

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

August 31, 2020

The Honorable Benjamin S. Carson, Sr. M.D.
U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20410

The Honorable Steven Mnuchin
Department of the Treasury
1500 Pennsylvania Ave.
NW Washington, DC 20220

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Carson, Secretary Mnuchin, and Secretary Perdue:

Tomorrow, another month's rent will be due for millions of Americans struggling to make ends meet. The coronavirus pandemic has killed more than 180,000 people in the United States and left millions out of work. As the virus continues to ravage our country, we urge you and your departments to take immediate, meaningful action to mitigate the already-growing wave of evictions and to prevent a gut-wrenching rise in homelessness. We trust that you share our common goal of keeping as many Americans as possible in their homes as our nation deals with both the health and economic consequences of this unprecedented pandemic.

The impending eviction crisis and its devastating outcomes are entirely preventable, and Congress has already acted to help families in crisis. In May, the House of Representatives passed the Heroes Act, comprehensive legislation that would provide almost \$200 billion in additional funding for housing and homelessness programs. The Heroes Act seeks to support and protect families by creating a \$100 billion Emergency Rental Assistance Fund, extending and expanding eviction moratoriums to all renters, and assisting people experiencing homelessness by providing \$11.5 billion for Homeless Assistance Grants and \$1 billion in new Section 8 vouchers. A longer-term legislative solution will be critical to help Americans in crisis, but the Administration also has executive authority to take immediate action.

The executive order the President issued on August 8, 2020 has done nothing thus far to prevent evictions and homelessness. Instead, the executive order may harm renters by misleading them into believing that they are protected when they are not. We strongly urge you to use existing authorities at the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Department of the Treasury, and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to implement sweeping eviction moratoriums and deploy other federal funding or policy remedies to stem the tide of this oncoming "tsunami" of evictions.¹

¹ <https://www.nbcnews.com/business/business-news/tsunami-evictions-coming-warn-housing-advocates-n1233965>

To this end, we direct your attention to the enclosed letters sent to each of you from the National Housing Law Project and National Low-Income Housing Coalition citing explicit authorities at each of your respective departments to enact broad eviction moratoriums. These federal eviction moratoriums are necessary steps to prevent catastrophic, long-term fallout for many families and our entire economy.


The pandemic has exacerbated the existing affordable housing crisis, putting more renters at risk of eviction and homelessness. Even before the pandemic, about 8 million of the lowest-income renters paid more than half of their limited incomes on rent.² With so few resources, they were just one financial shock away from housing instability, eviction, and, in worst cases, homelessness.

Without significant and sustained federal intervention, 30 million to 40 million renters could be evicted by the end of the year.³ These are families with children, people with disabilities, and seniors. Economist Mark Zandi estimates that renters already owe \$25 billion in back rent and could owe as much as \$70 billion by the end of the year, a debt they cannot possibly pay off⁴ through no fault of their own. Prior to the expiration in late July of the federal eviction moratorium and enhanced unemployment benefits enacted under the CARES Act, approximately 21 percent of all adult renters were already behind on their rent.⁵ Tenants in “Class C” properties that tend to have the lowest rental rates in a market paid just 54 percent of total rents that were due in June.⁶

Evictions risk lives, drive families deeper into poverty, further burden overstretched health care systems, and make it much more difficult for the country to contain the coronavirus. Studies from cities across the country have demonstrated that people of color, particularly Black and Latinx people, comprise approximately 80 percent of people facing eviction.⁷ These disparities will be exacerbated and further entrenched if the federal government does not take action to provide additional housing protections and resources.

The price of inaction is far greater than the cost of providing essential rental assistance to households at risk of eviction and homelessness.⁸ Keeping Americans affordably and stably housed during this pandemic is both a moral imperative and a public health necessity. Please, Mr. Secretaries, do not delay another day.

Sincerely,


Suzanne Bonamici
Member of Congress

² <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/109380/witnesses/HHRG-116-BA00-Wstate-YentelD-20190430.pdf>

³ https://nlihc.org/sites/default/files/The_Eviction_Crisis_080720.pdf

⁴ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2020/08/06/trump-eviction-moratorium>

⁵ <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2020/demo/hhp/hhp12.html>

⁶ <https://leaselock.com/blog/class-c-rent-payments-covid-19/>

⁷ <https://www.innovations.harvard.edu/sites/default/files/10950.pdf>

⁸ <https://arizona.app.box.com/s/Ocgdsbf8zj7i9rakayy5ehag4n55txwp>

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