

Team Tenant: Eviction Prevention and Building Housing Justice in Guilford County

An Analysis of Court Watch, Organizing, and Local Solutions to the Eviction Crisis



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October 2025



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*Cover image: Keep Gate City Housed volunteers and AFSC staff
at a Greensboro City Council meeting. (Photo: Ugl3e)*

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The Landscape of Eviction in Guilford County

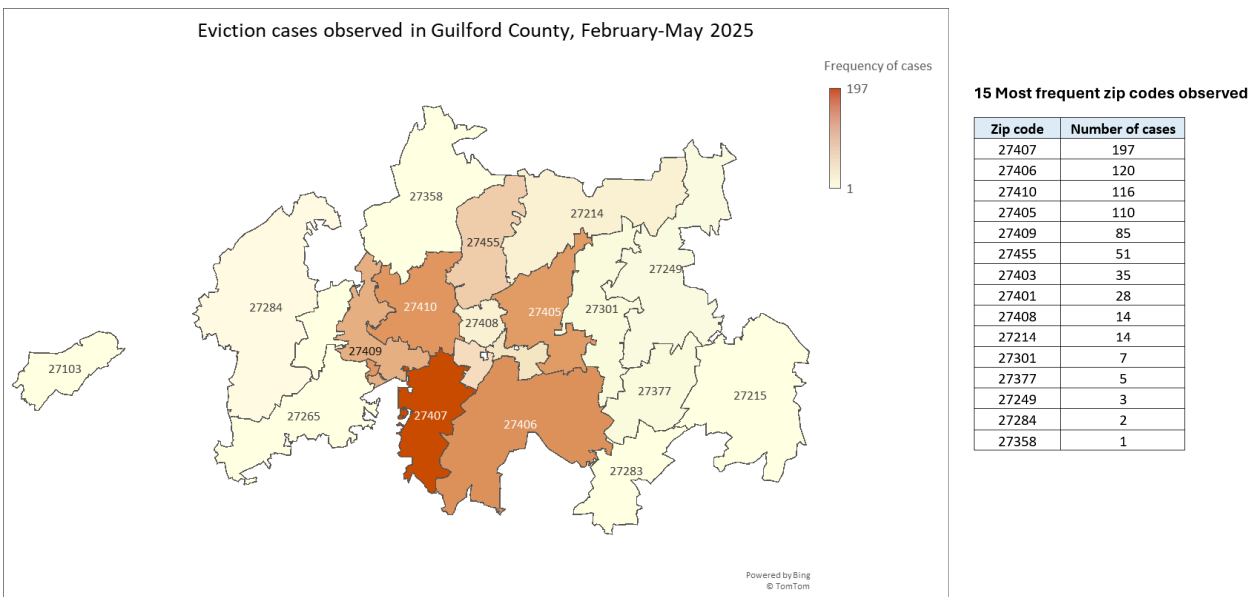
Guilford County is in the midst of an eviction crisis that affects thousands of residents each year, most of them renters living in low-income, Black, and Brown communities. While eviction is often framed as an individual or legal issue, the local data reveals it as a systemic and racialized pattern that demands structural change.

Each year, over 16,000 people in Guilford County face the threat of eviction. Evictions are not spread evenly across the county. They are concentrated in a handful of ZIP codes, including **27407**, **27406**, **27410**, and **27405** in East Greensboro and parts of High Point: communities that have long faced disinvestment, housing discrimination, and limited access to resources.

These areas also reflect the legacy of redlining and urban renewal, where predominantly Black and Brown neighborhoods have borne the brunt of landlord neglect, inadequate code enforcement, and rising rent burdens.

Volume and Geography of Evictions

Visual 1: ZIP codes image of eviction cases observed



Observed chart reflects observed evictions from court sessions in the Guilford County Courthouse, NC (February-May 2025). Source: Keep Gate City Housed Coalition, Court Watch Team

These trends point not just to a legal imbalance, but to the absence of meaningful tenant protections in Guilford County’s eviction system.

