OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

DAVID CROWLEY

MILWAUKEE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

FOR PLANNING PURPOSES
July 19, 2021

CONTACT:
Brandon Weathersby
414.469.3493
press@milwaukeecountywi.gov

County Executive David Crowley Signs "Right to Counsel" into Law
Bill establishes a six-month pilot program to provide free legal representation in evictions for eligible households

MILWAUKEE, WI – Today, Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley signed "Right to Counsel Milwaukee" into law, establishing a pilot program to provide no-cost legal representation for residents facing eviction or foreclosure. The bill, authored by County Board Supervisor Ryan Clancy, is an additional strategy by Milwaukee County to keep residents in their homes and reduce evictions.

"I'm proud to sign the Right to Counsel legislation into law and take another important step forward in increasing housing security for Milwaukee County residents as we continue our recovery from the economic downturn caused by the global COVID-19 pandemic," **said Milwaukee County Executive David Crowley.** "Since the onset of the pandemic, thanks to the hard work of the Department of Health and Human Services, Milwaukee County Housing Division, and our community partners, we've saved over 8,500 families from being evicted through our eviction prevention programs. Eviction curtails access to safe, affordable housing from reputable landlords and perpetuates the cycle of poverty for generations. Right to Counsel provides an additional resource for residents to maintain housing security and avoid the negative impacts of eviction."

Right to Counsel Milwaukee (RCTM) provides a right to free legal representation in evictions for eligible households through the lead partner organization - United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties (United Way) - and the designated organization – the Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee (Legal Aid). The program is tentatively scheduled to launch on September 1, 2021.

The program will begin in a six-month pilot phase focused on representing eligible families with minor children facing eviction. Any family unable to afford a lawyer will be represented by one of RTCM's twelve attorneys specializing in housing law. Robust subcontracting of qualified counsel will ensure appropriate coverage for overflow and conflict issues. The program model is to provide full representation to ensure proper time to develop legal strategy and defenses, prepare discovery, investigate out-of-court resolutions, advocate at hearings, and address often overwhelming monetary damage judgments.

"I'm deeply grateful for the many organizations and individuals who were part of this monumental step. From the United Way who showed up with support and a $1.5 million commitment, to the

many organizations who advocated for it, to the folks impacted by eviction who bravely shared their stories, the push for the Right to Counsel has been a community effort," **said Supervisor Ryan Clancy**. "I'm thankful that this important right has the support of County Executive Crowley and I am excited to see the positive impact it will have on families and individuals. When we prioritize spending on human needs, the effects are enormous and far-reaching."

National data shows that individuals who have been evicted are more likely to experience homelessness and extended usage of homeless shelters, more likely to lose their jobs, and more likely to have children who become chronically absent from school after eviction occurs. The Milwaukee Eviction Defense Project data shows that 90% of eviction cases are dismissed or delayed when a tenant has legal representation, but only 3% of the 14,000 Milwaukee families facing an eviction in a typical year will have legal representation.

"Housing is one of the main social determinates of health. By providing comprehensive eviction prevention strategies, our community has provided stability for thousands of households who otherwise would have had nowhere else to turn," **said Milwaukee County Housing Administrator James Mathy.** "Right to Counsel will ensure families have the representation they need and that Milwaukee County can continue its progress in dramatically reducing homelessness."

Milwaukee County Small Claims Court data indicates families at-risk for evictions are mostly Black and Latino residents in low-income areas. Black women, families with children, and Latino families in mostly White neighborhoods are disproportionally evicted. Citywide, Milwaukee is 38% African American, with a 25% poverty rate. The 10 neighborhoods with the highest eviction rates are 73% African American with a 40% poverty rate. Research by EvictionLab and the ACLU confirm that evicted families have worse outcomes in critical determinants, such as economic stability employment, education, physical and mental health.

"United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County is pleased to see Right to Counsel evolve from idea to reality. The impact of COVID on housing stability has reinforced the need for robust eviction prevention efforts – which include direct service and policy change," **said Nicole Angresano, United Way of Greater Milwaukee & Waukesha County Vice President of Community Impact.** "Right to Counsel is a key piece of our commitment to ending Family Homelessness by 2023. We are grateful to continue to partner with Milwaukee County towards this end."

In addition to RTCM, Milwaukee County is launching a regional eviction prevention campaign in partnership with Waukesha County to get the word out that the Emergency Rental Assistance Program has available resources.

Renters and landlords in Milwaukee and Waukesha Counties are urged to apply for emergency rental assistance funds. Applications for Milwaukee and Waukesha County's Emergency Rental Assistance Programs (ERAP) are online at: communityadvocates.net.

ERAP Helps with Rent, Utilities, and Other Home Energy Costs. For individuals who qualify, ERAP pays for:

- Up to three months of rent at a time
- Up to twelve months of rent in arrears (back-rent)
- Cost of electricity and other home energy costs
- Cost of utilities in arrears (back-utilities) occurring after March 13, 2020

# # #