



Supporting Housing Stability for Washington

Washington's 21 nonprofit dispute resolution centers (DRCs) have been supporting people's housing stability and equity in Washington for 37 years and have innovated new approaches to meet changing needs.

How does early resolution of conflicts between landlords and their tenants stabilize housing and strengthen communities? Resolving disputes earlier in the conflict preserves and improves relationships between the parties, and among stakeholders and communities. DRCs address at-risk situations before tenants lose their housing through conflict coaching, conciliation, and mediation, which reduces reliance on expensive homelessness services. Additionally, early dispute resolution is trauma-informed and reduces burdens on the court system.

73,163
PEOPLE ASSISTED IN 2021
WITH DIRECT SERVICES
(INCLUDING 2,308 YOUTH)

Who Benefits from Dispute Resolution Services for Housing Stability?

DRCs engage communities with diverse services that stabilize housing from many different approaches and sectors, including:

- **Landlord and tenant mediation** to preserve housing stability and rental income
- **Housing professional and service provider training** for conflict resolution
- **Community engagement** and effective facilitation of large public engagement meetings and including homelessness shelter planning and civility projects
- **Neighbor-to-neighbor conflict mediation** and facilitation of conflict resolution addressing housing specific needs

Since July 2021, DRCs have been implementing the legislated Eviction Resolution Pilot Program (ERPP) to solve unpaid rent disputes before going to court, including the facilitation of tenant and landlord communication, problem solving and resource access in collaboration with rental assistance and local legal aid.

EVICTION RESOLUTION PILOT PROGRAM
*Where outcome known.

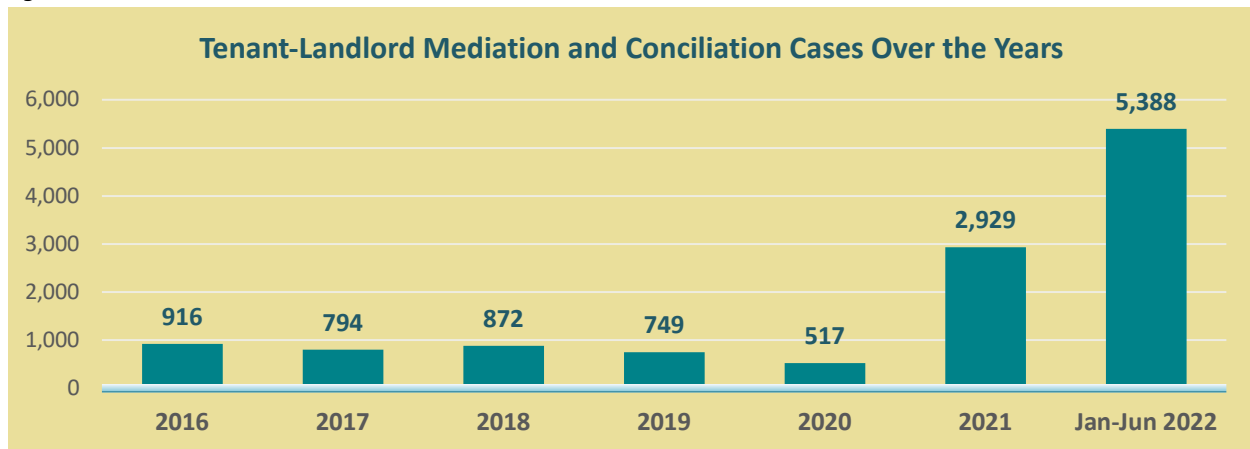
63,911
PEOPLE SERVED WITH ERPP

94%
OF TENANTS CONTINUED TENANCY*

Demand for landlord-tenant conflict resolution has grown significantly during the public health emergency, both for services of the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program and for other types of tenant-landlord conflict resolution than unpaid rent/ERPP (fig. 1). Pre-pandemic, the volume of landlord-tenant mediations and conciliations overall averaged about 850 per year compared to 2,929 in 2021. Case volume during the first months of 2022 has surpassed the 2021 total and is expected to keep increasing to an annual total at least three times higher than last year's.



Figure 1.



DRCs provide diverse housing stability-related services including:

Conflict resolution training for housing professionals and service providers. These trainings include: Basic Mediation Training (40 hours) for anyone negotiating with landlords and tenants; de-escalation training (4 hours); and ongoing 1–2-hour training on specific conflict resolution skills such as reflective listening, motivational interviewing, and utilizing open-ended questions to engage people.

Community and large group public meeting facilitation. Centers work with the hosting organization and support elected officials or government staff in facilitating public engagement meetings. Some examples include: homelessness shelter planning; resource allocation planning; and civility projects. Services include process design, training, and facilitation to support informed and effective community engagement.

