

What is a moratorium?

A moratorium is a delay in an activity or an obligation. Moratoriums are usually issued by an authority such as a state agency or elected official.

Is there a moratorium on evictions in Rhode Island?

On March 17, 2020, Rhode Island courts stopped hearing all non-essential matters, including evictions, until after April 17, 2020. This functions as a moratorium on evictions because the courts will not move them forward, even if they are filed, during this period.

You cannot legally be evicted from your home until an eviction has been processed through the court system and a court order for the tenant to move out (also called an "order of execution") has been issued. You might get letters or legal papers from your landlord during this period, but the courts are not processing new eviction cases until after April 17, 2020.

I heard that evictions are still happening. Is that true?

There are a few steps to legal evictions. Papers have to be filed with the court, a hearing must be scheduled, and after the hearing, a judgment entered by a judge. After a judgement is entered, a court order for the tenant to move out can be issued. The court order to move out can be enforced by an authorized constable or sheriff.

Right now, landlords can still file papers with the court, but hearings will not be scheduled until after April 17, 2020. This means evictions cannot move forward until after April 17.

State authorities are instructing landlords and constables to not enforce court-ordered move outs at this time. However, if the court approved a move out order before the Rhode Island Supreme Court closed on March 17, it can be enforced.

Can my landlord just move me out?

Landlords cannot move you out without going to court and getting a court order.

If someone comes to move you out, make sure that they have a court order signed by a judge. Only a constable or sheriff authorized by the State of Rhode Island can move you out with a court order. Ask to see their credentials and call the police for assistance if they cannot show you proof of ID as a sheriff or constable, or if they do not have a court order. Your landlord cannot just come to your home and move you out even if they claim they got a court order. Only a constable or sheriff can move you out with a court order and they are being instructed by the state not to do that right now.

I have received an eviction notice. What should I do?

You cannot be legally evicted until after the case has been processed through the court system and received a hearing. Hearings are not being scheduled until after April 17, 2020 unless there is an emergency. If you have received a notice, check the hearing date. If the date is before April 17, you can call the court to verify whether the case has been rescheduled.

In the meantime, this still means that your landlord will want to evict you after the courts reopen. You should keep evidence of your efforts to pay rent. You should document any changes to your income at this time and track any conversations you have with your landlord about making partial payments or about losing your income. These will all be important when the courts start to handle these cases again. It is very important that you get and keep receipts for rent that you pay. Proof of payment can be a money order receipt, a canceled check or a receipt from the landlord.

COVID-19 RI FACT SHEET ON EVICTIONS | FOR RENTERS | CONTINUED

Updated 03/23/2020

I heard that the federal government declared a moratorium on evictions and foreclosures. Is that true?

On March 18, 2020, the federal government placed a 60-day moratorium on evictions and foreclosures for single-family homeowners who have government-sponsored mortgages (Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, FHA-insured). Most mortgages fall into one of these categories.

In the coming months, the federal government might offer financial help to tenants, landlords, and homeowners due to the public health emergency. There is not yet federal help for rent.

Where can I go for help with an eviction?

If your landlord is telling you to move out during this emergency, or you have other concerns about your rental apartment, you can call the RI Center for Justice: (401) 491-1101.

If you have Section 8 housing or live in public housing you can call RI Legal Services at (401) 274-2652 to get help and advice about public housing rights and responsibilities. Both RI Legal Services and the RI Center for Justice can answer general housing questions and concerns.

If you are experiencing homelessness, you can go to the nearest shelter or call (401) 277-4316.

I am worried about paying my rent because I have lost income. What should I do?

If you think that you might not be able to pay your rent next month, you should notify your landlord right away to talk about your options. If you have a Section 8 Voucher or another type of rental assistance, you should contact the Housing Authority who issued your voucher, or RIHousing at (401) 457-1125. To report a change in income due to coronavirus to RIHousing, you can email documentation of the change from your job to COVID-19incomeupdate@rihousing.com.

Where can I go for more help?

Depending on what you need help with, there are lots of resources. Call Rhode Island 2-1-1 to speak to someone who will refer you to help based on your needs.

I was disconnected from utilities before the moratorium was put in place by the PUC. Can I get reconnected?

The PUC has ordered that people who had services disconnected before the moratorium can be reconnected by paying 10% of their balance and entering into a payment plan. They also ordered providers that offer low-income discounts, like National Grid, to make sure that people who are eligible for these discounts are enrolled in them. If you've lost your job, or have reduced hours and income, you might be eligible for these discounts now even if you were not in the past. Call the utility provider to talk about getting your service turned on.

If you need help with utility issues, you can contact the RI Center for Justice at (401) 491-1101.

I am worried about paying my utility bills. What should I do?

First, you should contact your utility provider or your city/town to work out a payment plan. The Rhode Island Public Utilities Commission (PUC) has placed a moratorium on shut-offs and collections for utilities regulated by the state (electric, gas, water, sewer) through April 16, 2020. National Grid has announced that they have suspended collections and service disconnections through April 30. Cox Communications has pledged to not terminate service and will be waiving late fees.

The PUC will accept public comment until April 7, 2020 on whether they should keep these protections from shut-offs past April 16. You can send your comments to the PUC clerk at luly.massaro@puc.ri.gov.