

March 12, 2020

The Hon. Mayor Levar Stoney  
City of Richmond  
900 East Broad Street, Suite #201  
Richmond, VA 23219

Re: Emergency actions requested to slow the COVID-19 Coronavirus

Dear Mayor Stoney:

In the wake of today's recommendation from the City to postpone or cancel large events within Richmond – and as requested yesterday by Senior Policy Advisor Osita Iroegbu – the attorneys and organizers at Legal Aid Justice Center, Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, and Virginia Poverty Law implore you to take the following emergency actions to slow the COVID-19 coronavirus.

Reliable media reports inform us that the U.S. is 10-14 days from a major health crisis which will overwhelm our health care system. Action taken now will slow the spread of Covid-19, delay many illnesses, allow our health care system a better opportunity to respond, and ultimately save lives.

Housing needs specific action. Because the General District Court normally is packed with eviction cases, tenants are wondering if they are susceptible to getting sick in the courtroom environment. In addition, if a person has COVID-19 and is evicted, they will have no place to self-quarantine, leading to further unnecessary spread of what now officially is a global pandemic. To address these concerns, we entreat you to take the following emergency actions:

1. Urge the Richmond Redevelopment and Housing Authority (RRHA) to extend the eviction freeze for nonpayment of rent beyond the current expiration date of May 1, 2020.
2. Urge RRHA to offer the “no questions asked” repayment agreements beyond the current expiration date of May 1, 2020.
3. Urge housing providers which have received assistance from Richmond's Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF) to freeze evictions due to nonpayment of rent, and to freeze foreclosures due to nonpayment of mortgages.
4. Urge publicly subsidized (HUD subsidized and Low Income Housing Tax Credit – LIHTC subsidized) Richmond landlords to freeze evictions due to nonpayment of rent.
5. Urge other Richmond landlords and mortgage companies generally to freeze evictions due to nonpayment of rent, and to freeze foreclosures due to nonpayment of mortgages.
6. Request that Governor Northam issue a statewide freeze on evictions due to nonpayment of rent, and a statewide freeze on foreclosures due to nonpayment of mortgages.

7. Issue a moratorium on utility cutoffs for natural gas and water/sewer services by the Richmond Department of Public Utilities (DPU), and direct that all such disconnected utilities be reconnected with no charge or deposit.

8. Request that Governor Northam issue a statewide moratorium on utility cutoffs for electric services by Dominion Energy, Appalachian Power, and all other electric utilities, and request that all such disconnected utilities be reconnected with no charge or deposit.

9. Keep the cold weather overflow shelter open beyond April 15. Additionally, create new shelter bed space (for example, using the Coliseum), and halt the closure of the Shockoe Bottom homeless encampment until extra shelter beds are set up.


10. Impose a moratorium on all foreclosures of City tax liens on residential property.


11. Extend the City's application for Tax Relief for the Elderly and Disabled beyond the current deadline of March 31, 2020.


12. Distribute the New York City Health Department guidance for shelter operators to all operators of homeless shelters in Richmond. The guidance is available at <https://www1.nyc.gov/assets/doh/downloads/pdf/imm/guidance-for-congregate-settings-covid19.pdf>

Your Administration continues to work on the goal of "One Richmond." Richmond can and should be a leader in a local response which boldly protects the safety and health of all residents. We ask for your immediate action.

Respectfully,

  
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