

May 1, 2020

Honourable Jason Kenney
Premier of Alberta
307 Legislature Building
10800 - 97 Avenue
Edmonton, AB
T5K 2B6

Dear Premier Kenney:

We are writing to you regarding the expiration of the eviction ban your government announced on March 27, 2020.

As you are aware, the ban on evictions for non-payment of rent and/or utilities ended yesterday. Starting May 1st, landlords can begin eviction proceedings through the Residential Tenancy Dispute Resolution Service (RTDRS) if the landlord and tenant do not come to an agreement regarding the repayment of late rent and/or utilities.

While we hope every landlord and tenant in the province will form a repayment agreement, we know this is an unrealistic assumption. Many tenants and landlords are likely to come to some type of agreement, but it is also quite likely there will be instances where no agreement can be reached. As a result, landlords can begin the eviction process. While we know the eviction process can take time, there is still a very good chance people will be evicted from their homes in the middle of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

In the Edmonton Social Planning Council's recent report, "The High Cost of Waiting: Tenant-Focused Solutions to Enhance Housing Affordability," released earlier this year, we heard extensively of the heavy toll – financial, psychological, and mental – from those who were placed on the bottom of a year's long wait list to access rental assistance programs for which they were qualified to receive.

They were faced with very strong financial burdens – having to access food banks to meet their basic needs and still having a tough time paying for other living expenses, such as heating or medications. No matter what prudent steps they took to live on a tight budget, they were always one emergency expense away from falling completely behind and slipping through the cracks. As a result of these excruciating wait times, some people became homeless while waiting and many more were at severe risk of becoming homeless.

We are requesting the Government of Alberta provide financial support to renters who have lost income due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This will allow Albertans to stay in their homes and ensure landlords are able to pay their bills too. This is a win-win for both parties, and our province.

We are also urging you to extend the eviction ban, at the very earliest, until the public health emergency is lifted. British Columbia, Ontario, Saskatchewan, and Quebec have all taken this step and not doing so makes Alberta an outlier in the country.

Evicting Albertans at a time like this could have disastrous effects for Albertans and the broader public health of our province. Public health officials have advised everyone to stay home during the pandemic, but evicting people during this time could force them into a friend or family member's house, or possibly even a shelter. This could result in the further spread of COVID-19, threatening the health and safety of our entire province.

To protect the health and safety of Albertans, I urge you to act now.

Sincerely,

Michael Phair
Former City Councillor, Ward 4

Susan Morrissey, ED
Edmonton Social Planning Council

Cc:
Nate Glubish, Minister of Service Alberta
Josephine Pon, Minister of Seniors and Housing
Rachel Notley, Leader of the Official Opposition