



Greater Milwaukee
& Waukesha County

Linda E. Benfield
Board Chair
Amy Lindner
President & CEO

July 21, 2021

Alderman Nik Kovac
Milwaukee Common Council, District 3
200 E. Wells St., Rm 205
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Honorable Alderman Kovac:

In reference to resolution CCFN 210547, United Way urges the Common Council to support Mayor Barrett's recommendation to invest \$1.8M of Rescue Plan funding into the Milwaukee Right to Counsel (RTC) pilot, as part of the Stronger Summer Plan. While we are grateful for the current Milwaukee County funding as supplied through resolution 21-506, those dollars afford us the ability to serve only households that include children under 18 years of age, and covers those costs for only two of the pilot's three-year span. It will not be possible for us to implement the full RTC pilot without City of Milwaukee funding for two reasons:

1. The \$1.8M in City of Milwaukee funding is needed for us to increase the scope to ALL households, regardless of size & composition, that earn under 200% of the federal poverty guideline. Without this funding, we can only serve households with children. By looking at the household compositions of clients served by the Eviction Defense Project, we know that this investment by the City of Milwaukee will increase the amount of households served by RTC by about 59%.
2. The \$1.8M in City of Milwaukee funding is needed to execute the pilot for all three years, as intended. Without this funding, we can only meet the costs of two years of the pilot.

Milwaukee needs Right to Counsel now, and our pilot launch date is scheduled for September 1, 2021. There is an urgency that the Common Council reschedules and adopts CCFN 210547 before the August 2021 recess. The success of the project is dependent on the adoption of CCFN 210547.

Milwaukee County Small Claims court data indicates families subject to evictions are predominantly Black and Hispanic residents in low-income neighborhoods. About 80% of all evictions in Milwaukee County occur within the City of Milwaukee. An evaluation firm, Stout Risius Ross, LLC, has been contracted for three years of formative evaluation to supply comprehensive reports and data visualization tools that will allow the City of Milwaukee to prove the case that this investment has positive effects on housing stability, particularly for low-income residents and residents of color.

We know that full legal representation in eviction cases is a highly effective strategy to prevent the trauma of homelessness. Data from the Milwaukee Eviction Defense Project shows that 90% of eviction cases are dismissed or delayed when a tenant has legal representation, yet less than 3% of Milwaukee tenants can afford an attorney. With about 14,000 evictions filed every year, RTC will prevent thousands of evictions, which in turn leads to more school stability for children, and better health outcomes for entire households.

We have found when speaking with other communities that have implemented RTC, that landlords who are initially apprehensive about the process, become supporters of the work because in working with a represented tenant, they are able to get connected to rental arrears more fully and quickly. Having both sides represented creates efficiencies for an over-burdened court system, by discouraging frivolous filings where pre-court mediation would suffice, and by speeding up proceedings since attorneys are skilled in housing laws and resources available to both tenants and landlords.

GIVE. ADVOCATE. VOLUNTEER.

225 West Vine Street
Milwaukee, WI 53212
414.263.8100
UnitedWayGMWC.org

The \$1.8M proposal of funding through Mayor Barrett's Stronger Summer Plan CCFN 210547 is necessary to meet the Right to Counsel's budgetary needs. RTC is a critical element of racial and housing justice in the City of Milwaukee and we urge you to support this funding request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Amy Linder". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "A".

Amy Linder
President and CEO
United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County