

Research Brief: Analysis Of The Social And Economic Impact Of Delaware Qualified Tenant Advocates (2022-2025)

By the Access to Justice Research Initiative at the American Bar Foundation¹

Who are Qualified Tenant Advocates?

Qualified Tenant Advocates (QTAs) are a type of community justice worker (CJW)—individuals who are not licensed attorneys but who are trained, authorized, and supervised to provide legal services, including legal advice and in-court representation, to people facing civil justice problems.

Across the United States, community justice workers serve as frontline access to justice providers and include people like staff at shelters and food banks, faith leaders, community health workers (such as *promotoras*), and other government or nonprofit workers. Some CJWs are employed by legal services organizations, while others serve as community volunteers. QTAs are one of several contemporary justice worker roles that are authorized to provide legal advice, representation and advocacy in courts and administrative hearings, as well as in negotiations and settlements.

QTAs focus specifically on housing-related legal issues, particularly landlord-tenant matters, and are authorized to represent tenants in eviction proceedings and related cases throughout Delaware.

Why are QTAs needed?

Across the United States, less than 10% of the civil justice problems of low-income people receive any or enough legal help.² In Delaware, between 2017 and 2022, the majority of landlords were represented (>80%) in Justice of the Peace housing court cases, while less than 3% of tenants were.³ At the same time, only a minority of landlords (14% of cases) were represented by lawyers. Most (73%) of the people representing

1 This Brief shares findings from independent research funded by Arizona State University (ASU) and the American Bar Foundation. The authors are James Teufel, MPH, PhD, Matthew Burnett, JD, and Rebecca L. Sandefur, PhD. Dr. Teufel conducted the quantitative analyses reported here.

2 The Legal Services Corporation's 2022 study of the legal needs of the low-income population found an increase in the proportion of the civil justice issues of the poor that receive no or inadequate service, from 86% in 2017 to 92% in 2022. Mary C. Slosar, Slosar Research, LLC. (2022). The justice gap: The unmet civil legal needs of low-income Americans. Legal Services Corporation. <https://www.lsc.gov/initiatives/justice-gap-research>. There are no indications that this situation has improved since the study.

3 Teufel, J., Pelletiers, W. & Coleman, B. (2023). Report: *Delaware landlord-tenant docket (2017-2022) analysis*.

landlords in these proceedings were not attorneys but rather “form 50 agents” permitted under Supreme Court Rule 57. These agents are non-lawyers approved to represent corporate entities in landlord-tenant cases after submitting “form 50” to the Justice of the Peace Court.⁴ Until the recent changes, in Justice of the Peace Courts, where magistrates themselves are also not required to be attorneys, tenants had the choice between representation by an attorney or no representation, while landlords had the choice of representation by attorneys, by form 50 agents, or appearing without representation. For nearly 30 years, until 2022, this formal inequality was designed into access to housing justice for tenants in Delaware.

How are QTAs authorized and trained?

Establishing QTAs included both regulatory and legislative action. In March 2022, the Delaware Supreme Court amended Rule 57 and adopted Rules 57.1–57.3, authorizing legal aid organizations to employ or contract with, train, and supervise Qualified Tenant Advocates.⁵ In June 2023, the Delaware General Assembly enacted legislation establishing a right to representation for tenants in summary possession (eviction) cases in Justice of the Peace Courts, as well as in related housing matters.⁶ Notably, Delaware’s right-to-representation statute differs from traditional right-to-counsel laws. Rather than limiting representation to licensed attorneys, the statute explicitly recognizes representation by both lawyers and Qualified Tenant Advocates in landlord-tenant proceedings.

Under Rule 57.1, all three of Delaware’s legal aid organizations—the Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. (CLASI), Legal Services Corporation of Delaware (LSCD), and Delaware Volunteer Legal Services (DVLS)—are authorized to train, supervise, and deploy QTAs.

