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Article 4

CDC Re-Ups Eviction Moratorium For Much Of Ohio

After a nationwide moratorium on evictions ended earlier this week, the Biden Administration has implemented new restrictions that only apply to counties with significant spread of COVID-19.

The expiration of the initial order from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on July 31 led to concerns from housing advocates, who warned it would lead to a spike in evictions just as the pandemic faces a new surge driven by the highly contagious Delta variant.

The new moratorium is expected to give officials and community groups more time to distribute emergency rental assistance funds.

CDC Director Dr. Rochelle Walensky on Tuesday signed the **order**, which will expire Oct. 3, that covers counties experiencing "substantial and high levels of community transmission," according to the agency. It also gives more time for rent relief to reach renters and landlords and for vaccination rates to increase.

"The emergence of the delta variant has led to a rapid acceleration of community transmission in the United States, putting more Americans at increased risk, especially if they are unvaccinated. This moratorium is the right thing to do to keep people in their homes and out of congregated settings where COVID-19 spreads," she said in a statement. "It is imperative that public health authorities act quickly to mitigate such an increase of evictions, which could increase the likelihood of new spikes in SARS-CoV-2 transmission. Such mass evictions and the attendant public health consequences would be very difficult to reverse."

The move earned applause from Bill Faith, executive director of the Coalition on Homelessness and Housing in Ohio, who said it currently applies to **70 of the state's 88 counties**. Franklin, Cuyahoga, Hamilton, Montgomery, Stark and Summit counties are all currently covered by the order. Lucas County, with moderate spread, is not.

"We're pleased that the Biden Administration recognized the threat that eviction poses to efforts to

control the spread Covid-19," Mr. Faith said in a statement. "This extension will help prevent unnecessary evictions, at least in places where the virus is spreading, which includes most of Ohio. The order buys two more months to get Emergency Rental Assistance out to tenants, which is especially important because it takes time to build this new program from scratch. Emergency Rental Assistance is critical to help keep people safely housed during this crisis, but it's only short-term relief. We need structural change that expands access to affordable housing so the next public health crisis doesn't immediately become a housing crisis as well."

The distribution of emergency rental assistance has itself generated concerns from advocates and lawmakers. During Monday's Controlling Board, **Rep. Bride Rose Sweeney** (D-Cleveland) asked Matt Redfield, legislative director for the Department of Development, about the disbursement of those federal dollars.

Mr. Redfield did not have those figures readily available but said the department and Community Action Agencies have been working to get that money out.

"I think it's even more important and critical to figure out what's going on after the expiration of the federal moratorium on evictions," Rep. Sweeney said.

Department of Development spokesman Todd Walker said Ohio received more than \$775 million for the program, with \$565 million going to the state itself and \$210 million to eligible local governments. Through June 30, just \$79 million has been used to help 12,680 households. In total, the department has used \$135 million for housing assistance across all funding sources, including the Emergency Rental Assistance program, to help 38,000 households.

"Development will continue to work with Ohio's 47 Community Action Agencies to ensure efficient dispersal of these fund to help Ohioans in need of assistance," Mr. Walker said in an email.

U.S. Sen Sherrod Brown (D-Cleveland) cheered the CDC's new order during a Wednesday conference call with reporters, saying "it's good news that people will not be evicted. That's the most important thing."

He also encouraged the state to work in the next two months to push out rental assistance funds to help both tenants and landlords.

"We need all these dollars out the door to help these families quicker rather than later," he said. "State government and local governments have to do better."

When the CDC moratorium expired, COHHIO said its **analysis** of court data showed eviction filings have remained below pre-pandemic levels but that the restrictions generally didn't stop landlords from starting eviction proceedings.

The state typically had between 7,500 and 10,000 eviction cases per month, and filings have hovered

between 5,000 and 6,600 each month in 2021, COHHIO said.

"The CDC's eviction moratorium was poorly designed and implemented in Ohio so it's impossible to know how many eviction cases were put on hold until the CDC moratorium expired July 31," he said.

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