

Poverty Justice Solutions

Initiated by New York State Chief Judge Jonathan Lippman, Poverty Justice Solutions is an effort to help low-income New Yorkers preserve their housing and prevent homelessness. The product of a unique public-private partnership involving the Robin Hood Foundation, New York State Unified Court System, Center for Court Innovation, New York City Human Resources Administration, and civil legal service providers in New York City, Poverty Justice Solutions will seek to improve court outcomes by expanding the pool of attorneys available to represent low-income New Yorkers in Housing Court.

The Problem

Each year, thousands of New Yorkers find themselves in Housing Court facing eviction without the benefit of legal representation. Should they lose their cases, the potential ramifications are far-reaching. Evicted families experience dislocation and, in many cases, homelessness. This kind of residential instability increases the likelihood of all sorts of negative outcomes, including failure in school, depression, and poverty. Put simply, the evidence suggests that stable housing is the foundation of family well-being. And experience tells us that the presence of a lawyer can be the difference between keeping your home and getting evicted.

How It Will Work

In an effort to close the justice gap, Poverty Justice Solutions will place 20 new attorneys in two-year fellowships as entry-level attorneys with civil legal service providers in New York City. The program will underwrite half of the cost of their salaries; participating service providers will be required to provide the other half. They are free to identify this matching money as they see fit, but one available source is the Human Resources Administration, which now oversees the expansion and consolidation of the City's funding of civil legal assistance programs.

Poverty Justice Solutions builds on a foundation put in place by Chief Judge Lippman last year. In 2014, Judge Lippman announced the creation of the Pro Bono Scholars program, which allows students at New York's law schools to take the bar exam in February of their third year in exchange for performing pro bono work full-time during the remainder of their school term. Participants in the Pro Bono Scholars program will receive first priority for Legal Fellows slots.

Poverty Justice Solutions legal fellows will be full-time employees of participating legal service providers and subject to all of the rules (and benefits) of their host agency. They will also receive the training, supervision, and mentoring support provided to all such attorneys. Each legal fellow will be assigned an active caseload of clients, giving them the chance to make a lasting contribution to improving the lives of hundreds of low-income New York City residents in need of legal assistance. Legal Fellows will work exclusively on Housing Court cases representing clients facing potential eviction or seeking repairs.

Poverty Justice Solutions will be overseen by an advisory board chaired by Chief Judge Lippman and will be administered as a project of the Center for Court Innovation.