



YOUR SLO COUNTY RENTERS' RIGHTS GUIDE DURING COVID-19

Thousands of local residents are out of work due to shelter-at-home orders designed to curb the spread of COVID-19, the illness caused by the new coronavirus — and that means many tenants are likely short on rent money.

But that doesn't mean landlords can kick renters out of their homes. County and state officials in March approved temporary orders prohibiting landlords from evicting tenants until May 31 if they can't pay their rent after losing work or if property owners want to renovate their living spaces.

So what should you do if you can't pay rent or are being forced out of your apartment?

The Tribune contacted the San Luis Obispo Legal Assistance Foundation and California Rural Legal Assistance to get answers to common questions about coronavirus rental housing rules.

WHAT IF I CAN'T PAY RENT BECAUSE I LOST WORK DUE TO THE CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK?

You should write a letter, email or text to your landlord explaining your situation within 30 days of when the rent was due and keep a copy for yourself. It is very important to keep records of your communication with your landlord.

You should also keep letters from your employer saying you've been laid off and pay stubs showing you've lost wages as proof of your situation.

Renters cannot be evicted from their apartments for the following COVID-19-related reasons:

-  Losing work due to the virus outbreak
-  Complying with a Public Health recommendation to stay home, self-quarantine or avoid contact with groups of people
-  Falling ill with COVID-19 or caring for a sick family member
-  Paying large medical bills related to coronavirus
-  Taking on child care responsibilities due to coronavirus school closures

WILL I EVENTUALLY HAVE TO PAY THE RENT I MISSED?

Yes. If your landlord doesn't forgive your rent, you need to pay it within six months after the emergency order is lifted.

If you can't pay your back rent after things get back to normal, your landlord can't evict you. They can, however, take you to court to get their money.

If you can pay your rent during this time – or even a portion of it – you should. It will help you avoid problems later.

WHAT SHOULD I DO IF MY LANDLORD TRIES TO KICK ME OUT OF MY HOME, EVEN IF IT'S NOT BECAUSE I CAN'T PAY RENT?

You should contact the San Luis Obispo Legal Assistance Foundation or California Rural Legal Assistance and ask for help.

Eviction is a legal process – you have a right to a court hearing if your landlord asks you to leave your living space. This applies even if your landlord wants to renovate your home or move in.

The eviction court process won't start until 90 days after Gov. Gavin Newsom lifts the state emergency order. So, effectively, landlords can't even take tenants to court to remove them from their homes for three months after the coronavirus emergency ends.

WHAT IF I'M RENTING A ROOM OR PART OF A HOUSE OR APARTMENT FROM ANOTHER TENANT? DO I HAVE THE SAME RIGHTS?

Yes. All tenants are covered under the emergency coronavirus protections, including those renting space from other tenants, also known as subtenants.

WHAT IF I NEVER SIGNED A LEASE, OR I SIGNED A LEASE WITH A DIFFERENT LANDLORD?

You're still protected under the emergency order. Renters still have rights even if they never signed a lease.

WHAT IF I'M UNDOCUMENTED AND SPEAK ONLY SPANISH? WHO CAN HELP ME?

You're still protected from eviction. The emergency rental rules apply to everyone, whether you're a citizen or not.

Spanish speakers can call the San Luis Obispo Legal Assistance Foundation or California Rural Legal Assistance. Both organizations have bilingual staff members.

For legal advice in English and Spanish, call California Rural Legal Assistance at 805-544-7994 or the San Luis Obispo Legal Assistance Foundation at 805-543-5140.

MY LANDLORD HAS LOCKED ME OUT OF MY APARTMENT OR THREATENED TO LOCK ME OUT. WHAT SHOULD I DO NOW?

You should contact your local police department or the San Luis Obispo County Sheriff's Office. Your landlord is not legally able to lock you out of your apartment without a court order.

It's currently illegal to remove tenants from their homes, and landlords can face criminal misdemeanor charges if they knowingly violate the emergency rental protections.

WHAT IF I'M A LANDLORD OR HOMEOWNER AND CAN'T PAY MY MORTGAGE FOR CORONAVIRUS-RELATED REASONS?

You should contact your bank or mortgage servicer and let them know about your situation as soon as possible. California is working with a group of financial institutions to provide mortgage grace periods and fee and foreclosure relief.

For more information, visit covid19.ca.gov/get-financial-help or covid19.ca.gov/obtener-ayuda-financiera

WHAT RESOURCES ARE AVAILABLE TO ME?

Legal help for tenants (both groups have Spanish-speaking staff)

- California Rural Legal Assistance: 805-544-7994, <http://crla.org/covid-19/slo>
- San Luis Obispo Legal Assistance Foundation: 805-543-5140, slolaf.org
- Note: Staff members told us to leave a message with the best way to contact you if someone doesn't answer the phone. They are responding to all calls but it might take 2-3 business days to get back to you because of the number of people reaching out.

Food

- SLO Food Bank: 805-238-4664, slofoodbank.org

Financial

- Community Action Partnership of San Luis Obispo (CAPSLO): 805-541-2272
 - English resources: capslo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Covid-19-Financial-Relief-Options_040820.pdf
 - Spanish resources: capslo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Spanish-Covid-19-Financial-Relief-Options_040820.pdf

Family Support

- For support in Spanish – Promotores Collaborative of San Luis Obispo County. Call Program Coordinator Fernanda Lucas: (805) 462-7135
- For support in English – Parent Connection of San Luis Obispo County. Call Program Coordinator Gwendolyn Garcia: (805) 543-3700.

SLO County services and assistance programs

- ReadySLO.org: emergencyslo.org/en/virtual-local-assistance-center

This guide was produced by reporter Lindsey Holden and the McClatchy Company with support from the USC Annenberg Center for Health Journalism, and the Center's engagement editor Danielle Fox. The San Luis Obispo Promotores Fernanda Lucas and Erica Ruvalcaba Heredia translated and provided feedback that informed this guide.