



June 18, 2020

To: Governor Kate Brown  
Senate President Peter Courtney  
House Speaker Tina Kotek

From: Clackamas County Chair Jim Bernard  
Multnomah County Chair Deborah Kafoury  
Washington County Chair Kathryn Harrington

Re: Extending Statewide Residential and Commercial Eviction Moratorium

Dear Governor Brown, President Courtney, and Speaker Kotek:

We are writing to urge you to extend Oregon's residential and commercial eviction moratorium in order to alleviate the economic and public health consequences of tenant displacement during the COVID-19 outbreak. State and federal funding to assist businesses and households has been flowing into our communities, however the majority of public funding targeted specifically to address the economic impact of COVID-19 on people's ability to remain housed did not start arriving until late May. In addition, as part of any extension, we also urge you to consider providing support to mortgage holders and landlords who are an integral component in the state's housing system.

#### Residential Needs

Many households seeking assistance for rent owed prior to June 30<sup>th</sup> will not have received assistance before the repayment deadline. Our housing safety net programs have seen a significant increase in calls for rent assistance, notably in the first two weeks of June. As more families see the June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline approaching and are not able to pay their accrued rent, more families are seeking assistance.

Additionally, many households who have not returned to work, have not yet received a full month of pay, have not yet received unemployment benefits, or were not eligible for unemployment benefits will not have enough income to afford July's rent. Extending the moratorium and instituting a six-month repayment grace period will relieve the stress community members are experiencing, allow more time for community-based organizations to distribute the funds, and prevent a significant increase in newly houseless individuals and families in our counties and across the state.

Prior to COVID-19, tens of thousands of residents in our counties earning less than \$50,000 per year were housing cost burdened. Since March 2020, over 100,000 individuals in our counties



have filed for unemployment insurance. Most of those job losses have been concentrated in low-wage industries including hospitality, construction, health care and social assistance, and retail. Workers in these industries were housing cost burdened prior to the pandemic and are least likely to have had savings to help weather a financial emergency.

These job losses have resulted in dramatic increases in requests for rent assistance:

- In Clackamas County, requests for rent assistance increased by 158% from an average of 137 per month in the first four months of 2020 to 354 requests in May.
- In Washington County, Community Action fielded rent assistance requests from callers 931 callers in April, 1,907 in May, and 1,274 in the first ten business days in June alone.
- In Multnomah County, 211 received over 13,000 calls for rent assistance from May 1<sup>st</sup> to May 20<sup>th</sup>.

Our jurisdictions are committed to local action in the limited statutory authority that we have to prevent evictions. The Housing Authorities of Washington and Clackamas County are allowing for a six-month repayment period for any rent arrearages accumulated during the eviction moratorium. The Housing Authorities will be as flexible as possible to anyone with rent arrears living in the properties the agencies own. Multnomah County included a six-month repayment period in its eviction moratorium ordinance.

Our staff and partner organizations continue to assist individual and family tenants to apply for existing rent assistance dollars from the federal Community Development Block Grant (CBDG) and Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) funds, and from the Oregon rent assistance funds that the state legislative emergency board released in April and again in June. Still, given the time it takes to get the needed dollars into the right hands, coupled with the likelihood that the COVID-19 pandemic will persist into fall 2020 or even into 2021, we would welcome extension of the moratorium and would begin our repayment period following its new end date.

### Commercial Needs

Our counties continue to field requests for rent assistance and an extension of the eviction moratorium from commercial tenants, too. Ongoing requests for direct assistance reflect that even with partial reopening, businesses that have storefronts are concerned that they will not be able to make sufficient funds to pay all their bills regardless of reopening. Providing regulatory or financial relief will allow for breathing room for our businesses because even though revenue is down, many business owners are keeping all staff members on payroll. Again, our jurisdictions are doing what we can for this sector, too.

Businesses that are evicted don't often survive and employees are let go, which is why this reprieve will be so helpful – they didn't have to choose between paychecks and rent.



Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Jim Bernard".

Jim Bernard  
Chair, Clackamas County Board of Commissioners

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Deborah Kafoury".

Deborah Kafoury  
Chair, Multnomah County Board of Commissioners

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kathryn Harrington".

Kathryn Harrington  
Chair, Washington County Board of Commissioners