

Virginia Eviction Diversion Program Final Report



**Virginia
Housing
Commission**

Virginia Housing Commission
November 30, 2023

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The General Assembly passed [SB 24](#) in 2022 and it was signed into effect by the Governor. It included the provision requiring the Interim Report and this Final Report. The following is the applicable language: That beginning on July 1, 2022, the Virginia Housing Commission shall evaluate data submitted by the Office of the Executive Secretary of the Virginia Supreme Court relating to the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program.

There was limited data available to analyze in the interim report, and less data for analysis in this final report. There were very few participants who used the Pilot Eviction Diversion Court (Pilot). Reasons for the lack of data provided in the interim report were credited to; (1) the stringent guidelines to qualify for the Pilot, (2) court closures and, (3) other programs to avert eviction during the Covid-19 pandemic (pandemic). Other eviction diversion programs within the examined period received funding to aid tenants in paying their rent and offer tenant support. This potentially makes those programs more attractive choices for participating landlords and tenants, as opposed to the Pilot program which has no funding allocation. While several eviction assistance programs have since expired or exhausted funding, including the Virginia Rent Relief Program, the stringent guidelines, pandemic-related programs, and legislative changes remained a limiting factor for participation in the year following the interim report.

This Final Report gives an overview of the requirements for the Pilot and the Virginia eviction process. It also looks at the effectiveness of other states' legislation and efforts to reduce evictions, provides an updated analysis on the status of eviction rates in Virginia, and includes insights and information from various Virginia stakeholders. Additionally, Census surveys may provide insights into rent increases, rent-burdened households, and households at risk of eviction. Analysis based on the recent survey data shows Virginians may be at a lower risk of rental increase or eviction compared to national averages, however these averages are all gradually returning to the higher pre-pandemic levels.

Given the very small sample size for the program data provided in 2022 and 2023, and paired with Virginia's rising eviction rates, it is difficult to determine the scope of effectiveness of the Pilot program. In part due to the pandemic related eviction diversion and reduction efforts, the Pilot was not afforded the chance to be utilized for several years. However, based on documents and data provided by the Office of the Executive Secretary, it is reasonable to conclude the Pilot program was effective in preventing several evictions of tenants who fell into the targeted guidelines within this studied period.

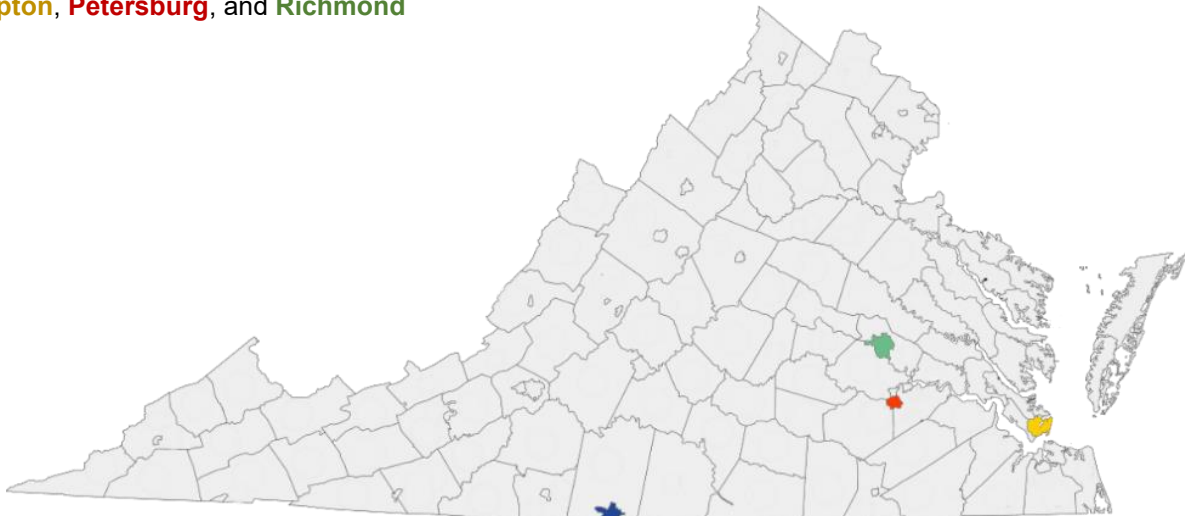
OVERVIEW OF THE EVICTION DIVERSION PILOT PROGRAM

Evictions for nonpayment of rent can impact families and lead to homelessness, health issues, and effect community development (The Network For Public Health Law, 2020). Longitudinal data shows that an average of 2.7 million households in the country receive eviction filings every year (Gromis et al, 2022). To combat reported high levels of evictions in the Commonwealth, in 2019 the Virginia Housing Commission created, and the General Assembly of Virginia passed, legislation establishing an Eviction Diversion Pilot Program. This trial program was initiated within the General District Courts of four localities in the Commonwealth: Danville, Hampton, Petersburg, and Richmond (Figure 1). The Eviction Diversion Pilot Program (Va Code Ann. §55.1-1260, 2023) aims to reduce the number of evictions of low-income tenants who are not able to pay rent after experiencing job loss, medical bills, or any one-time crisis. The program became effective on July 1, 2020, and will expire on July 1, 2024.

The Eviction Diversion Pilot Program is meant to help tenants who experience emergency situations rather than those who are consistently in financial hardship. To be eligible for this court-based eviction diversion pilot; (i) the tenant must not have a repeated history of late payments, (ii) the tenant must be able to pay 25 percent of the amount due on the unlawful detainer as amended on the first docket call of the case, and (iii) make payments under the court payment plan. When the tenant meets the eligibility requirements and enters into a court-ordered payment plan, the tenant is required to pay the remaining balance on the unlawful detainer in 25 percent installments by the fifth day of each month over the following three months. If the tenant makes all the payments as scheduled by the court-ordered payment plan, the judge shall dismiss the unlawful detainer case as being satisfied. This pilot program facilitates the landlord and tenant entering into a reasonable payment plan; this ensures that the landlord receives full rental payments, and the tenant can make payments and avoid eviction.

The Eviction Diversion Pilot Program was created as a result of a series of discussions, negotiations, and recommendations from the Virginia Housing Commission's Eviction Workgroup and the legislators who were members of the Virginia Housing Commission. According to Martin Wegbreit, Director of Litigation at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and member of the Eviction Workgroup, the Pilot was a revolutionary idea at the time of conception. If participating in the Pilot, a rent-owing tenant could leave court proceedings with a payment plan instead of the outcome of a judgement of possession.

Figure 1: The Four Localities of the Pilot Program highlighted in corresponding colors; **Danville**, **Hampton**, **Petersburg**, and **Richmond**



Eligibility for Participation in the Eviction Pilot Program

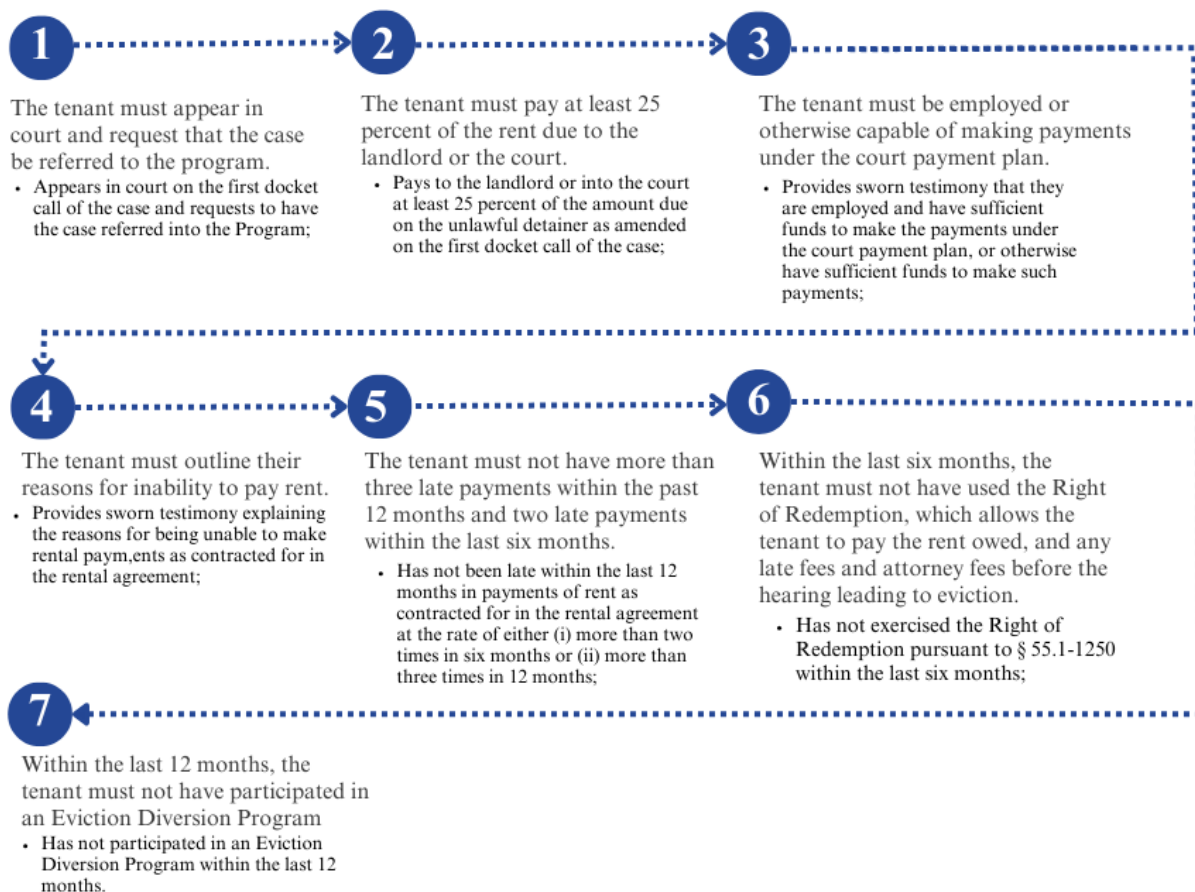
A tenant is eligible for the Pilot program if the tenant:

- Appears in court on the first docket call of the case;
- Pays the landlord at least 25% of the total amount due on the unlawful detainer;
- Provides sworn testimony that they are employed and have sufficient funds to make the payments under the payment plan;
- Provides sworn testimony explaining the reasons for being unable to make contracted rental agreements;
- Has not been late paying rent within the last 12 months either (i) more than two times in six months or (ii) more than three times in 12 months;
- Has not exercised the right of redemption pursuant to § 55.1-1250 within the last six months; and
- Has not participated in an eviction diversion program within the last 12 months.

Figure 2: Requirements to Participate in the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program (Va Code Ann. §55.1-1260, 2023)

Eviction Diversion Pilot Program

Eligibility for Participation (§ 55.1-1262)



EFFECTIVENESS OF THE PILOT PROGRAM

The Virginia Housing Commission is required to evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program using the data submitted by the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia. The Supreme Court provided information on civil cases for unlawful detainers filed in the general district courts of the cities of Danville, Hampton, Petersburg, and the City of Richmond between July 1, 2020, and September 30, 2023.

When analyzing this data, it is important to note that the Court does not collect information regarding why a case was dismissed. This means it is sometimes not possible to assess whether evictions were averted by mediation, financial support, or the successful completion of a payment plan. A specific continuance code was created for the Eviction Diversion Program and dispositions (dismissed, judgement for one party or another, non-suited) convey how a case ended without capturing why it ended in that way. A nonsuit is a voluntary withdrawal or dismissal of a lawsuit by the landlord that leaves the possibility that the landlord will bring the suit another time.

