

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

What is the Shriver Program?

The Sargent Shriver Civil Counsel Act pilot program was legislatively established in 2009 (AB590) and expanded in 2019 (AB330) 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 seven housing pilot projects funded between 2011 and 2019 to help low-income Californians in eviction cases. All pilot projects involve 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.

Why eviction cases?

Even before the wave of evictions anticipated as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, many low-income Californians were unstably housed and at heightened risk for eviction and possible homelessness. Historically, eviction cases involve imbalanced representation, wherein more than 90% of landlords have attorneys, but very few tenants do. These factors make this a prime area for Shriver services.

What types of services are available?

Shriver services are provided to low-income people in eviction cases who face an opposing party with an attorney. Projects can serve tenants and landlords, but the overwhelming majority of clients are tenants because tenants more often meet the eligibility criteria.

Projects offer a range of services, including:

- **Legal representation** (an attorney represents the client and manages the case)
- **Unbundled legal services** (staff helps with discrete legal tasks such as brief legal advice, preparation of forms, or trial preparation)
- Expanded **court self-help assistance** and **other court services** to help parties settle their cases
- **Housing inspectors** to investigate allegations of poor housing conditions (offered by two projects)

Are the pilot projects successful?

A multi-year evaluation of the Shriver pilot projects used data from multiple sources and included a random assignment component that compared outcomes of cases involving tenants represented by a Shriver attorney with cases involving self-represented tenants (did not have an attorney). The study found that Shriver cases resulted in fewer defaults, more settlements, and fewer trials, as indicated in the more detailed summary on the reverse side.



Who received Shriver Services?

Between 2011 and 2019:

39,461

low-income tenants were served

Of these tenants:

71%

were people of color

98,306

household members were impacted by services

61%

were female



Many tenants had characteristics that posed potentially serious consequences if evicted:

51%

had minors in the household

33%

had a disability or chronic health condition

29%

lived in subsidized housing, making it more challenging to find replacement housing

Shriver housing clients experienced severe rental cost burden (according to federal guidelines from HUD):

\$1,000/month

Shriver clients' median household income

70%

Shriver clients spent more than half of their income on rent

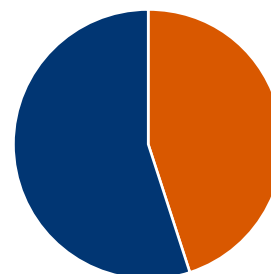
\$840/month median rent among Shriver clients

Avg. 2019 Fair Market Rent for a 2-bedroom apt. in Shriver counties = \$1,485/month

What services were provided?

55%

received representation by a Shriver attorney



45%

received unbundled legal services

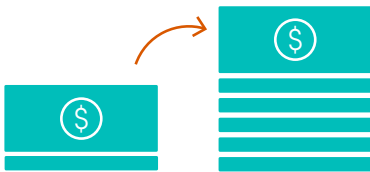


Notable Impacts of the Shriver Housing Pilot Projects

Fewer Defaults

Tenants have only 5 days to file a response to an eviction complaint to avoid a default on their case. Default judgments result in tenants losing their housing without presenting their side of the story. In 2019, the average default rate across counties with Shriver housing projects was 40%.

Among tenants receiving Shriver services, the default rate was close to zero.



Tenants' Financial Burdens were Eased

Faced with the costs of relocation, many tenants experience mounting financial pressure. Shriver representation helps low-income tenants avoid paying some potentially high costs, such as landlord attorney's fees and holdover damages.

The median amount saved among Shriver-represented tenants was \$2,127 per case, compared to \$1,365 among self-represented tenants.

Litigants Felt Supported

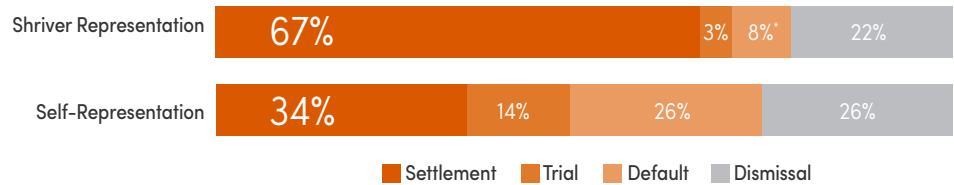
Navigating an eviction case can be frightening and overwhelming. For Shriver clients, having an attorney helped to make their eviction case manageable. They felt heard, supported in the process, and not lost in the judicial system.



For more information, visit:
www.courts.ca.gov/shrivercommittee.htm

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. Settlements also enable tenants to negotiate the terms of their case resolution, giving them a voice in the process. **Shriver-represented tenants settled their cases twice as often as self-represented tenants and had many fewer trials:**

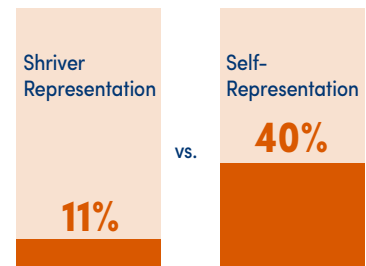


*These Shriver cases had defaults on record at intake which attorneys were unable to have set aside.

Fewer Judgments Against Tenants

Three quarters of tenants moved out at the end of their case. Most Shriver clients moved as part of a negotiated settlement, enabling a more stable transition. Few Shriver clients had judgments issued against them, which would have subjected them to a lockout.

% of Tenants with Judgments Entered 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. Shriver-represented tenants were **twice as likely as self-represented tenants** to receive additional case outcomes that helped support their ability to relocate, such as the **eviction record being sealed, neutral rental references from the landlord, and the case not being reported to credit agencies.**

One Year Later

A telephone survey found that

71% vs. **43%**
of Shriver tenants had moved into a new rental unit
of self-represented tenants

(as opposed to staying with family or being homeless)



SUMMARY

Shriver attorneys ensure low-income tenants can actively participate in their eviction cases and help them negotiate good settlements, often leading to a smoother transition to replacement housing with fewer financial burdens and less family disruption. Providing these services also creates efficiencies for the court, as more cases settle and judges have more complete information on which to base decisions. Shriver services safeguard against tenants' waiver of important legal rights.