

May 12, 2020

Dear Governor Pritzker:

Thank you for the action that your administration has taken thus far in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We appreciate your leadership in this crisis and your concern for the people impacted. We are writing to urge your office to take further action to assist residents who are experiencing issues related to housing.

The below signers are members and allies of the Illinois Energy Efficiency for All (IL EEFA) coalition. IL EEFA's work focuses on making affordable housing healthy, affordable, and energy efficient in Illinois. For the past six years, the coalition has collaborated on work in the affordable housing, financing, utility, regulatory, state agency, clean energy advocacy, energy efficiency, health, environmental justice, and low-income advocacy arenas.

The pandemic makes it clear that the health, fate, and lives of all human beings and life on this planet are unavoidably interconnected. We applaud the actions that have already been taken, and we offer the following suggestions to further assist Illinois residents.

- **Ensure people without homes are housed:** To ensure the safety and security of people without homes, we ask that the state of Illinois and local governments immediately:
 - Continue to take action to convert vacant hotel and motel rooms, dorms, schools, hospitals, parking garages, and large stadiums into homes for people who need them, including those experiencing homelessness and people living in unsafe or unsanitary conditions.
 - Expedite leasing of vacant government subsidized housing units to house people who need them and those affected by the coronavirus federally declared disaster.
 - For people who will not or cannot move indoors, build emergency sanitation sites near homeless encampments and major public transit hubs to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Sites should include 24-hour restrooms and showers, laundry, free hygiene supplies, water stations, COVID-19 testing, caseworkers, and disease prevention information in multiple languages.
 - Provide basic masks for people without homes and N95 masks for those more severely at-risk.
- **Provide rental assistance:** Provide enough rental payment assistance to ensure that renters can afford their housing costs without taking on additional debt and that building owners have the resources necessary to continue to maintain their properties. Eviction moratoriums without rental assistance put renters in a deeper crisis in the future while harming rental housing providers. Provide immediate rental assistance to people who risk losing their homes because of sickness, inability to work, or any other factors related to COVID-19. State and local officials can look to Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds from the CARES act as one potential funding source for rental and mortgage assistance.

- **Continue the statewide eviction moratorium:** We applaud the administration for its step of ceasing enforcement of orders of evictions for residential premises and prohibiting property owners from commencing residential eviction for the duration of the Gubernatorial Disaster Proclamation. The need for affordable housing is crucial at this time and no one should be displaced from their home during this crisis.
- **Prevent mortgage foreclosure:** Urge state-regulated mortgage lenders to offer permanent loan modifications for borrowers who have experienced a decline in earnings, including lowering monthly payments over at least a six-month period. We suggest, at a minimum, capitalizing arrearages and extending the repayment term, or further modifying the loan to reduce the monthly payment, and possibly the principal balance.
- **Provide operating assistance for affordable housing properties (both government subsidized and unsubsidized).** The state should create a fund to provide grants to housing providers so building owners can cover operating expenses, including mortgage payments, to prevent losing rental buildings which are critical to providing housing to under-resourced communities.
 - In Michigan, the housing finance agency gives short-term financial relief for affordable housing owners if tenants are unable to make rent payments during the COVID-19 health crisis. In addition, MSHDA allows short-term payment relief on bond-financed loans. The relief could extend up to 12 months, begin any time up through June 1, 2021 and are granted on a case-by-case basis.
- **Establish clear and accessible communications about new policies:** It is vital for communities to be aware of the resources in place to assist them with housing access during this emergency. This should include leveraging community networks already in place and making sure all announcements and policies are made available in multiple languages and accessible to persons with disabilities.

We thank you for your time and consideration, and we appreciate your response to this unprecedented health and economic emergency. As you continue to work to address this crisis, we urge you to focus heavily on those most vulnerable and ensure that all have access to the lifesaving shelter and resources they need to protect themselves and their families.

Sincerely,

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Better Building Institute

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