

**Evictions in Milwaukee County 2008 – 2009:  
Estimating the Impact of Aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**

A Policy Report Prepared for Community Advocates  
Milwaukee, Wisconsin

by

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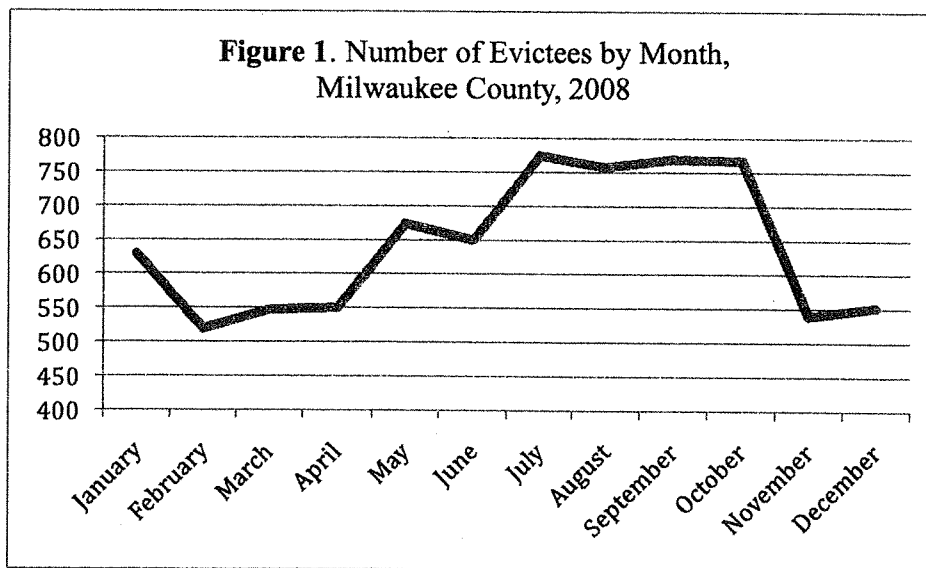
## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to explore the patterns of evictions in Milwaukee County from 2003 to early 2010 and, specifically, to evaluate if evictions in Milwaukee County decreased after aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 began to be dispersed. The report draws from eviction records collected by the Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts, extracted by Court Data Technologies.

## Yearly Cycle of Eviction Rates

Evictions in Milwaukee County follow a set pattern, one involving a small peak and a large one. The small peak occurs between November and February, reaching its apex in January; the large peak occurs between March and October, reaching its apex in September.

Figure 1 displays the number of Milwaukee County evictees (defendants in eviction cases) by month in 2008.<sup>1</sup> As the year begins, evictions are moderate: in January, there were 628 evictees. The number dips down during February but then begins to climb back up. The summer sees the highest number of evictions. September marks the peak with 769 evictees. The monthly count then begins slowly to decline, falling below 600 evictees in the months of November and December. Any attempt to determine the effect of a policy or legal change on Milwaukee evictions must first take into account the normal fluctuation in evictions across months.<sup>2</sup>



Source: Milwaukee County Eviction Records, 2008;  
Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts

