

# Free lawyers for renters in

## Washington State

### **Author**

Northwest Justice Project

### **Last Review Date**

May 3, 2025

Renters who have a low income in Washington State may be appointed a free lawyer before a court can proceed with an eviction lawsuit. Read this to find out who is eligible, and how to find a free lawyer.

### **Do all tenants get a free lawyer to help in an eviction case?**

Under Washington State law at [RCW 59.18.640](https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=59.18.640) (<https://app.leg.wa.gov/RCW/default.aspx?cite=59.18.640>), tenants who have a low income may be appointed a free lawyer before a court evicts you.

The law says that “indigent” tenants must be given a free lawyer in an eviction court case. “Indigent” means either:

- the tenant earns less than [200% of the Federal poverty level](#)

or

- the tenant receives public assistance, for example:
  - Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
  - Aged, Blind, or Disabled assistance benefits (ABD)

- Food stamps (for example, an EBT card)
- Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- Poverty-related Veterans' benefits
- Refugee Resettlement benefits
- Medicaid (Apple Health)
- Pregnant individual assistance benefits

### **When can a lawyer be appointed for a tenant in an eviction?**

Courts will only appoint a lawyer after the tenant receives court documents starting an eviction lawsuit, called a "Summons" and a "Complaint."

The Complaint and Summons may have already been filed with the court (and have a case number), or they may have been given to the tenant without being filed. Either way, the court must appoint a free lawyer for tenants who are "indigent."

### **Will the court call the tenant to offer them a lawyer?**

No. Renters who receive an Eviction Summons and Complaint should **call our Eviction Defense Screening line at 1-855-657-8387 or apply online** (<https://nwjustice.org/apply-online>) to find out if they qualify for a free lawyer in an eviction case.

### **What if I don't have a lawyer at my first eviction hearing?**

If your eviction hearing date and time arrive and you have not yet been given a free lawyer, you should go to the hearing and ask the judge for more time to get a free lawyer. The judge may then postpone the hearing to give you time to **call our Eviction Defense Screening line at 1-855-657-8387 or apply online** (<https://nwjustice.org/apply-online>).

**I received an eviction notice but haven't yet received a Summons and Complaint. Are free lawyers available to help me?**

Maybe! Before you receive an Eviction Complaint and Summons, your landlord should have given you an eviction notice. For example, you may receive a "14 Day Notice to Pay or Vacate," a "10 Day Notice to Comply or Vacate." Because you haven't yet received an Eviction Summons and Complaint, the court will not appoint a free lawyer yet.

But you can still try to get free legal help in responding to the termination notice.

**WashingtonLawHelp.org** gives general information. It is not legal advice. Find organizations that provide free legal help on our Get legal help page.