The Court often has no ability to know why a case ended. If parties reach an out of court resolution, the case is often dismissed by a letter request with no explanation as to why it has been resolved. If a tenant completes a payment plan the case would most likely be dismissed by the judge, but dismissal can occur for a variety of other reasons.

Individual case papers contain the Payment Plan Orders; this provides additional context regarding the effectiveness of the program. However, the documents do not indicate if a case was dismissed or nonsuited due to completion of those payments or for other reasons. If a tenant failed to make a payment under the plan, the court would enter an order of possession (eviction) without further hearings or proceedings.

According to the data provided by the Supreme Court;

20 eviction cases were referred to the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program statewide between July 1, 2020, and September 30, 2023. **14** occurred from July 1, 2020, to July 31, 2022 and **6** occurred from July 31, 2022 to September 20, 2023.

20 cases from July 1, 2020 to September 20, 2023

12 cases from the Richmond Civil General District Court
(between July 1, 2020, and July 31st, 2022)

5 cases from the Petersburg General District Court

3 cases from the Hampton General District Court

Among these 20 cases referred to the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program;

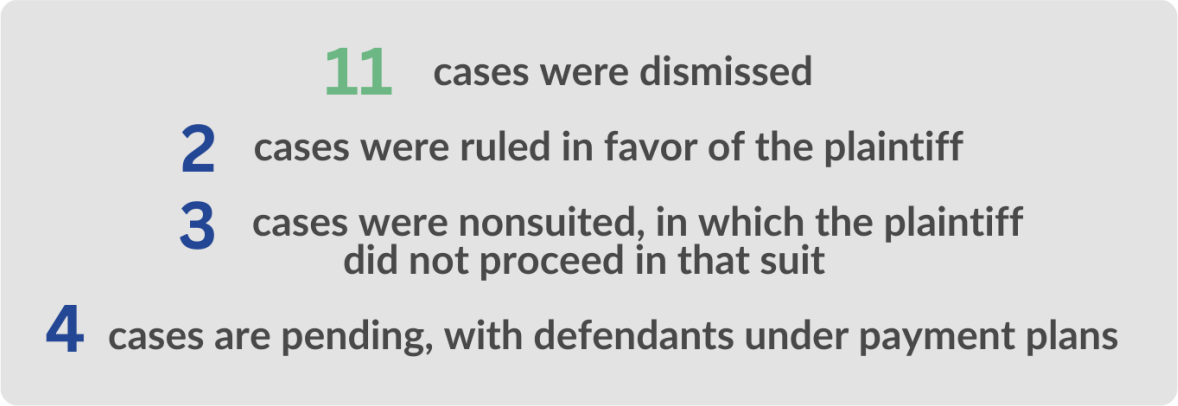
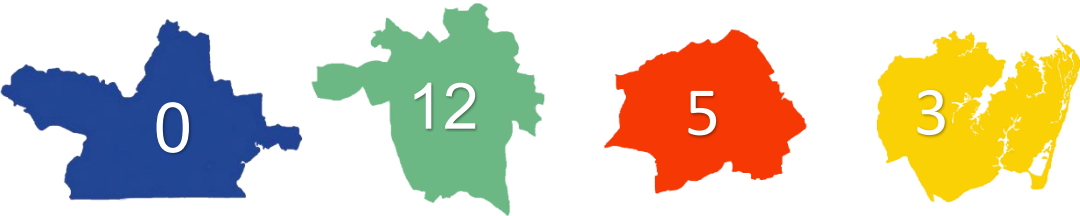


Figure 3: The number of Eviction Diversion Pilot Program cases in Danville, Richmond, Petersburg, and Hampton from 7/1/2020 to 9/30/2023



Five cases were from Petersburg and one case from Hampton between 7/1/2022 and 9/30/2023. In Petersburg, one resulted in a nonsuit and the four others, each heard on or after August 9, are still pending. In the four that are still pending, tenants have entered into ongoing payment plans. In the case that resulted in a nonsuit, the nonsuit result was reached one month into the Payment Plan Order schedule. The documents do not indicate if the tenant paid the full amount prior to the scheduled dates, or how the case concluded other than the nonsuit disposition. The four ongoing Petersburg cases, all with similar hearing dates and pending payment schedules, indicate that the Pilot is beginning to have a greater impact on eviction diversion. This recent uptick in program use could be attributed to the lack of COVID-19 eviction diversion and prevention efforts and may indicate more use in the future as eviction filings return to pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 4: Payment Plans in 4 Petersburg Pilot Program Cases

Pending Petersburg Cases Payment Plans	
TOTAL RENT OWED	25% OF AMOUNT DUE ON THE FIFTH DAY OF EACH MONTH AFTER THE INTIAL 25%
\$2,983.57	\$745.90
\$1503.76	\$374.58
\$6,200	\$1,550.00
\$4,885.72	\$1,221.43

Potential Factors Limiting Pilot Participation

Criteria for Participation

Director of Litigation at Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, Martin Wegbreit, attributes the lack of tenant participation partly to the narrow tailoring of the Pilot participation criteria. This aligns with information provided by Judge Devika Davis who explained how the criteria may prevent widespread success. That information is outlined in the Interim Report.

Judge Devika Davis, Richmond General District Court, explained to a group of observers from the Virginia Housing Commission in 2022 that tenants rarely met the criteria to be considered for the Pilot. More specifically, the language says a tenant can qualify for the Pilot if that tenant; (i) has not been late within the last 12 months (ii) more than two times in six months (iii) more than three times in 12 months. The usual course of action, Judge Davis said, is the landlord and tenant wait until the third month to take legal action. While the narrow criteria aimed to remove habitual late payers in favor of those experiencing one-time crises, it may have been too narrow to capture a larger number of eligible tenants prior to eviction. The explanation from Judge Davis aligns with Wegbreit's experience at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and Census Pulse Survey data analysis. Laura Dobbs, Director of Policy at Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME), emphasized that the expectation of a tenant having 25 percent of the owed balance on the court date is often unrealistic.

Other Eviction Diversion Efforts

Based on research and discussions with housing representatives, including Renee Pulliam, Vice President – Director of Operations for Residential Property Services at Thalhimer Realty Partners, said reaching a conclusion about the efficacy of the Pilot is difficult when considering the other eviction reduction efforts in the Commonwealth that were active during the program timeframe.

According to Pulliam, the additional programs targeting Virginia's eviction rates were unexpected at the creation of the Pilot program and thus not considered as an impacting factor. It is difficult to accurately evaluate the impact of the Pilot program alone when many other diversion efforts were undertaken and drove down participation numbers.

Pandemic-Related Eviction Diversion Efforts

In part due to the pandemic related eviction diversion and reduction efforts, the Pilot was not afforded the chance to be utilized for several years. The pandemic programs were less restrictive for participation and often provided financial assistance the Pilot does not.

Federal Eviction Protections

The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act eviction moratorium began on March 27, 2020 and ended on July 24, 2020. Under this moratorium, tenants in federally related properties could not be forced to vacate, and landlords could not file notices to vacate until 30 days after the expiration of the moratorium on August 23, 2020 (116th Congress, 2020). It has been estimated the CARES Act eviction moratorium

applied to between 26% and 28% of rental units nationally (Congressional Research Service, 2021) After the expiration of the CARES Act moratorium, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) moratorium took effect September 4, 2020 and was extended through July, 2021.

The CDC moratorium applied to all renters who met income and other eligibility criteria, including demonstrating they have made efforts to obtain rental assistance. It also provided a total of \$4.5 billion for emergency rental assistance (ERA) (Congressional Research Service, 2021). Unlike the CARES Act, the CDC moratorium did not address notices to vacate or prohibit landlords from charging late fees. Neither moratoria forgave unpaid rent amounts. Additionally, federal funding from the FY 2021 Consolidated Appropriations Act and the American Rescue Plan went to states to fund ERA programs.

[Virginia Eviction Protections](#)

The Commonwealth declared a state of emergency due to COVID-19 in March 2020 until the end of June 2021.

The Virginia Supreme Court suspended all non-essential court hearings, which included eviction proceedings beginning on March 16, 2020, and originally expiring April 6, 2020. It was later extended to expire on June 28, 2020, granting Governor Ralph Northam's additional extension (Supreme Court of Virginia, 2020). The Orders suspended all residential unlawful detainer actions and the issuance of writs of eviction (Supreme Court of Virginia, 2020).

After the 2020 Special Session, which was convened to address needs brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislature passed additional, but temporary, statewide pathways to divert eviction. A bill requiring landlords to provide payment plans to tenants had very few restrictions for participation (HB 5064, 2020 Special Session I). It is less likely a tenant or landlord would have opted for the Pilot during the two-year period this bill was in effect as this program offered financial support.

[Virginia Rental Relief Program](#)

Virginia's Rental Relief Program (VRRP) provided funds to pay delinquent rent payments until funding was exhausted in October 2022. Virginia was one of few states to enact a rent relief program with CARES Act funding early in the pandemic. Over \$1 billion in a combination of state and federal funding was disbursed to households in Virginia through the VRRP program, resulting in 193,588 rent relief payments (Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development, 2022). Considering this and the financial support provided in these programs that allowed landlords to collect delinquent rent quickly, it is unlikely the Pilot would have been considered in these cases.

[Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot](#)

During the 2020 Special Session, \$3.3 million was allocated to implement the Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot (VERP). The program was designed and is administered by the Virginia Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD). The program's purpose is to create a local/regional coordinated systems approach to prevent evictions and divert evictions in cases where an unlawful detainer has been received. HOME received funds through VERP to assist with Richmond's Eviction Diversion Program.

VERP also allocated \$850,000 to the United Way of the Virginia Peninsula in 2022 to provide eviction diversion services and a court navigator program to several Virginia Peninsula localities. The United Way of the Virginia Peninsula focused on Hampton as a priority area due to the city's high rate of eviction.

Additional Eviction Diversion Efforts

[City of Richmond Eviction Diversion Program with Housing Opportunities Made Equal \(HOME\)](#)

Prior to the Pilot's enactment date, the City of Richmond established its own voluntary Eviction Diversion Program (EDP) and provided funds to Housing Opportunities Made Equal (HOME) to administer the program (The City of Richmond, 2019). The EDP provides financial assistance to tenants to help pay past due rent to their landlords, in addition to creating payment plans. The Richmond Eviction Diversion Program also provides tenants with legal aid, financial consulting, and connects tenants to support services, such as food and utility assistance.

When the pandemic started HOME began to distribute federal, state, and local funding through the EDP infrastructure to keep tenants housed through the crisis. This additional bucket of funding allowed HOME to cover all of the tenants' arrearages, instead of the portion of unpaid rent the original local funds provided. Laura Dobbs, Director of Policy at HOME, shared that while the success of the program during the pandemic years can be attributed to the additional financial assistance provided to tenants, due to the restrictions and limited resources of the Richmond EDP, it was not able to serve all tenants who contacted HOME for rental assistance. After the federal relief funds were exhausted and eviction protections ended, HOME relied on local funds and awarded Virginia Eviction Reduction Pilot (VERP) funds to assist households.

While this program can only be utilized by tenants with Richmond addresses, it has diverted a significant number of evictions since its inception and could have been a factor in why Richmond did not have any cases go through the Pilot in the second phase of evaluation. In Wegbreit's experience, Richmond landlords and tenants are more interested in this voluntary program than the Pilot because of the partial financial assistance given to tenants.

