



RSI

Summary of Survey Responses

16th Judicial Circuit of Illinois Eviction Mediation Program
March to June 2023

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RESOLUTION SYSTEMS INSTITUTE | ABOUTRSI.ORG

Acknowledgements

Resolution Systems Institute (RSI) is grateful to the Illinois Equal Justice Foundation, whose support has enabled us to operate the 16th Judicial Circuit of Illinois' Eviction Mediation Program and to continue to monitor its effectiveness.



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Background

In 2021, the Kane County court launched a video mediation program for eviction cases; this program is administered and continuously evaluated by RSI. Parties are informed of this program when they receive their summons. At their initial hearing, which they can attend either by Zoom or in person, they are invited to join the mediation program. If they decide to participate, tenants connect with the program coordinator and/or a program associate; at this point, tenants are regularly referred to rental assistance applications, financial counselors, and/or a legal services representative.

After making initial contact with the tenant, the coordinator schedules the mediation on a date prior to the next hearing. Parties are not required to have an attorney to participate in mediation; however, if they have an attorney then their attorney must participate. Additionally, an attorney can participate on the party's behalf (and therefore that party does not need to be present at the mediation) if the attorney has full settlement authority. Most mediations are conducted on Zoom; occasionally, mediations are held in person at the Kane County Courthouse. Mediations are performed by roster mediators paid through grant funds.

After each mediation, participating parties and attorneys are invited by email to complete a survey online about their experience. Their responses are outlined in this report, which includes survey responses from March 1, 2023 through June 30, 2023. During that time, 264 mediations were held. Not all participants in eviction mediations completed the survey; throughout this report, the number of responses received is indicated by n.

At least one tenant attended each of the 264 mediations held. For those 264 mediations, tenants completed 31 surveys, accounting for 12% of the cases mediated. Landlords completed 4 surveys. Landlord attorneys completed 3 surveys and tenant attorneys completed 24 surveys. The response rate for landlords and attorneys could not be precisely calculated. The landlord did not have to participate in mediation if their attorney did, and not all landlords had attorneys; therefore, landlords did not attend some mediations and there were no attorneys in others. However, if we were to assume that landlords attended all mediations, then 2% of landlords completed surveys. Relatedly, if we were to assume that landlord and tenant attorneys attended all mediations, then 9% of landlord attorneys completed surveys and 1% of tenant attorneys completed surveys.



We asked participants a variety of questions in their post-mediation survey. This report focuses on fairness, trust, and satisfaction questions to glean participant perspectives on the mediator and the mediation. Participant comments are presented verbatim except when the comment could not be understood as written, or when redaction was necessary to maintain confidentiality. Please note that throughout this report, we use the term “tenant” to refer to renters and condo/homeowners facing eviction from their condo/homeowner's association; we use the term “landlord” to refer to anyone who attended mediation for the plaintiff: landlords (property owners), property managers, condo/homeowner association representatives, and bank lender representatives.

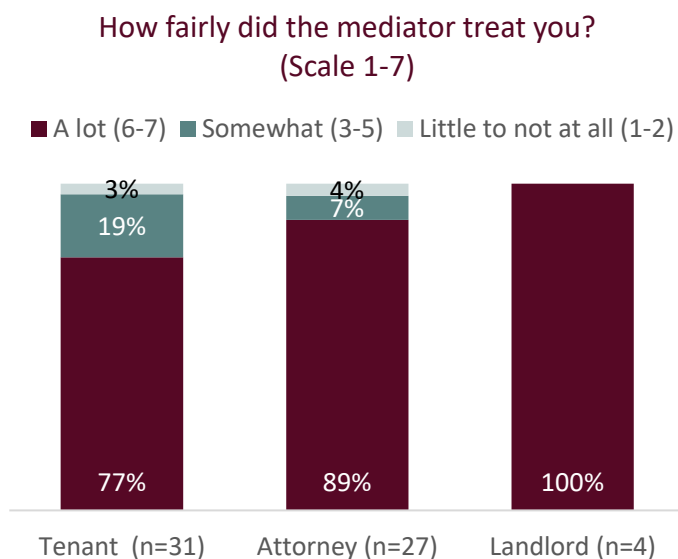
Perception of the Mediator

We asked parties and their attorneys several questions to evaluate their perception of the mediator. Two of these questions were whether they felt the mediator treated them fairly and whether they trusted the mediator. The participants then responded according to a seven-point scale, which we consolidated into three categories: low (1-2), medium (3-5) and high (6-7).

