



# Small Property Owners Association

Families who own & operate over half of America's rental housing

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September 17, 2020

The President  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, DC 20500

## **RE: Requesting free Covid testing for tenants wanting to move and a prompt end to the CDC eviction moratorium**

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of small landlords across the country, I urge you to investigate the likely impact on rental housing of the CDC's recent decision to impose an eviction moratorium – for almost the entire U.S. rental housing stock – until December 31.

For health reasons, the CDC moratorium stops eviction of renter households who are not paying rent. But it will place many small landlords in peril, those who provide an essential service but now cannot require payment for it.

The predictable impact will be substantial and quick in lower-income neighborhoods especially. In these neighborhoods, small landlords predominate, rents are lower, operating budgets are tight, pandemic shutdowns have caused the most layoffs. Any sustained nonpayment of rent for owners of a few low-rent units will push them quickly out of business, their housing will be abandoned and often permanently lost, and tenants will be displaced anyway, despite the moratorium.

The CDC's decision is based on a medical concern regarding the risk of Covid-19 transmission if evicted renter households are forced to move into "congregate or shared living settings, or [to] unsheltered homelessness." All well and good. But tenants need to move for one or more reasons: to a new job, to a new living arrangement where they can afford the rent, and to stop the financial distress on small landlords and the prospect of low-rent housing permanently lost.

Therefore, we urge the CDC and your administration to establish protocols to facilitate safe household relocation during the pandemic. Primarily, we suggest that **rapid, convenient, and free coronavirus testing be made widely available to all tenant households that want to move or need to move.** Covid-19 disease is quite contagious and especially serious for the elderly, but the incidence of disease is low. Allowing people to establish their Covid-negative status – both those moving and those allowing move-ins – will give many people the freedom to safely create more affordable living arrangements, such as becoming or acquiring a roommate or two smaller households sharing one unit, at least temporarily until pandemic issues are better resolved.

Unsheltered homelessness remains a concern, but facilitating these more affordable living situations will cut down on the number of homeless individuals and households. Local restrictions on renting by rooms or renting to more than one household per unit need to be ended or at least suspended during the pandemic.

What CDC officials almost certainly do not know is how the rental housing market works

and, more specifically, that the U.S. has recently lost an incredible amount of low-rent housing, defined as rents below \$600. As reported by Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies using U.S. Census Bureau data, in less than three decades, the country's low-rent housing dropped from being **46%** of all rental housing stock in 1990 to just **25%** in 2017\* – a staggering loss. The reasons for this loss are various, but a major reason is recessions and prolonged non-payment of rent, often encouraged by “tenant protection” laws.

The Census data tells us exactly where the loss has occurred – in lower-income neighborhoods. And these neighborhoods remain just as vulnerable today. I can cite other situations where extended non-payment results in serious housing loss.

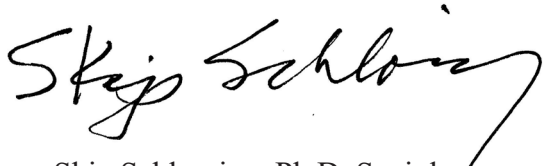
For these reasons, the federal moratorium, as well as other moratoriums that have already been in effect for several months, need to end as soon as possible. Alarmists say we should expect “a tsunami of evictions” whenever a moratorium ends. Totally untrue. The eviction process will add several more months of non-payment, which landlords will surely want to avoid.

My association is urging landlords not to evict, but instead to talk with their tenants and come to fair agreements. We suggest that all unavoidably unpaid rent should be forgiven (in practice, it's probably uncollectable) and new rent levels set, often lower than previous levels. We expect many tenancies can be preserved in this way. But moratoriums need to end to give non-paying tenants the motivation to make these agreements with landlords or find more appropriate living situations.

We urge you, therefore, to make free Covid testing broadly available to tenants who want to move and to make sure that the CDC moratorium ends on December 31 or even sooner. When a vaccine becomes available, perhaps lower-income tenants (often minorities) can be targeted first along with other vulnerable groups.

If we can be of any help in making this transition back to a more normal and more affordable rental housing market, we would be glad to do so.

Thank you for considering our concerns.



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\*[www.jchs.harvard.edu/research-areas/working-papers/documenting-long-run-decline-low-cost-rental-units-us-state](http://www.jchs.harvard.edu/research-areas/working-papers/documenting-long-run-decline-low-cost-rental-units-us-state)

**The Small Property Owners Association** is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that defends the rights and interests of small landlords who do their own management and repairs from their homes. We are known for our victory in a statewide referendum in 1994 that ended rent control in Massachusetts. We seek practical ways to provide private rental housing for all income levels.