HOME shared with the VHC that the Richmond EDP has diverted 1,639 evictions from October 1, 2019, to September 30, 2023. The program diverted the greatest number of evictions from July 1, 2020, to June 20, 2021, which was when the program transitioned from the diversion payment plan option to full rental payment and disbursed rental relief funds to assist more households. According to HOME, the housing counseling services and court navigation outreach program components are critical to successful eviction diversion. Since October 2019, 641 people have attended the housing stability workshops HOME offers through the EDP.

According to the HOME [City of Richmond Eviction Diversion Program](#) webpage, to take part in the program, the landlord must agree to participate, and the tenant must:

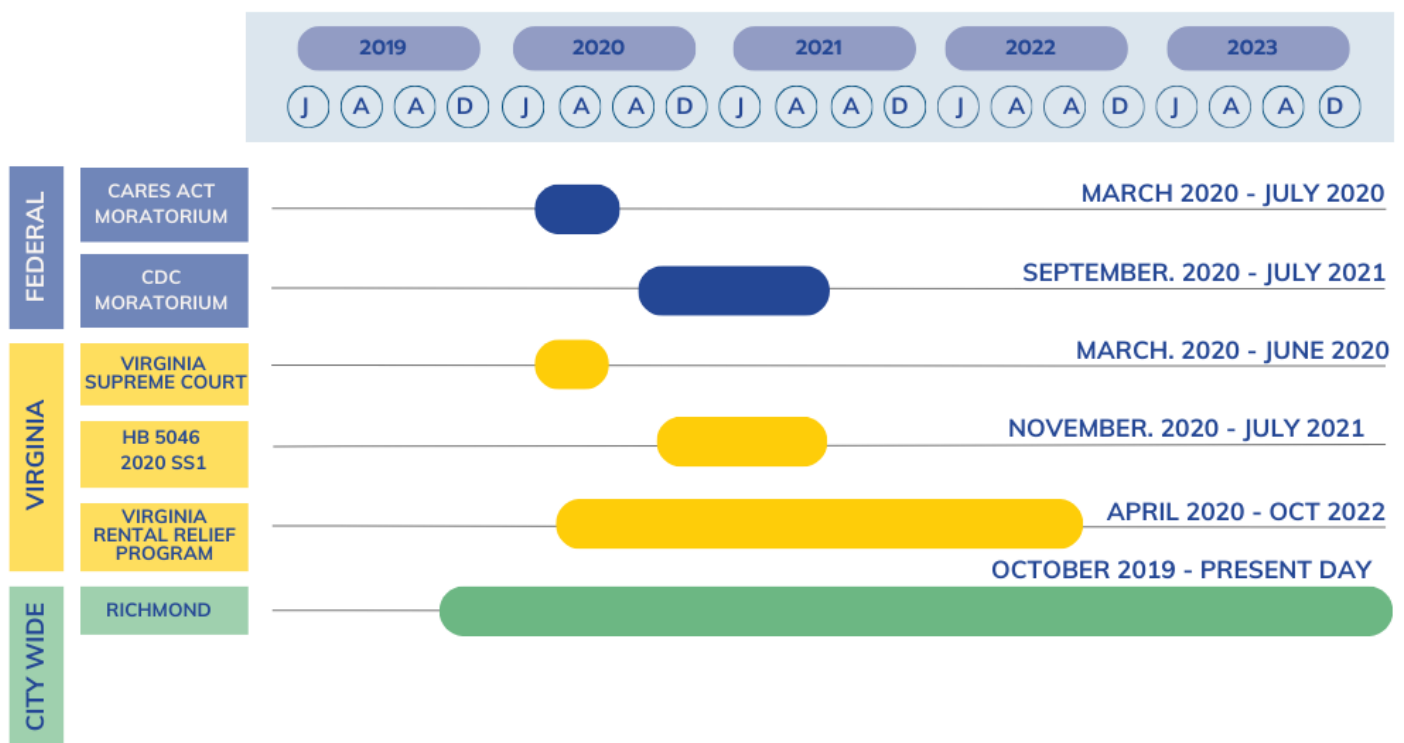
- Have been issued a Summons for Unlawful Detainer.
- Not exceed gross household income of 80% area median income.
- Come to the court date and pay at least 10% of the total amount owed on the unlawful detainer as of the first court date.
- Be able to pay ongoing rent on the due date.
- Have rent arrears as the only issue.
- Not have participated in an eviction diversion program within the last 12 months.
- Not have rental payments exceed \$3,000.

Eviction Diversion Program Timeline

Figure 4: Is a timeline of the various eviction protections and diversion programs active in the Commonwealth from 2019-2023. The letters J, A, A, and D represent months in the following order: January, April, August, December

EVICTIION PROTECTION & DIVERSION PROGRAMS

FEDERAL, VIRGINIA 2019 - 2023



EVICITION PROCESS IN VIRGINIA

Steps Leading to a Landlord Filing an Unlawful Detainer Suit

When the tenant fails to pay the rent or violates the lease agreement, the landlord may begin an eviction procedure. Most standard leases allow for a five-day grace period after the date the rent is due for the tenant to pay the rent and not be in arrears. If the tenant does not pay within that time frame and has not made a written agreement with the landlord to pay differently, the landlord may begin the legal eviction process of the tenant. The landlord must provide the tenant with a Pay or Quit Notice. This is a written notice to pay the amount owed in rent or vacate the rental property. The tenant has five days to pay or leave with all possessions.

There are lease violations other than nonpayment of rent. Common examples of other lease violations are the tenant causing damage to the property, having more people than the lease allows to live on the premises, or having pets when not allowed. In these situations, the landlord provides in writing and by the same means discussed above a 30-day Notice to Quit or Cure. The tenant has 21 days to remedy the situation or move by the end of 30 days, or the landlord can file an unlawful detainer (eviction) suit.

The landlord must submit the notice in writing and note the date served on the tenant. It may be hand delivered, sent by certified mail, placed on the door of the rental property, or sent by email if lease provisions allow for email notification. The landlord must state the amount of rent owed, including any late fees, to whom the rent needs to be paid, and the date the eviction proceedings will begin.

If the tenant pays the rent and fees at this point and within this time frame, the landlord shall not continue with the proceeding. The tenant must pay the amount owed using a cashier's check, certified check, or cash. The tenant may also move out with all belongings. This doesn't prohibit the landlord from filing a suit in General District Court for rent due, but this is not an eviction procedure.

If there are violations other than late rent, the landlord may Accept the Rent with Reservation. This means the landlord accepts the rent due but goes forward with the court process so that the judge may determine other issues that may be in conflict and rule on other lease violations. If the tenant does nothing, the landlord files an unlawful detainer suit; this is the legal name for an eviction suit.

Steps Leading to a Judge Making an Eviction Determination

A summons issued by the Clerk of the Court notifies the tenant of the date of the eviction hearing; this is called an Unlawful Detainer Hearing. It must be served by personal service, served on the tenant by the Sheriff's Office, or posted on the property in dispute, and it must also be mailed to the tenant's last known address.

If the tenant wants to contest the eviction, the tenant must appear in court for the judge to schedule a trial date. If the tenant doesn't appear in court, the landlord will be granted judgment in favor of the landlord at the hearing. This situation occurs frequently in Virginia.

The **Right of Redemption** allows a tenant the option to pay the rent owed, and any late fees and attorney fees, up to two-days before the hearing. If the tenant does this the case is dismissed and will not be labeled as an eviction on the tenant's record. The tenant may use this process only once in each 12-month period.

Judges in Virginia frequently request both parties involved in the eviction proceeding attempt to reach a compromise solution between themselves before the judge hears the case. The tenant may also request the judge have the case referred to the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program. If the tenant does not have a defense that is allowed to be asserted by tenants in Virginia, the landlord will be granted a Writ of Eviction. The term Writ of Eviction was formally called Writ of Possession. The term was changed to make the legal term easier for non-legal parties to understand.

Steps Leading to a Sheriff Evicting the Tenant

Once the judge sends the Writ of Eviction to the Sheriff's office, it has 30 days to serve the tenant with this writ. However, a tenant cannot be evicted until a 10-day appeal period has passed. There must be a 10-day period before the tenant has belongings set out of the rental property and the locks changed. This allows the tenant to file an appeal to the circuit court where the property is located. When a Writ of Eviction is issued, the Sheriff must give the tenant at least 72 hours advance notice of the eviction.

The landlord must give 10 days-notice to the tenant that his belongings left on the property will be disposed of if not removed by the time of eviction. The sheriff must remove the tenant and tenant's property; the landlord may not do so independently. If the landlord attempts to do so, it is illegal and called an unlawful ouster. Landlords may not have the utilities turned off as a means of eviction to force the tenant out of the property.

Figure 6 on page 13 provides an overview of steps of the eviction process in Virginia for both nonpayment of rent and other lease violations that could lead to eviction.

Figure 6: Virginia Eviction Process

EVICTON PROCESS



LEGISLATIVE CHANGES TO VIRGINIA’S EVICTION PROCESS

The Virginia Housing Commission’s special workgroup recommended a series of bills to the full Commission that later became law after the 2019 legislative session, including the Eviction Diversion Pilot Program. These bills, and several other pieces of legislation since, concerned the eviction process and made significant changes to the way the process affects landlords and tenants in Virginia. These changes are outlined in greater detail in the Interim Report and shown in Figure 7.

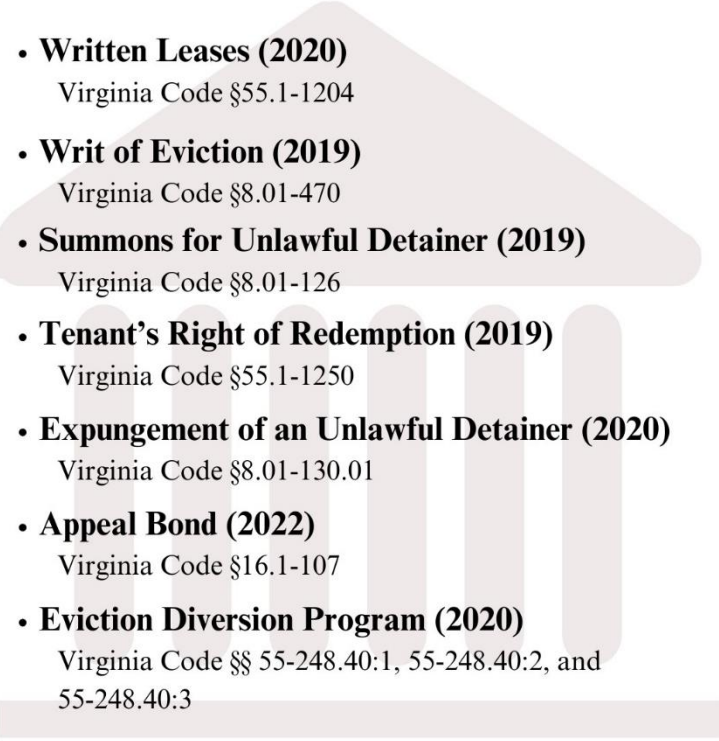
- 
- **Written Leases (2020)**
Virginia Code §55.1-1204
 - **Writ of Eviction (2019)**
Virginia Code §8.01-470
 - **Summons for Unlawful Detainer (2019)**
Virginia Code §8.01-126
 - **Tenant’s Right of Redemption (2019)**
Virginia Code §55.1-1250
 - **Expungement of an Unlawful Detainer (2020)**
Virginia Code §8.01-130.01
 - **Appeal Bond (2022)**
Virginia Code §16.1-107
 - **Eviction Diversion Program (2020)**
Virginia Code §§ 55-248.40:1, 55-248.40:2, and 55-248.40:3

Figure 7: Legislative Changes to Virginia’s Eviction Process, 2019-2022

In 2023 the Legislature passed [HB 1836](#) and companion [SB 1089](#) and amended [§8.01-471](#) of the Code of Virginia to expand data collection regarding evictions in the Commonwealth. Virginia courts that issue writs authorizing a local sheriff to evict tenants are now tracking the yearly number of evictions. Executed writs will be returned to the issuing clerk by the sheriff who executed the writ, creating a new method of collecting eviction data. The Office of the Executive Secretary of the Supreme Court of Virginia will report this information to the following committees: Senate Judiciary, Senate General Laws and Technology, House Courts of Justice, and House General Laws. The bill also requires the Office of the Executive Secretary to report this information to the Virginia Housing Commission. The first report is expected on or before September 1, 2024 and will include writs executed between July 1, 2023, and June 30, 2024.