Mediator Fairness

We asked our participants how fairly they felt the mediator treated them/their side. A total of 62 participants responded to this question, including 31 tenants, 27 attorneys, and 4 landlords.

The responses were largely positive, with 50 of 62 respondents (81%) giving a rating of 6 or 7. Three participants (3%) rated mediator fairness as a 1 or 2, including one tenant and one attorney.

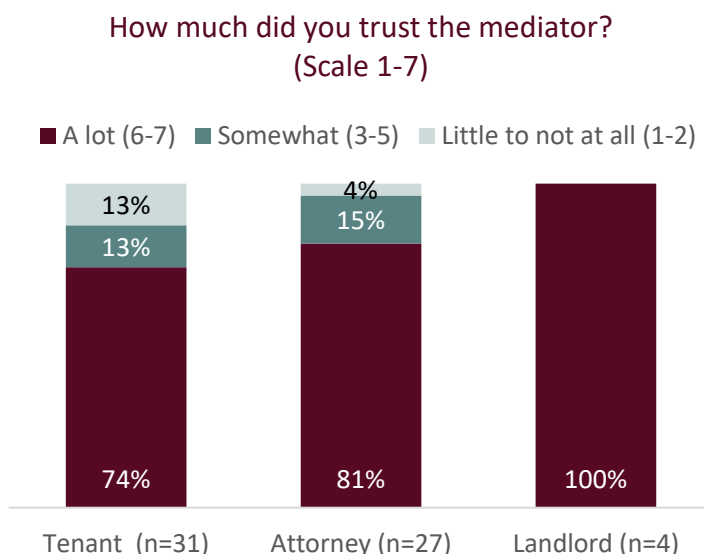




Trust in the Mediator

We asked our participants: “How much did you trust the mediator?”

A total of 62 participants responded, including 31 tenants, 27 attorneys, and 4 landlords. **The responses were largely positive, with 79% of respondents (49 of 62) rating their trust of the mediator at a 6 or 7.** Five respondents (8%) rated their trust of the mediator low, giving a rating of 1 or 2. They included four tenants and one attorney.



Perception of the Program

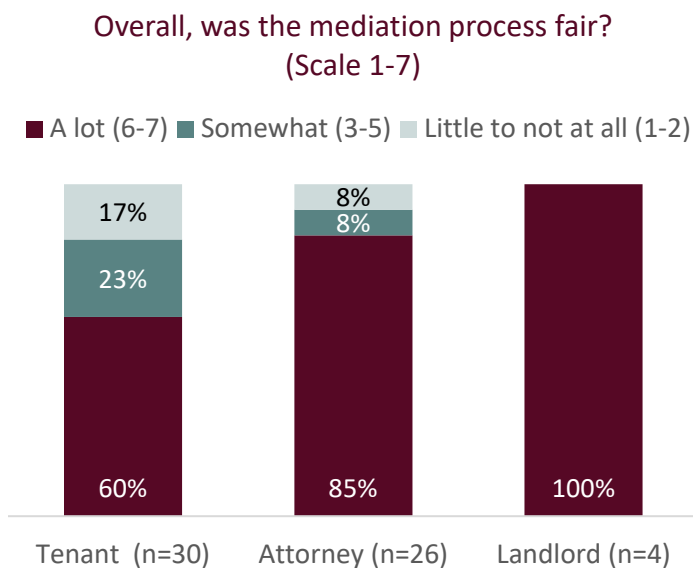
We asked parties and their attorneys several questions to evaluate their perception of the mediation program as a whole. We specifically asked: “Overall, how fair was the mediation process?” and “If a friend (or colleague) had a dispute like yours, how likely are you to recommend mediation?” The participants responded according to a seven-point scale; we merged their responses into three categories: 1-2 (little to not at all), 3-5 (somewhat), 6-7 (a lot). Participants were also asked to give comments to explain their scale ratings.

Most participants gave high ratings for process fairness and indicated that they would recommend the process. Tenants tended to rate the mediator more fairly than they rated the overall process. For example, only 60% of tenants found the *overall* process fair, while 78% tenants felt the *mediator* treated their side fairly. There was a similar, albeit smaller, shift observed in attorney’s ratings, with 85% rating the mediation process as fair, compared to 89% who felt the mediator treated them fairly. We did not observe a similar trend in landlords’ responses.



