Eviction Help Illinois

Legal Solutions for Your Housing Issues

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Year One Report - FY21

ILLINOIS Equal Justice FOUNDATION ★ 20 YEARS ★

A Project of the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation

Funded by the Illinois Department of Human Services

THE NEED

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted inequities and vulnerabilities across the societal spectrum. Housing stability is one of the most visibly impacted areas. According to a recent study commissioned by the Illinois Department of Human Services and the Illinois Housing Development Authority,

> **414,000 Illinois households are at 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI) and vulnerable to eviction.[1]**

While tenants have been protected under Executive Orders issued by the Governor in response to Covid-19 that prohibited the filing of eviction cases in many circumstances, that moratorium has come to an end.

In 2019, there were approximately 20,000 evictions in Illinois due to the non-payment of rent. The Eviction Lab at Princeton University estimates that triple that amount:

> **60,000 Illinoisans - may be evicted in 2021 due to the strains of the pandemic.**

[1] *Eviction Crisis Study, University of Illinois, Chicago and Southern Illinois University.*

THE RESPONSE

1. The State of Illinois Dedicated Funding for Legal and Mediation Services

- Funding was provided by the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS). The Illinois Equal Justice Foundation (IEJF) was charged with distributing the grant funding to civil legal aid and mediation organizations to assist Illinois residents facing eviction in accessing legal assistance and mediation services. As a twenty-year partner of the State of Illinois in distributing state appropriations, IEJF was excited for the opportunity to be part of the work.
- IDHS developed a multi-pronged response to the eviction crisis, which included funding legal services, a statewide outreach effort, rental assistance and a public relations campaign. While funding through the IEJF was specifically to provide eviction-related legal and mediation services, IDHS had also dedicated a separate pool of money for Eviction Mitigation Outreach that is administered by the Access to Justice Grant Administrators (Westside Justice Center and the Resurrection Project).

2. IEJF's Grant Process and Goals

- **Types of Funding:** IEJF launched a grant application process in two funding categories: Civil Legal Assistance and Mediation Services. Within the Civil Legal Assistance funding category, organizations could apply to deliver eviction legal services and/or develop and implement technological infrastructure to enable residents to connect to services through statewide access points.
- **Supporting Legal Services Availability Statewide:** It was critical this funding support legal and mediation services for residents throughout Illinois. In the fall, the Cook County Legal Aid for Housing and Debt (CCLAHD) was launched to respond to the eviction, foreclosure, debt, and tax deed issues for Cook County residents. One component of the county-wide program was an Early Resolution Program (ERP) that focused on legal and mediation services for tenants and landlords prior to an eviction being filed. One goal of the IEJF grants program was to bring similar opportunities to the rest of the state and compliment – but not duplicate – the Cook County funding and programs. Each Cook County grantee for which funding was granted serves specific populations or communities that would not easily access the county-wide services or would be best served by the local organization. However, all organizations committed to referring appropriate housing inquiries into the county-program.

3. IEJF's Funding Decisions

IEJF awarded $1,646,021 in grant funding for FY21, which was January 1 – June 30, 2021.

Civil Legal Assistance ($1,238,651)

- Land of Lincoln and Prairie State Legal Services were funded to split coverage of the 101 counties outside Cook County. Both organizations expanded their legal hotlines to receive direct calls for their respective services areas.
- Five organizations were funded to supplement services throughout the state by accepting cases that cannot be served by the Legal Services Corporation (LSC)-funded organizations due to conflicts, income, or immigration status.
    - The North Suburban Legal Aid Clinic: services for northern Cook and Lake County.
    - Westside Justice Center: services for Will County in collaboration with a local organization, Warehouse Workers for Justice.
    - The University YMCA: services for Champaign County's immigrant population.
    - The Public Interest Law Initiative: services statewide via a hotline, with presence in Champaign, Macon, Madison, Peoria and Tazewell County courthouses through pro bono help desks.
    - Catholic Charities Legal Assistance: services available statewide via a hotline, with a presence in Cook and Lake Counties, and a willingness to provide pro se support throughout the state.
- Three organizations served unique populations in Cook County (Beyond Legal Aid, James B. Moran Center, and Uptown People's Law Center).

