

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
CONSUMER RELATIONS COMMITTEE  
CONFERENCE CALL MEETING  
July 24, 2020**



**PARTICIPANTS:** Mark Council, Dorsheena Hagler, Mickey Pickett, Eddie Martin, Jr., Joanna Diamond, Malcolm Williams, Athena Haniotis

**I. INTRODUCTION AND READ GROUP AGREEMENTS:** Malcolm Williams

**II. HOUSING POLICY UPDATES – EVICTION PREVENTION** *Joanna Diamond, Director of Public Policy*

- There has been an eviction order in place at the State level and an eviction freeze at the Federal level. The federal restrictions on eviction freeze ends on Saturday and the courts in Maryland and all over the country will start hearing court cases where the outcome to be people getting evicted from their homes starting on Monday July 27th.
- The types of cases not covered under the eviction freeze at the state level are cases that essentially started before the State of Maryland state of emergency that went through on March 25th – those are cases that were already in the works:
  - Tenant holdover actions are when someone has a lease for a year and that year is up. They are put on a month-to-month, and then the landlord them a notice to vacate within 60 days. Those folks under law can still be evicted that is not covered under the order – sheriffs can start executing evictions warrants starting on Monday.
  - Failure to pay rent cases are going to start getting served on August 31
- The eviction order at the State level is in place indefinitely through the official declaration of the public health emergency in the State of Maryland. Any case that is brought is limited to someone that has not been able to pay their rent as a result of COVID – cases that have started March 27 and on are included. If there are any cases for failure to pay rent, those cases are still going to get dismissed. The problem is there are still some of those cases like the tenant holdover cases that are not included because that is not a failure to pay rent and also the public health emergency can end whenever the Governor wants it to end. Another issue is even if the order is extended beyond the public health declarations beyond the governor, all this time rent for many people has been piling up – they have been unable to pay for many reasons, i.e., loss their job because of COVID which was no fault of their own.
- Public Policy is working very hard to both extend the eviction order both for the types of cases and the length of time, and also ensuring there is a significantly higher amount of rental assistance that has been provided by local and state level.

*Comments/Questions:* Under the City's eviction prevention, the only people that are guaranteed help is someone that had 62 or older or under 18 in in their homes, and paid your March rent. People that are clients for HCH are not covered under this unless they have assistance because of homelessness and is sick, they would be eligible regardless of age. If an individual have a voucher, they do not qualified for any assistance. If a person rent was not paid in March or if they have subsidized rent, they are not qualified to get any assistance – not helpful. People still have rent and people with vouchers pay anywhere from 30-60% of the median of their income towards rent. If people don't have income or unemployment and is not covering at least 60% of what they was making when they was working, they are not making enough to cover rent, bills and everything else – this is an example of people not being helped by the City and State and facing eviction. What is HCH doing to try to address this influx, and the loop holes in the system, because there is one client and one CRC member looking at homelessness next week?

*Responses:*

- Eddie will further this conversation.
- Joanna: These loop holes are real – and the advocacy that HCH is doing to make sure that there is just more money. The Baltimore City rental assistance fund was opened, was extended, but now it's closed. Baltimore County had about \$1m and that ended in a week. The City applied for federal funds in the amount of about \$30m and they got \$13m. The reality is there is not leadership at the highest level and we cannot bank of federal funds, but there is funds at the State level that is not getting release and we have to continue to put pressure on the State to release those funds. Also, if a person has not been able to pay their rent starting in March, there is a little more time for those type cases because the State eviction Order is still in place.

*Comments/Questions:* If a person received an eviction notice prior to March and pays the back rent up to March, would that person be able to use COVID for not paying their rent after March?

*Response:* It depends on the State, if there is a warrant of restitution. The court is well within their rights to seek that and so they can potentially evict them, however there are cases if they haven't already got evicted, they are able to pay their rent and then potentially utilize that they haven't been able to pay April and on because they loss their job because of the global pandemic - that is where the order is utilized. It's very likely going to be on a case-by-case basis which is unfortunate.

*Comments/Questions:* If someone misses January and February's rent, will the warrant be for January through July?

*Response:* No, the warrants will be for April, May, and June only.

*Comments/Questions:* People that have a mortgage are not being penalized for not being able to make their mortgage payments, they are not being ask to pay interest, or even penalized on their credit. Why aren't these people with mortgages that are also landlords trying to help their renters, especially if the renter has lost their income due to COVID? The renter is still being penalized for not being able to make payments.

*Response:* The late fees and some of the other debt that gets accrued from the renter is another loop hole in the eviction order that HCH is advocating for. We are also asking the Governor to extend the order during the pandemic.

### **III. CLIENT MAIL ISSUES:**

Committee discussed some issues with clients receiving their mail. Discussed possibly increasing the window of time for clients to get their mail. Suggested HCH holding the client mail for 2 months instead of 1 month – gives people the opportunity to collect their prior month mail before it is returned. Also, reviewing and discussing the client mail policy, and making sure that clients are informed of the policy along with any changes.

Malcolm has scheduled a meeting with Aisha Darby for next week to discuss the mail issues and will report back to the committee.