Fairness of the Mediation

A total of 60 participants responded to the question about whether their mediation process was fair, including 26 attorneys, 30 tenants, and 4 landlords. **Most of the participants who responded felt that the mediation was fair overall, with 44 of 60 (73%) saying it was highly fair and nine (15%) saying it was somewhat fair.** Seven (12%) of the respondents gave low ratings of 1 or 2, including five tenants and two attorneys. **Notably, seven tenant respondents (23%) felt that the mediation process was only somewhat fair.**



Tenant Comments

When asked to explain their answers, tenants who gave high ratings to the fairness of the mediation process mentioned that their mediators were clear and made them feel comfortable with the process; they enjoyed being able to have a conversation and share their point of view. A few high-rating tenants enjoyed the process but mentioned frustrations with the landlord. Below are representative comments. The comments are presented without edits.

- “She was **every clear to my understanding and helpful**”
- “I know this is out of you guys control but I wish there would have been a requirement on quickly both parties had to schedule mediation.”
- “I wish that I could have stayed in my unit. However, the landlord's attorney had already made the decision to terminate my lease before the mediation. **I would have liked more than a month to find a new place...but at least they are not holding it against me. Therefore, I am truly grateful.**”
- “**The mediator was extremely nice and helpful**, and helped me to settle the matter.”
- “**Conversation went very well.** Still [redacted a date for confidentiality] software issues with application for court ordered assistance.”



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- **“Mediation is very good for reaching an agreement**, only I did not like it because the plaintiff did not want to reach an agreement and also did not want to sign for financial aid and be able to pay him.”
 - “We just talked to each other and came to a agreement on things and it all worked out”
 - “The mediator went above and beyond in making sure that I understood all legal terms and made sure that I felt comfortable with the agreement reached. **She made me feel like an actual person and not just some case number.** I greatly appreciated her sincerity and her kindness toward me.”
 - **“I was very nervous and a little unsure what to expect but the mediator was very nice and calm** and put my mind to ease and gave me a change to tell my story of how I got to where I am today”
 - **“Felt very comfortable** with the situation during the entire process.”
 - “I was only given a couple days to apply for rental assistance, and have been having trouble with completing the application, could of used a little more time”

When asked to explain their answers, tenants who rated the overall process as **somewhat fair** were focused on the shortcomings of their landlord. They stated:

- **“Totally frustrating for me.** I know that I have to move if they are offering to cancel that debt that I know I have. Telling me that they would damage my record even more is like putting an ultimatum of mandatory cooperation. If it were up to me, I would leave here today because the house is damaged and the insulation is releasing residues, which causes me more respiratory damage. They have never provided the maintenance they should have, although they promised it when I entered. **They also did not tell me what happened to my security deposit; they didn't deduct it from the debt. But since it's already too much frustration and the mediation was for that, it's better to leave without fighting or having more problems...**”
 - “Our landlord DID NOT participate in the mediation, only his lawyer. Prior to the mediation I discussed the upcoming mediation with our landlord. [Tenant further stated that the landlord's lawyer did not adhere to what the landlord agreed prior to mediation, but these details were removed to protect confidentiality.] The mediator was gracious enough to pause the mediation to give the landlords lawyer a chance to call him to resolve this at my repeated insistence, and he stated that he did try 6 times to reach the landlord who would not pick up his phone. If the landlord was REQUIRED to attend the mediation session, which I was under the impression that he had to, this may have been settled properly. **I do NOT trust the landlord to adhere to the terms of the mediation anyway**, I pray that the Court will constrain him to do so. **Otherwise the**
-



mediation process was fantastic, the Mediator was fantastic, and I believe that it was much better than having to appear physically in court. Thank you."

When asked to explain their answers, tenants who gave low ratings to the fairness of the process also focused on the landlord's shortcomings. They stated:

- **"No didn't talk or mediate was a big shamble and I'm homeless cause of it"**
- **"The attorney for the landlord clearly had no intention of reaching any agreement or participating in a negotiation with me and immediately stated so. His offer was not accepted by me and further talks were clearly not going to be productive."**
- **"Well, I chose not very good because the owner demands a lot and he broke the contract from the beginning because he did not want to fix many things in the apartment and he did not respect my deposit [The remainder of the tenant's response was redacted to protect confidentiality.]"**

Landlord Comments

Only landlords who gave a high rating for process fairness provided commentary for their answers. They stated:

- **"Just a few years ago the landlord went before the judge and they were out. Now mediation takes 30 days, then we relinquished 75 more days, if they are not out add another 30. The saving grace is the rental assistance program that reimburses the landlord."**
- **"An objective individual (the mediator) brought a fresh perspective to the case. Mediation provided a lens to also view the situation from the opposing party's perspective.** Basically, what the opposing party (defendant) was experiencing in terms of emotions, the situation that resulted in the eviction, their purported view of the plaintiff's stance, possible solutions, managing expectations."

