JUSTICE DIVERTED

HOW RENTERS ARE PROCESSED IN BALTIMORE CITY RENT COURT
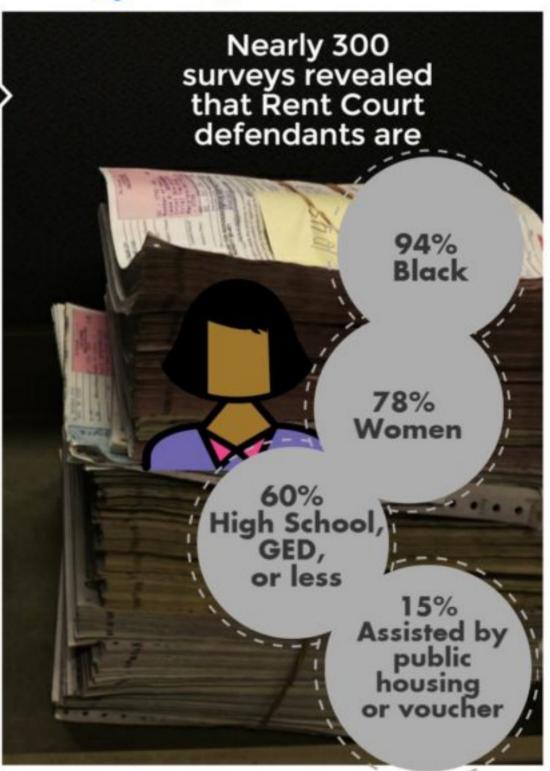
Renters make up 52% of Baltimore City households.

Their median income is under $27,000/yr.

When they fall behind on rent, they wind up in a broken court system.

Inside Baltimore's Rent Court

Nearly 700 lawsuits filed per day
150,000+ filed per year
Leading to 70,000+ warrants and

6,880 EVICTIONS PER YEAR

(1 in 17 renter households)

Cases, warrants, and actual evictions data, from Baltimore City Sheriff, are averaged since 2012.ACS 2013 5-Year estimate for renter households is 124,782; in same year, there were 7,235 judicial evictions.

Nearly 300 surveys revealed that Rent Court defendants are

94% Black

78% Women

60% High School, GED, or less

15% Assisted by public housing or voucher

78% of surveyed renters said they were living with a threat to health and safety at time of trial.

3 in 4 of those folks didn't know they could raise a legal defense to eviction based on the serious defects in their homes.

Public Justice Center

Right to Housing Alliance

http://justicediverted.org

Nearly 60% of defendants could have raised a conditions-based defense at trial.

But only 8% of these renters succeeded in raising that defense before the judge.

297	
196	
168	
62	
25	

DIVERTED AT COURT

- ■ Surveyed at court (red)
- ■ Saw judge (yellow)
- □ Potential habitability defense (white)
- ■ Disputed the case (gray)
- ■ Attempted habitability defense (black)

As the court processes hundreds of cases quickly and efficiently, renters are directed toward informal deal-making with landlords and agents.

64% of surveyed renters were pulled into pre-trial negotiation. Half of them mistakenly thought it was legally required of them.

70% were told they could leave the court before the judge's arrival.

Judges repeatedly tell renters not to raise any matter other than the amount of rent they owe.

48% of surveyed renters felt "discouraged" after hearing those instructions.

In nearly 2 of 3 cases when renters tried to speak up about housing defects, the judge disallowed their testimony or evidence.

Landlords largely failed to follow housing regs. But that didn't matter in Rent Court.

60-70% of non-compliant landlords still won an eviction judgment.

79%

Compliance with Maryland Lead Law
- ■ No/Partial Compliance (79%)
- ■ Full Compliance (21%)

68%

Stated status with Baltimore Housing
- ■ Invalid (68%)   ■ Valid (32%)

Recommendations

★ Cut down on repetitive "sue first, talk later" litigation so judges can focus on serious disputes.

★ Even the playing field: provide renters clear notice and time to prepare, plus legal information, assistance, and representation at court.

★ Hold landlords accountable to existing housing laws and tenant protections.

★ Expand landlord licensing and annual health/safety inspections to cover all of Baltimore's rental housing.

★ Fund eviction prevention programs adequately to meet the scale of the crisis.