



Washington State Legislature
Black Members Caucus

June 17, 2021

The Honorable Governor Jay Inslee
P.O. Box 40002
Olympia, WA 98504

RE: Extending the Eviction Moratorium

Dear Governor Inslee,

On June 30, 2021, Washington communities will not be prepared for the expiration of the eviction moratorium. Your moratorium has played an immeasurable role in preventing homelessness and limiting the spread of COVID-19, and for that, we thank you. It has protected vulnerable households and has kept racial inequities related to COVID from getting even worse.

In the spirit of these successes, the Black Members Caucus urge you to extend the moratorium until the legislatively enacted protections are in place in each county, or at least December 31, 2021. A hasty expiration will cause significant harm to the state, and as you may know, working-class and low-income Black, Indigenous and Asian, Pacific Islander, Latinx and rural Washingtonians have had difficulty accessing all of the resources in response to the pandemic.

Evictions should not be allowed to proceed until counties have the key protections in place and counties must be able to demonstrate they are able to prevent evictions. The courts remain extremely backlogged. Cases are not progressing. In addition, the Office of Civil Legal Aid is reporting that the Right to Counsel and Eviction Resolution Pilot Program (as passed in SB 5160) will not be fully implemented statewide until the end of 2021. This uncertainty on the legal process places both renters and landlords in an untenable position.

Further, we urge you to extend the prohibition on rent increases for one year. There are almost 400,000 renters in Washington who are not current on rent. These community members are barely hanging on by a thread, using unsustainable means to meet their basic needs. Rent increases will push many into our already overwhelmed rental assistance programs and will raise the cost of housing stability. The Legislature approved over \$1 billion in rental assistance this past session, but uncontrolled rent increases will strain the ability to cover the arrears already accumulated.

Hundreds of millions in federal and state rental assistance funds that have yet to be dispersed. Some counties need additional time to staff programs as requirements for dispersing funds have become

more complicated and/or lead to inequitable outcomes, especially for residents who are barred from accessing federal funds. In a recent rental assistance implementation survey, 21 counties reported that they will disperse 50% of the rental assistance funds into community by December 2021 and well into 2022. When the renters can access these funds and/or the negotiate a settlement on their arrears, evictions can be avoided.

Washington needs an orderly process to the lifting of the moratorium. We request that you only lift it on a county by county basis only after they can demonstrate to you that it has met essential criteria including:

- 1) The “Right to Counsel” is ready to go in their county,
- 2) A significant amount of their rental assistance dollars are dispersed into community in an equitable manner,
- 3) The Eviction Resolution Pilot Program is in place with sufficient resources to meet the demand in their county.

There will be significant setbacks to racial equity if evictions are suddenly allowed without an orderly county-by-county phase in as we propose. Recent federal census data in the Pulse Survey shows that 34% of Latinx/Hispanic renters and 16% of Black renters in Washington are behind on rent. This is compared to 3% of white households. People with disabilities and families with children also consistently report high rates of rental arrears. The moratorium has been extremely protective against worsening inequality.

Extending the moratorium will protect Washingtonians from unnecessary and prolonged court action, unnecessary anguish as they return to back to work, unnecessary disruption as they fight to keep their families healthy and safe while the state emerges out of this pandemic.

Allowing evictions to proceed before these vital protections are ready will undermine the intent of your moratorium and of the bills and budget investments the Legislature made this session. Washington will experience the flood of evictions and homelessness that so many, including you and your team, have worked so hard to prevent.

Respectfully,



Representative Jamila E. Taylor, JD
Chair, Black Members Caucus