Attorney Comments

When asked to explain their answers, attorneys who gave a high rating for process fairness were most likely to mention the ability of both parties to express themselves and the mediator's evenhanded treatment of the parties. They stated:

- **"The satisfaction is based upon the mediation resolution, but of course it would have been nice to get all the back rent as well."**



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- “I was not disappointed in the mediator, but the opposing party and counsel had no interest in trying to reach a resolution. They showed up late, and then made, in my opinion, an unreasonable demand that served to waste everyone's time.”
 - “Both sides were afforded the **opportunity to consult privately** and to **express their positions fully**. Our mediator was very **professional and competent**.”
 - “The Mediator **carefully listened to both sides** and **gave both parties the opportunity to express their opinions**.”
 - “Parties were able to have a dialogue, exchange settlement proposal and reach an agreement.”
 - “[The mediator] did a great job of **putting everyone at ease** and did a good job of letting the attorneys talk through their positions so that an agreement could be reached.”
 - “The mediator first met with the tenant and gave her a chance to explain any proposals she had. The mediator then met with the landlord to let her explain any proposals she had. She then brought that information back to the tenant so she could make a decision, which she did. **Both sides had a chance to consider their options**.”

When asked to explain their answers, the two attorneys who rated the overall process as somewhat fair and responded to this question indicated the mediator was biased toward the tenant and inefficient. They stated:

- “After landlord accepted tenants offer **mediator kept exploring claims of tenant that did not meet the current timeframe**.”
- “**The mediator started the mediation that she did not understand what the case was about and asked the defendant to explain. This is disrespectful to the plaintiff in many ways.** First, she could have taken 2 minutes to read the complaint in advance. Second, she could have allowed the only attorney in the room give a 60 second summary of the situation and then allow defendant to explain why they did not pay. Third, she started talking about what fees the judge would allow. Fourth, she did not understand the eviction procedures in the court room. In all, **she wasted so much time with her lack of knowledge and deference to the defendant** who just wanted to explain why they did not pay for nearly 10 years. Furthermore, this happens frequently that people log on and do not know how to use zoom. You should instruct people with the email link to practice with zoom. You can email them a test link or send them to the zoom site to practice instead of spending valuable time during the mediation messing around with how to use zoom.”



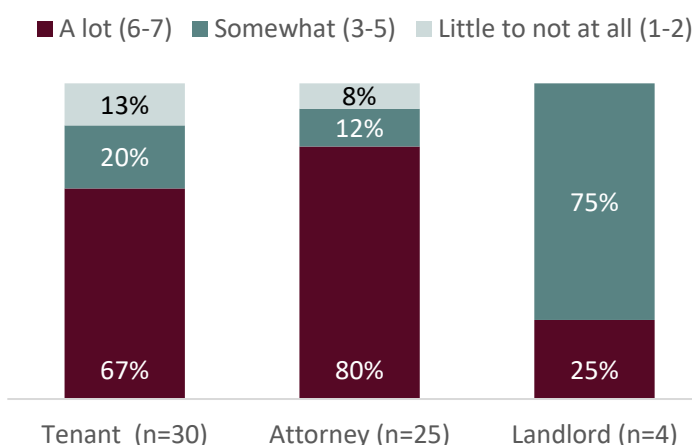
When asked to explain their answers, attorneys who gave low ratings for process fairness believed that the mediator was trying to disproportionately help the other side. They stated:

- **“The mediator was giving the other side advice on their case and asked the defendant to stay on the zoom call so they could discuss the case after the mediation.”**
- **“Mediator allowed OC to appear without the client which is contrary to the court's order and good mediation practices. Also, mediator mentioned she knew opposing counsel, but relationship was unclear. We were from a different county and this made us concerned about her impartiality. She had a nice demeanor and was pleasant.”**

Satisfaction

We asked tenants and landlords how likely they were to recommend eviction mediation to a friend. We asked attorneys how likely they were to recommend eviction mediation to a colleague. A total of 59 participants responded, including 30 tenants, 25 attorneys, and 4 landlords. (One landlord completed the attorney survey.)

