

NEWS > COLORADO NEWS

Eviction reduction effort set for Adams, Broomfield counties as tenant rights pilot program readies for launch

Escalating home prices, rentals in metro Denver have put the squeeze on tenants



Andy Cross, The Denver Post

“Housing is a Human Right” in Spanish is posted on the door of a meeting room at the Advent Lutheran Church for a renters assembly sponsored by United New Economy Oct. 25, 2018.

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Adams County has the highest eviction rate for renters in Colorado, at 4.4 percent. And three of the cities on a list of the 100 “top evicting large cities” in the United States are [completely or partially in Adams County](#): Aurora, Thornton and Westminster.

That’s according to research compiled by the [Eviction Lab, a Princeton University initiative](#) that has tracked evictions in the country going back to 2000.

It’s against that backdrop that six cities in Adams County, along with the county itself, have been chipping in money this month — to the tune of \$182,000 combined — to fund a 2-year pilot program to provide legal services to tenants struggling to make rent or who are in danger of losing their homes. Broomfield is also part of the agreement.

“Most renters who can’t afford legal help face a very lopsided battle in court,” said Jonathan Asher, an attorney and executive director of Colorado Legal Services. “With an attorney, tenants feel they understand the process and they understand their options.”

The final city set to approve a contribution to the Landlord/Tenant Legal Services Pilot Program is Aurora, whose City Council is scheduled to vote on the issue Monday. The program should officially launch by mid-November or early December, with two physical locations — the Irving Street Library in Westminster and the Adams County Justice Center in Brighton — open to tenants seeking face time with an attorney.

It’s a badly needed service, said Lorena Osorio, who with her husband and two children has rented a house in Westminster for the past three years. Speaking in Spanish at a renter rights rally in Westminster last week, Osorio said her landlord has been flexible and understanding, keeping her rent at around \$900 a month.

But she knows of neighbors and friends who have been given the boot from their homes for any number of reasons.

“People are scared to ask questions because they aren’t English speakers or because of their immigration status,” she said.

Sometimes attorneys can hammer out agreements in which an eviction can be expunged from someone's legal record so that it doesn't prevent them from renting in the future, LiFari said.

Denver [launched a pilot program of its own in June](#), also using attorneys from Colorado Legal Services. The city spent just over \$130,000 to fund the Denver Eviction Legal Defense pilot program for up to nine months.

Denver City Councilwoman Robin Kniech said the program has been successful in slowing down the eviction process because it allows both sides in a rental dispute to talk about how to resolve an impasse short of going to court. Having professional advice in the mix is critical to arriving at a less drastic solution than eviction.

"You're at a disadvantage without a lawyer," Kniech said.



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Folks gather at the Advent Lutheran Church for a renters assembly sponsored by the United New Economy October 25, 2018.

Tenant rights in Colorado don't have the same level of protection that they have in other states, according to [a survey of landlord-tenant laws in the United States conducted by RentCafe](#) in March. In fact, Colorado came up in the bottom 10 for tenant rights among the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

[A bill introduced during the 2018 legislative session, House Bill 1127](#), would have limited rental application charges to the costs of background and credit checks while mandating that landlords spell out to applicants the requirements for approval – such as credit histories and income. It died in committee.

“It became very clear that the eviction process in Adams County can often be lopsided,” Adams County Commissioner Steve O’Dorisio said. “The stories we’ve heard, especially with mobile home communities, are shocking. This is supposed to create fair and equitable outcomes.”