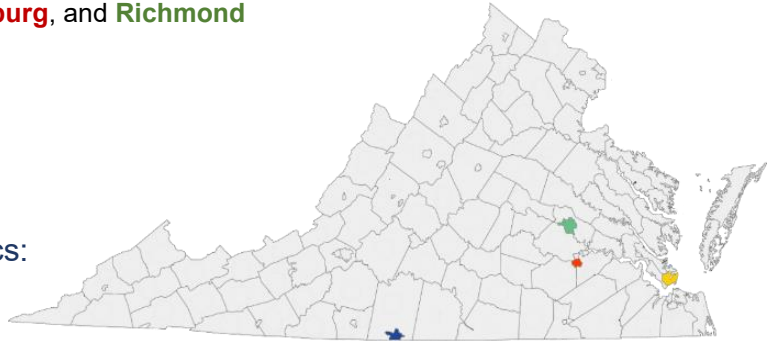
This new data will provide information as to how many evictions are carried out after a writ is issued, offering insight into a gap that is commonly noted as a potentially skewing factor in Virginia’s eviction numbers. It will also provide information on where evictions are being carried out. Location information may make it easier to identify areas more prone to eviction and seek targeted solutions to reduce the numbers of evictions.

EVICTON RATES IN VIRGINIA

In 2018 researchers at Princeton University found that several large Virginia cities ranked in the top ten nationwide with high eviction rates. RVA Eviction Lab's research shows that the City of Richmond eviction rate is greater than 11%, making it the second highest in the country. Four other Virginia cities; Chesapeake, Newport News, Norfolk, and the Pilot-participating Hampton, rank in the top evicting large cities in the United States (Eviction Lab, 2016). Analysis using data from a recent U.S. Census Pulse Survey¹ indicates that **59%** of surveyed Virginia rent-paying respondents experienced an increase in rent over the last twelve months; **79%** of those reported increases were more than \$100.

This section provides analysis on the state of eviction rates in Virginia as a whole and additionally looks at eviction rates in each of the Pilot cities: Danville, Hampton, Petersburg, and Richmond. The analysis is based on public data downloaded from the Legal Services Corporation Civil Court Data Initiative and United States Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey. Analysis will also include data and findings from the RVA Eviction Lab First Quarter 2023 Eviction Report. Based on the information provided in this section and additional analysis from several sources, it can be concluded that eviction filings and judgments have returned to pre-pandemic levels after a period of historically low filing rates.

Figure 1 and 8: The Four Localities of the Pilot Program highlighted in corresponding colors; **Danville**, **Hampton**, **Petersburg**, and **Richmond**



Statewide Population and Economic Statistics:

Population: **8,683,619**

Virginia Poverty Rate: **10.6%**

Median Household Income: **\$80,615**
(based on family households of two or more individuals)

Per Capita Income in Past 12 Months: **\$43,267**

Median Gross Rent: **\$1,326**

National Median Household Income: **\$74,580**

National Median Gross Rent: **\$1,163**

National Poverty Rate: **12.94%**

The population information is based on July 2022 and Week 62 Pulse Survey Census results and the economic information is based on 2017-2021 Census results.

¹ The U.S. Census Bureau Household Pulse Survey is a collaborative effort with multiple federal agencies to produce experimental data on social and economic effects of the pandemic on American Households. Data collection started in April 2020 and concluded in October 2023. The data is experimental and uses estimates based on subpopulations. The sample-size could be small and there may be large standard errors. <https://www.census.gov/data/experimental-data-products/household-pulse-survey.html>

Trends in Virginia Eviction: Data Analysis

Virginia Filing Data

The number of statewide eviction filings lines up with the timelines of the various eviction protection program dates, as shown in Figure 9. After the first quarter of 2020, evictions reached their lowest point in Virginia in April and remained low for the rest of the second quarter. In late June 2020, evictions begin to rise again as the Virginia Supreme Court's temporary suspension of eviction proceedings and CARES Act eviction moratorium expired. By the fourth quarter of 2020, eviction filings fall again and remain consistently lower as additional statewide and federal protections were implemented. After the second quarter of 2022, eviction filings began to rise almost every month and trend towards matching pre-pandemic levels as programs expire or reach capacity.

The data collected by the Civil Court Data Initiative is available through May 2023, so a complete analysis of eviction filings in 2023 is not yet possible. However, when compared to filings prior to the pandemic the eviction filings have reached about **87%** of pre-pandemic levels for the same five-month period in 2019. This is consistent with research conducted that concluded evictions are returning to levels seen prior to the impacts of the pandemic.

A recent U.S. Census Pulse Survey (September 20-October 2, 2023) indicated that **31%** of responding Virginians who are behind on rental payments feel they are very likely to leave their home in the next two months due to eviction (United States Census Bureau, 2023). In October 2020 eviction fears in that same group were lower with **12%** of Virginian respondents answering that they will very likely be evicted within the next two months (United States Census Bureau, 2020). This may further support the finding that eviction rates are consistently rising to rates seen prior to the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 9: Line graph showing monthly Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative

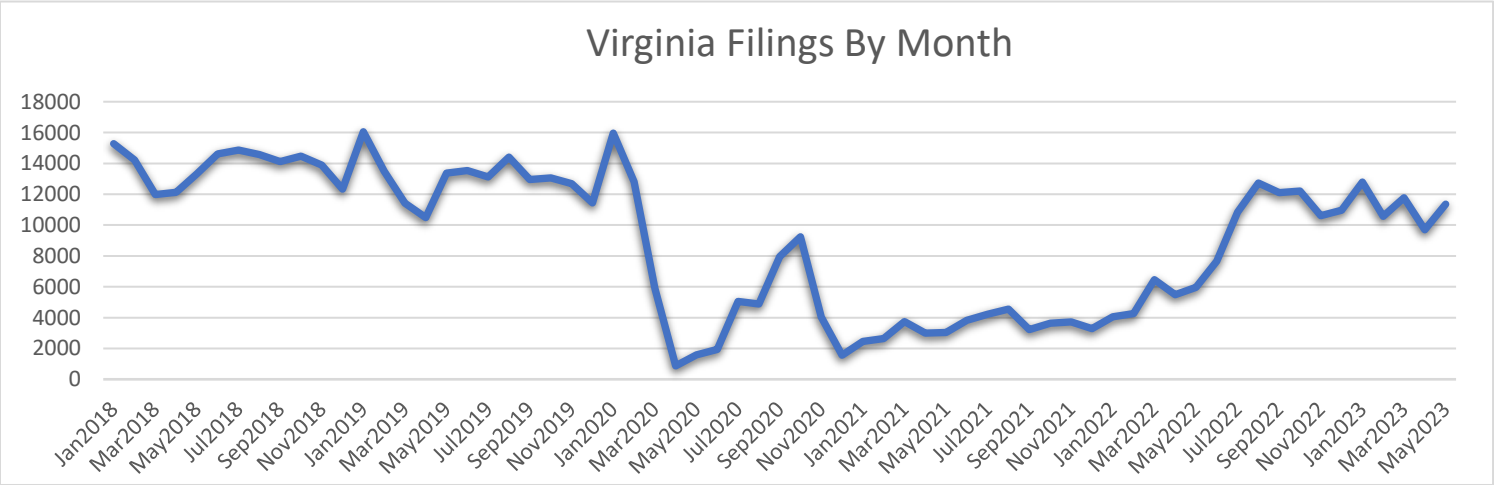
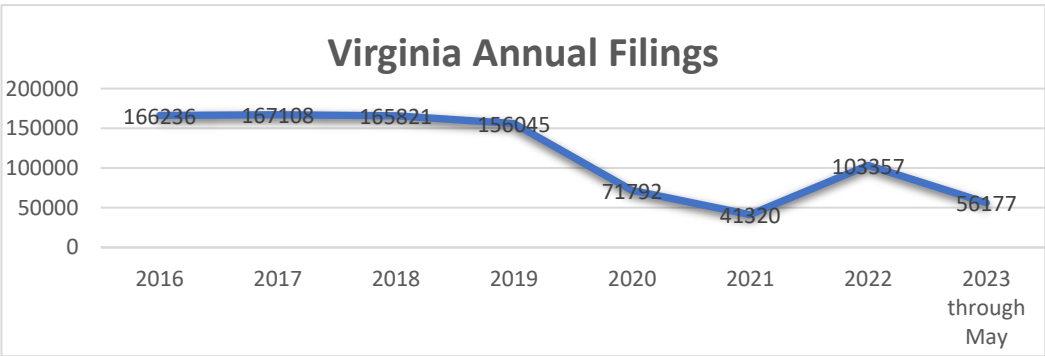


Figure 10: Line graph showing annual Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative



Pilot Locality Information and Eviction Filing Data

Each of the localities participating in the Pilot program encountered similar fluctuations in eviction filings that can be attributed to pandemic related eviction moratoria and prevention programs. The locality trends also align with the statewide quarterly eviction filings. In Petersburg and Danville, both filings and judgements rose to surpass pre-pandemic levels completely in the first five months of 2023. While the larger localities, Hampton and Richmond, numbers have not reached pre-pandemic levels, they are close to meeting those rates of eviction filings and judgements.

