

NY to end eviction ban, reopen rent relief site

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Body

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — New York will let its eviction and foreclosure moratorium expire at the end of the week, but will once again let people apply for eviction protection and rent relief, Gov. Kathy Hochul said Tuesday.

The state Office of Temporary Disability Assistance said the application portal will open at 10 p.m. Tuesday — even though the state doesn't have enough money to provide any more rent relief, absent a deluge of federal funding. Applicants get protection from eviction while the state reviews their application.

A state judge last week ordered New York to reopen the application portal for now, as the court considers a lawsuit filed by tenants and the Legal Aid Society.

Tenant advocates say it's unfair for the state government to leave thousands of still-struggling New Yorkers without eviction protections, particularly as the eviction ban is about to end Saturday.

Lawyers for the Hochul administration have argued it's wrong to offer false hope to applicants whose landlords won't receive rent relief without more aid from Washington.

Hochul used her Tuesday press conference to make clear that she plans to let the eviction moratorium expire.

"What we want to do is let people know that is concluding, very shortly," Hochul said. "I'm having conversations with the Legislature on what to do."

She said New York extended its eviction moratorium last fall even as other states let theirs end, and that she and other governors, including from California, will again ask the federal government for more assistance.

Lawmakers are considering other ways to help tenants, including legislation that would make it much harder for landlords to evict tenants.

New York has spent about half of \$2.4 billion in federal funding for emergency rent relief. Much of the remainder has yet to reach landlords because, according to the state, it's having trouble contacting landlords and tenants.

New York is set to receive just \$27 million in extra federal rent aid — a sliver of the nearly \$1 billion Hochul sought last fall.

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Joseph Strasburg, president of the **Rent** Stabilization Association, which represents 25,000 owners and managers housing over 2.5 million people in New York City, said the state should keep pushing for federal aid and fully reopen housing courts.

"It's time to end the **eviction** moratorium and put an end to tenants skipping the **rent** because there are no repercussions for not paying," Strasburg said.

He said existing state law allows tenants to argue in court that they can't pay **rent** because of a COVID-19 financial hardship.

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Hispanics in Florida protest rent hike and possible eviction

CE Noticias Financieras English

January 12, 2022 Wednesday

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Body

Miami, Jan. 12 - More than twenty tenants of an apartment complex in Hialeah, Florida (USA), demanded Wednesday that local authorities respond immediately to an exponential rent increase of up to 60% that could lead to eviction.

The protesters, mostly Hispanics and tenants of a building located at 1501 West 42nd Street in Hialeah, a city near Miami, claim that as of February 1st they will have to pay an increase of up to 60% of the rent or else they will have to leave.

The decision of the owners of the property was notified to them "with very little time" in advance, according to the demonstrators, who showed signs reading "No to eviction" and "No one leaves Hialeah".

Other signs displayed by the protesters, who represent about 20 affected families, read "No to gentrification."

"Here we used to pay around \$1,050 (a month) and they raised it (the rent) to \$1,650; since Dec. 22 they left us a notice saying we had to pay that or else leave," Denio Abel Sierra, who works as a driver, told Efe.

"What lives here is a working class. This is disrespectful. They said they had studied the market, but that is a lie. We don't want them to pay us rent, we are protesting to have a fair rent," added Sierra, who has been living in the building for four and a half years.

For her part, María Rubí, detailed that, from paying 900 dollars a month, she will now have to pay 1,650 dollars a month.

"I've been living here for 25 years, nothing like this has ever happened before. This is not Miami Beach or Downtown for them to raise the rent so much," the woman complained.

Some tenants of the two-story building do not have an annual lease, as is customary in the United States, and pay month to month.

The protesters, some of whom have lived in the building for about 20 years, asked for annual leases for no more than \$1,200 per month.

Others indicated that, in the face of possible eviction, they are looking for rental options in a real estate market currently in high demand and with few offers.

According to RealPage, a real estate data analytics firm, professionally managed apartment rentals increased 10.3% in the third quarter of 2021.

