these tenants:



61% were female



65% were people of color



33% had a high school diploma or less

Many tenants had other characteristics posing potentially serious consequences if evicted:



25% had a disability



53% had minors living in the household

Most Shriver eviction clients experienced **severe rental cost burden** (as per HUD):

\$980 Shriver clients' median monthly household income

\$825 median rent among Shriver clients (avg. Fair Market Rent for a 2-bedroom apt. in Shriver counties = \$1,286)

73% Shriver clients who spent more than half their income on rent

What Services Were Provided?

46% received **unbundled legal services**

54% received **representation** by a Shriver attorney

Of tenants who received Shriver representation, **96%** faced a landlord who had representation.

Notable Impacts of the Shriver Housing Pilot Projects

FEWER DEFAULTS: Default judgments result in tenants losing their housing without presenting their side of the story to the court. Shriver representation helped tenants avoid defaults and increased their ability to participate in the judicial process and meaningfully defend their cases.



91% of Shriver tenants successfully filed responses to UD complaints—resulting in significantly **fewer defaults**—and **84%** of Shriver tenants were able to raise relevant facts to actively **defend their cases**.

MORE SETTLEMENTS AND FEWER TRIALS:

Settlements require fewer court resources than trials do, and increasing the rate of settlement relieves court congestion and preserves limited court resources. **Shriver tenants settled their cases twice as often as self-represented tenants, and had substantially fewer trials:**

Shriver-Represented:



Self-Represented:



■ Settlement ■ Trial ■ Dismissal ■ Default

FEWER JUDGMENTS AGAINST TENANTS: Most Shriver clients moved out as part of a negotiated settlement, enabling a more stable transition. Even though Shriver representation did not lead to more tenants staying in their homes, **fewer Shriver tenants were subject to lockouts:**

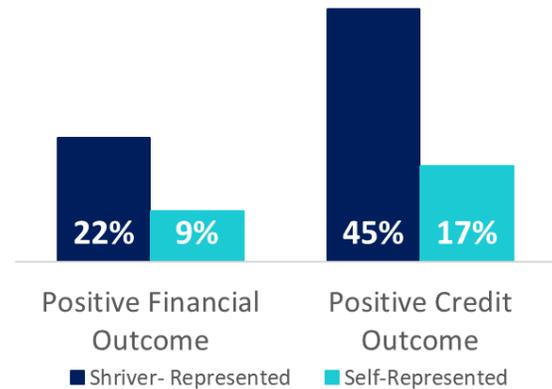
- **75%** of tenants moved out, but only **11%** of Shriver tenants were **formally evicted**.

Overall, fewer Shriver clients **had judgments issued against them:**



OUTCOMES SUPPORTED LONGER-TERM HOUSING STABILITY:

Eviction can have disastrous consequences for low-income people, who may struggle to pay moving costs and find replacement housing. Settlements can provide tenants with conditions that can support their ability find replacement housing sooner. **As part of their settlements, Shriver tenants more often received positive financial outcomes (e.g., reduced/waived rental debt, damages, or fees), positive credit outcomes (e.g., UD record sealed, no report to credit agencies), and extra time to move:**



ONE YEAR LATER: A telephone survey found that **71%** of Shriver tenants had moved into a **new rental unit** (as opposed to staying with family or being homeless), vs. **43%** of self-represented tenants.

LITIGANTS FELT SUPPORTED: Navigating an eviction case can be frightening and overwhelming. For Shriver clients, **having an attorney helped to make their eviction case manageable**. They felt heard, supported in the process, and not lost in the judicial system.

SUMMARY: Shriver attorneys ensured low-income tenants could actively participate in their eviction cases and helped them reach good settlements, often leading to a smoother transition to replacement housing with fewer financial burdens and less family disruption. Providing these services also created efficiencies for the court and safeguarded against tenants' waiver of important legal rights.



For more information about the Shriver pilot projects, visit: <http://www.courts.ca.gov/15583.htm>