

GUEST OPINION

What everyone should know about evictions

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Guest Opinion

The severe, often lifelong, impact of eviction on families is graphically described in Holli Lankford's June 8 letter to the editor recounting her family's experience.

Sadly, homelessness, evictions, foreclosures and other housing problems are widespread — especially in the present economy. And unfortunately, when Ms. Lankford was dealing with her situation four years ago, legal aid services in this area were extremely limited and there had been no legal aid office in Grays Harbor since 1995.

Fortunately, since that time, the Washington Legislature has recognized the critical importance of providing civil legal assistance and representation to those unable to afford an attorney and has provided increased funding for legal aid services. As a result, in September 2007, Northwest Justice Project (NJP), Washington's statewide civil legal aid program, expanded and opened offices, including a new office in Aberdeen, which provides civil legal aid services to Grays Harbor and Pacific Counties.

NJP provides *free* legal advice, brief services and direct representation to eligible low-income people seeking to meet basic needs such as housing, family safety, consumer protection, education, medical care, employment, public benefits and much more.

To apply for legal assistance, please call NJP's toll free statewide intake and assistance hotline known as CLEAR (Coordinated Legal Education Advice and Referral) at 1-888-201-1014 Mondays through Fridays 9:15 a.m. to 12:15 p.m. (interpreters are available). Seniors 60 and over should call 1-888-387-7111.

CLEAR will screen for eligibility, provide immediate legal advice or brief services and, as appropriate, depending on the type of problem and services needed, refer cases for further review to the field office in your service area. Domestic violence victims can gain expedited access to CLEAR through the local domestic violence shelters. Native Americans can press "5" to speak with a Native American attorney.

In addition to CLEAR and our seventeen field offices around the state, NJP also maintains a free public Web site at www.washingtonlawhelp.org, which has an extensive library of legal self-help materials (many translated into other languages) on various legal issues.

In the meantime here are some tips everyone should know:

1. You can *only* be evicted by court order.
2. If you have unsafe housing conditions, you *must* keep paying your rent — but seek help, other legal remedies may be available.
3. If you're a tenant in a property foreclosed after May 20, 2009, a new federal law requires that you receive a 90-day notice before you can be evicted.
4. If you're paying lot rent in a mobile home park and you own your home, you have greater legal rights to protect your home.
5. If you're having trouble with your housing — seek help! Your problem is not going to go away!
6. If you receive a foreclosure or eviction notice, it *must* comply with the law.
7. Always pay rent by check or money order or demand a receipt before paying in cash.
8. Keep records! Save receipts!

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