Technology Infrastructure ($225,573)

- Coordinated Advice and Referral Program for Legal Services (CARPLS) established the statewide hotline infrastructure that fed into the Cook County program and into Land of Lincoln and Prairie State's hotlines for the other two regions. CARPLS also supported the build of an Illinois Eviction Resource website that included a statewide virtual legal assistant/chatbot.
- Lawyers Committee for Better Housing (LCBH) expanded its Rentervention.com online tool and chatbot statewide and facilitated virtual legal clinics for all Cook County residents.
- Illinois Legal Aid Online (ILAO) offered a third line of statewide access to the program through SMS texting, in addition to providing online, timely information on evictions and referrals through its Online Triage and Intake System (OTIS).

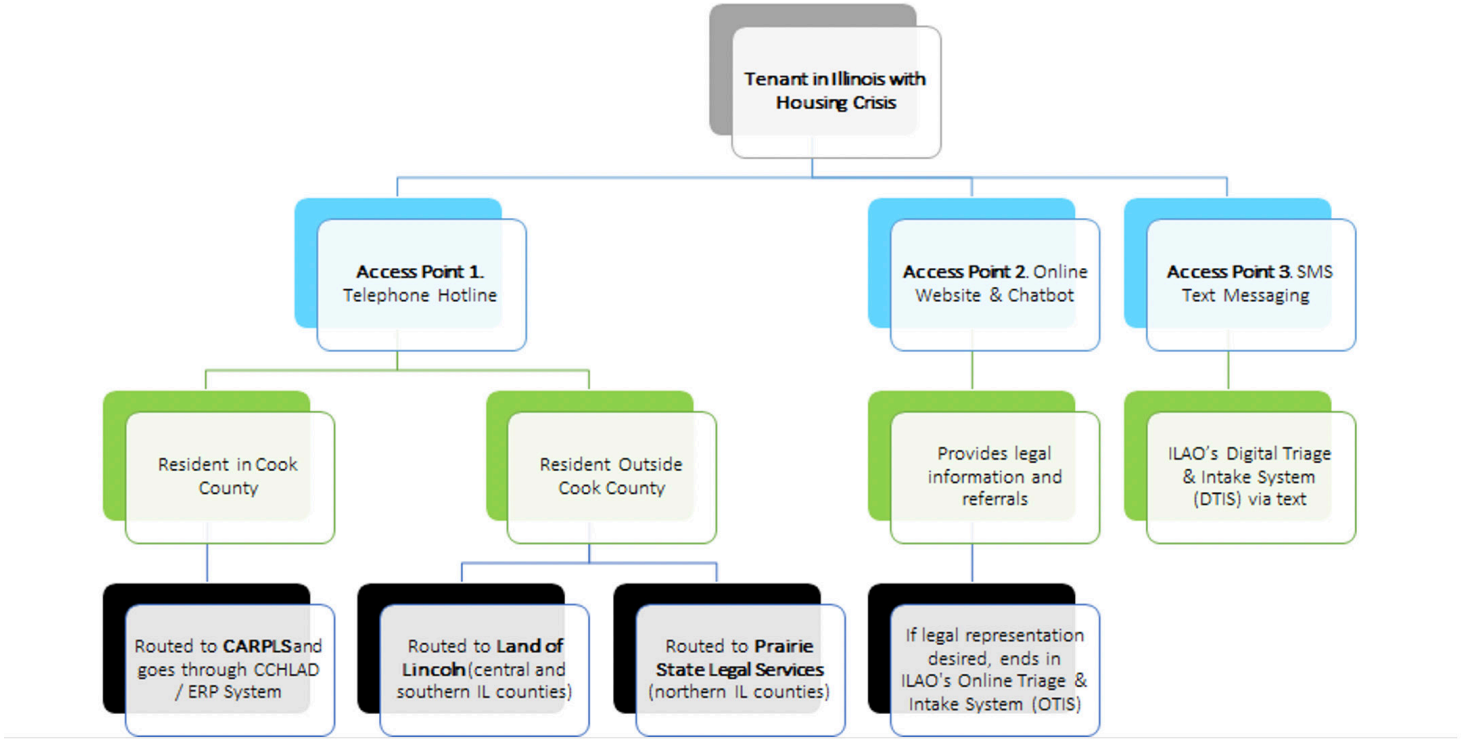
Mediation Services ($181,797)

