

Awaiting A Storm: Baltimore Evictions Looming on July 25th

By Arin Jayes

As the magnitude of the COVID-19 pandemic unfolded in March, the Chief Judge of Maryland ordered all residential evictions to be stayed until July 25th, 2020. This action coincided with Congress passing the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which limits evictions in certain circumstances. With this protection about to be lifted in 10 days amid the ongoing pandemic and struggling economy, residents and tenant advocates say they are bracing for a wave of evictions.

As of April 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has caused almost 20 million temporary and permanent layoff across the United States. Leading economists have stated that the 0.9% change in the unemployment rate is a signal for recession, and that post-pandemic re-employment and consumer spending may lag behind expectations. Laid off workers who are not re-employed after 6 months face hysteresis, a phenomenon in which the longer one is unemployed, the less likely re-employment will occur.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, More than 150,000 renters in Maryland have lost their income during the pandemic and 1 in 5 residential rental units have fallen into delinquency. Kevin Lindamood, president and CEO of Health Care for the Homeless, points out how the pandemic has painfully revealed Maryland's housing affordability crisis that was present before COVID-19. In Baltimore City, 20% of the households are at risk of homelessness, he said, because they spend more than half their income on housing.

On July 1st, dozens of advocates congregated outside a Baltimore courthouse to urge Maryland Governor Larry Hogan and Baltimore Mayor Bernard Young to "cancel rent" and expand housing relief. Groups such as Housing Our Neighbors and the Baltimore Fair Development Roundtable are demanding that the city extend its eviction moratorium and provide permanent housing for all homeless people who live in shelters or temporarily in hotels. They argue that the \$30 million in rent relief set up by counties across the state aren't enough to stop the flood of evictions that the state faces. They call on Hogan to allocate at least \$175 million from the state's Coronavirus Relief Fund towards rental assistance and eviction protection.

Maryland's current housing crisis is not a new one. Baltimore previously ranked as having one of the highest eviction rates in the country. Recent research found that while 96% of landlords have representation to help with their cases in court, just 1% of tenants do. Housing advocates hope that the looming evictions will shed light on the systemic issues that have plagued Baltimore's housing system for year and ignite changes that will last beyond the COVID-19 pandemic.

What can I do to help? Visit Housing Our Neighbors and the Baltimore Fair Development Roundtable to learn more about how you can get involved, volunteer, or voice your opinion about the July 25th deadline.

Need legal resources for your rent situation? Visit the People's Law Library of Maryland and the Maryland Access to Justice Commission.

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