While landlords have rights, so do tenants, a real estate agent acknowledged to a local media outlet.

Hispanics in Florida protest rent hike and possible eviction

"You have the right to be told when there are intentions to sell the house. You have a right to at least 30 days' notice," Rosa Decarlo, a real estate agent with Keller Williams Realty Partners SW, told CBS Channel 4 on Wednesday.

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COVID rages, rent assistance ends, eviction court fills

The Philadelphia Daily News

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Body

WHEN Landlord Tenant Court reopened for the first time in the new year, up to 100 people found themselves packed into a courtroom roughly the size of a 7-Eleven.

Some mothers cradled their children in chairs, while others stood because there were no more chairs to be had. Landlords and tenants, young and elderly, awkwardly tried to maintain social distance as they waited to be summoned for their case.

Coronavirus cases were reaching record highs - and yet the courtroom was more crowded than it had been in two years.

"There wasn't anywhere to stand where you weren't standing within a foot of somebody," said Peter Valle, an attorney at the Legal Clinic for the Disabled who was there last Monday. "It's probably the most crowded place I've been since the pandemic."

Court schedules indicate the First Judicial District returned Jan. 3 to a pre-pandemic process for hearing disputes between landlords and tenants, often revolving around thousands in unpaid rent.

Last year, the court relied heavily on Zoom meetings and staggering in-person hearings to avoid overcrowding. But it reverted to a pre-pandemic schedule to kick off 2022, summoning parties for each case en masse ahead of morning and afternoon sessions.

Hearing safety concerns from court-goers, court officials told The Inquirer they plan to reduce the number of in-person cases at Landlord Tenant Court by about 65% within two weeks, offering more teleconference hearings instead.

While the overcrowding has declined since early last week, the sardine-can courtroom is a symptom of larger problems that advocates fear will escalate in the year ahead: The courts are backlogged with cases, cash for emergency rental assistance is nearly dry, and eviction filings are on the rise.

According to data compiled by the Eviction Lab, a Princeton University-based project that monitors eviction proceedings, Philadelphia saw over 300 new eviction cases filed in the first full week of the year - the highest volume since the pandemic began. It's also a sharp increase from the months when the eviction moratorium ended in October, where landlords filed about 40% of their typical number of cases.

COVID rages, rent assistance ends, eviction court fills

Carl Gershenson, project director at the Eviction Lab, said Philadelphia's rental assistance and diversion programs helped delay the tide of new eviction filings, compared with other cities.

"The numbers everywhere are going up," Gershenson said. "Now that the aid is running out, there's undoubtedly astrong upward trajectory."

Fears about a nationwide eviction "tsunami" gained steam as eviction moratoriums came to an end last year, but Gershenson said much of the speculation was based on exaggerated estimates, with some think tanks projecting as many as 40 million Americans at risk of eviction once the moratoriums lapsed.

That said, legal evictions do not happen overnight, and it could take months to know the true scope of the crisis.

With the current backlog of cases, Gershenson said it's unlikely Philadelphia's court could process more than the 20,000 eviction proceedings typically filed each year, meaning that an eviction spike, if any, might play out over a long period of time. Landlord groups tell their members the average case can take more than six months to resolve.

Philadelphia has extended its nationally renowned eviction diversion program for another year. Researchers and advocates credit the program with preventing a flood of displacements. Under the current system, landlords cannot seek eviction for nonpayment before attending a mediation session with tenants and applying for rental assistance.

But the city's cash aid for renters - more than \$250 million disbursed to nearly 40,000 households since 2020 - is nearly gone. Officials stopped accepting new applications for the program last week, stoking fears among both tenants and landlords.

The current eviction diversion program can continue only as long as the city has enough rental assistance available. Officials have asked for \$485 million in additional federal funds and said they would revamp the program if the money doesn't materialize.

Greg Wertman, president of Hapco Philadelphia, which represents many of the city's small and midsize landlords, said the funds have been a blessing. "I've told everyone, 'Go get the money,'" Wertman said.