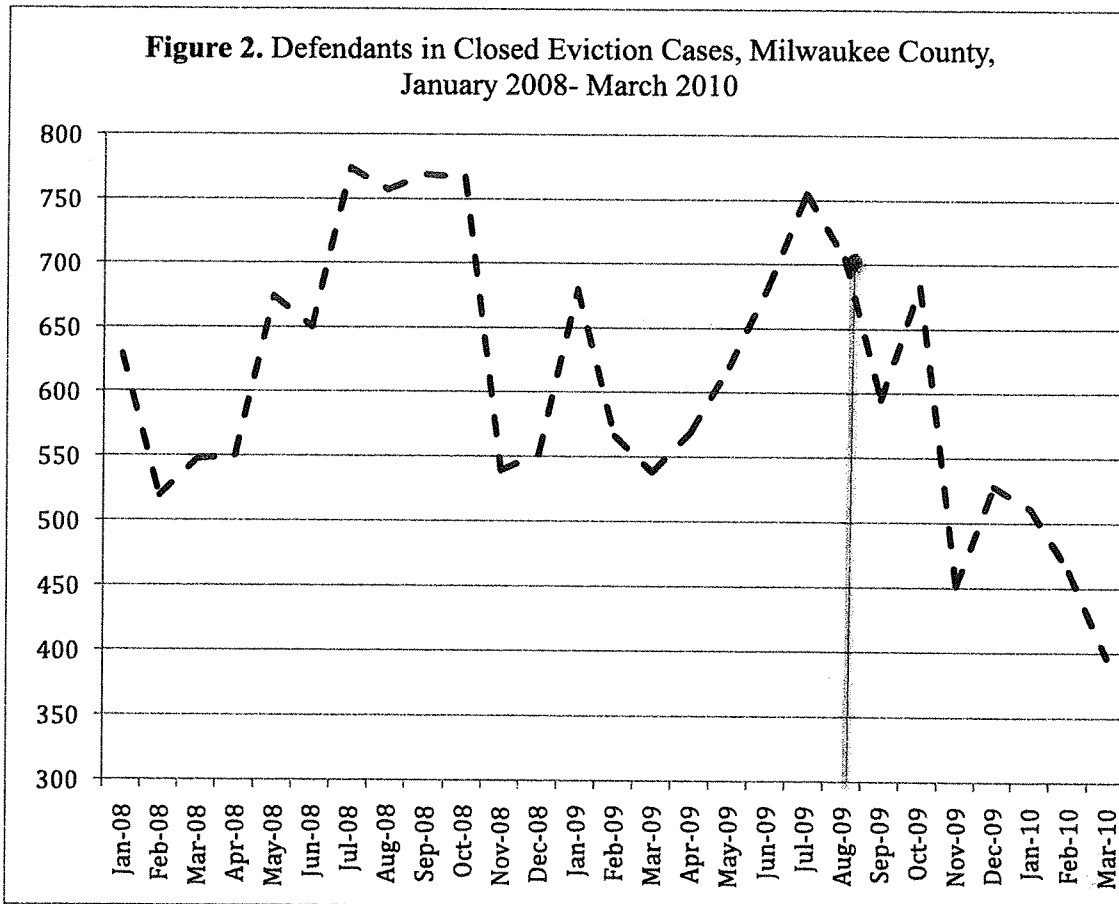
<sup>1</sup> Here and elsewhere, evictions refer only to “first cause” judgments (judgments for eviction). “Second and third” cause judgments (judgments for money) have been excluded from the analysis.

<sup>2</sup> This pattern has been replicated in previous years (2003-2007).

## Evictions in Milwaukee County: January 2008 to March 2010

The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 allocated \$1.5 billion for rental assistance and housing relocation, nationwide. In Milwaukee, Community Advocates began distributing stimulus funds in August 2009 in the form of eviction assistance aid. Did evictions decrease after aid began to be dispersed?

Figure 2 graphs the number of defendants in closed eviction cases from January 2008 to March 2010. The purple line springing from August 2009 indicates the approximate time stimulus aid began to be distributed in Milwaukee.

