

STATEMENT ON PROPOSED CITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF AN EVICTON MORATORIUM

We fully support the resolution introduced today by Councilmember Gym calling for a moratorium on evictions. While our organizations support the entirety of the resolution, we as tenant advocates want to highlight the importance of an eviction moratorium.

Our country's lack of a social safety net has been laid bare by the coronavirus pandemic, as the most vulnerable citizens will face the greatest consequences. Workers who rely on hourly wages, part-time jobs, and the gig economy face the real risk that their income will dry up. The lack of paid sick or family leave in many places outside of Philadelphia will force people to risk their health and physically go to jobs they cannot do remotely. Parents will scramble to find child care options when their children's schools are shut down; and children who rely on schools for food will not receive it. All while millions of these same families lack access to healthcare, which should be a basic right.

To ease the burden on the most vulnerable families, the City of Philadelphia should use every tool at its disposal during this crisis to ensure that all Philadelphians are secure in their homes. Making sure that people are safe and comfortable at home is one of the most effective ways to protect the health and economic well-being of our neighbors. A moratorium on evictions will help by allowing the most vulnerable families to weather this crisis as best they can and resume their jobs, education, and social life after the outbreak has ended.

Moreover, forcing people to attend hearings in Philadelphia's eviction court would endanger the health of tenants, landlords, court staff, and attorneys. Each morning, dozens, if not hundreds, of people from across Philadelphia are tightly packed together in a small courtroom as the list of eviction cases is read. There is no way to practice "social distancing" when every seat in the courtroom is full. Tenants have no option but to appear in court, or else risk losing their homes.

Seniors, persons with disabilities, and immunocompromised citizens, all of whom are already among the most vulnerable Philadelphians, would be forced to choose between exercising their due process rights to defend critical housing, and risking illness or even death at a rate many times higher than the general population.

Similarly, a spike of coronavirus-related evictions would overwhelm the City's emergency housing providers. And overcrowded shelters or emergency housing centers would present a nightmare for public health officials attempting to stop the spread of this pandemic.

The coronavirus outbreak will exact an enormous financial, emotional, and physical toll on many families throughout Philadelphia. But, the City can blunt the impact by ensuring its citizens enjoy housing security during this time.

We urge City Council to adopt Councilmember Gym's resolution and ask that the First Judicial District, the Sheriff's Office, and Landlord-Tenant Officer take immediate action to suspend eviction court hearings and halt any scheduled evictions.

Signatories:

The Public Interest Law Center

Community Legal Services

Senior Law Center

AIDS Law Project

Legal Help Center

Philadelphia Rent Control Coalition

HELP: MLP at Philadelphia Nurse-Family Partnership

TURN

Legal Clinic for the Disabled

Philadelphia Tenants Union

Philadelphia VIP

Homeless Advocacy Project

Regional Housing Legal Services

Face to Face