Landlord groups worked with lawmakers last year to expedite what they describe as burdensome processes that slowed the eviction process. Changes include reducing the required time between mediation and eviction from 45 days to 30 days. Landlords will also be able to post resolution offers to their tenants online, which could help avoid mediation altogether.

Still, some landlords have not been paid in years. And short of more money, eviction cases will likely continue to increase.

"The courts are the courts, we can't control how they pack a room," said Andre del Valle, director of government affairs at the Pennsylvania Apartment Association. "Our landlords don't want to go through this process. They don't want to create instability. But this is the result of the failure of programs meant to cover both parties."

Martin O'Rourke, spokesperson for the First Judicial District, said the courts will grant extensions to any subpoenaed tenant who requests to hold their hearing remotely until Jan. 23.

"Requests for continuances are being liberally granted," O'Rourke said, adding that 98% of the court staff is vaccinated.

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Philadelphia alters eviction diversion program amid low rent aid

Newstex Blogs

Axios

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Philadelphia is making some adjustments to the city's eviction diversion initiative after closing its rental assistance program[1] Friday due to low funds.

What's happening: Landlords seeking eviction will continue to have to participate in the diversion program through 2022, but now there's a shortened mediation period and an opportunity to expedite the process entirely.

Catch up fast: The city decided[2] last month to make the eviction diversion program — an emergency housing protection set up during the pandemic — permanent through 2022. Philadelphia requires that all landlords seeking to evict a tenant apply to the diversion program before filing. But prior to this week, they were also required to apply to the now-defunct rental assistance program. What's new: The city announced changes to the diversion program Monday, including a requirement that landlords provide a notice of diversion rights[3] to tenants by mail. The notice must include an updated ledger account of balances owed and any other conflicts that can be discussed in mediation. The diversion program's required time that landlords participate in mediation before filing for eviction will drop from 45 days to 30 days. Landlords can also now propose an agreement directly into the eviction diversion web portal[4] if they choose, which could expedite the process. If the tenant agrees to it, a mediation doesn't have to happen. Of note: All landlords must apply through the web portal. There was formerly an option to automatically enroll when applying for rental assistance. Between the lines: The city confirmed to Axios it expects to receive around \$8.3 million from the federal government for additional emergency rental assistance. It's far less than the \$485 million the city originally requested. Philadelphia will use the funds for rent aid applications that have already been submitted. What they're saying: City Councilmember Helen Gym, who spearheaded the eviction diversion program, expressed disappointment that there isn't enough rental assistance. But she reiterated that the diversion program is still vital because "mediation is now a right of tenant that can be exercised." Rachel Garland, a housing lawyer at Community Legal Services, said even without rental assistance, the program is still able to help tenants and landlords in need of support reach agreements before evictions are filed.

Meanwhile, Andre Del Valle, director of government affairs at the Pennsylvania Apartment Association, said the group is supportive of the reduced mediation timeline. "I think you want to have a good balance of keeping people in their homes but you also want to balance landlords getting the areas they've desperately needed going into year two of this pandemic." What to watch: Gym plans to advocate for putting aside a portion of the city's budget for rental assistance in the coming months.

Philadelphia alters eviction diversion program amid low rent aid

What to do: If you're a tenant and received a diversion rights notice, call the Philly Tenant Hotline at 215-334-HOME (4663) to participate in the program. Every tenant is assigned a housing counselor and the hotline will set up an appointment between the tenant and landlord.

[1]: <https://www.axios.com/local/philadelphia/2022/01/06/philadelphia-rent-assistance-program-closing> [2]: <https://www.axios.com/local/philadelphia/2021/12/16/philadelphia-eviction-diversion-program-2022> [3]: <https://dpd-eviction-diversion-documents.s3.amazonaws.com/Notice%2Bof%2BDiversion%2BRights%2B%28final%2Bbilingual%29.pdf> [4]: <https://eviction-diversion.phila.gov/#/>

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