



June 8, 2020

RE: Support Rental Assistance Program with Additional Tenant Protections (Agenda Item 11, June 9, 2020 Council Meeting; File 20-0495)

Honorable Mayor and City Councilmembers:

On behalf of Long Beach Forward, I want to thank you for your recent actions to protect Long Beach renters and small businesses from eviction if they aren't able to pay rent during the COVID-19 pandemic. The extension of the eviction moratorium was a critical first step, but it is far from enough to protect our most vulnerable neighbors from falling into homelessness at a time when we all must continue to stay Safer At Home.

Long Beach Forward's mission is to create a healthy Long Beach with low-income communities of color by building community knowledge, leadership, and power. We know first-hand that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated long-standing racial, health, economic, and social inequities in our city and has made already vulnerable communities exponentially more vulnerable. Thus, any and all efforts to mitigate this crisis must lead with equity.

The May 2020 report by the UCLA Luskin Institute on Inequality and Democracy, "[UD Day: Impending Evictions and Homelessness in Los Angeles](#)," forecasts a coming avalanche of evictions and homelessness. In LA County, at least 365,000 renter households have no adult who is employed or has sufficient replacement income to pay rent and thus are in imminent danger of eviction once the current restrictions on evictions expire. Those facing eviction will be heavily concentrated in low-income communities of color. Assuming that only one-third of those evicted with no resources become homeless, **approximately 120,000 households in LA County, including 184,000 children, are likely to become homeless at least for some period over the next several months.**

Given this alarming reality, any efforts to mitigate the housing catastrophe must lead with preventing mass evictions and homelessness. We support the City's efforts to establish the Long Beach CARES Rental Assistance Program to assist low-income renters and their landlords, but in order to effectively stabilize our neighbors and neighborhoods, **any rental assistance must be conditioned on the following:**

- **A temporary prohibition on rent increases through July 31, 2021**
- **A temporary prohibition on all no-fault evictions through July 31, 2021**

Both conditions are needed to prevent bad-actor landlords from taking taxpayer dollars only to turn around and raise rents and/or evict tenants for no-fault reasons such as substantial remodel or relative move-in. Renters across the city have already reported experiencing this kind of harassment. It is in the City's interest to proactively prohibit this abuse of taxpayer dollars, keep vulnerable renters housed, and avoid increasing the number of families falling into homelessness.

Along with requiring additional tenant protections, the City's rental assistance program must be accessible to our neighbors who are low-income, undocumented, and/or have Limited English Proficiency, and the application process must not be so burdensome so as to prevent those who need help the most from applying. Requiring onerous documentation from tenants, including copies of lease agreements, tax returns, W-2s, unemployment benefit letters, cancelled rent checks, etc., is problematic considering many tenants do not have written leases, are denied access to copies of their lease, pay their rent in cash and are not provided receipts, and/or have limited access during the pandemic to their banks which makes retrieving cancelled checks improbable. In addition, many tenants may have an understandable discomfort with providing such personal and private information to the City. Thus, the documentation required should be the minimum necessary to verify the applicant's identity and demonstrate their need.

Finally, the proposed first-come-first-served processing of applications is inequitable and fails to account for the many barriers that our vulnerable neighbors face, including language access and digital access. In accordance with the City's Equity Toolkit, the rental assistance program should "reduce racial, economic, and social disparities to advance equity." Therefore, the distribution of rental assistance funds must be based on both *need* and the reduction of these deep-rooted disparities.

We urge you to support these critical changes to the proposed rental assistance program, in light of the looming eviction and homelessness catastrophe for Long Beach's renter-majority. During this global pandemic and beyond, until everyone is safe, everyone is at risk.

I am copying the City Clerk so that this letter can be included in the public record as public comment related to Council File 20-0495.

Sincerely,



Christine E. Petit, Ph.D.
Executive Director