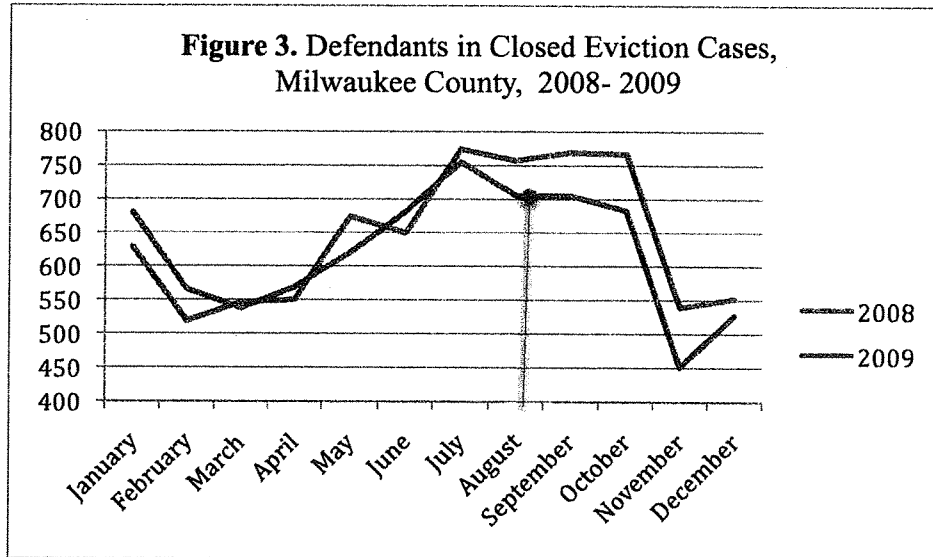


Source: Milwaukee County Eviction Records, 2008-2010; Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts

It is clear that the number of evictees in Milwaukee County decreased considerably after August 2009. In most years, the number remains high until around October. (Figure 2 shows that this was the case in 2008, for example). In 2009, however, the number of evictees declined after August. It peaked in October and again in January (following a normal seasonal pattern), but the overall shape of the pattern was that of a decline.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> The number of evictees for March 2010 should be viewed somewhat skeptically. Although the data were extracted from Wisconsin Circuit Court Access (CCAP) in June 2010, presumably giving the system enough time to record eviction cases that occurred in March, the relatively low count for March may in part be a reflection of a lag in the system (and thus an underestimation of the total number of evictees for that month).

Figure 3 compares the number of defendants in closed eviction cases by month in 2008 and 2009. The two lines more or less converge until August 2009, when the line representing the number of evictees in 2009 drops noticeably. Each month between August and December 2009, the monthly evictee count was less than the year before.



Source: Milwaukee County Eviction Records, 2008-2009;  
Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts

Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that the drop in the number of evictees during the latter part of 2009 cannot be attributed to the normal annual eviction pattern. This is especially evident in Figure 3: the line for 2008 and that for 2009 both conform to the normal pattern, but the line for 2009 is consistently below that for 2008 post-August.

Month-to-month comparisons, too, document a significant drop in the number of evictees after August 2009. In August 2009, there were 52 less evictees in than there were in August 2008. September had 174 less evictees than the year before; and October and November had 84 and 88 less, respectively. January 2010 had 169 fewer evictees than January 2009. February 2010 had 103 fewer, and March 2010 had 142 fewer, than the year before (see Table 1).

On average, compared to the previous year, the number of defendants evicted each month in Milwaukee County has decreased by 15% since August 2009. In some months (e.g., September 2009, January 2010), the percent difference exceeds 20%.

From August 2008 to March 2009, 5,168 people were evicted through the Milwaukee County Court. From August 2009 to March 2010, however, only 4332 people were, a difference of 836 people—or the equivalent of more than the number of people evicted in an average month in Milwaukee County.

**Table 1.** Defendants in Closed Eviction Cases,  
Milwaukee County, January 2008- March 2010

	<b>2008</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>
January	629	680	511
February	519	566	463
March	547	538	396
April	550	569	
May	674	620	
June	650	681	
July	774	755	
August	757	705	
September	769	595	
October	767	683	
November	539	451	
December	552	528	

*Source:* Milwaukee County Eviction Records, 2008-2010;  
Milwaukee County Clerk of Circuit Courts

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that there has been a drop in the number of defendants in eviction cases in Milwaukee County since August 2009, the month aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act began to be distributed, and that this drop cannot be explained by the normal eviction cycle. Data limitations prevent us from attributing this decline solely to aid from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. But the fact that the number of evictees began to decrease at the exact time stimulus aid began to be dispersed cannot be ignored.