Figure 11: Quarterly eviction filings from 2018Q1 to 2023Q1 for each Pilot participating locality: Danville, Hampton, Petersburg, and Richmond. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

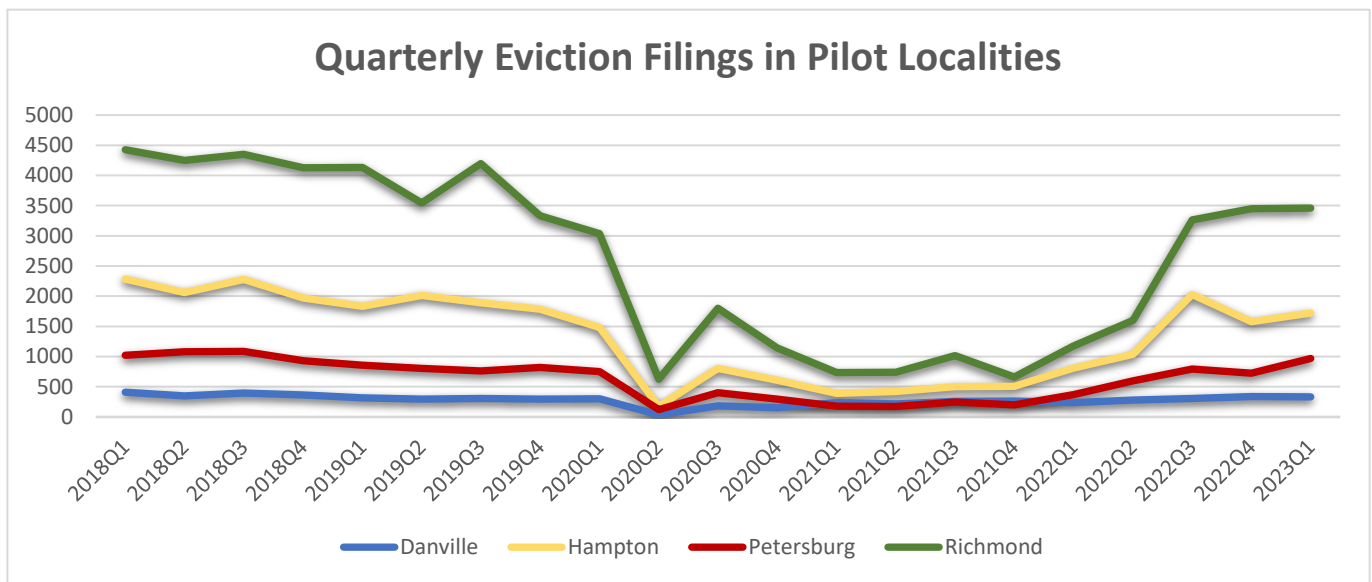
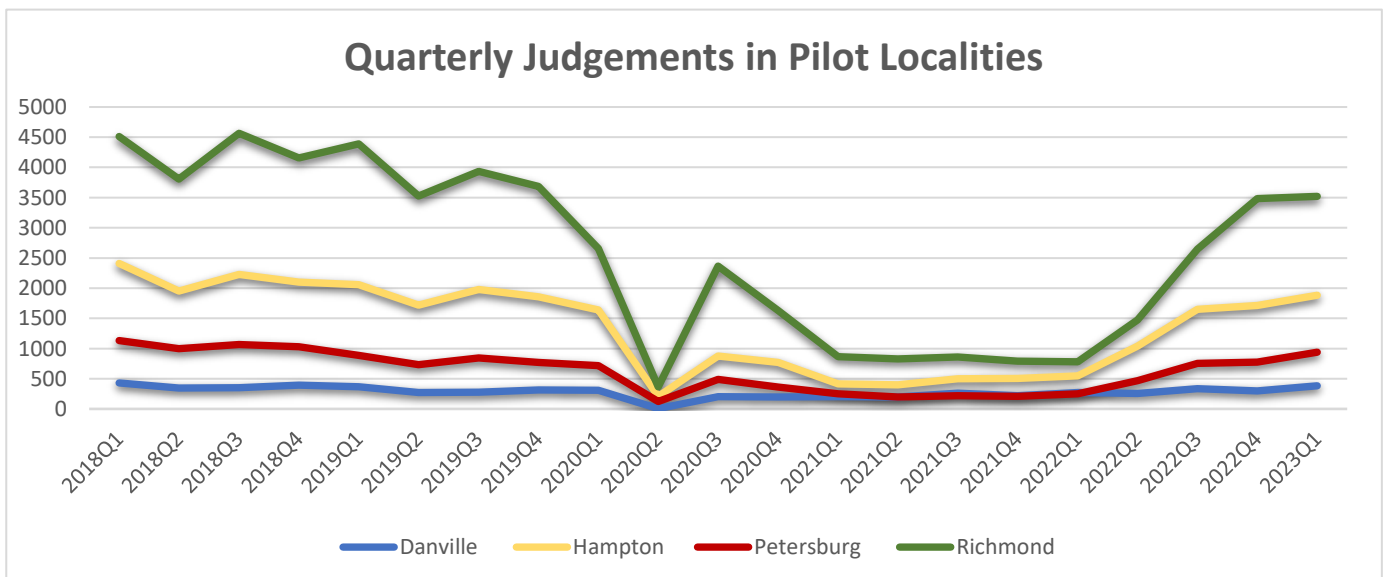


Figure 12: Quarterly number of judgements from 2018Q1 to 2023Q1 for each Pilot Participating locality. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.



Danville Locality Information and Eviction Filing Data:



Population, 2022: 42,229

Median Household Income, 2017-2021: \$38,904

Median Gross Rent, 2017-2020: \$733

Per Capita Income in Past 12 Months: \$24,535

Poverty Rate, 2017-2021: 23.1%

Danville eviction filings and judgements have surpassed pre-pandemic levels. In the January – May 2023 timeframe, eviction filings have risen to **106%** of the levels from the same period in 2019. Eviction judgements rose to **103%** of pre-pandemic numbers. Figures 13 and 14 also show that eviction rates encountered similar seasonal peaks and troughs both pre-pandemic and currently.

Figure 13: Line graph showing filings per month from January-May for the years 2019 and 2023 in Danville, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

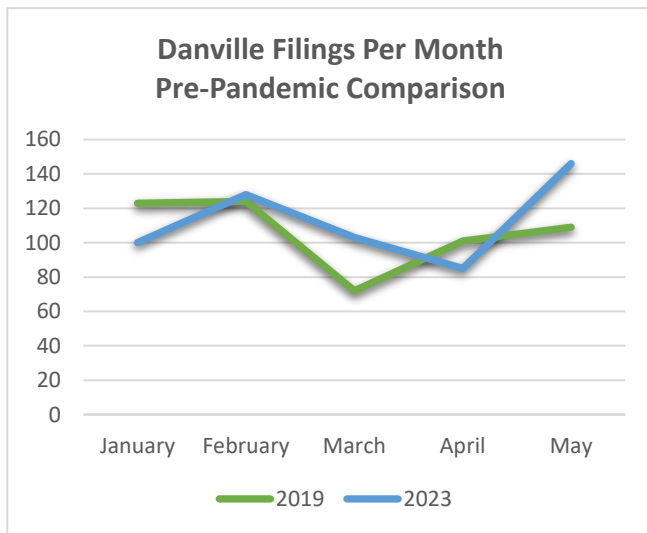


Figure 14: Line graph showing judgements per month from January-May 2019 and 2023 in Danville, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

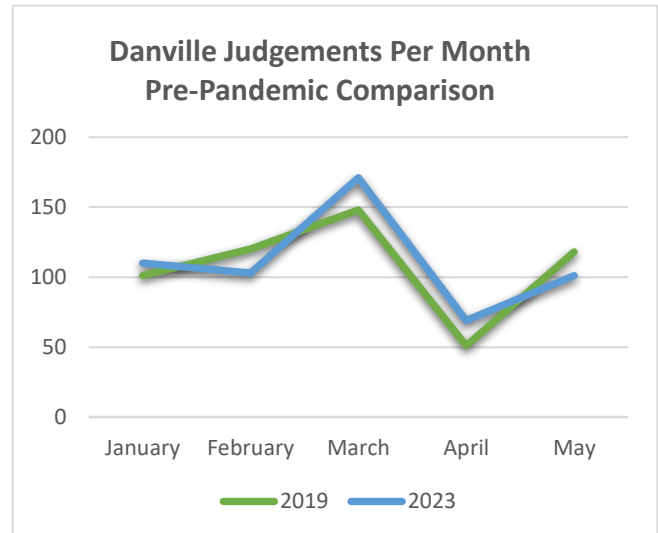


Figure 15: Line graph showing quarterly Danville, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

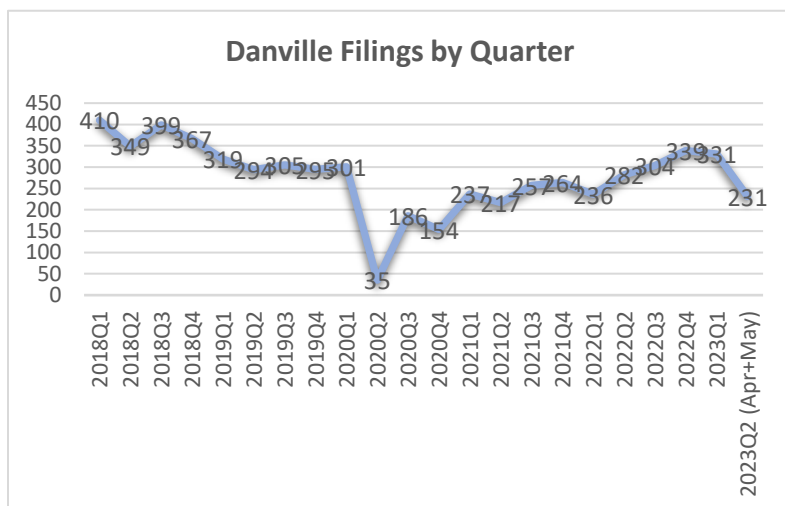
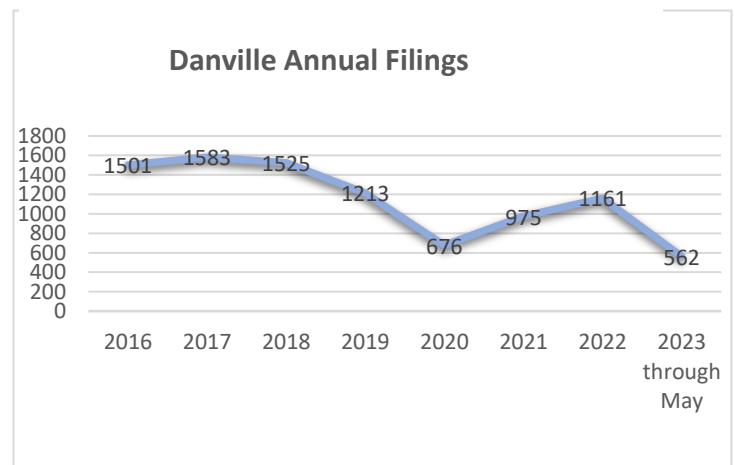


Figure 16: Line graph showing annual Danville, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.



Hampton Locality Information and Eviction Filing Data:



Hampton Population, 2022: 138,037
 Median Household Income 2017-2021: 59,380
 Median Gross Rent, 2017-2021: \$1,159
 Per Capita Income in Past 12 Months: \$32,831
 Poverty Rate 2017-2021: 14.4%

Hampton eviction filings and judgements are close to meeting pre-pandemic levels. In the January – May 2023 timeframe, eviction filings were **86%** of the levels from the same period in 2019. Eviction judgements reached **92%** in the same period.