- Unlike legal aid organizations that had established programs throughout the state, mediation programs were not active in most jurisdictions. The three main mediation organizations collaborated on the grant application process to play to their core strengths and split the state to execute programs in jurisdictions that were ready to launch programs and explore new partnerships with additional jurisdictions.
- The Center for Conflict Resolution (CCR) is a partner in Cook County's Early Resolution Program (ERP). CCR was funded by the IEJF to provide training in an effort to build the state's capacity to provide mediation throughout Illinois.
- Dispute Resolution Institute (DRI) focused bringing mediation programs to fruition in the Twentieth, First, and Third Judicial Circuits where they already had mediation programs for other substantive areas or have been in conversations with the judiciary over the last several months. Additionally, DRI will serve as the administrator of the mediator payment system, which was approved by DHS and AOIC.
- Resolution Systems Institute (RSI) focused on the launch of the Kane County Eviction Mediation Program and exploration of new programs in circuits in the northern part of Illinois.

Grantee Organizations

THE RESULTS

1. The Network Approach to Eviction Help Illinois



A client was facing housing insecurity because she was behind on her rent due to COVID. This client had been renting an apartment for over 11 years. She had COVID-19 in the spring of 2020 which led to COVID pneumonia. Almost a year later, she was still suffering effects from COVID including persistent low oxygen levels which left her breathless and unable to speak for long periods. The client was unable to resume her employment because her line of work required speaking and presenting. Client had received a 5-day notice from her landlord and reached out to us for help. The North Suburban Legal Clinic advised the client on the current eviction moratorium which prevented her landlord from evicting her and provided her with the Declaration to sign and give to her landlord. They also referred the client to rental assistance. She was relieved to know that the eviction moratorium protected her and has applied for rental assistance.

2. The Services Provided throughout Illinois

Total # of people served: **61,178**

57,806 accessing one of the statewide access points (online, text, or hotline)

Total # of legal cases opened: **3,370**

Brief Service: **2,867**

Representation without Litigation: **234**

Extended Representation: **269**

Total # of telephone consultations: **2,708**

Total number of referrals to legal service provider through telephone or online intake: **988**

Total # of people accessing online legal information on evictions: **54,110**

Total # of mediators trained in preparation for expansion: **81**

> "Great bot services. Very functional and easily navigable. I loved the experience. Great service!"

Coordinated Approach and Consolidated Access Points is Better for People in Illinois

- **Removes Uncertainty and Confusion**
  - By providing statewide access points, a person does not need to figure out where to call for services. One number – one website – one SMS will get people to the right place.
- **Meets People Where They Are At**
  - If people do not have access to the internet, the telephone hotline and SMS is available. If people cannot contact the hotline during business hours, online and SMS allows information and referrals to provided 24-7. If people only need information, but do not yet have a legal issue, the available websites provide that.
- **Provides a Coordinated Referral Mechanism to Critical Services: legal services (specific numbers discussed below), rental assistance, and housing/financial counselors**
  - Total # of referrals to rental assistance programs: **7,239**
  - Total # of referrals to housing or financial counselors: **164**

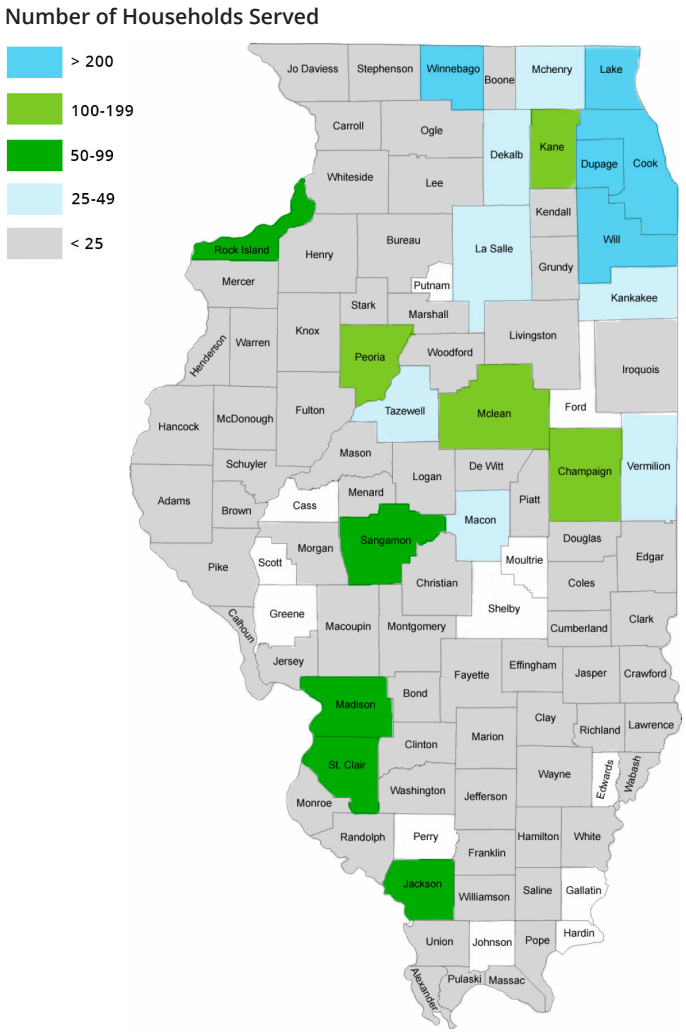
Provides Support to Launch and Expand Statewide Mediation Services

