

March 4, 2021

Dear Mayor Durkan,

We are writing to urge you to extend Seattle's eviction moratorium for residents, small businesses, and nonprofits beyond its current expiration date of March 31, 2021. We ask that it be extended through the end of this year, and that you announce this extension as soon as possible.

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a rental debt crisis of massive proportions. Black, Indigenous people of color communities are especially hard-hit, facing disproportionate unemployment, loss of income and lack of access to affluent social networks and generational wealth. Many lower-income households are taking on consumer debt to pay bills, including rent, and as the pandemic wears on it's getting harder to keep up.

Vaccination progress has been slow and unpredictable in Washington state and nationwide. It's unlikely that COVID-19 restrictions will be fully lifted before this fall, or even later. Seattle's economy will take time to recover, especially the hardest-hit sectors like restaurants and small retail shops. That also means unemployment will remain high and many tenants will struggle to pay full rent.

Currently, the City of Seattle is in the process of administering a rental assistance program to help tenants who have fallen behind. It will take time to process rental assistance applications and distribute funds. If the moratorium is not extended, then tenants could be evicted before rental assistance is even made available on a large scale to local households.

Council Bills 119784 and 119788, which create payment plans and allow non-payment of rent due to financial hardship to be used as an eviction defense for six months after the city's eviction moratorium is lifted, will help. However, these bills will not prevent a massive wave of eviction filings, causing many tenants to self-evict because they are afraid, don't understand their rights or don't want to fight in court.

Small businesses and nonprofits are struggling, too. It will be quite a while before restaurants are allowed to operate at full capacity, and many small retail and service businesses have had to close temporarily. The eviction moratorium provides security for businesses and nonprofits to work out deals with their landlords to get through the pandemic. This is not the time to take that security away.

Extending the city's eviction moratorium through the end of this year will give tenants time and stability, enabling more renters and small businesses to get caught up on rent and allowing rental assistance programs time to work.

Not knowing whether moratoriums will be extended, sometimes until the last minute, has added to the stress of tenants who are at risk of eviction. Therefore, we ask you to act swiftly in extending the moratorium, doing so in early March rather than waiting until a week or two before the expiration date.

We are concerned that the statewide eviction moratorium may not be extended beyond March 31 or, if it is, may only be extended for a short period of time. This makes it all the more important that Seattle step up and lead, standing up for tenants and small businesses & protecting vulnerable communities. Please act without delay to extend Seattle's eviction moratorium through the end of 2021.

Signed:

350 Seattle
43rd District Democrats
Ballard Community Taskforce on Homelessness & Hunger
Be:Seattle
Body, Heart, and Mind Academy
Cafe Red
Casa Latina
Civic Ventures
Creative Justice
El Centro de la Raza
Faith Action Network
Housing Justice Project
King County Young Democrats
Lake City Taskforce on Homelessness
LGBTQ Allyship
MLK Labor
Nickelsville
North Helpline
OneAmerica
PROTEC17
Puget Sound Sage
Queen Anne Helpline
Real Change
RFPU-NW
Seattle Independent Artist Sustainability Effort
Seattle Indian Health Board
Seattle/King County Coalition on Homelessness
SEIU 775
SEIU 925
Share The Cities Action Fund
SHARE (Seattle Housing and Resource Effort)
Sierra Club Seattle Group
Solid Ground
Standing Against Foreclosure and Eviction (SAFE)
Tenants Union of Washington
The Urbanist
Transit Riders Union
Positive Spin Pole Dance Fitness
UAW Local 4121
UFCW 21
UNITE HERE Local 8
WA-BLOC (Washington Building Leaders of Change)
Washington Community Action Network
Washington Physicians for Social Responsibility
WHEEL (Women's Housing, Equality and Enhancement League)

Working Washington / Fair Work Center
YouthCare