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Philly's eviction diversion program takes step to outlast the pandemic that inspired it



By [Aaron Moselle](#) · December 8, 2021



USPS carrier Henrietta Dixon walks her route to deliver mail in Philadelphia, Wednesday, May 6, 2020. (AP)

Photo/Matt Rourke)

to landlord-tenant court created with keeping thousands of residents in their homes while dramatically reducing the number of eviction proceedings in the city.

Following a hearing held on Wednesday, Council's Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development, and the Homeless approved a bill that would keep the heralded program intact through 2022. It's currently set to expire at the end of this year.

The bill could be passed by the full Council as early as next week.

"We are on a path towards long-term sustainability and seeing resolutions other than eviction moving forward," said Councilmember Helen Gym, who introduced the measure in November.

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The bill does not spell out specifics on a permanent version of the program. It simply enables Philadelphia to continue the effort on its own, without authorization from the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania, which has overseen the temporary program on an emergency basis.

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without a court case, which can [negatively impact a tenant for years](#) even if a judge finds in their favor.

In some cases, that's been accomplished with [emergency rental assistance dollars](#) from the federal government. Other cases have been resolved after a landlord has agreed to extend a deadline, or be paid in a series of installments.

The program, which operates in partnership with the courts and a group of nonprofits, is credited with helping to reduce eviction filings by 75% between 2019 and 2020. The majority of those cases have involved [Black women](#).

"When landlords and tenants are empowered to tackle their issues together, the result is not just a win-win, but it's a win-win-win," Sue Wasserkrug, program administrator for the Good Shepherd Mediation Program told the committee on Wednesday.

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"It's a win for the tenant, who doesn't lose their housing. It's a win for the landlord, who doesn't incur the costs of turnover. And it's a win for the community, by reducing evictions and homelessness and all of the problems associated with that."

To date, the program has worked with more than 2,300 landlord-tenant pairs, and helped the

overwhelming majority of them — more than 90% — reach a resolution through mediation that doesn't involve an eviction proceeding, said Daniel Hyman, a staff attorney with

Another 7,000 tenants have been able to stay in their homes without a mediation session, he said.

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John Solomon, who fell behind on rent when he lost his restaurant job during the pandemic, said Wednesday the diversion program was invaluable, allowing him to stay in his apartment and avoid imposing on his parents, who live on a fixed income.

“If I didn't have this mediation program, it would have caused a very traumatic experience in my life. The program saved my dignity and my self-respect,” said Solomon.

“We have an opportunity here to be groundbreaking,” said Tynetta Edens, [a member of One Pa.](#) of Gym's bill. “If we don't make this program permanent, we can show how a city wastes an incredible opportunity.”

[The Pennsylvania Apartment Association](#), a group representing landlords across the state, testified in support of the bill.

The measure moves as the city awaits word from the state and the U.S. Department of Treasury on requests for an additional \$485 million for its Emergency Rental Assistance Program, an effort launched last May to help landlords and renters experiencing financial hardship as a result of the pandemic.

To date, the program has disbursed more than \$235 million to 37,480 households, according to a city dashboard. Some 30,000 applications have yet to be processed, however, and current



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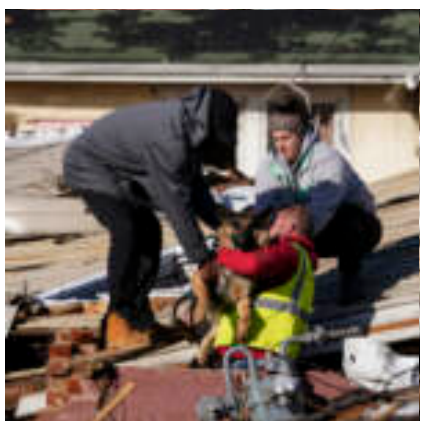
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