- **Outside Cook County, there were not established eviction mediation programs. Funding allowed the organizations to begin the work of establishing relationships with jurisdictions to create and implement these programs.**
- **They also began to provide trainings to orient already trained mediators to eviction, and train more mediators to be available throughout the state.**
- **This was aided by the Supreme Court, which entered an order in February which authorized and encouraged early eviction resolution programs. It removed the requirement that jurisdictions receive prior approval, providing for a quicker launch, as well as guidance and resources for good programs.**

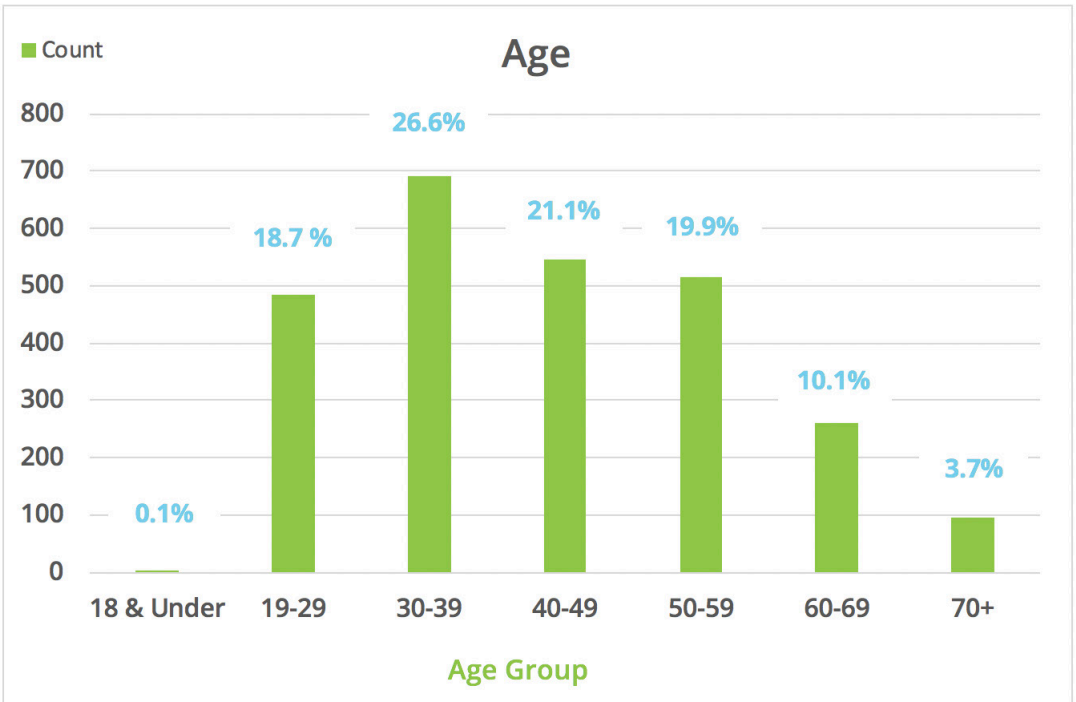
> "CCR's mediation program is helpful, informative and prepared me for landlord-tenant mediations."

