

Stout's Independent Evaluation of Oklahoma County and Tulsa County Eviction Right to Counsel Pilot Programs – Key Findings

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LASO attorneys have assisted RTC Pilot clients in achieving approximately 95% of their case goals.

Approximately 27% of RTC Pilot clients reported that they experienced homelessness due to a past eviction. Approximately 40% of RTC Pilot clients indicated that they experienced a barrier (e.g., had to miss work, change childcare plans, miss or change a medical appointment) that made it challenging to attend their hearing.

Stout estimates that Oklahoma County and Tulsa County likely realized economic and fiscal benefits of approximately \$6.3 million between August 1, 2022 and June 5, 2024 as a result of the RTC Pilot.

Plaintiff (landlord / rental property owner) legal counsel appreciates the importance of tenant legal representation and indicated to Stout that when a tenant is represented, cases are generally resolved more efficiently and effectively.

Key Findings

LASO has been assisting Oklahoma County and Tulsa County residents in eviction proceedings though the RTC Pilot since August 2022 in Tulsa County and since June 2023 in Oklahoma County. LASO significantly expanded data collection as an element of Stout's independent evaluation, which enabled a quantitative approach to evaluation. LASO is the first civil legal services organization Stout was engaged by that collected data to demonstrate: (1) the frequency with which clients experienced homelessness as a result of a past eviction; and (2) systemic barriers that clients may be experiencing when trying to attend their hearings (e.g., needed to miss work, change childcare plans). Throughout the independent evaluation, Stout sought feedback from LASO staff and rental property owners (RPOs) and their counsel related to their experiences engaging with the RTC Pilot. The combination of quantitative and qualitative evaluation measures demonstrates the impact of the RTC Pilot through different lenses.

RTC Pilot Attorneys Assisted Clients in Achieving Their Goals

For RTC Pilot cases opened and closed between June 1, 2023 and June 5, 2024 where the client received extensive services, LASO attorneys achieved approximately 95% of clients' stated case goals.¹ The 3 most common goals are listed below with the frequency of the goal being achieved, the number of clients with the goal, and the percent of clients with that goal.

¹ Based on goals the 3 most frequently stated client goals.

Client Goal	Frequency Goal Was Achieved	# of RTC Pilot Clients with Goal ²	% of RTC Pilot Clients with Goal ³
Prevent eviction judgment	94%	269	50%
Secure additional time to move	98%	229	42%
Prevent involuntary move	94%	219	42%

LASO Made a Significant Commitment to Data Collection and Iterative Evaluation

Stout worked closely with LASO to expand structured data collection that would be used to inform the iterative evaluation and assist in quantifying the impact of the RTC pilot. LASO invested significantly in a comprehensive client interview process intended to better understand clients and their circumstances. LASO’s dedication to data collection has been critical for developing a data-oriented approach to the RTC Pilot evaluation. Based on the data collected by LASO, Stout evaluated the client goals achieved by LASO, analyzed client household demographics and case characteristics (including case complexities), and estimated the preliminary fiscal impacts of the RTC Pilot. These quantitative analyses were combined with and informed by qualitative feedback from LASO, rental property owners, RTC Pilot clients, and other Oklahoma eviction ecosystem stakeholders.

RTC Pilot Clients Are Experiencing Substantive Legal Issues Beyond Non-payment of Rent

In jurisdictions⁴ where Stout has conducted evaluations of eviction right to counsel programs, attorneys representing tenants in eviction proceedings have communicated (and the data collected has shown) that tenants are often trying to navigate complex situations related to their eviction. Stout’s evaluation found that while most eviction filings in Oklahoma County and Tulsa County, (and throughout the country) are brought for non-payment of rent, there are often substantive legal issues or procedural deficiencies with how the case was brought. Tenants seeking legal representation through the RTC Pilot are often doing so because they want an attorney to assist them with substantive legal issues with their case, potential defenses, or they are experiencing challenges within the household exacerbating the trauma of the eviction process.

Stout analyzed data from the client intake interview to determine the frequency with which RTC Pilot clients who received extensive services indicated they were experiencing at least 1 complex case criteria. In 64% of closed RTC Pilot cases where the client received extensive

² Clients can have more than 1 goal for their case.

³ Total will be greater than 100% because clients can have more than 1 goal for their case.

