

Free lawyers for renters in Washington State

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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>), 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.