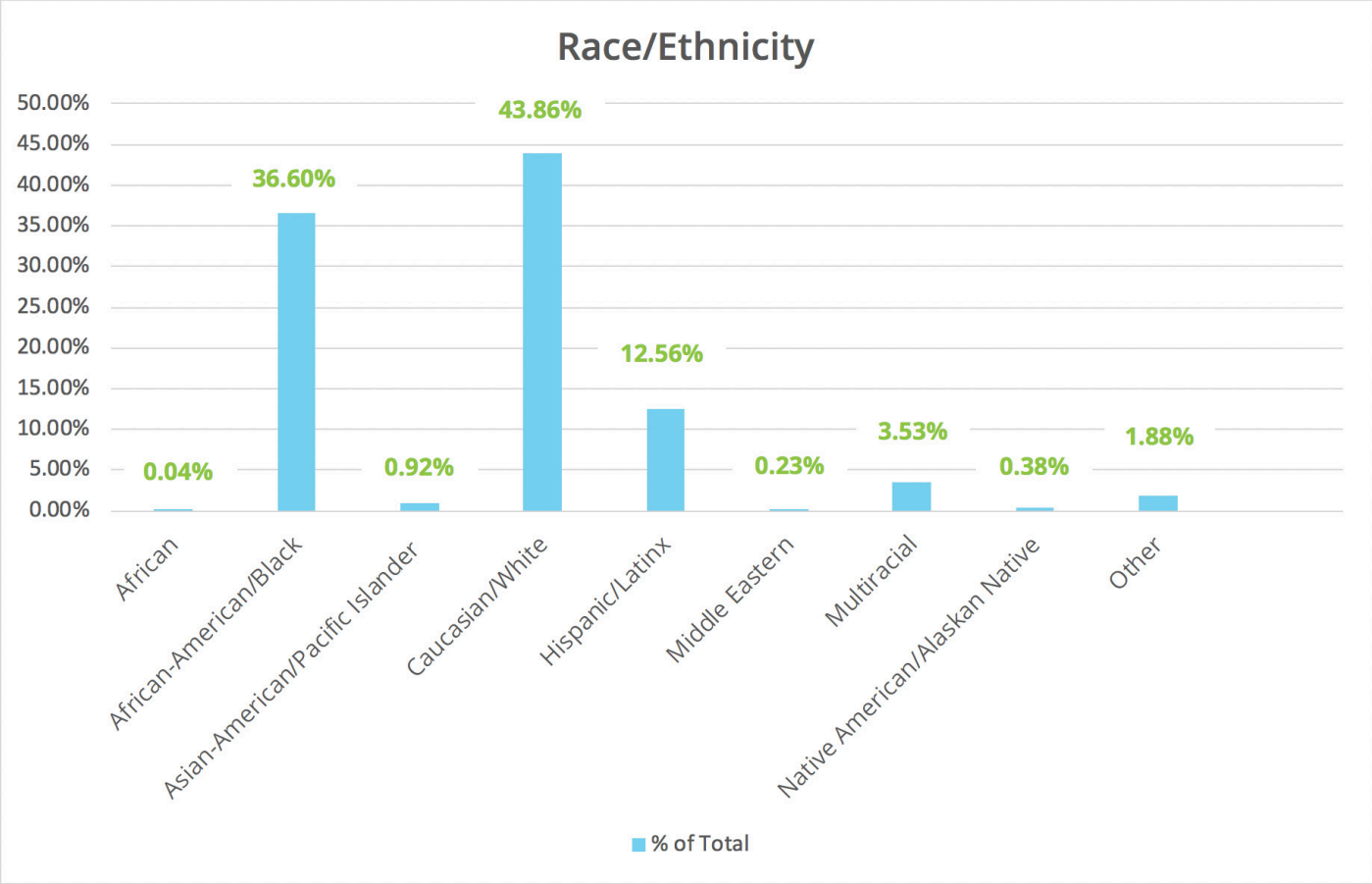
3. The People Accessing Services

- **Where people live**



- **Who people are**





Household Size	% of Total
1	20.87%
2	17.57%
3	17.87%
4	19.01%
5	10.96%
6	6.43%
7	4.33%
8	2.14%
9	0.30%
10	0.50%