⁴ These jurisdictions include Cleveland, Connecticut, Davidson County (Nashville), and Milwaukee.

service⁵, clients were experiencing at least 1 complex case criteria⁶, and in 32% of closed RTC Pilot cases, clients were experiencing multiple complex case criteria. In Stout's evaluation of Cleveland and Milwaukee's eviction right to counsel program, it found approximately 86% of closed extensive service cases had at least 1 complex case criteria.

Additionally, approximately 27% of RTC Pilot clients reported that they had experienced homelessness due to a past eviction. Clients who experienced past homelessness due to an eviction were more likely to be female (76%) than male (24%). Clients who identified as White disproportionately indicated they experienced past homelessness due to an eviction. Approximately 35% of clients who identified as White indicated they experienced past homelessness due to an eviction compared to approximately 27% of clients who identified as Black, approximately 8% of clients who identified as Native American, and approximately 5% of clients who identified as Hispanic or Latino.

RTC Pilot Created Economic and Fiscal Benefits

Stout estimates that Oklahoma County and Tulsa County likely realized economic and fiscal benefits of approximately \$6.3 million between August 1, 2022 and June 5, 2024 as a result of the RTC Pilot. Based on Stout's review of information provided by LASO, it spent approximately \$860,000 (approximately \$472 per case on average) on the RTC Pilot between August 2022 and June 2024 (approximately \$540,000 (63%) in Tulsa and \$320,000 (37%) in Oklahoma City).

The costs incurred for the pilot activities included personnel salaries and benefits as well as a portion of overhead costs related to the pilot activities. Funds from the Federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) were used for RTC pilot activities during the evaluation period in Oklahoma City. For RTC activities during the evaluation period in Tulsa, LASO utilized a portion of grant funding secured from HUD (additional amounts available from this grant continue to support RTC pilot activities in Tulsa). Based on the amounts incurred during the pilot evaluation period, Stout estimates a return on investment of \$7.37 for every dollar spent. Using Stout's estimate of cost per case for a fully-funded, sustainable eviction right to counsel (\$3.5 million annually in Oklahoma County and \$3 million annually in Tulsa County, an average estimated cost per case of \$818), Stout estimates the return on investment would be \$4.21 for every dollar invested. The cost per case expected for a sustainable eviction right to counsel is greater than that experienced during the pilot, as additional costs would likely be required for a fully scaled eviction right to counsel, such as facilities, technology, equipment, training, and outreach.

⁵ Approximately 71% of RTC Pilot clients received extensive service.

⁶ Complex case criteria include defective conditions, the presence of a disability in the client's household, living in public or subsidized housing, or previous issues with the rental property owner.

The estimated economic and fiscal benefits were related to:

- Fiscal impacts related to housing social safety net responses - \$1.7 million
- Economic value preserved by retaining residency in Oklahoma -\$1.2 million
- Reduction in crimes related to lack of shelter - \$740,000
- Fiscal impacts related to increased educational attainment - \$720,000
- Fiscal impacts related to responding to unsheltered homelessness - \$710,000
- Fiscal impacts related to employment stability - \$470,000
- Sustained education funding for children in Oklahoma schools - \$420,000
- Fiscal impacts related to criminalizing homelessness - \$160,000
- Fiscal impacts related to Medicaid spending on health care - \$130,000

Stout’s preliminary estimate of fiscal impact is likely significantly understated. Included in the calculation are benefits of the RTC Pilot that can be quantified based on currently available data. However, Oklahoma County and Tulsa County (as well as individual cities within the counties) would likely realize additional benefits that are not currently quantifiable based on available data. These benefits that are not currently quantifiable include but are not limited to:

- The juvenile justice costs and child welfare costs associated with children experiencing homelessness
- The negative impact of an eviction filing (regardless of the outcome) on a tenant’s ability to re-rent and/or retain a housing voucher or subsidized housing
- The cost of mental health care
- The cost of family, community, and neighborhood instability
- Preservation of financial and personal assets
- A reduction, over time, of the number of eviction cases filed resulting in improved use of Oklahoma County District Court and Tulsa County District Court resources.