The racialized nature of eviction compounds existing inequities. It undermines access to education, employment, and health, reinforcing cycles of poverty and segregation across the country.

Courtroom Disparities: Representation and Outcomes

In Guilford County’s eviction courtrooms:

- The vast majority of tenants go unrepresented. In the cases we observed only 9% of tenants had legal counsel, compared to landlords who are represented in over 80% of cases.¹²
- Outcomes skew heavily toward landlords. Even when tenants raise legitimate concerns, such as unaddressed maintenance issues, harassment, or lack of notice, judgments are often issued in favor of property owners.
- Repeat filings are common, often used by landlords as a tool of harassment or rent collection rather than actual removal. Some tenants face multiple eviction filings in the same year, destabilizing households even if they avoid physical displacement.³

“It was either pay my electricity bill so I could use my breathing machine or pay rent.”

— An elderly woman explaining to the magistrate her reason for non-payment

¹ Am. Friends Serv. Comm., NC Court Watch Data (Internal Report, 2024)

² Stout Risius Ross, The Cost-Benefit Analysis of Providing a Right to Counsel in Eviction Cases (2016)

³ Matthew Desmond, Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City (2016)



*Volunteers and staff celebrate the City of Greensboro's support in funding the TEAM Project.
(Photo: E Henderson)*

Why Eviction Prevention Matters: Racial Equity, Public Cost, and Community Health

Eviction is not just a housing issue; it's a racial justice issue, a public health crisis, and a costly failure of prevention. When families are pushed out of their homes, the consequences ripple far beyond the front door. Communities without strong eviction prevention measures face rising costs, deepening racial disparities, and long-term harm to residents' well-being.

Housing isn't just a singular issue, and eviction prevention is just one of the many priorities that need to be highlighted when discussing the evident disparities in access to legal representation amongst tenants facing eviction. Eviction prevention should take priority because of its short and long-term effects on racial equity, public cost, and community health. Without prevention, tenants are forced to face the eviction process with a lack of prior knowledge of tenant rights and legal verbiage.

As observed through summary ejectment cases, most tenants observed without legal representation struggled through their quick hearing, oftentimes costing them consequences unbeknownst to them. The nature of forcibly losing your home causes mental and physical stressors. There is a story to each case and a family behind many.

Unfortunately, the name on the lease does not equate to a singular story. Many cases involve parents and children. The mental health of families and individuals facing eviction causes an immediate strain on their productivity level which reflects their income.

What's Happening Without Prevention

With no resources, legal support, mediation services, and no guidance, the disturbingly frequent cases of overlooked incorrect filings and uninhabitable living areas will continue. Without targeted eviction prevention, thousands of families are displaced every year; many over small amounts of rent or due to landlord neglect. In Guilford County alone, more than 16,000 people face eviction annually. The lack of legal representation, affordable housing, and mediation means tenants are often funneled through a system that oftentimes prioritizes speed over fairness, escalating instability and homelessness.

