



Monday, March 29, 2021

Article 3

Feds Extend Halt On Evictions Through June

A federal moratorium on evictions during the COVID-19 crisis will continue for three more months.

Housing advocates say the moratorium is part of a needed strategy, alongside rental assistance, in helping keep Ohioans in their homes during the pandemic.

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky on Monday signed a three-month extension of the **order** prohibiting evictions of tenants who can't make rental payments. The new order ends June 30.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a historic threat to the nation's public health. Keeping people in their homes and out of crowded or congregate settings — like homeless shelters — by preventing evictions is a key step in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19," the CDC said in a release.

Marcus Roth, director of communications and development for the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, said the group is glad to see the moratorium extended but that it is disappointed nothing was done to improve it.

"It's been implemented very haphazardly," he said in an interview. "Some courts are really adhering to the spirit of the moratorium, recognizing that people shouldn't be tossed out of their homes during a pandemic. Others are pretty much ignoring it."

"We were really hoping that the administration would take the opportunity not just to extend it but to improve it," he added.

By itself, the eviction moratorium isn't enough to help renters in need, Mr. Roth said. "If you don't help tenants pay off the back rent that they owe after getting laid off, they're just going to get evicted when you lift the moratorium."

The state has already allocated more than \$100 million in federal relief dollars toward rental and utility assistance programs. A pair of companion bills (**HB 167** and **SB 110**) would allocate an additional \$465 million for those purposes are pending in the General Assembly, with the Senate version already having passed the upper chamber. (See **Gongwer Ohio Report, March 17, 2021**)

With the House out for two weeks for spring break, passage will wait until mid-April at the earliest. That isn't much of a problem, said Philip E. Cole, executive director of the Ohio Association of Community Action Agencies. Ohio's CAAs are administering the program through the Development Services Agency.

"We need it to pass, but if it passes in the next three months and has an emergency clause or otherwise takes effect immediately so the funds are to DSA soon, that will meet the needs of Ohioans who are affected by COVID," he said in an email. "In other words, it does not need to pass tomorrow, but sometime soon."

Mr. Roth said the rental assistance helps landlords and tenants.

"It doesn't make sense to rush to evict someone when you could wait a little bit for an emergency rental assistance application to process and get all your arrears paid off and get back to normal," he said.

The funding can pay for rent that is in arrears, which is especially important for tenants who have been without work and unable to pay for months, he said. That's why the assistance is needed in addition to the eviction moratorium.

"If you don't help tenants pay off the back rent that they owe after getting laid off, they're just going to get evicted when you lift the moratorium," he said.

Sen. Hearcel Craig (D-Columbus) said on Twitter Monday that he plans to introduce legislation to help renters with another issue they face: having an eviction on their record. He said the bill would allow Ohioans to have eviction records expunged.

"Ohio families that undergo evictions find out that a temporary hardship has turned into a lifelong barrier to obtain safe, stable, and affordable housing," he said. "This proposal will allow all Ohioans the ability to expunge eviction records."