If a friend/colleague had a dispute like yours, how likely are you to recommend eviction mediation? (Scale 1-7)



Most of the participants who responded were likely to

recommend mediation to a friend or colleague, with 41 of 59 (70%) saying they were highly likely to recommend it and 12 (20%) saying they are somewhat likely to recommend it. Four tenants and two attorneys (10%) indicated they were unlikely to recommend mediation.

Notably, three of the four landlords (75%) responded that they were only somewhat likely to recommend eviction mediation to a friend.

Tenant Comments

When asked to explain their answers, tenants who said they were very likely to recommend mediation to a friend praised the program and how it helped them and their cases. They stated:

- **“I think it is a necessary process to go through.”**
- **“Very helpful for both sides”**



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- “I think it's better than court”
 - “It helps both parties move on”
 - “It is very good to be able to reach an agreement”
 - “If you [can sit] down and talk to someone e you can generally come up [w]ith a solution to the problem at hand”
 - “It would be an absolute mistake no going through mediation. **It is the best decision when going through this type of process.**”
 - “**I believe overall it is a great process.** I also believe that the landlord SHOULD BE REQUIRED to attend the mediation session.”
 - “I recommend mediation it takes the pressure off[f] of being in court right away with a judge and **it's a little more personal so you have more time to express your concerns**”
 - “Mediation is not only doing the right thing but **can avoid an eviction on your record**”
 - “The mediator behaved very well but they almost do not help people who do not have documents, like we do not have rights”
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**“It would be an absolute mistake no[t] going through mediation.
It is the best decision when going through this type of process.”**

- Tenant

When asked to explain their answers, tenants who said they were somewhat likely to recommend mediation to a friend mentioned the difficult housing market and landlord's reluctance to negotiate. They stated:

- “It so hard but to find a place”
- “The concept is solid but not if both parties are not in agreement to be open to discussion ”

Only one tenant explained why they were not likely to recommend mediation to a friend, stating: “As I do not have a lawyer, mediation helps the plaintiffs. There is no point in wasting time and giving others more to talk about [portion redacted to protect confidentiality] Individuals' emotional problems should not be aired in this way.”

Landlord Comments

Only one landlord explained why they gave the rating they did. That landlord indicated they were somewhat likely to recommend mediation to a friend. They commented: “As indicated in the previous response, mediation, especially, under the guidance of a professional mediator, opens the eyes and ears of both parties to the entire situation. It presents different angles of possible resolution(s) to the case.”

Attorney Comments

When asked to explain their answers, attorneys who said they were highly likely to recommend mediation to a colleague focused on the benefit of having a shorter timeline and being able to control the outcome in their case. They stated:

- “Always better to get an agreed order to avoid going to trial since you know what your getting.”
- “Mediation can work well if both sides are reasonable.”
- “I think the mediation process is an appropriate way to resolve disputes.”
- “Not sure what I can add, generally it is best to try to resolve these cases to save time.”
- “The process worked very well.”
- “Many of these case[s can] be settled. Mediation is worth a try.”
- “It allows a **solution that both sides had some part in reaching** in lieu of trial.”
- “Always important to get the parties talking.”

**“It allows a **solution that both sides
had some part in reaching** in lieu of trial.”**

- Attorney

One attorney explained why they were somewhat likely to recommend mediation to a colleague: “In some situations mediation is warranted but when you are dealing with a premise only then mediation is not as easy.”

One attorney explained why they were not likely to recommend mediation to a colleague: “When mediators are partial to one side or the other it defeats the purpose of mediations.”

Mediators should not be asking to speak to one side after the mediation finishes or advising them on what to do next."

Additional Participant Comments

We asked participants for additional comments about their experience in mediation, particularly what positives and negatives they perceived about the process.

What Participants Liked about Mediation

We asked tenants and landlords to tell us what they liked about mediation; we asked attorneys to tell us what made their mediation effective. Participants liked mediators' demeanor and helpfulness; and they welcomed the open conversations and information provided. However, a couple of responses noted that they could find nothing good about the program. Below are representative comments.