Intersections with Race, Sex, and Poverty

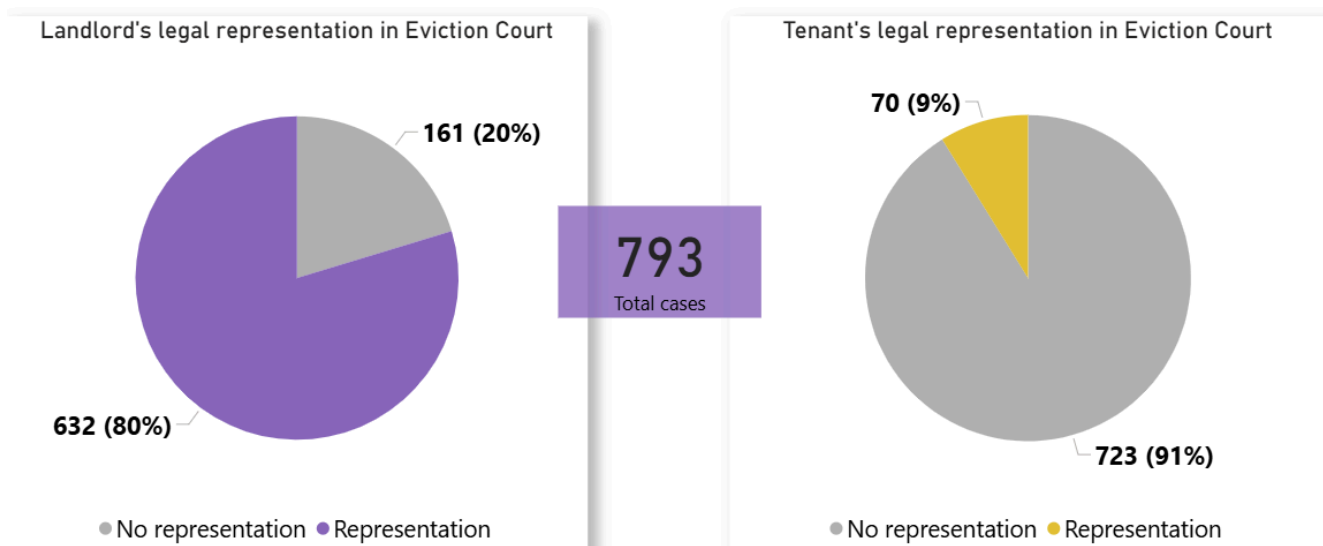
- Black women are the most disproportionately impacted, especially single mothers. They are more likely to be renters, more likely to be underpaid in the labor market, and more likely to face eviction even when accounting for income and household size.⁴
- Many tenants facing eviction live below the poverty line or are one emergency away from crisis. Rent burdens—where families spend more than 30% or even 50% of their income on housing—are common in high-eviction ZIP codes.
- Evictions also disproportionately affect children, as many cases involve households with minors who then face school disruptions, instability, and trauma.
- In Greensboro and High Point, neighborhoods with predominantly Black and Latinx residents see the highest eviction rates; often overlapping with areas that have been historically redlined or disinvested in.

⁴ Bluthenthal, C. The disproportionate burden of eviction on Black women. Center for American Progress (2023)

Here's what the Keep Gate City Housed Coalition data team found:

- In 793 cases we observed that 80% of the time the landlord showed up with legal representation for eviction court.
- Only 9% of tenants showed up with legal representation for eviction court.
- When tenants had legal representation (seen below), their likelihood of receiving a continuance⁵ increased from 17% to 37% and their likelihood of receiving a dismissal increased from 32% to 43%, in comparison to tenants without legal representation.
- When tenants had legal representation, their likelihood of getting evicted that day dropped from 48% to 16%, in comparison to tenants without representation.

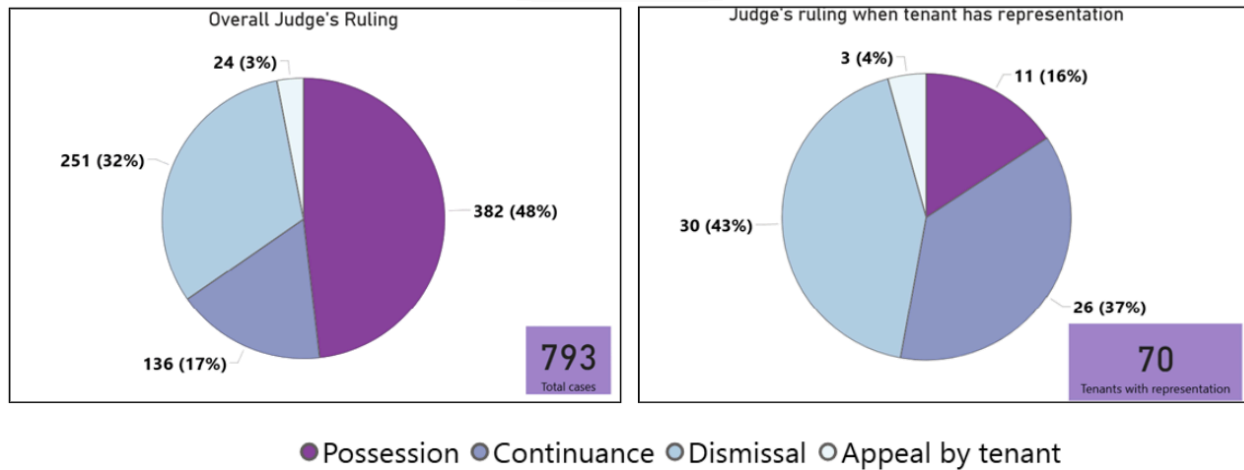
Visual 2: Legal representation disparity in eviction cases observed