Figure 17: Line graph showing filings per month from January-May for the years 2019 and 2023 in Hampton, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

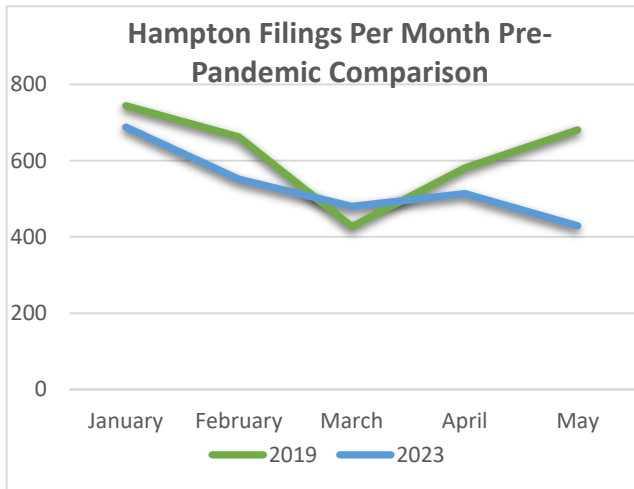


Figure 18: Line graph showing judgements per month from January-May 2019 and 2023 in Hampton, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

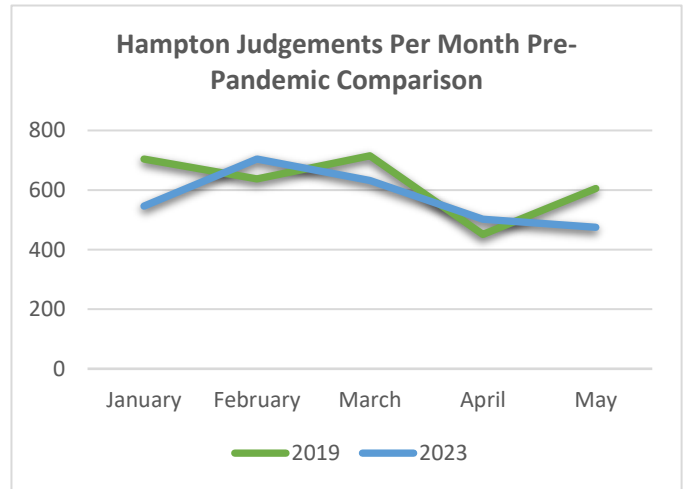


Figure 19: Line graph showing quarterly Hampton, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative

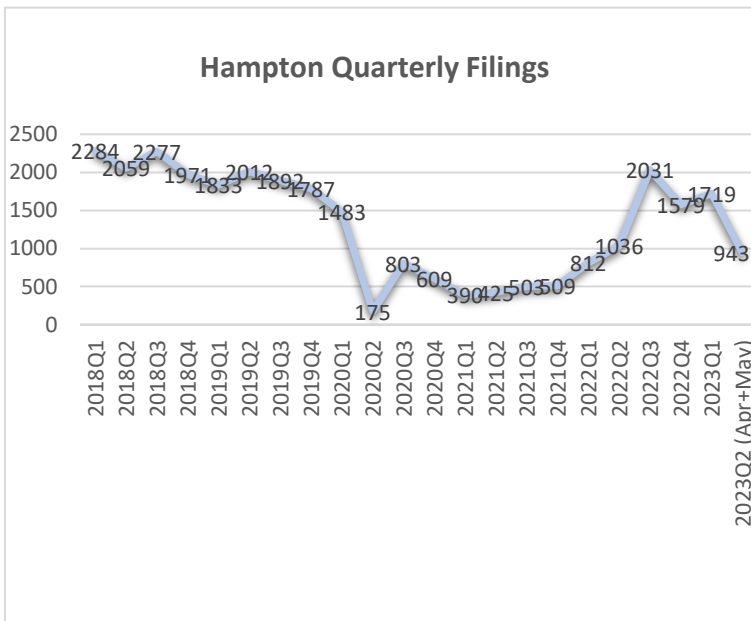
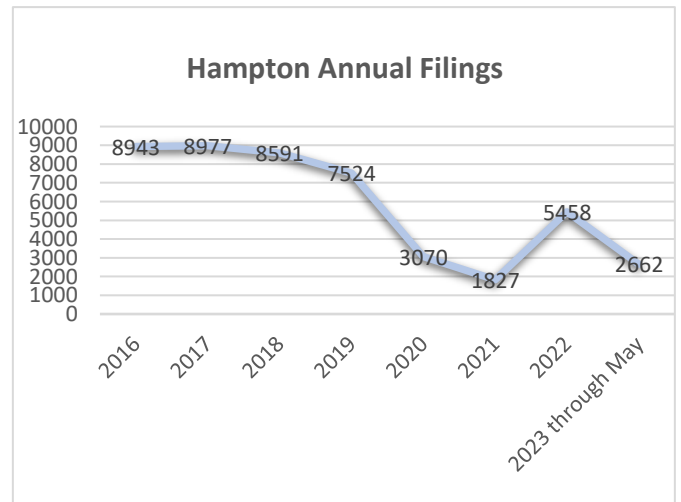


Figure 20: Line graph showing annual Hampton, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative



Petersburg Locality Information and Eviction Filing Data:

Population, 2022: 33,394

Median Household Income, 2017-2021: \$44,890

Median Gross Rent, 2017-2021: \$1,023

Per Capita Income in Past 12 Months: \$26,091

Poverty Rate, 2017-2021: 21.3%



Petersburg eviction filings and judgements have surpassed pre-pandemic levels. In the January – May 2023 timeframe, eviction filings have risen to **105%** of the levels from the same period in 2019. Eviction judgements rose to **112%** of pre-pandemic numbers. Further analysis done by RVA Eviction Lab also concluded that Petersburg eviction filings have surpassed pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 21: Line graph showing filings per month from January-May for the years 2019 and 2023 in Petersburg, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

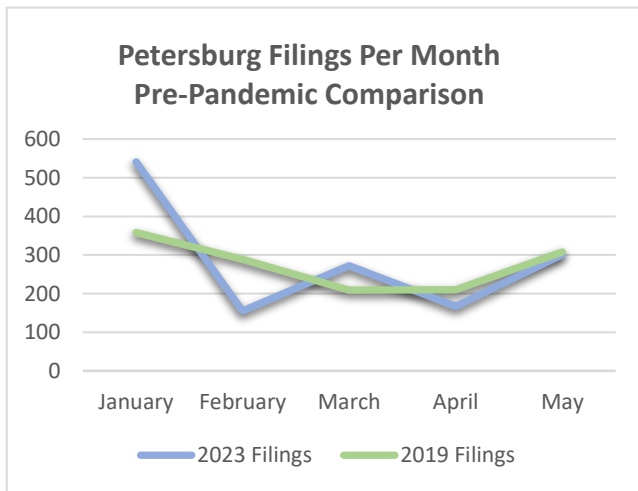


Figure 22: Line graph showing judgements per month from January-May 2019 and 2023 in Petersburg, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

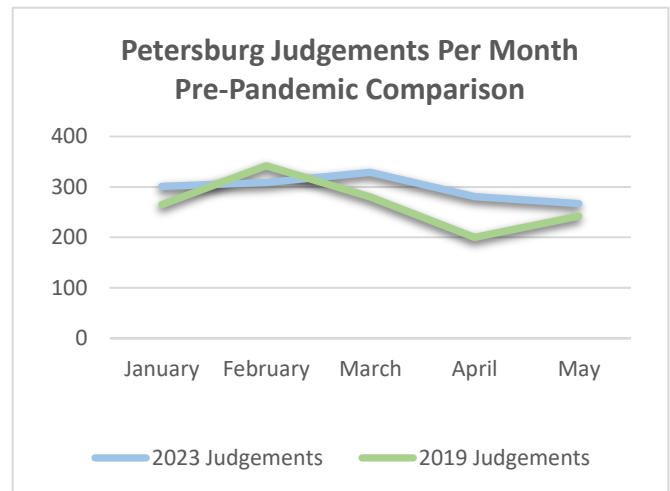


Figure 23: Line graph showing quarterly Petersburg, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative

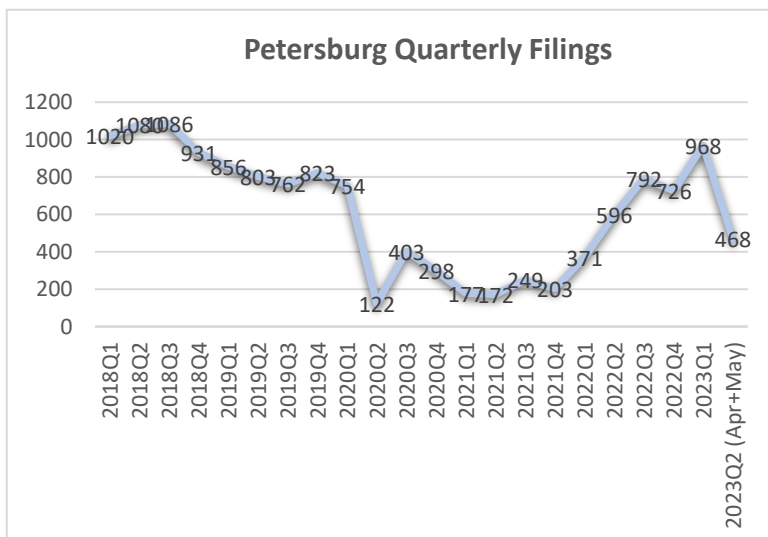
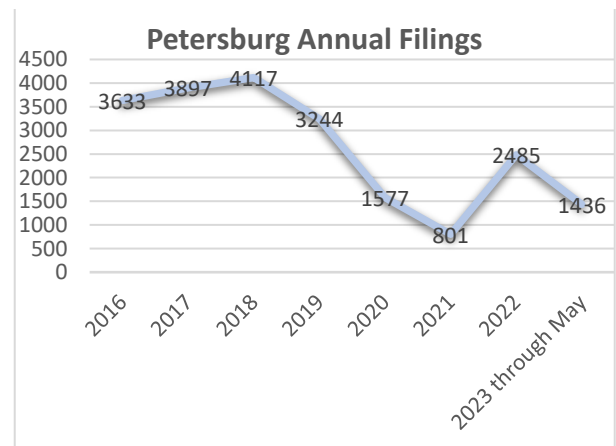


Figure 24: Line graph showing annual Petersburg, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative



Richmond Locality Information and Eviction Filing Data:

Population, 2022: 229,395
 Median Household Income, 2017-2021: \$54,795
 Median Gross Rent, 2017-2021: \$1,132
 Per Capita Income in Past 12 Months: \$38,132
 Poverty Rate, 2017-2021: 21.1%



Richmond eviction filings and judgements have not met pre-pandemic levels, but they are close to meeting those rates. In the January – May 2023 timeframe, eviction filings and judgements reached around **85%** of the levels from the same period in 2019. RVA Eviction Lab also found that judgements and filings have not reached pre-pandemic levels (RVA Eviction Lab, 2023). Out of the four Pilot cities, Richmond appears to be the furthest away from reaching pre-pandemic levels. This comparatively lower feature may be attributable to the Richmond Eviction Diversion Program's intervention and diversion of evictions within the city. The Richmond EDP and the statewide Pilot program are geared towards the same group of renters and participants are likely more inclined to pursue a program that offers legal services and financial assistance. The remaining Pilot participating cities do not have a similar city-specific eviction diversion program.

Figure 25: Line graph showing filings per month from January-May for the years 2019 and 2023 in Richmond, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

Figure 26: Line graph showing judgements per month from January-May 2019 and 2023 in Richmond, Virginia. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative.