Neighbor-to-neighbor conflict **mediation and community facilitation** — In partnership with the landlord or property management, DRCs can mediate neighbor-to-neighbor conflicts and facilitate conflict resolution, which address the specific needs of the housing complex. Some past facilitations include supporting LGBTQ+ communities with safety plans and supporting violence and drug activity reduction programs.

Conflict resolution systems design community engagement— DRCs adapt their services to meet local needs and requests. For example, DRCs work with service providers, advocates, and decision makers to design and implement responses to community challenges surrounding housing.

Landlord tenant and fair housing conciliation line — DRCs have offered a landlord-tenant call line for members of the public to learn about fair housing and landlord/tenant rights and responsibilities. The line's service included free housing related mediation and facilitation services, and direct referrals to

“
It literally made the difference in me having
a place to live and being homeless.
-ERPP Tenant Client; Clark County
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legal services and fair housing agencies.

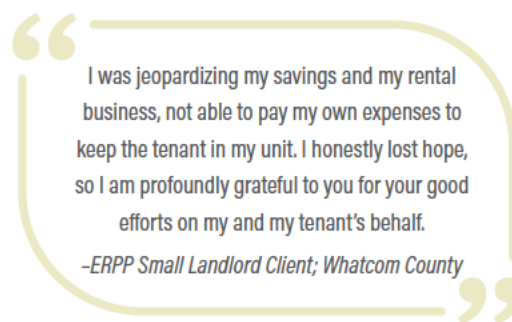
Training foreclosure mediators — DRCs have supported and delivered services under the Department of Commerce Foreclosure Mediation Program since its inception in 2011. DRCs trained all foreclosure mediators and mediated 5,385 foreclosures between 2012 and 2019. In 2019, 76% of foreclosure mediations reached an agreement.

Help tenants improve qualifications and opportunities with renter certification — One of the DRCs' most effective responses to housing stability was a 14-year, award winning "Renter Certification" program in Snohomish County. The DRC partnered with shelters, transitional housing, and affordable housing organizations to help tenants improve qualifications and opportunities to move from temporary into stable housing.

The Certification included tenant education in Residential Landlord Tenant Act rights and responsibilities and Fair Housing, and financial coaching including referrals to bankruptcy clinics and repayment plans. Each participant created their own rental resume and received coaching and support in building a new relationship with their landlord. The program gave landlords confidence to rent to tenants completing the certification whom they might otherwise have labeled as "high risk." The DRC offered free mediation services for any conflicts that might arise with a housed tenant who completed renter certification. In 14 years, only 12 tenants required additional mediation services.

Eviction Resolution Pilot Program (ERPP) — DRCs facilitate communication to solve unpaid rent in order to help tenants retain housing and landlords receive rents owed to maintain their properties in the rental market while reducing the unlawful detainer (eviction) case filing burden on Washington's Superior Courts.

The centers work closely with their Superior Courts as well as local legal aid and rental assistance organizations to support access to resources and options. DRCs provide information, referrals, and conflict resolution services to tenants and landlords as established under RCW 59.18.660 at no cost to the participants. ERPP was created under guidance of the Washington State Supreme Court and Legislature and is overseen by the Administrative Office of the Courts and local Superior Courts.



DRC's role in furthering housing stability

Rental assistance has been a critical part of the COVID-19 pandemic response, but levels are diminishing and expected to revert to pre-pandemic levels. Before the pandemic, two thirds of the landlord-tenant cases using DRCs were resolved without need for rental assistance. Dispute resolution will continue to provide an effective and efficient way to prevent homelessness, helping tenants and landlords find realistic solutions that work for them.

www.resolutionwa.org

Resolving Disputes. Strengthening Communities.

Washington's Association of Dispute Resolution Centers



DRCs have the experience and skills to support Washington's goals around housing stability and equity. Insufficient operational funding is the primary challenge in meeting these demands. DRCs are nonprofit organizations with a public charge for service and accessibility yet receive modest public funding for these services.

Commitment to Equity and Access to Justice

- Resolution Washington is committed to equal justice for all marginalized community members and supports people of color and low-income residents in having access to equitable opportunities statewide.
- Resolution Washington is a partner of the Washington Race Equity Justice Initiative (REJI).
- DRC certified mediators complete training in equity and addressing power imbalances between participants.
- The Access to Justice Board awarded Resolution Washington the 2019 Access to Justice Community Leadership Award.

Dispute Resolution Center Background

In 1984 the state Legislature established a framework for dispute resolution centers (DRCs) to provide a high-quality resolution alternative for disputes. DRCs "meet the needs of Washington's citizens by providing forums in which persons may voluntarily participate in the resolution of disputes" free or according to the participants' ability to pay (RCW 7.75).