This data is from the American Friends Service Committee - North Carolina Program, Eviction Court Watch project. The eviction court cases were observed and documented by volunteers from February 3, 2025 - May 1, 2025.

⁵ Continuance - A delay or deferral of a court hearing, trial, or other legal proceeding which can be requested by either involved party or initiated by the judge
(Continuance. Justia Legal Dictionary.(n.d.).<https://dictionary.justia.com/continuance>)

Visual 3: Judge's ruling in eviction cases observed



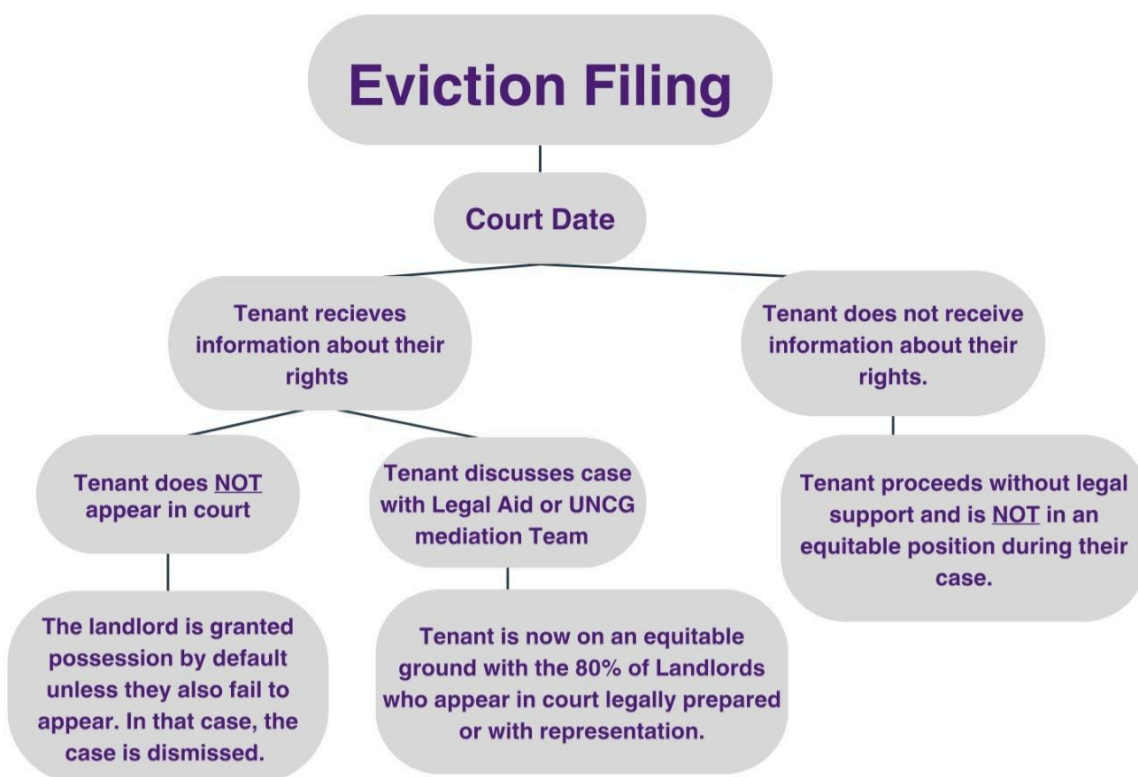
This data is from the American Friends Service Committee - North Carolina Program, Eviction Court Watch project. The eviction court cases were observed and documented by volunteers from February 3, 2025 - May 1, 2025.

