Housing in Crisis: An Analysis of Unlawful Detainer Actions in the King County Courthouse

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Unlawful detainers, or eviction proceedings, are filed in our court systems every day. In Washington State in particular, the eviction process is especially expedited, which can lead to disparate application of the law on its citizens. Seattle has attempted to remedy parts of these issues with a Just Cause Eviction Ordinance, and WA also modified its housing laws in 2019 to attempt to address these issues on a larger scale. The research questions motivating this research were:

• How effective is the Just Cause Eviction Ordinance and the 2019 changes to the RLTA in protecting renters facing eviction?

• Are there significant differences between how eviction proceedings occur in the City of Seattle and elsewhere in King County as a result of the renters' protections available therein?

• What unintended consequences might arise from Seattle ordinances that affect eviction proceedings?

Through observational research conducted at the King County Courthouse, as well as interviews conducted with eviction attorneys, patterns of unlawful detainers in WA were analyzed. The findings of this report conclude that protections by these laws are severely weakened by the structural advantages held by landlords, which allow them to twist these protections to their own advantage.

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