

March 18, 2020

Virginia Housing Providers

RE: A Plea to Help Halt Evictions During the COVID-19 Crisis

Dear Housing Provider:

We are writing to ask for your help in protecting low-income tenants across the Commonwealth.

As you know all too well, the novel coronavirus poses the most serious public health threat our world has seen in over a century. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention, over 4,200 cases of coronavirus have been reported in the United States; 51 of those are right here in Virginia. (The Washington Post reported an ever higher number of 67 in Virginia yesterday.) Two Virginians have died due to coronavirus.

We're concerned about the members of our communities who don't have the option to stay home in order to keep themselves and their neighbors safe. Specifically, we worry about people who have been given eviction notices because they have been unable to pay rent. These tenants must choose between going to court, where they will be in close contact with others and potentially become part of the problem that is the spread of this disease, or staying home for the safety of themselves and others despite the risk of being evicted. If they are evicted, many will have nowhere to stay as homeless shelters across the state are already at, and in some cases over, capacity. Evicting more people will increase the public health risk of coronavirus quickly spreading, especially if they become infected. How can someone self-quarantine without a home to self-quarantine in?

We realize that stopping all efforts to evict tenants who are behind on rent may pose a financial hardship for you, and we are in daily contact with the Governor's office urging him to find funds to help stop evictions during this crisis. We are confident that he and his staff are doing everything they can.

In the meantime, **we strongly urge you to stop issuing pay or quit notices, filing unlawful detainers and seeking writs of eviction until this COVID-19 crisis has abated.** As Attorney General Herring said in the press release his office issued yesterday related to the Virginia Supreme Court's suspension of all non-emergency eviction cases, "It would be an absolute outrage for Virginians to be evicted from their homes during this emergency, especially as we are asking them to practice social distancing and stay home to prevent further spread of COVID-19."

We trust that like us, you agree with the Attorney General, and that you will do your part to halt evictions during this crisis.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Christie Marra
Director of Housing Advocacy
Virginia Poverty Law Center

Brian Koziol
Executive Director
Virginia Housing Alliance