

CREATE A STATE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM TO PREVENT EVICTIONS AND HOMELESSNESS (House Bill 1277/Ormsby)

The current problem:

Prior to the pandemic, many households in Washington were struggling to pay the rent and the economic impact of COVID-19 has made that worse. In mid-December, approximately 175,000 people lived in households who were not caught up on rent. Many families who were caught up reported relying on unsustainable means to meet their basic needs, including credit cards, loans from friends and family, and selling personal assets. The Department of Commerce estimates that, conservatively, \$100 million per month is needed in rental assistance.

Legislative solution:

The Legislature should fund a state rental assistance program, to help meet the needs related to the pandemic and to reduce evictions and homelessness for the long-term by increasing the state's document recording fee by \$100.

Why it matters:

Without rental assistance, Washington will face a tsunami of evictions and more homelessness. Rental assistance will help people stay in their homes and make sure landlords get paid.

The \$510 million in federal rental assistance coming to Washington will not meet the full need to get tenants caught up and make sure landlords are paid. The expected "K-shaped" recovery means that recovery will be slow for low-wage workers, many of whom will need rental assistance for an extended period of time.

Because people of color are more likely to work the types of jobs most impacted by COVID-19, are more likely to be renters, and were more likely to be struggling to afford housing even before the pandemic, the large majority of people behind on rent are people of color. Failing to prevent evictions and homelessness when the eviction moratorium ends will make current inequities even worse.

Having a safe, stable home makes a difference to a child's education. Over half of those behind on rent live in households with children. Children have been learning remotely for almost a year. If they lose their homes when the eviction moratorium ends, their education will be disrupted even more.

Even before the pandemic, housing was out of reach for many families in Washington. There was a shortage of over 195,000 affordable and available rental homes for very low-income households and 72% of the lowest income households were paying more than half their income for rent. A long-term state rental assistance program will help meet immediate needs and address the already existing housing crisis.

This would bring the total fee related to housing and homelessness to \$185.50, an insignificant amount when buying a home. Calculated over a 30-year mortgage, that is around \$6 a year or 50 cents a month for the home buyer. This modest fee would generate over \$100 million per year to help struggling families and individuals.

Rental assistance is a critical component to preventing people from losing their homes, but it must be coupled with additional protections for renters.