Dear Governor Northam:

We write to ask that you issue an immediate moratorium on all residential evictions in the Commonwealth of Virginia pursuant to your emergency power to regulate goods and commodities under Section 44-146.17(1) of the Virginia Code. Some of the people facing eviction will be protected by the federal CARES Act, which prohibits covered housing providers from filing any eviction cases in court until late August. But we estimate that fewer than half of the renters in Virginia fall under the CARES Act protections. **We urge you to issue an executive order providing the same protection against eviction to every renter in Virginia by prohibiting ANY residential evictions until at least September 1 or whenever the federal eviction moratorium ends, whichever is later.**

Many of the nearly 400,000 Virginians who are presently unemployed worked in low-wage jobs in the accommodation, food service or retail industries¹ and have little or no savings. According to the University of California at Berkeley, over 40 percent of Virginia renter households working in these and other industries heavily impacted by COVID-19 are rent-burdened, with annual incomes below $30,000².

Here in the Commonwealth, these renters are also disproportionately Black and Latinx. Over 50 percent of Black and Latinx renter households in Virginia are rent-burdened; over 25 percent of them are severely rent-burdened, meaning they pay more than 50 percent of their income on rent³. Those who are severely rent-burdened are also most vulnerable to COVID-19, as they are “more likely than other renters to sacrifice other necessities like healthy food and health care to pay rent” according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition⁴. Data from the Virginia Department of Health bears out this link: Latinx Virginians have the highest rate of COVID-19 related hospital visits, Black Virginians the second highest. Among the myriad of inequities rooted in systemic racism, disproportionately high rent burdens certainly contribute to these statistics.

Now these and other rent-burdened members of our communities face another, more dangerous risk factor: eviction. Until May 18, Virginians who were unable to

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² [www.ternercenter.berkeley.edu](http://www.ternercenter.berkeley.edu), last accessed May 17, 2020.
³ Joint Center for Housing Studies at Harvard, [www.jcs.harvard.edu/ARH_2017_cost_burdens_by_race](http://www.jcs.harvard.edu/ARH_2017_cost_burdens_by_race), last accessed on May 17, 2020. This 50 percent compares to 40 percent of Asians who are rent-burdened and 35 percent of whites who are rent-burdened in Virginia.
pay their rent were protected from eviction by the Virginia Supreme Court’s series of judicial emergency orders. But the Court’s most recent order issued on May 6, 2020 and effective May 18, allows all courts to hear in-person non-emergency matters if they determine it safe to do so. Over 800 eviction cases are scheduled across the Commonwealth for the next two weeks alone, with over 200 of them being heard in jurisdictions with high rates of COVID-19, like Loudoun and Stafford. This is just a small fraction of the cases coming in the weeks and months ahead. Many courts have delayed hearing eviction and other non-emergency cases until safety measures are in place, and many renters paid March, April and May rent with final paychecks and federal stimulus checks. In terms of evictions, the worst is yet to come.

We know that you have worked diligently over the past few years to lower eviction rates across the Commonwealth and that during this state of emergency you have directed state agencies to work with housing partners to help Virginians avoid evictions, and we thank you. But we cannot afford to merely reduce evictions. As a physician, you recognize that putting a person on the street raises the risk of infection not only for that person, but for everyone who has contact with them. Allowing mass evictions to occur in the next few months will erase the hard work we’ve all done to flatten the curve of the infection. The homeless provider system is beyond overloaded, as you acknowledged when you used Emergency Solution Grant funds to house Virginians experiencing homelessness in hotels and motels. If tens of thousands of Virginians are evicted in the next few months, there will simply be nowhere for them to go. They will be denied the opportunity to follow the sound directive to “stay home” that you have issued in every press conference and executive order because they will have been forced out of their homes by judicial order.

We are sensitive to the financial challenges faced by housing providers right now. Along with a number of nonprofit housing providers and others, we have asked the Virginia Congressional delegation to support any and all legislation containing robust rent relief funding. We are in favor of these funds going directly to the housing providers, with credit given to individual renters. We will continue to encourage renters across the Commonwealth to work with their landlords to establish realistic payment plans they can follow. But none of these measures will help housing providers in the long run if tens of thousands of evictions cause a spike in infections, hospitalizations and deaths. Even the evictions themselves are costly, with every eviction costing a housing provider thousands of dollars in advertising and readying the vacated unit for new renters. Halting evictions through the end of the summer will not substantially harm housing providers, but it will substantially save renters from homelessness and worse.
Since March, governors of thirty states have used their executive powers to declare eviction moratoria. We urge you to become the thirty-first governor to take this life-saving action.

Sincerely,

Jay Speer, Executive Director

Delegate Clinton Jenkins, 76th District

Delegate Dr. Dawn M. Adams, District 68

Del. Marcia S. "Cia" Price, 95th District

Del. Betsy B. Carr, 69th District

Delegate Joshua G. Cole, 28th District
Senator Ghazala F. Hashmi, 10th District

Senator Jennifer L. McClellan, 9th District

Delegate Patrick A. Hope, 47th District

Delegate Jennifer Carroll Foy, 2nd District

Delegate Delores L. McQuinn, 70th District

Senator Jennifer B. Boysko, 33rd District

Delegate Sam Rasoul, 11th District

Delegate Paul Krizek, 44th District
Senator Barbara Favola, 31st District

Senator John S. Edwards, 21st District

Delegate Mark L. Keam, 35th District

Delegate Don Scott, 80th District

Delegate C. E. Cliff Hayes, Jr.

Delegate Sally Hudson, 57th District