Who Is Most Affected?

Evictions do not affect everyone equally. National and local data show:

- Black renters, particularly Black women, are disproportionately evicted, regardless of income.
- Families with children are more likely to be targeted for eviction.
- Low-income renters, who often spend more than 50% of their income on housing, face a higher risk.

Tenants vs Eviction: A Flowchart of Possible Legal Outcomes



Impacts on Health and Environment

Through observations of the Cottage Gardens apartments, there were about 35 code compliance violations filed. It was concluded that the standard of living for these tenants was uninhabitable. Filing a complaint just isn't enough in cases where tenants are going home, following a hearing, to sewage flooding their bathtub and mysterious fungus.

Substandard housing has lasting effects on tenants' health, including the risk of exposure to dangerous and toxic substances.

Eviction increases exposure to environmental hazards and chronic stress. Displaced families often move into overcrowded, unsafe, or poorly maintained housing, if they can find housing at all. Children experience higher rates of asthma and missed school days, while adults face increased emergency room visits, mental health crises, and untreated chronic conditions. Eviction also disrupts access to transportation, groceries, and healthcare.

Undermining Racial Equity

Evictions widen the racial wealth gap and erase progress toward racial justice. Generations of discriminatory housing policies, from redlining to exclusionary zoning, have funneled Black and Brown families into vulnerable rental markets. When evictions occur, these same families lose not just shelter, but stability, credit, job access, and sometimes custody of their children. Preventing eviction is an essential part of repairing historical harm.

“I’m just embarrassed and sorry.”

— A woman behind one month on rent, representing herself in a
Summary Ejection Case

The Public Cost of Inaction

Eviction is expensive for everyone, especially the public.⁶ **When prevention fails:**

- Families enter emergency shelter systems or rely on overburdened family networks.⁷
- Children may be placed in foster care, especially when housing instability is mistaken for neglect.⁸
- Increased emergency medical services, school instability, and court costs drain public budgets.⁹
- Neighborhoods see higher rates of crime and surveillance, adding to public safety expenditures.¹⁰
- Investing in eviction prevention — through legal support, rental assistance, and proactive code enforcement- is not just the moral thing to do. It's the smarter, more cost-effective, and equitable approach to keeping our communities housed and healthy.¹¹

"Mom, it's raining again."

— A mother in court explaining what her son told her every time the roof started leaking in their apartment

⁶ Ross, *supra* note 2, at 3

⁷ National Low Income Housing Coalition, *The Gap: A Shortage of Affordable Homes* (2025)

⁸ Child Welfare League of America, *Housing Instability and Child Welfare: Partnerships Supporting Families in Crisis*, CWLA (2025)

⁹ Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, *The Health Impact of Eviction* (2021)

¹⁰ Matthew Desmond & Nicol Valdez, *Unpolicing the Urban Poor: Consequences of Third-Party Policing for Inner-City Women*, 78 *Am. Soc. Rev.* 117 (2013)

¹¹ Ross, *supra* note 2, at 3



A volunteer speaking at a County Commissioners Meeting. (Photo: Whitney Campbell)

AFSC NC's Role and Mission in Housing Justice

The American Friends Service Committee – North Carolina (AFSC NC) is rooted in the belief that housing is a human right and that no one should be punished with homelessness because of poverty, racism, or neglect. Our mission in housing justice is to center the voices and experiences of those most impacted by housing insecurity—especially Black, Brown, immigrant, working class, and low-income renters—and to organize collectively toward a future where everyone has a safe and dignified place to live.