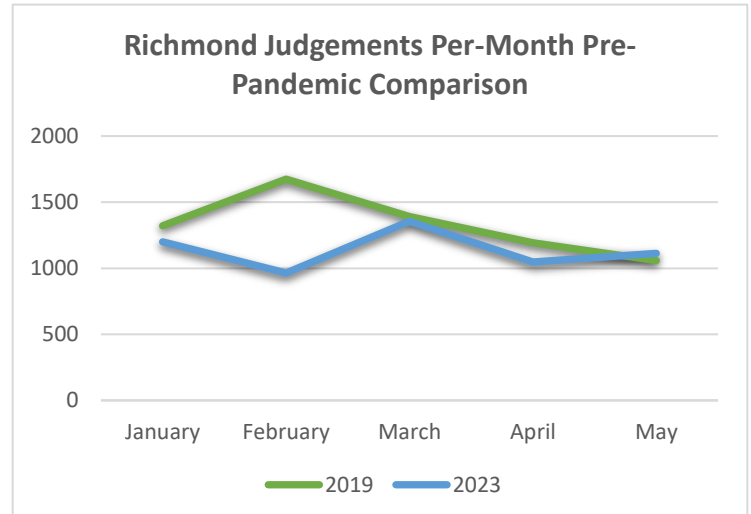
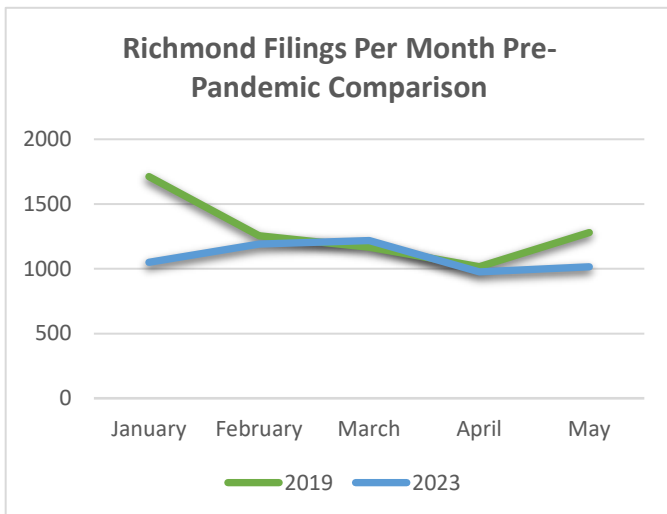
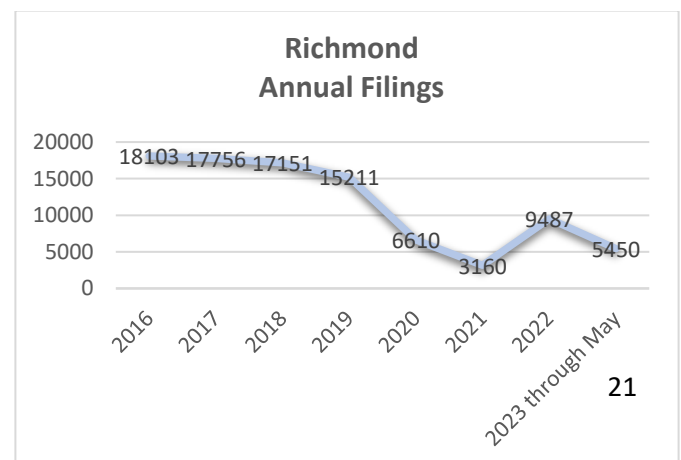
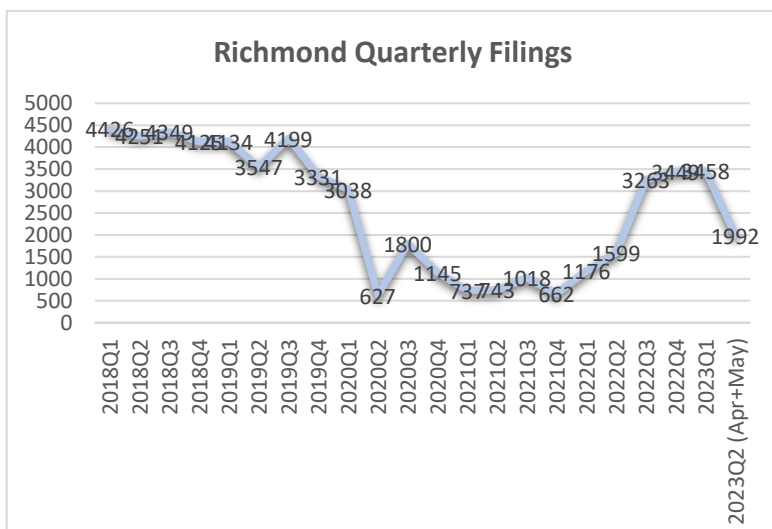


Figure 27: Line graph showing quarterly Richmond, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative

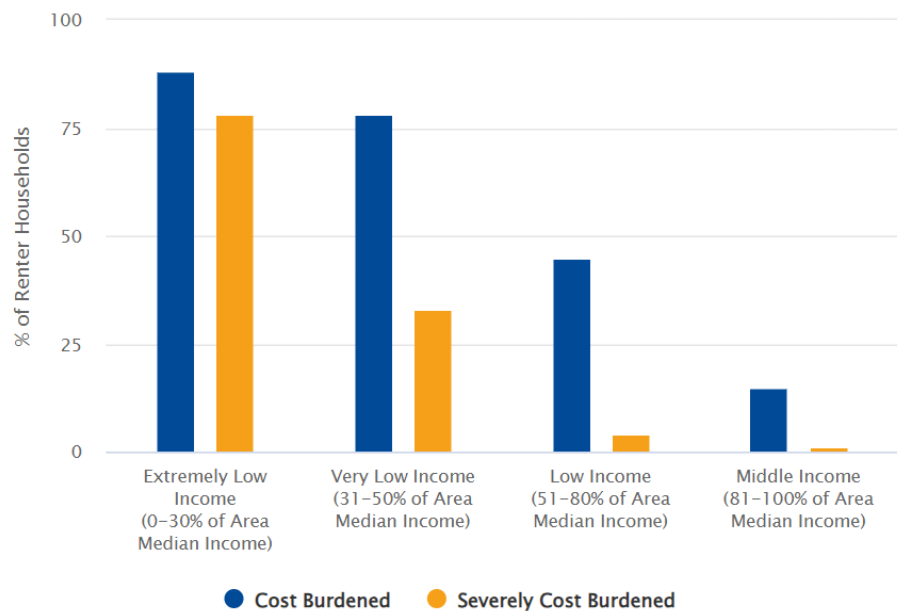
Figure 28: Line graph showing annual Richmond, Virginia eviction filings from January 2018 to May 2023. Created using data from the Civil Court Data Initiative



Trends In Virginia Rent and Rental Payments

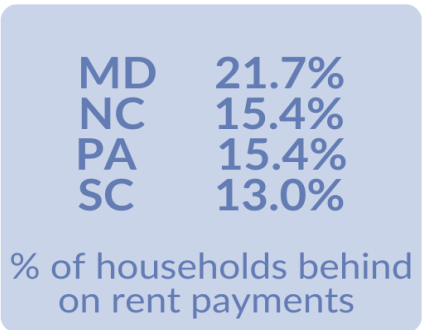
Analysis using data from the U.S. Census Pulse Survey taken between September 20 – October 2 indicates that **59%** of surveyed Virginia rent-paying respondents experienced an increase in rent over the last twelve months. Most of those reported increases were more than \$100. Nationwide, over 64% of surveyed Americans experienced a rent increase in the last year. The level of income needed to cover rental payments can affect the economic well-being and financial stability of households. When households need to devote a large share of their income to rent, a sudden increase in rent payments could leave them unable to pay rent and could lead to eviction. An assessment done by the Federal Reserve found that the share of income spent on rent has increased significantly for low-income households since 2000 (Federal Reserve, 2017).

Figure 29: Virginia Rental Housing Cost Burden by Income Group (National Low Income Housing Coalition)



Renter households spending more than 30% of their income on housing costs and utilities are cost burdened; those spending more than half of their income are severely cost burdened.

Figure 30: Shows the percentage of households in rental-occupied housing units for four other states for those not current on rental payments based on respondents surveyed in the September 20 – October 2 Week 62 Census Household Pulse Survey (United States Census Bureau, 2023)

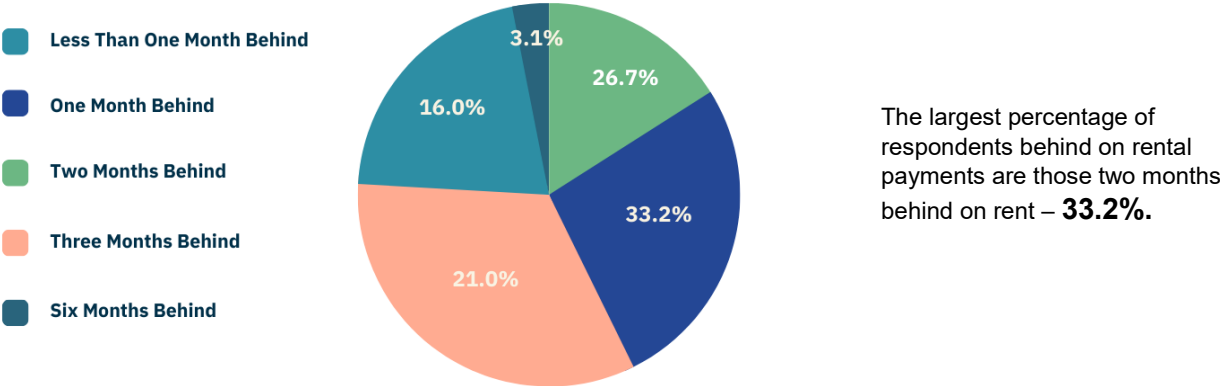


8.1% of Virginian Pulse Survey respondents in rental-occupied housing units are not current on rental payments and may be considered at risk of eviction. Nationally, **12.6%** of surveyed households are not current on their rental payments and Virginia has the smallest percentage of those behind on rental payments compared to nearby states (Figure 30). Based on the census survey data, Virginians may be at a lower risk of rental increase or eviction compared to national averages, however these averages are all gradually returning to the higher pre-pandemic levels (United States Census Bureau, 2023). The data could also indicate Virginia’s pandemic-related rental assistance efforts were successful in easing financial burdens for households at risk of eviction.

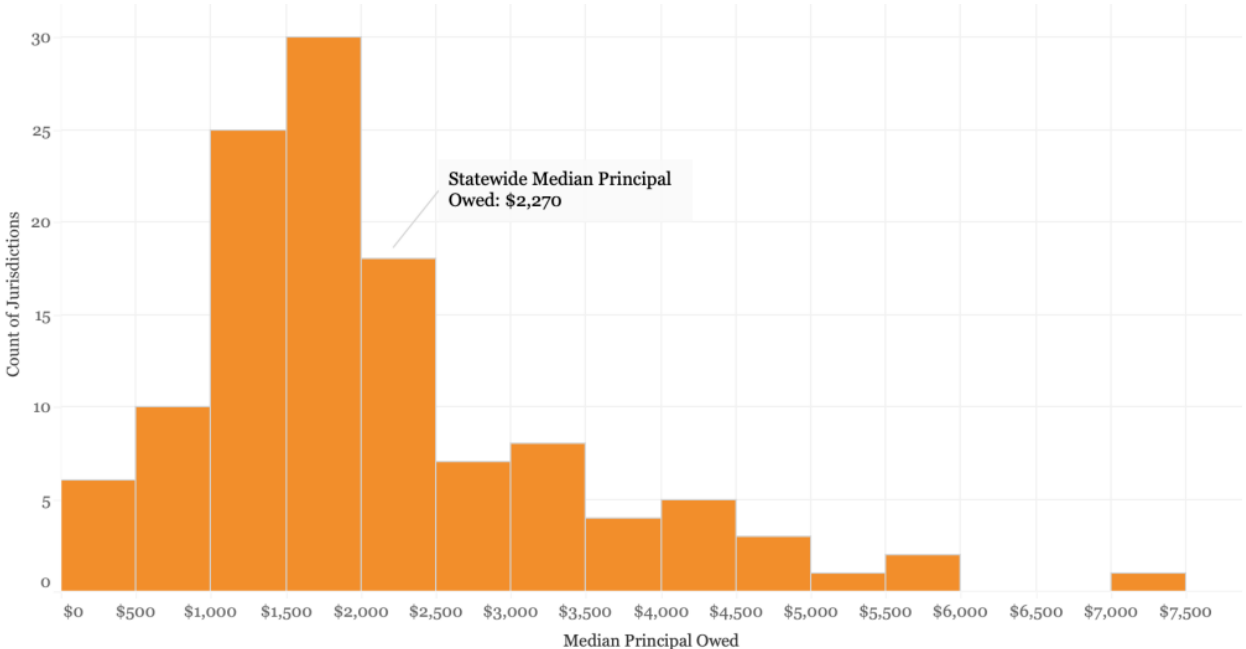
Census Pulse Survey data could support the information shared by Judge Davis and further indicate the potential impact the eligibility criteria of the Pilot has on the number of tenants able to participate in the program (Figure 31). The majority of surveyed renters are behind on rent by at least two months. While the Census data does not indicate whether these respondents' landlords have started eviction proceedings, it does show that the majority of those who are behind on rent answered that they are not very likely/not likely at all to leave their current home due to eviction in the next two months.