Training to become a Qualified Tenant Advocate (QTA) includes a minimum of three months of weekly, two-hour classes. The curriculum covers Delaware’s landlord-tenant code, ethical and professional standards, and the specific role of QTAs in housing matters. Instruction is delivered by subject-matter experts affiliated with Delaware legal organizations. Like other practice-based training programs (e.g. clinical legal education in law schools), QTA training is interactive and skills-focused, incorporating practical exercises, simulations, and mock hearings. Through this training, QTAs learn to identify and analyze legal issues, recognize statutory and case-law defenses, develop and organize evidence, conduct client interviews, and prepare for advocacy in court and administrative settings. Although eviction defense is central, training also addresses related landlord-tenant issues that commonly arise in practice, including habitability claims, lease termination, security deposits, housing vouchers, manufactured housing, and the rights of tenants with disabilities. Once trained, QTAs receive support and feedback from supervising attorneys.

4 Justice of the Peace Court. (2025). *Artificial entity and public body pro se representation in civil actions in the Justice of the Peace Court (Form 50)*. https://courts.delaware.gov/jpcourt/jp_form50.aspx

5 Delaware Supreme Court Rule 57.1. (2022). <https://ruledex.com/delaware/rules-of-the-supreme-court-of-the-state-of-delaware/part-v-attorneys/subpart-a-board-of-bar-examiners/rule-57-1-representation-of-residential-tenant-by-qualified-tenant-advocate-in-the-justice-of-the-peace-court/>

6 Two additional recently passed bills have funded right to representation (lawyer or QTA) in Delaware landlord tenant cases (see SS 1 for SB 1, 152nd General Assembly, signed 7/25/23 and SB 132, 153rd General Assembly, signed 9/3/25). <https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail/130110>
<https://legis.delaware.gov/BillDetail?legislationId=142240>

Once authorized, QTAs' scope of practice includes client intake and case management, case investigation and development, legal writing, negotiation with opposing parties, and participation in court and administrative proceedings. Between 2022 and 2025, the Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. (CLASI) recruited and began training 13 QTAs. Of those, seven completed the full training program and were certified to practice by the Justice of the Peace Court and Delaware Supreme Court.

What have we learned about the effectiveness of Delaware QTAs in connecting people with the help they need?

Qualified Tenant Advocates delivered substantial housing-related legal services. Between 2022 and 2025, QTAs working with the Community Legal Aid Society, Inc. (CLASI) contributed to 3,755 housing matters, delivering legal assistance across all three counties in Delaware. During this period, QTAs were involved in over three-quarters (78 percent) of the 4,829 housing cases handled by CLASI, underscoring their central role in the organization's housing practice. The scope and intensity of services provided by QTAs ranged from brief counsel and advice to full representation in contested court proceedings, demonstrating flexibility in matching the level of assistance to the complexity and stakes of each case.

The majority of QTA-assisted matters involved federally subsidized housing. QTAs participated in 3,130 cases, representing 83 percent of all matters in which QTAs were involved, that raised issues related to subsidized housing. These included Section 8 voucher issues (1,303 matters), evictions from public housing (361 matters), public housing quality and habitability concerns, including conditions and code violations (266 matters), and evictions from Section 8 housing (255 matters).

As of the end of 2025, 88 percent of matters involving Qualified Tenant Advocates (QTAs) had closed, 11 percent remained ongoing, and 1 percent were rejected (largely due to being determined to fall outside the scope of CLASI's practice). Across more than 3,300 closed cases, QTAs assisted tenant-clients in securing or preserving approximately \$4.8 million in housing-related financial assistance, primarily by maintaining access to housing subsidies or vouchers.

Overall, 38 percent of QTA-assisted closed housing cases resulted in at least one "substantial outcome" that directly benefited the tenant-client, such as preventing eviction, preserving subsidies, or reducing rent. The seven most common such outcomes were: eviction prevented (74 percent of closed cases with at least one substantial outcome), negotiated settlement (36 percent), right to remain in the rental unit (17 percent), preservation of a housing subsidy or voucher (14 percent), rental assistance obtained (10 percent), prevention of an involuntary move (6 percent), and monetary relief (4 percent).

Consistent with cases handled exclusively by CLASI attorneys, the vast majority of cases involving QTAs closed through negotiated settlements or court decisions that produced one or more substantial outcomes for the tenant.

Qualified Tenant Advocates deliver substantial and measurable impacts for individuals, families, and communities. Across the cases in which they were involved, QTAs assisted nearly 8,000 people, including 4,233 adults and 3,463 children. Among QTA-assisted cases, 67 percent of clients identified as Black, 80 percent identified as female, 57 percent reported living with a disability, and 9 percent reported experiencing

domestic violence. These figures indicate that QTAs disproportionately serve populations facing heightened vulnerability to housing instability and other civil justice problems.

