Janae Craddock, 37
Courthouse Housing Law Attorney at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society

When Janae Craddock was a senior at Richmond Community High School, she did her thesis on First Amendment rights and how they pertain to students. By the time she graduated from the University of Virginia and began law school at Campbell University, she knew she wanted to work with families and children.

After serving as assistant commonwealth’s attorney, handling cases in the Richmond Juvenile and Domestic Relations District Court, Craddock took on a newly created position at the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society in February of this year. Now, rather than prosecuting, she spends her time advising and counseling people who are facing eviction — a serious problem in Richmond, which has one of the highest eviction rates in the country.

Her office is in the courthouse, and oftentimes Craddock says she finds herself operating as both an attorney and counselor at law, balancing legal advice with emotional baggage.

“A lot of times when I first meet a person they’re in tears, and all they know is the judge just told them they’ve got to get out of their house,” she says, adding that it’s important for her to make people feel comfortable. “They’re facing the possibility of homelessness or displacement, so you can’t just jump into all your legal defenses right there.”

She describes the work as challenging but rewarding.

“Sometimes I’m able to stop the eviction due to a technicality,” Craddock says. “I have been successful in having cases continued out, to allow people more time to pay. I count that a win as well.”