The Estimated Cost to Fully Implement RTC in Oklahoma County and Tulsa County

Stout worked with LASO to estimate the cost to fully implement RTC in Oklahoma County and Tulsa County. Stout estimates the cost to fully implement RTC in Oklahoma County to be \$3.5 million annually, and the cost to fully implement RTC in Tulsa County to be \$3 million annually. The cost estimates include personal costs for hiring staff attorneys, supervising attorneys, paralegals / intake specialists, and social workers. The cost estimates also include costs for facilities, technology, equipment, training, outreach, and other costs necessary to provide legal representation under an eviction right to counsel program. The table below shows the staffing required and other select metrics for each jurisdiction at full implementation of RTC.

	Oklahoma County	Tulsa County
Staff attorneys	23	20
Supervising attorneys	6	5
Paralegals / Intake specialists	4	3

Social workers	5	4
Est. tenant households fully assisted annually	4,252	3,605
Est. % of tenant households fully assisted relative to expected number of eviction filings	25%	25%
Estimated cost per case	\$815	\$822

Qualitative Feedback from Rental Property Owners’ Counsel

Stout sought feedback from attorneys representing rental property owners to learn from their experiences interacting with the RTC Pilot. The plaintiff attorneys with whom Stout engaged represented large corporate rental property owners and small “mom and pop” rental property owners. Feedback about the RTC Pilot from plaintiffs’ counsel was (consistent with Stout’s engagement with rental property owners and their counsel throughout the country) centered on several key themes: (1) plaintiff legal counsel appreciates the importance of tenant legal representation; (2) when a tenant is represented, cases are generally resolved more efficiently and effectively; and (3) sustained rent assistance and processes for identifying cases where there are no legal defenses could result in rental property owners being more willing to negotiate repayment plans for longer move out periods.

Opportunities for Sustaining and Expanding the RTC Pilot

Based on quantitative and qualitative findings of Stout’s independent evaluation of the RTC Pilot, Stout recommends the following for sustaining and expanding the RTC Pilot:

1. Should LASO expand the RTC Pilot, it should assess internal capacity and continually assess personnel needs, reasonable caseloads, and the ability to expand sustainably. If the RTC Pilot were expanded, LASO should consider seeking regular feedback from the local rental property owner community, including attorneys representing rental property owners, regarding the implementation of the expanded RTC Pilot.
2. Maintain a commitment to timely, accurate data collection. Use available tools and dashboards to monitor data collection and ensure client interview information is complete whenever possible, and cases are promptly closed. Capturing as much data as possible during the interview, and recording that information promptly, can create a comprehensive view of what clients are experiencing and how LASO are responding to those circumstances. Prompt case closure will be important to having current, reasonably accurate data throughout the year to inform LASO’s operations and activities.
3. Explore pathways for preventing eviction filings and opportunities for early intervention. There may be opportunities for LASO to collaborate or partner with rental property owners or housing authorities to create pilot programs with the goal of avoiding eviction filings for tenants and the eviction process for rental property owners. There may also be opportunities to collaborate with Tulsa District Court personnel who are

implementing the National Center for State Courts' Eviction Diversion Initiative to ensure seamless referrals, when necessary.

4. Consider mechanisms for collecting client feedback at different intervals after service delivery. Client feedback after service delivery may provide insights into external challenges clients are experiencing that contribute to ongoing housing insecurity for RTC Pilot clients.
5. Consider door-to-door canvassing and implement an outreach strategy centered on local trusted messengers. In Stout's experience, in-person interactions are impactful for connecting people with resources and can be used as an opportunity to understand why people may not be willing to engage with the eviction process. Information gleaned from these conversations could be used to inform other types of outreach or supplemental services that could increase the number of tenants engaging with the legal process and seeking legal representation, while also potentially decreasing the frequency of tenant non-appearances / defaults.
6. Engage with the Oklahoma County and Tulsa County District Courts to assess opportunities for collaboration. There may be opportunities for LASO to work with court personnel to develop best practices for improving messaging to people facing eviction, including when tenants are appearing pro se and may be eligible for the RTC Pilot services.
7. Consider the role of housing navigators and other non-attorney staff as complements to attorneys and to assist with non-legal work.
8. Develop a methodology for assessing the frequency of repeat RTC Pilot clients and systemic / persistent barriers to housing stability for them. Data collected by LASO indicated approximately 40% of RTC Pilot clients previously had an eviction filing against them, with approximately 57% indicating the eviction filing occurred within the last year, and approximately 24% of clients who previously had an eviction filed against them were represented by LASO in that filing. Of clients whose previous eviction filing was in the past year, approximately 38% were represented by LASO.