73% of primary household members were female

9% of primary household members were immigrants

- **Who qualifies for services (income eligibility)**
  - Cook County legal assistance grantees used 80% of Chicago Area Median Income (AMI) and grantees providing legal services outside Cook County used Illinois 80% AMI standard. Mediation services do not need to follow income guidelines as many of the cases will be court-appointed and as neutrals, they do not have a client, and online information is available to everyone. The State of Illinois AMI is below:

FY 2021 Low-Income (80%) Limit (LIL)							
1 Person	2 Person	3 Person	4 Person	5 Person	6 Person	7 Person	8 Person
47,600	54,400	61,200	68,000	73,450	78,900	84,300	89,750

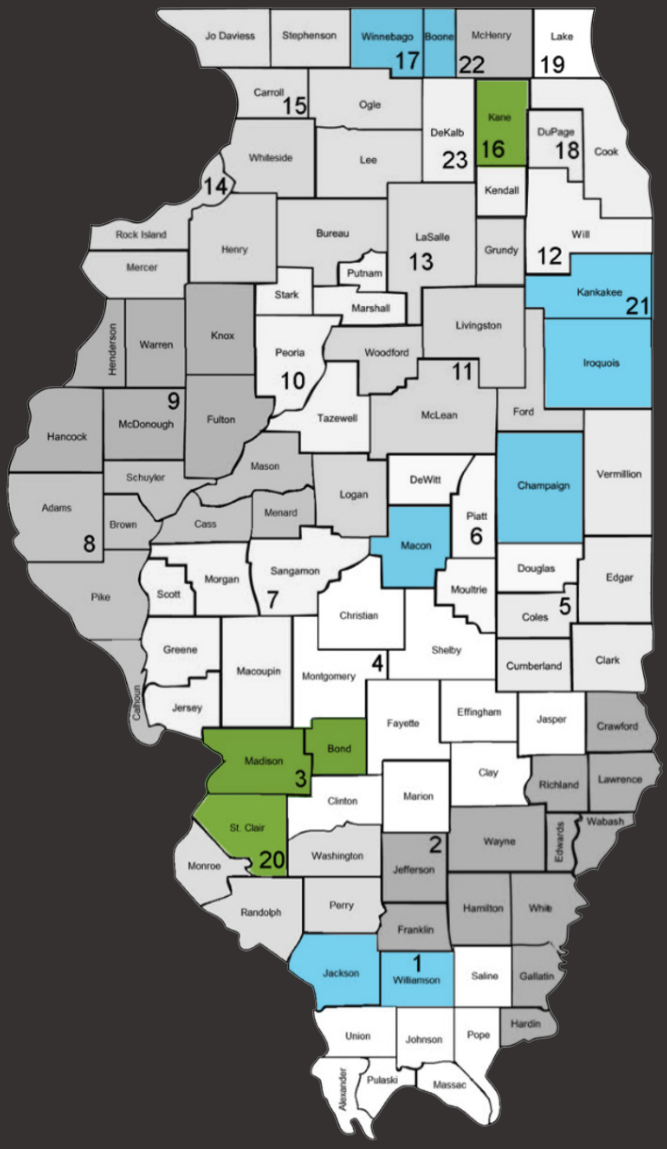
4. Overall OUTCOMES

- **# of People Receiving Legal Advice and # of People with Open Legal Cases at Year End**
  - Due to the eviction moratorium, the majority of cases did not move into final disposition, as landlords were unable to file against most tenants. While **2,867** number of households received legal information and advice, **576** cases remain open and people will have representation when the courts begin to accept eviction filings.
- **Of the cases reaching resolution, the following progress was made toward goals, where applicable:**
  - **104 Evictions Prevented**
  - **46 Moveouts Negotiated**
  - **$ Value of returned security deposits - $8044**

Mary*received court papers for an eviction case. The landlord had been trying to get Mary, her partner, and their two minor children to move out of their apartment. They were behind on rent because they lost their jobs due to the COVID pandemic. The landlord constantly knocked on their door and yelled at the family to vacate the apartment. Catholic Charities Legal Aid (CCLA) informed Mary about the laws and ordinances that protected tenants who were unable to pay rent due to loss of employment caused by the pandemic. CCLA learned that Mary had received a COVID Declaration, but they were unable to read the document written in English. CCLA explained the purpose of the Declaration and sent her a copy in her native language. With CCLA's support, Mary filled out the Declaration. She was also referred to Catholic Charities Emergency Assistance Program to apply for assistance with rent payments.