QTAs' work also generated broader community-level benefits. By preventing evictions and involuntary moves, QTA-assisted cases helped Delaware communities avoid an estimated \$5.43 million in downstream public costs, including expenditures related to emergency shelter, foster care placements, and disruptions to children's education.⁷

In addition, housing assistance has a documented local economic multiplier effect: for every dollar of housing assistance entering a community, approximately one additional dollar is spent locally.⁸ As a result, the \$4.8 million in housing assistance recovered or preserved through QTA involvement generated an estimated \$4.8 million in additional local economic activity, sufficient to support approximately 44 full-time jobs for one year.⁹

Client satisfaction with Qualified Tenant Advocate (QTA) services was consistently high. Among 113 clients who received services from a QTA and completed a satisfaction survey: 95 percent strongly agreed that they were able to ask questions and discuss their case with the QTA; 90 percent strongly agreed that they would use QTA services again; 89 percent strongly agreed that they were treated courteously; 89 percent strongly agreed that the information provided was easy to understand; 82 percent strongly agreed that they were satisfied with the help received; 78 percent strongly agreed that they learned more about their legal rights; and, 74 percent strongly agreed that their health improved or stress decreased as a result of the services they received.

Together, these findings indicate that QTA services are not only effective in resolving housing-related legal issues, but are also accessible, understandable, and responsive to client needs, and have measurable benefits for client well-being.

What have we learned from QTAs about how community justice workers can scale up to meet communities' needs?

In a short time, these justice workers can begin to contribute meaningful services. Over less than three years, a small workforce of QTAs contributed to over three quarters (78%) of a legal aid organization's landlord-tenant caseload, including acting as the primary legal provider¹⁰ in fully one-third (33%) of those housing cases. By expanding the pool of authorized advocates, QTAs increase system capacity to respond to justice needs that attorney-only models struggle to meet.

7 Based on a sample of 6 jurisdictions where Stout has conducted eviction right / access to counsel fiscal impact analyses, the average per household fiscal impact of avoiding disruptive displacement is approximately \$5,700. Included in the \$5,700 estimate are the per household fiscal impacts of: (1) avoiding housing social safety net responses; (2) retaining economic value by minimizing out-migration; (3) responding to unsheltered homelessness; (4) responding to forcible entry and vehicle theft crimes; (5) avoiding out-of-home foster care placements; (6) increasing educational attainment for children; (7) increasing employment stability for adults; (8) retaining federal and/or state funding for local public school districts; (9) avoiding incremental spending on Medicaid-funded health care; and (10); avoiding incarcerating people experiencing homelessness. (S. DiDomenico & N. Steinkamp of Stout, personal communication, January 13, 2026)

8 The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities. (2018). *The economic impact of public housing: Ongoing investment with wide reaching returns*.

9 Inflation adjusted estimates; See The Council of Large Public Housing Authorities. (2018). *The economic impact of public housing: Ongoing investment with wide reaching returns*.

10 Most landlord-tenants cases included more than one contributing provider. The case management system requires notation of a primary provider and the type of advocate. A QTA can be linked to a case as primary provider (case lead) or act in a supporting role.

What Have We Learned About the Sustainability of Community Justice Workers from QTAs?

Qualified Tenant Advocates (QTAs) benefit from three core pillars of sustainability for community justice worker models: political support, community legitimacy, and return on investment.¹¹ The early experience of Delaware's QTAs suggests that community justice worker models like QTAs can be politically viable, community-grounded, and economically sustainable.

Political Support. A central element of sustainability is durable political support, and QTAs have demonstrated this. The QTA program has been endorsed and supported by both the judicial and legislative branches of Delaware's government. QTAs are funded in part through Delaware's Right to Representation legislation, supplemented by public and nonprofit grants, embedding the model within the state's access to justice infrastructure.

QTAs have also proven instrumental in helping legal aid organizations address persistent attorney recruitment and retention challenges, as well as broader shortages of attorneys working in people-facing and public-interest law.