Tenant Comments

- "She was nice"
- "Explaining everything"
- "The **breakout rooms were nice** because it wasn't a good process to be in eviction."
- "The fact that she was every helpful and she suggested alternatives help also made sure I understood everything that was spoken clearly"
- "The information was helpful."
- **Nothing.** They said that in two weeks I would have to leave, and the Judge could do it on the day of the court."
- "That they explain much more and help filling out forms..there's a bunch of questions that are not quite understood and they help with that alot."
- "Nothing"
- "It was so short I can't comment either way"
- "Every represented, **fair and open discussion.**"
- "They do everything possible to reach an agreement."
- "That **the mediator gave me opportunity to talk and express my thoughts and opinions** let alone the situation at hand"
- "It gave [b]oth sides the opportunity to take and understand what was going on and how to proceed to handle the problem"



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- “Again, the mediator was **kind and thoughtful** when it came to helping me understand what the legal terms meant and even walking me through the entire process. She was a **calming presence when I felt very stressed**. I cannot remember her name, but I thank you from the bottom of my heart.”
 - “**The process seems to be a great alternative to Court. Informal, relatively stress-free, and of course having a very polite, professional, impartial mediator helped a lot.** Not having to file appearance and an appearance fee is definitely a positive!”
 - “**I liked that it was a more intimate setting** in my home on zoom, **I [didn’t] feel pressured, and I felt that I had a voice to tell my story** of how I got to where I am in my situation, where as a judge may not be so understanding.”
 - “Just knowing it's controlled and true.”
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“I liked that it was a more intimate setting in my home on zoom, I [didn’t] feel pressured, and I felt that I had a voice to tell my story of how I got to where I am in my situation, where as a judge may not be so understanding.”

- Tenant

Landlord Comments

One landlord completed an attorney survey. In response to the question on that survey about what would make mediation more effective, the landlord stated: “**The presence of a sincere, professional mediator made this a very effective and efficient mediation.** I was very impressed with our mediator and the knowledge that she brought to the table. She was able to keep the discussion focused. **There was no sidetracking as we went further in the discussion.** This was impressive and made for an effective mediation.”

Attorney Comments

When asked what made mediation effective, attorneys almost universally pointed to the mediator. A few mentioned the parties’ openness or ability to talk with one another.



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- “In our case I had had previous discussions with the tenant and the mediator made he realize that this eviction was going forward no matter what so it was better to discuss a settlement.”
 - **“Mediator's tone and and approach.”**
 - “The mediator had both the landlord and tenant indicate their story regarding the eviction.”
 - “Strong mediator. Very organized process.”
 - “The parties ability to speak with one another.”
 - “The back and forth between the parties.”
 - “My and my client's interceding to make it happen”
 - **“Mediator was realistic with both sides and did not waste time with extreme positions.”**

What Participants Did Not Like about Mediation

We asked tenants and landlords to tell us what they didn't like about mediation; we asked attorneys to tell us what, if anything, could be improved about their mediation. Below are some representative comments.

Tenant Comments

Tenants tended to focus on the other party when stating what they did not like about the mediation. A few had issues with the process. Three indicated they liked everything about the mediation.

- “The attorney threatened me!”
- “I don't like the landlord lawyer she was so rude”
- “The first question was what do I plan to do after it's paid? I was a little thrown off....”
- “Timing and when asked about being able to make decisions I was the only party that was fully authorized to do so.”
- “I had good experience”
- “The attacking attitude of the lawyer.”
- “Is a bit long process”
- “Glitches”
- “N/A”
- “I did not appreciate the fact that the opposing attorney clearly had no intentions of participating in any type of mediation or discussion or compromise, and instead chose



to participate in the mediation solely to express his solid conviction to not negotiate, and instead cite irrelevant reasons to not entertain any further discussion.”

- “Everything is fine, **if I didn’t understand something the mediator explained it to me.**”
- “The lawyer on the opposite side doesn't know his client very well”
- “Nothing it was definitely worth [d]oing.”
- “I didn't like that the lawyer from the other side was very pushy and aggressive, but I have nothing bad to say about the mediator or the process.”
- “Landlord was not required to attend. Basically this nullifies any advantage of mediation, completely defeats the purpose. Landlord definitely **SHOULD** be required to attend.”
- “So far there isn't anything I didn't dislike about mediation”

“I didn't like that the lawyer from the other side was very pushy and aggressive, but I have nothing bad to say about the mediator or the process.”