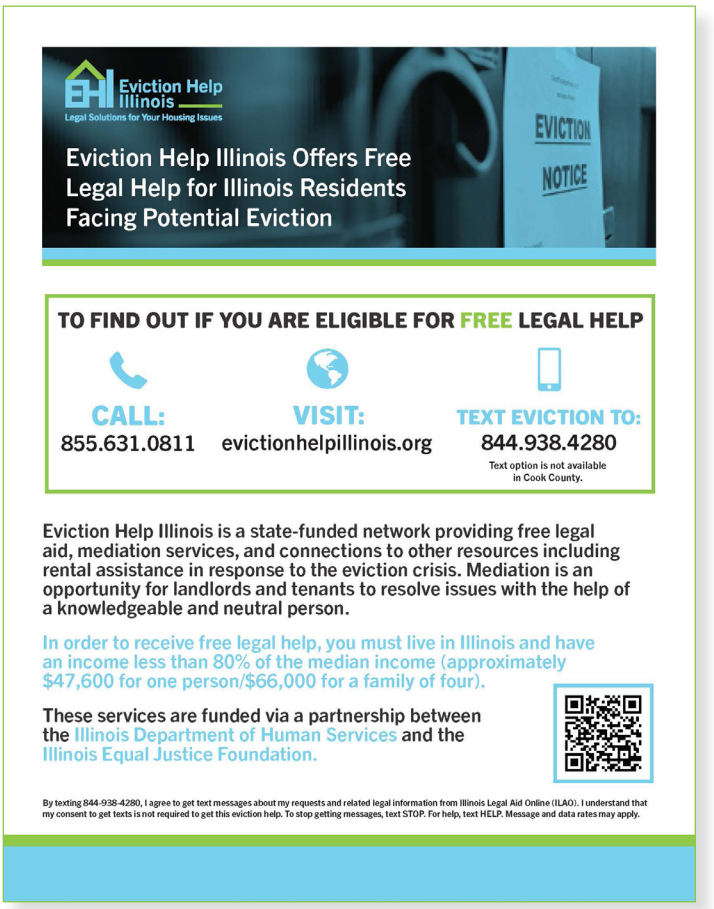
of jurisdictions moving forward into FY22 for mediation programs

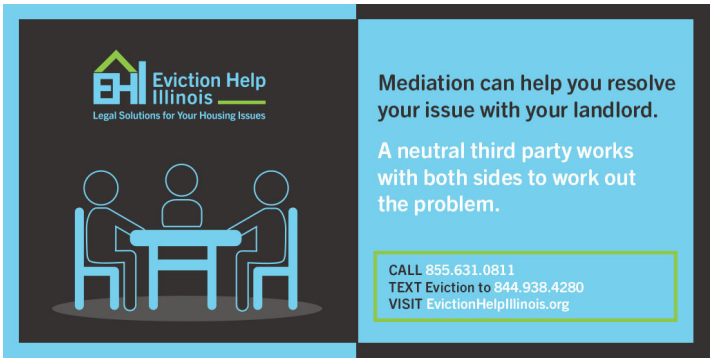
1st Circuit: Jackson/Williamson counties
3rd Circuit: Madison/Bond counties
6th Circuit: Champaign/Macon counties
16th Circuit: Kane County
17th Circuit: Winnebago/Boone counties
20th Circuit: St. Clair County
21st Circuit: Kankakee/Iroquois counties



> "The Kane County mediation program was singled out for its readiness in the face of this crisis."

Outreach Materials





NEXT STEPS

- **IDHS awarded the IEJF $3M to continue Eviction Help Illinois in FY 22.**
- **The statewide eviction moratorium ended July 31. Evictions could be filed as of August 1 but will not be enforced until August 31. However, the federal moratorium has been extended to October 3. The IEJF, its grantees and community stakeholders advocate for a delay in enforcement until the next round of federal rental assistance dollars can be distributed by the IL Housing Development Authority, IDHS and local entities.**
- **The IEJF is partnering with IDHS and the AOIC to develop a court-based rental assistance program to assist landlords and tenants who have not been able to access other pools of rental assistance in order to make landlords whole and stem evictions.**