Community Support and Legitimacy. A second pillar of sustainability is community acceptance and trust. Because entry into QTA work does not require the high barriers associated with becoming an attorney—such as seven years of higher education, licensing fees, and multiple examinations—QTAs are often more proximal to and representative of the communities they serve. Client feedback supports this conclusion. Results from CLASI's client satisfaction surveys show that clients valued their interactions with QTAs and expressed a strong willingness to seek QTA assistance again for future legal needs, indicating meaningful community legitimacy and acceptance of the model.

Return on Investment. A third critical element of sustainability is demonstrable value for money. Programs that generate measurable benefits relative to cost are more likely to be maintained and scaled. Initial findings from the evaluation of Delaware's QTA program are promising. Accounting for salary and fringe benefits, as well as training, administrative, and supervision costs, QTAs generated approximately \$7 in benefits for every \$1 invested. Even during the program's early stages—when training and startup costs are often highest—the cost per case for QTAs was less than half of the benchmark for low-cost, sustainable justice initiatives in the United States (\$580 per case, compared to a benchmark of \$1,470 per case).¹²

What do we still need to learn about Qualified Tenant Advocates?

Although early findings demonstrate that Qualified Tenant Advocates (QTAs) provide effective, trusted, and cost-efficient services, QTAs—and community justice workers more broadly—remain a relatively new source of legal help. Several important questions remain.

¹¹ See Matthew, B. & Sandefur, R.L. (2024). A people-centered approach to designing and evaluating community justice worker programs in the United States. *Fordham Urban Law Journal*, 51(5), 1509-1551.

¹² Manuel, M. and Manea, S. (2025). State of justice financing 2025: Annual review of domestic financing and aid trends. ODI Policy Brief. London: ODI. https://media.odi.org/documents/Justice_Financing_Annual_Review_2025_Sep25_rev081225.pdf.

How Do People Learn About QTAs and Decide to Use Their Services? Even the most effective service cannot have impact if people do not know it exists or do not understand what it offers. Research from Delaware indicates that people commonly connect with QTAs through prior experience with CLASI, recommendations from family or friends, and referrals from the court. At the same time, the single most common referral category in the data is labeled “other,” indicating that we do not yet know how most Delaware residents actually learn about QTAs. Understanding these pathways—whether through informal networks, community organizations, housing providers, or other channels—is critical to improving outreach, access, and equity in service utilization.

What Supports the Recruitment, Training, and Retention of Justice Workers? Sustainability depends not only on funding and political support, but also on the ability to recruit, train, and retain qualified justice workers. For programs like QTAs, the evidence base on workforce development is still emerging. Key unanswered questions include: What factors support successful completion of QTA training and court certification? What supports enable QTAs to persist in their roles over time after certification? How do supervision, workload, compensation, peer support, and career pathways affect retention? Addressing these questions is essential for building sustainable and scalable community justice worker models.

How Can QTAs' Skills Be Used Most Effectively Within Legal Services Delivery? Landlord-tenant work often occurs outside courtrooms and outside formal litigation, through client counseling, problem-solving, and negotiation with opposing parties. Currently, approximately one-third (33 percent) of QTA work involves negotiating settlements, litigated outcomes, or uncontested court decisions. However, in cases that proceed to litigation, QTAs are still less likely than lawyers to serve in the primary advocacy role. This raises important questions about the optimal division of labor between attorneys and QTAs: Is the current allocation of responsibilities the most effective and efficient use of QTA skills? Could QTAs' roles in litigation be expanded in ways that improve outcomes, increase system capacity, or reduce costs? What regulatory, training, or supervision changes, if any, would be required to support such expansion?

How were the data collected?

The analytic dataset was constructed using data from CLASI's case management system. Case records were limited to matters opened, rejected, or closed between January 2022 and December 2025. Data cleaning, analysis, and interpretation were conducted in consultation with CLASI staff to ensure the accuracy, completeness, and contextual validity of the findings, including appropriate interpretation of case types, outcomes, and service activities. To estimate the duration of benefits and economic multiplier effects, the analysis incorporated findings from external empirical research and published reports, which were used to establish baseline valuation assumptions for cost avoidance, housing stability, and local economic impact.¹³

¹³ See also notes 8, 13, 14, and 15.

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