

March 20, 2020

Dear Mayor Stothert, Omaha City Council, and Douglas County Commissioners:

We're calling on your leadership in this time of uncertainty to ensure our community is best prepared to stay healthy and safe. Since all are being asked to remain in our homes to protect community health, it is critical that our leaders take action to ensure members of our community have homes in which to remain. In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the economic hardship this will bring to our community and those across the state, we urge our leaders to take immediate action to prevent evictions for the duration of this state of emergency.

We have not even begun to understand the extent to which COVID-19 will dramatically increase economic instability for our community, particularly for those families who live paycheck to paycheck. As more workers are unable to safely go to work and with many low-income workers lacking access to any paid sick leave, this pandemic will directly impede the ability of our community's residents to work and provide for their families.

With disruptions in regular sources of income resulting from this crisis, this public health emergency will quickly become an economic one. Local utility companies (MUDⁱ & OPPDⁱⁱ) are protecting customers during this difficult time by suspending service disconnections due to non-payment. In addition, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) is taking action to stop foreclosures and evictions on certain FHA-insured mortgages.ⁱⁱⁱ We encourage leaders in our community to now take additional steps to ensure that families are able to stay in their homes during this emergency.

In addition, evictions and resulting homelessness will be counterproductive to public health efforts to contain the virus and will dramatically impact the risks and spread of COVID-19. Individuals experiencing homelessness often face additional health conditions resulting from exposure to the elements, poor living conditions, and limited health care access that puts them at higher risk of contracting and experiencing extreme symptoms of COVID-19. Homelessness limits ability to self-isolate and practice social distancing. Already limited resources, such as shelters or food banks, will be further strained, crowded and become particularly vulnerable to the spread of infectious diseases.

With an average of 4,823 eviction actions filed annually in Douglas County – or approximately 92 per week – and 40 eviction hearings scheduled in Douglas County Courtroom 20 this Friday, March 20 alone, we must take immediate policy action to get ahead of the economic fallout. Cities and states across the country are implementing eviction suspensions in response to this pandemic. It's time for our community to join their leadership.

We, the undersigned organizations, urge leaders in our community to take decisive action to protect the safety and stability of our citizens by enacting an eviction moratorium in line with the following goals:

- Ensure that judicial eviction procedures do not themselves undermine social distancing requirements by increasing interpersonal interactions or by obligating persons to visit courts or attend in-person hearings;
- Prevent anyone from being displaced from that person's home throughout the complete duration of the COVID-19 pandemic; and,
- Ensure that no persons against whom eviction cases have already been started or initiated during the pandemic are not prejudiced in their ability to redeem the tenancy or defend against the claim by reason of social distancing measures.

We are committed to working with you on this effort during this extraordinary time of crisis for our community and our state.

Sincerely,

Coalition for a Strong Nebraska	North Omaha Neighborhood Alliance
College Possible	Omaha By Design
COVID-19 Community Response Task Force	Omaha Together One Community
Family Housing Advisory Services	Planned Parenthood North Central States
Habitat for Humanity of Omaha	Policy, Research & Innovation
Heartland Workers Center	Restoring Dignity
I Be Black Girl	Rise
League of Women Voters Greater Omaha	South Omaha Neighborhood Alliance
Legal Aid of Nebraska	Spark CDI
Metro Area Continuum of Care for the Homeless	Survivors Rising
Nebraska Appleseed	Together
Nebraska Civic Engagement Table	University of Nebraska- College of Law, Civil Clinical Law Program, Tenants' Rights Project
Nebraska Children and Families Foundation	Voices for Children in Nebraska
Nebraska Housing Developers Association	Women's Fund of Omaha
New Leaders Council Omaha	Young Black & Influential
No More Empty Pots	

CC: Mayor Stothert
Omaha City Council
Douglas County Board
Tim Dunning, Douglas County Sheriff
Hon. Sheryl Lohaus, Douglas County Court Judge

ⁱ Metropolitan Utilities District, "COVID-19," <https://www.mudomaha.com/node/5359>.

ⁱⁱ Omaha Public Power District, "Keeping the power on remains top priority amid COVID-19," March 13, 2020, <https://oppdthewire.com/keeping-the-power-on-while-covid-19-plans-in-place/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, "Mortgagee Letter 2020-04," March 18, 2020, <https://www.hud.gov/sites/dfiles/OCHCO/documents/20-04hsgml.pdf>.