Through community organizing, policy advocacy, and direct support, AFSC NC works to: prevent evictions by supporting rental assistance, legal representation, and tenant rights education; build tenant power through court watch programs, leadership development, and organizing campaigns; advance housing policy that protects renters, combats displacement, and holds landlords and governments accountable; shift the narrative by exposing the root causes of housing injustice and uplifting community stories and solutions.

Launching the Keep Gate City Housed campaign in Greensboro, tenant organizing around non-compliant landlords to expand our Court Watch program, AFSC NC plays a vital role in connecting everyday struggles to systems change. We believe that by building coalitions, documenting injustice, and organizing with compassion and resolve, we can transform our housing system to serve people, not profit.

AFSC Volunteers vs. Eviction



Volunteers chanting for tenants' right to counsel, continued TEAM funding, and rental assistance at a Guilford County Commissioners meeting. (Photo: Whitney Campbell)



Volunteers at a Guilford County Commissioners Meeting. (Photo: E Henderson)

Volunteers supporting the Keep Gate City Housed Campaign have been instrumental in ensuring tenants' voices are heard and funding is continued. Packing the stands and speaking on behalf of the court watch observations, tenant rallies, and personal lived experiences are just a few of the ways tenants have publicly backed the right to counsel initiative and TEAM funding support.

Scope of the Timeline

Geographic Reach

- Primarily focused on Greensboro and Guilford County, with emerging partnerships in High Point, Jamestown, and surrounding communities.

Organizing & Outreach

- Hundreds of tenants engaged through canvassing, court watch, storytelling, and multilingual outreach
- Collaboration with students, faith communities, and grassroots advocates