- Tenant

Landlord Comments

One landlord completed an attorney survey. In response to the question on that survey about what could have been improved about mediation, stating: “I cannot think of anything at this moment.”

Attorney Comments

When asked what could be improved about the mediation, the majority of the attorneys mentioned an issue with the mediator. A number indicated nothing would have improved it.

- “Nothing in my case.”
 - “n/a”
 - **“The mediator should have allowed the parties to work out an agreement without pushing for the other side.”**
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- “That prior to mediation, the parties need to be informed regarding other people walking through the mediation.”
 - “Nothing.”
 - “None. **Very impressive program and mediator.**”
 - “N.A.”
 - **“Mediator kept asking and exploring vague, inconsistent and in landlord's view irrelevant, claims after parties reached an agreement.”**
 - **“Mediator struggled with technology,** the process could have been slightly smoother but overall moved pretty quickly and smoothly.”
 - “Slightly shorter introductory comments.”
 - “There was a bit of confusion on the final order, but that was resolved.”
 - **“Eliminate the mediator.”**
 - **“Have the mediator be quicker.** She spent over 15 minutes covering the confidentiality agreement when both sides understood and had no questions.”

Other Comments

We asked our participants if they had any anything else they would like to tell us. Below are some representative comments.

Tenant Comments

- “I am trying to find a place and I am handicap it so hard to move around a lot but I am going do the best i can”
- “Overall, it's good we have the program to save our apartment”
- “I think all parties should be required to be present for the best outcome if agreed to attend.”
- “They should not assume that tenants like to be kicked out of where we live or don't pay rent out of choice, I think we are people who still like to fulfill our obligations and this type of situation embarrasses and frustrates us too much, that we don't use. Depression, anxiety, fears, traumas as an excuse despite the difficult days. We do not give up every day again, you win. Just as they won by leaving me without my two little children for thinking that all human beings make mistakes and have moments of anger, sadness and frustration regardless of gender, ethnicity, age, skin color, in the end all of humanity has blue blood (before they are given oxygen) in the end, the opinion of a case number does not matter, because for the court it is just another case.”



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- “This mediation program is very good for trying to reach an agreement, although I was not lucky enough to agree.”
 - “Thank you for providing this service.”
 - “We are leaving illinois. Renters and decent people in illinois basically have no rights, at least those of us who are poor. Criminal scum are allowed to repeatedly committ crimes against citizens, and scumbag slumlords the same. It is a pity that illinois government does not uphold basic human rights and their own laws. However, we appreciate folks like yourselves who are obviously attempting to make things a little better, Thank You for that.”
 - “[The beginning the response has been redacted to protect confidentiality] overall great experience. ***** [Asterisks are in the original comment.]”

Landlord Comments

Only one landlord responded to this question. They stated: “This was my first mediation and proved to be a positive experience and I hope that I can further build upon this experience with what was learned today.”

Attorney Comments

- **“I felt the mediator was advocating slightly for the tenant in terms of describing rental assistance programs.** Instead of asking what the tenant knew about the programs, mediator was telling the tenant so in some sense there was advocacy. It was not to the extent I felt the mediator was unbiased but in my various mediation trainings, the participants need to come with their own information.”
 - “Excellent mediator. **Very smart and shows empathy to the parties.**”
 - **“It should be mentioned that the defendant in this case is illiterate. Something to keep in mind is that Zoom is not a very effective platform for someone who cannot read.** This case is obviously atypical, but for mediation participants who are illiterate or lack access to technology, Zoom is not accessible. We made due in this case by trying to help the client verbally by describing what she should see on her screen to go into a break out room, etc. It also is significant that the defendant was represented here (by myself), so I was active in making sure she understood everything that was going on. It seemed like **the mediator and the parties were also careful to make sure that defendant understood written materials and/or cues.** Hope this feedback is helpful in future cases, happy to elaborate further about this.”
 - “Well done!”
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- “Keep up the good work.”
 - **“The mediator had a lot of difficulty filling out and completing the documents.”**

Conclusion

The survey responses indicate that the 16th Judicial Circuit of Illinois’ Eviction Mediation Program continues to provide a positive experience to participants. Those who completed the survey generally had very positive perceptions of the mediators and the program, with most giving high ratings on fairness, trust and satisfaction. However, some participants’ comments point to a possible need for individual mediators to receive more instruction on neutrality, technology, and discussion of conflict of interest.