

## Tenant Eviction Support Program in Two States Empowers Nonlawyer Advocates



The Arizona Supreme Court and the Utah Supreme Court have recently approved a groundbreaking proposal allowing trained nonlawyer advocates to provide free limited-scope representation to tenants facing housing instability. The program, developed by Innovation for Justice, aims to train and license "housing stability legal advocates" who can be volunteers or staff members of nonprofit organizations.

The state supreme courts issued orders earlier this year, acknowledging the significant impact this pilot program could have. By training and licensing these housing stability legal advocates, the program seeks to address the pressing needs of tenants facing housing instability and empower them with legal support. This innovative approach has the potential to revolutionize the delivery of legal services across the nation, as it marks the first time a service model is being implemented in two jurisdictions simultaneously.

Cayley Balser, the community-engaged research operations lead at Innovation for Justice, expressed optimism about the program's potential. In an email to Law360, Balser highlighted the importance of evaluating its effectiveness in two states with different housing stability landscapes, civil justice system interactions, and timelines. This comprehensive evaluation will help determine the program's viability and impact.

According to the Arizona order, housing stability legal advocates are authorized to provide general legal advice to tenants regarding their rights. Additionally, they can offer dispute resolution strategies, including the development of payment plans. These advocates are also permitted to provide guidance on the eviction process and timeline, assist with court form completion, and advise on viable eviction defenses. During court hearings, they may sit at the counsel table to support and assist clients and respond to questions from the presiding judicial officer.

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Similarly, the Utah order outlines the roles and responsibilities of housing stability legal advocates in the state. They can help tenants complete necessary forms, provide guidance on the civil legal process, screen for potential legal defenses, facilitate solutions negotiations, and assist in preparing for court proceedings.

While Arizona has already begun recruiting participants for the program, the Utah program is currently seeking funding for its launch. The initiative is spearheaded by Innovation for Justice, an organization associated with the University of Arizona James E. Rogers College of Law and the University of Utah David Eccles School of Business. This project represents their third major initiative aimed at enhancing access to justice by easing restrictions on the unauthorized practice of law.

The approval of these programs by the Arizona and Utah Supreme Courts signifies a significant step forward in addressing the legal needs of tenants facing housing instability. The program offers a practical solution to bridge the justice gap by empowering nonlawyer advocates with the necessary training and licensure. The outcomes and impact of this pilot program will serve as valuable insights for the broader legal community and may potentially pave the way for similar initiatives nationwide.