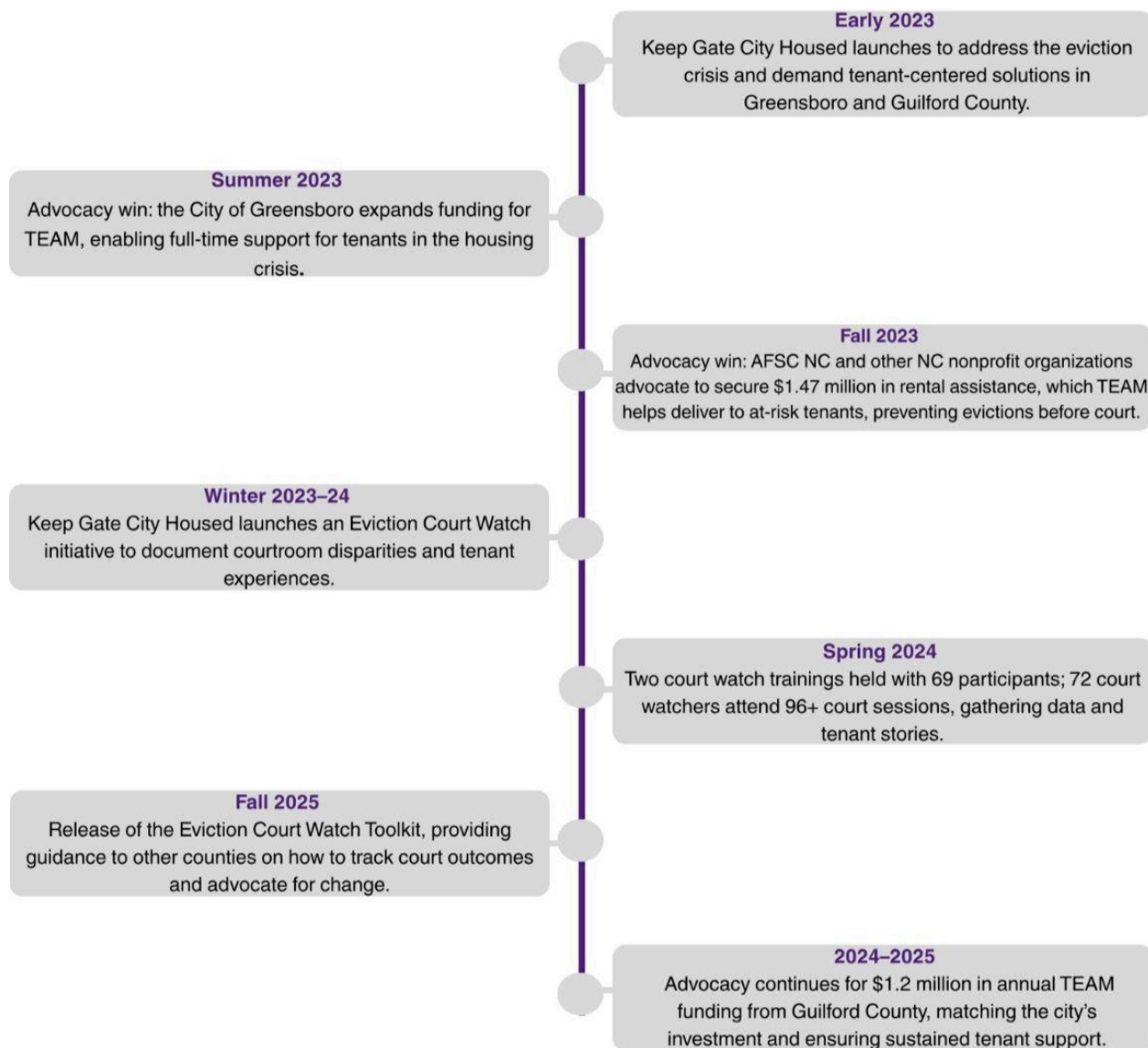
Policy Demands

- Secure ongoing city and county funding for TEAM
- Win a Right to Counsel for all tenants facing eviction
- Expand and streamline rental assistance access
- Enforce housing codes and hold negligent landlords accountable

Data & Accountability

- Court watch and tenant data used to identify eviction patterns and inform public policy
- Supportive alignment with programs like TEAM to advance holistic housing justice

Campaign Timeline





Cecile "CC" Crawford at the County Commissioners Public Forum. (Photo: Whitney Campbell)

Growing the Movement: Data, Toolkits, and Expansion

Witnessing Injustice: What Keep Gate City Housed Court Watch Reveals

The Eviction Court Watch program was never meant to be a standalone effort. From the outset, our goal has been to build a sustainable, replicable model—one rooted in community power, equity, and data-driven advocacy. By creating a detailed Court Watch Toolkit, we're equipping communities across North Carolina and beyond with the tools to document court proceedings, amplify tenant voices, and push for systemic change.

Recommendation on the Impact of Legal Representation

In order for the Keep Gate City Housed Campaign to succeed, it will take the permanent funding of the Tenant Education Advocacy Mediation Program (TEAM). The TEAM Program addresses underlying issues that low-income and medium-income tenants face. This program assists tenants in keeping their housing and mediating with

landlords over rental disputes. TEAM also makes referrals to community-based organizations and social services. Along with permanent funding for the TEAM program, KGCH NC is fighting for a Right to Counsel for all tenants in North Carolina, establishing a fair legal playing field for tenants vulnerable to housing instability.

It is imperative that the Keep Gate City Housed Coalition continues to work with local organizations committed to similar missions. Community groups like Guilford for All and the Unitarian Universalist are a few impactful organizations in Guilford County who have amplified the voice of tenants, teachers, and children. With a number of grassroots organizations fighting for justice, it is crucial that Guilford has leaders to push the long-fought narrative of local organizations and their pursuit toward justice.

Court Watch Toolkit: Purpose and Vision

The purpose of the toolkit is simple but powerful: To demystify the eviction court process, empower volunteers to observe and document patterns of injustice, and translate those findings into policy advocacy that keeps people housed.