Figure 31: Percentages of months behind on rental payments from respondents surveyed in the September 20, 2023 – October 2, 2023 U.S Census Household Pulse Survey.

Months Behind On Rental Payments



According to analysis done by RVA Eviction Lab, the percent of respondents of Virginia renter households surveyed by the census who were not caught up on rental payments decreased January through March 2023. In January, 8.8% of respondents were not caught up on payments and in March that percentage decreased to 6.6%. RVA Eviction Lab surmised that this could be an indication that Virginia renters are finding it easier to keep up with payments in 2023. Analysis based on the survey conducted September 20 – October 2, 2023, shows that the percentage of Virginia renters behind on rent is now at 8.1%, slightly higher than that period in March 2023. An additional assessment, shown in Figure 13, by RVA Eviction Lab concluded the financial burden on tenants is rising from 2019 to the first quarter of 2023. In that period, the statewide median principal owed increased by 89.2%, rising from \$1,200 to \$2,270 (RVA Eviction Lab, 2023).



COMPARATIVE STATE ANALYSIS: POST- COVID REVIEW OF STATUTES AND LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS, REGULATION, AND DATA

With the federal moratorium (CARES Act; CDC Eviction Moratorium) and most state-level eviction moratoria having expired or been lifted, this analysis will focus on the eviction diversion programs that were not affiliated with the pandemic as well as pandemic era programs.

Features of Eviction Diversion Programs

The National Center for State Courts identified three broad types of diversion eviction programs based on the programs' features: light eviction diversion, medium eviction diversion and full eviction diversion.

1) Light Diversion

In a light eviction diversion program, the court provides information about optional pre-filing resources including legal aid, mediation, and rental assistance. Landlords and tenants are encouraged to consider alternatives to litigation before moving forward with filing a case.

2) Medium Diversion

In a medium eviction diversion model, the court provides for eviction diversion through a general administrative order, but without a mandatory case management/pre-trial status hearing at the beginning of the case.

3) Full Diversion

In a full eviction diversion model, the judicial officer may refer the case directly to eviction diversion and postpone issuing a final judgement until the parties have been able to fully take advantage of the available program resources, including applying for rental assistance.

Successful Legislation

Washington

[Senate Bill 5160](#) was passed in 2021 as an alternative pathway after the end of the moratorium. It establishes a court-based eviction resolution pilot program for nonpayment of rent cases operated through the Washington Supreme Court. It requires a mediation process before an eviction can be filed. Landlords must notify tenants of the eviction resolution program prior to filing an unlawful detainer action for nonpayment of rent. The bill adds additional time to the eviction process and contains a right to counsel component that requires an attorney be appointed to the tenant. Additionally, it authorizes landlord access to certain rental assistance programs (Washington State Legislature, 2021).

[Eviction Resolution Pilot Program](#)

Washington's Eviction Resolution Pilot Program was established by the state legislature as a two-year pilot operating statewide from November 1, 2021, to June 30, 2023. Working with trained eviction resolution specialists, landlords and tenants were supported in accessing rental assistance to repay rent, work out a payment plan, or create a plan for the tenant to move out without court action. From November 2021 to May 2023, 78,102 cases were closed and completed at Dispute Resolution Centers, with 74% of those cases reaching an agreement and 94% of cases preserving tenancy. However, it is important to

note that outcomes were not always known, and several COVID-19 related funding sources were available during this time for rental assistance (Resolution Washington , 2023).

Since the program has expired, landlords are no longer required to provide tenants with an ERPP Notice and no longer required to give tenants the option to participate in the ERPP before the landlord can file an unlawful detainer case in court for rent not paid (Washington State Legislature, 2021).

New Jersey

In June 2023 New Jersey launched the statewide Comprehensive Eviction Defense and Diversion program (CEDD). CEDD allows low-income households at risk of eviction to access legal services and experienced caseworkers, known as resource navigators. Resource navigators connect tenants to necessary resources, including rental assistance and relocation support. CEDD is funded by \$7.4 million in federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) dollars, with \$5.1 million allocated for resource navigators and \$2.3 million for legal services.

This program is a continuance of successful eviction prevention programs administered in response to the pandemic (New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, 2023). The pandemic pilot programs revealed that 86% of the 5,100 households assisted avoided eviction due to the assistance from the resource navigators and attorneys (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2023).

Maine

Maine's [S.P. 485](#), "An Act To Prevent Homelessness by Establishing an Eviction Mediation Program," establishes an eviction mediation program administered by Maine's Supreme Judicial Court. Participation in mediation is mandatory if court-ordered or requested by either party in an eviction proceeding. The Act also requires a landlord to attach information to a case summons and complaint before it is delivered to a defendant. This information includes a description of the required court proceedings, a statement that explains a failure to appear at any scheduled conference or hearing may result in a judgement in favor of the landlord, and a list of rental assistance and housing counseling programs (Maine Legislature, 2021).

Indiana

The Indiana Supreme Court implemented a statewide pre-eviction diversion program aimed at funneling rental assistance to landlords and tenants. Classified as light eviction diversion, this program requires courts to inform parties of the availability of a pre-eviction diversion process and advise on available resources including rental assistance, legal assistance, and the free Settlement Conference Program. Under the diversion process, an eviction case can be stayed for up to ninety days while parties seek resolution through the variety of available resources. A high priority for the program is raising awareness about the existence of emergency rental assistance. In 2022, the Indiana General Assembly passed a law modifying this program to be strictly voluntary (Indiana Supreme Court, 2021).

Massachusetts

Massachusetts developed a mandatory two-tiered eviction process in which landlords and tenants work with a mediator. In Teir I, a housing specialist will schedule the first court event for the purpose of determining the status of the case, exploring available assistance, and potential mediation. If the case does not settle, the housing specialists and the clerk will hold a case management conference to determine the next steps and/or schedule a case for trial. In Teir 2, the trial tier, the clerk will schedule the next court event by written notice (Massachusetts Housing Court Standing Orders, 2023).

Pending Legislation

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania introduced [HB 330](#) to create an Eviction Diversion Mediation program within the housing courts. The program provides a conciliation conference between a landlord and tenant to mediate an agreement and stabilize tenancy. The mediator must have extensive knowledge necessary to advise parties on funds and services available, as well as conduct an initial screening and investigation. The conciliation conference must take place prior to a landlord filing a complaint for eviction. The bill is currently pending after being recommended for further study (The General Assembly of Pennsylvania, 2021).

Unsuccessful Legislation

Delaware

Delaware introduced legislation ([SB 101](#)) in 2022 to provide legal representation in eviction matters for individuals making up to 200% of the federal poverty income level. The law would have also created a residential eviction diversion program to facilitate pre-eviction resolutions between landlords and tenants (Delaware General Assembly, 2021). This bill failed to pass the state legislature.

Minnesota

Minnesota introduced bills ([HF 3287](#), [SF3445](#)) to establish a stable housing mediation grant program to provide voluntary mediation services. The goal was to prevent court costs and reduce other negative impacts that evictions may have on communities. The grant would provide funding to mediation facilities that increase access to housing mediation, increase the availability of culturally specific dispute resolution programs, and ultimately reduce the need for court actions. The language included a one-time appropriation of \$425,000 from Minnesota's general fund. The bills failed to pass the state legislature (Minnesota Legislature, 2022).

Rhode Island

Rhode Island [H 5309](#) was introduced during the 2021 session and has language similar to the pending Pennsylvania HB 330. The bill would impose a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures during a declared state of emergency and establishes an eviction diversion program to resolve landlord-tenant disputes. Landlords would be prohibited from imposing late fees for non-payment of rent if the tenant provides documentation to the landlord that the nonpayment was related to the declared state of emergency. Additionally, an eviction diversion mediation program would be established through the court system. The program would require a conciliation conference between the landlord and tenant with a designated housing mediator appointed by the chief judge. The mediators would be responsible for an initial screening and evaluation of the contested issues and may conduct investigations and recommend settlements. The bill failed to pass the state legislature (Rhode Island General Assembly, 2021).

National Center for State Courts (NCSC) Eviction Diversion Initiative Grants

Several states including Alaska, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Nevada, New York, Tennessee, and Wisconsin were selected to receive grants from NCSC to improve diversion efforts within state courts. Alaska's statewide grant-funded program is outlined. Programs in the other awarded states have been locality based.

After Alaska's COVID rental relief funds ran out and evictions began increasing, in March 2023 Alaska began a new statewide light eviction diversion program run by the Alaska Court System. The program offers free mediation to landlords and tenants as well as referrals to community resources. The attorney who runs the program, Will Walker, stated that between March and August he's connected with as many as 200 people involved in eviction proceedings and estimates 20 of those mediations have been successful (Maxwell, 2023).

- Alaska Administrative Bulletin 98 establishes the program and requires all housing providers to include a pre-filing eviction diversion flyer when serving an eviction notice to ensure every tenant receives information about the program prior to a case being filed in court. The program creates a formal pathway to resolve landlord-tenant issues before filing and without paying court fees (Alaska Court System, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Given the limited data available to analyze, it is difficult to determine the scope of effectiveness of the Pilot program. The pandemic related moratoria and eviction reduction programs, additional diversion efforts, and stringent criteria for tenant participation remained limiting factors for participation throughout the duration of the program. However, based on documents and data provided by the Office of the Executive Secretary, it is reasonable to conclude the Pilot program was effective in preventing several evictions of tenants who fell into the targeted guidelines within this studied period.

The Eviction Diversion Pilot program was initiated to reduce reported high levels of eviction filings and housing instability in the Commonwealth. Soon after the Pilot's initiation, the COVID-19 pandemic ushered in a wave of sweeping eviction protections and eviction moratoria to keep families housed through the unprecedented crisis. The historically low number of eviction filings during the studied period contributed to very low participation numbers within the Pilot courts in Danville, Hampton, Petersburg, and Richmond.

It is challenging to assess the impact the structure of the Pilot had on participation when pandemic programs and protections, many with mandatory participation, existed concurrently. The Pilot program would have been the least preferred eviction diversion option for both tenants and landlords during this period. In Richmond, the local Richmond Eviction Diversion program remains the often-preferable option, as it offers payment assistance and the guidelines for tenant participation are less stringent.

While the pandemic protections successfully reduced evictions to historically low levels, the rates of eviction filings and reported households at risk for eviction are rising. As programs are exhausted or discontinued, the rates are rising to pre-pandemic levels. However, eviction rates may be rising at slower rates in localities where there are funds allocated to locally focused eviction reduction efforts. This is exemplified when comparing the Pilot cities of Richmond and Hampton to Petersburg and Danville.

Virginians who participated in recent Census surveys indicated that Virginia renters may be at a lower risk of eviction when compared to other state and national averages. This suggests that the pre-pandemic legislation created to address high eviction rates and the rental assistance offered during the pandemic were both effective in reducing the number of evictions in Virginia.

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