



July 8, 2020

Hon. Judge Kim Berkeley Clark  
437 Grant Street, #330  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

Hon. Judge Christine Ward  
819 City-County Building  
414 Grant Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

To the Honorable Judge Kim Berkeley Clark and the Honorable Judge Christine Ward:

We, the below signed, represent Allegheny County-based landlords, tenant advocates, nonprofits, and elected officials. We collectively are asking you to use your discretionary authority to reestablish a moratorium on eviction filings, the scheduling of eviction hearings, and the issuance and execution of orders for possession, for reasons other than exigent threats to health and safety, until at least September 30, 2020.

The COVID-19 pandemic continues to pose huge challenges to people in Allegheny County. There has been a resurgence in infections, with record-breaking numbers of new cases announced nearly every day. Families are struggling with months of unemployment, uncertainty about whether they will have money to buy food and other essentials, the serious health risks attendant to the COVID-19 pandemic, *and* a months-long absence of childcare with an uncertain future for childcare and schooling. This all comes on top of the financial challenges that many of our constituents faced *before* the pandemic hit.

The State and County have allocated significant CARES Act funding to help low- and moderate-income renters who have difficulty making rent payments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Allegheny County could receive as much as \$22.5 million from the State and is expected to allocate \$10-\$15 million of its own funds for that purpose. July 6, 2020 was the first day that landlords or tenants could apply, and the application deadline is September 30, 2020. We do not know whether this and other rental assistance that is available locally will be enough to meet the need. There are also barriers that could prevent eligible tenants from accessing the funding which will take time to overcome. Allegheny County, the Pittsburgh Urban Redevelopment Authority and the Community Justice Project all plan to engage community organizations to provide outreach to vulnerable populations and help applicants assemble the necessary documentation, but that assistance is not yet in place.

Over the next few months, CARES Act rental assistance funds could prevent five thousand or more eviction filings in Allegheny County for non-payment of rent. This would have a tremendous impact on tenants, landlords and Court administration. Researchers with CMU's CREATE Lab have estimated that, based on historical filings alone, Allegheny County faces a backlog of over 4,000 MDJ eviction cases that would normally have been filed between March 27, when the Pennsylvania Supreme Court ordered the closure of all Courts throughout the Commonwealth, and July 10, when the Governor's executive order is set to expire. Economic losses due to the COVID-19 pandemic could increase that number.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court's May 27 Order regarding the Cessation of the Statewide Judicial Emergency after June 1, 2020, makes it clear that President Judges retain the authority to exercise emergency powers after June 1 as they deem prudent, by filing a self-effectuating declaration with the Supreme Court Prothonotary. On July 2, the President Judge of the Philadelphia Court of Common Pleas entered an Order (1) postponing all currently scheduled eviction hearings until September 2 or until further order of court, (2) postponing the scheduling of hearings on all newly filed eviction cases indefinitely, and (3) postponing the issuance and service of writs of possession indefinitely. A subsequent Order on July 6 suspended all supersedeas payments and the termination of supersedeas for failure to make payment until September 8 or until further order of court.

It is clear to us, representatives of the parties most impacted by the eviction moratorium, that we should collectively do everything within our power to ensure that residents of Allegheny County are not faced with the threat of losing their home during a resurgence of the COVID-19 pandemic. We also believe that it would be prudent to give Allegheny County time to deploy the substantial rental assistance resources that it now has to resolve COVID-related rental delinquencies before opening the Courts to new eviction filings. We therefore ask that you use your discretion to reestablish a County-wide moratorium on eviction filings, the scheduling of eviction hearings in pending cases, and the issuance and execution of orders for possession, for reasons other than exigent threats to health and safety, until at least September 30, 2020.

If any of us can be of any assistance to you, please do not hesitate to ask.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jennifer Rafanan Kennedy  
Pittsburgh United

Larry Swanson  
ACTION-Housing, Inc.

Megan Stanley  
Pittsburgh Commission  
on Human Relations

Lisa Schroeder  
The Pittsburgh Foundation

Jala Rucker  
Pittsburgh Union of Regional Renters

Brandi Fisher  
Alliance for Police Accountability

Kevin Quisenberry  
Community Justice Project

Teireik Williams  
Trap Panther Party

Shad Henderson  
Neighborhood Allies

Ivette Mongalo-Winston  
Mon-Win Consulting

Aweys Mwaliya  
Somali Bantu Community Association

Anne Wright  
CMU CREATE Lab

Jasiri X  
1 Hood Media

Megan Confer-Hammond  
Fair Housing Partnership

Mark Masterson  
Northside Community Development Fund

Ken Regal  
Just Harvest

Monica Ruiz  
Casa San Jose

Black Activists/Organizers Collective

Senator Jay Costa  
Senator Lindsay Williams  
Rep. Sara Innamorato  
Rep. Austin Davis  
Rep. Dan Deasy

John Katz  
Brandywine Communities

Bob Damewood  
Regional Housing Legal Services

Juan Garrett  
Riverside Center for Innovation

Naomi Ritter  
The Finesse Institute

Cheryl Hall-Russell  
BW3

Laura Chu Wiens  
Pittsburghers for Public Transit

Robert Racunas  
Neighborhood Legal Services Assoc.

Dave Breignan  
Lawrenceville United

Carl Redwood  
Hill District Consensus Group

Ed Nussr  
City of Bridges Community Land Trust

Dr. Jamil Bey  
Urbankind Institute

Jackie Smith  
Pittsburgh Human Rights City Alliance

Janel Young  
JY Originals

Olivia Bennett  
District 13 County Councilwoman

Bethany Hallam  
County Councilwoman At-Large