This toolkit reflects lessons learned from our experience in Guilford County, including:

- How to recruit and train volunteers
- What data to collect and how to collect it ethically and consistently
- Strategies for storytelling, healing, and community support
- Guidance on navigating limited access to court records
- Templates for forms, reports, and public communication

The Court Watch Toolkit was designed to make eviction court monitoring accessible, replicable, and impactful. Its primary goal is to equip grassroots organizations, tenant groups, and advocacy coalitions with a step-by-step guide for launching their own court watch programs. Rooted in our experience in Guilford County, the toolkit offers a model that can be adapted to other North Carolina counties and beyond. By

standardizing best practices and templates for observation, data collection, and volunteer coordination, we aim to fuel a growing statewide movement demanding transparency, tenant protections, and Right to Counsel.

Regional Replication Goals

We believe every community deserves transparency in their eviction process—and the power to hold systems accountable. Our goal is to support at least five new counties in launching their court watch initiatives over the next 12 months, using our toolkit as a foundation.

By expanding this work:

- We build a shared statewide data infrastructure to expose eviction patterns and legal disparities.
- We increase pressure for Right to Counsel legislation and proactive rental protections.
- We grow a network of tenant-centered, grassroots-led housing justice efforts that are informed by local context and strengthened by statewide solidarity.

This is how we grow the movement—not just with hope or outrage, but with infrastructure, tools, and a shared belief that everyone deserves a safe and stable home.

Central to our approach is people-powered data collection. We trained volunteers—including students, faith leaders, and tenants themselves—to observe court proceedings, collect detailed case data, and identify trends in representation, outcomes, and courtroom conditions.

Our framework includes:

- Orientation and issue education on tenants' rights and the eviction process.
- Training on how to use our standardized court watch form.
- A structured schedule of shifts to ensure courtroom presence.
- Ongoing communication and debrief sessions to support volunteer retention and wellness.
- This community-led data collection approach builds both local capacity and political will.

Technical support for other counties

We recognize that building a statewide movement requires more than just a toolkit. That's why we're offering:

- Virtual and in-person training to onboard new organizers and volunteers.
- Access to customizable templates for court forms, flyers, and reports.
- 1:1 consultation sessions with organizers from our Guilford County team.
- Ongoing peer learning cohorts to foster collaboration and real-time problem-solving between counties.

Through this infrastructure, we help remove the barriers that prevent communities from launching their own court watch programs.



Architect Toolkit team during a planning meeting. (Photo: AFSC/Cecile Crawford)

Standing Together: Tenant Organizing and Narrative Power

As every case has a different story, every volunteer who observes a court session has to observe various emotions. After every court session, the Eviction Watch Coordinator held a safe space discussion to ensure all volunteers had room to express their immediate feelings after hearing heartbreaking stories and to answer any questions that came up in the observations.

After all 96 court sessions, the volunteers had a healing circle led by Terrell Dungee, Cecile “CC” Crawford, Devyn Rascoe, and Jess St. Louis. During this session, volunteers shared the stories that touched them the most and unveiled the emotionally heavy cases that stuck with them. The stories ranged from tenants tearfully pleading for a continuance or dismissal to tenants who simply said nothing because they stated they were embarrassed to be in court.

Whether it was before or after a court session, tenants shared how grateful they were to see TEAM and the observers showing up for them. Even though the volunteers could not provide legal representation for tenants, the brochures full of tenant rights and encouraging dialogue shifted the energy in the courthouse.

Methodology

The AFSC North Carolina Program Director and the Just Economies Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning Technical Advisor used Microsoft Forms to collect the data that was observed in eviction court from February through April 2025.

A data entry team, composed of eight individuals, used the Microsoft Form to submit data from eviction court watch observation forms, court dockets, and publicly available information from North Carolina e-courts.

The data team met weekly from 3:30-4:30 PM and debriefed the data entry process, sharing trends seen in the data and working through any questions that arose from the process. We reviewed data visualizations created in Power BI each week and discussed data needs.

The visualizations provide data on the cases that eviction court watch volunteers were able to observe or hear the verdict in court. These visualizations are not representative of all eviction court cases in Greensboro; they only provide data and visualize the trends that the eviction court watch volunteers were able to observe from February through April, 2025.

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