

June 10, 2020

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510



Dear Senator Cantwell:

Re: The Importance of Emergency Rental Assistance

Seattle for Everyone is a broad coalition of non-profit and private developers, affordable housing providers, labor groups, businesses, social justice advocates, environmentalists, urbanists, and neighbors. We unite under the belief that everyone should have access to a safe, stable, and affordable home. Thank you for your bold leadership throughout the COVID-19 emergency. We also commend your demonstrated commitment to prioritizing federal housing action.

Historically, Seattle for Everyone has advocated at the city and state level for housing solutions that 1.) create and preserve more housing options, 2.) strengthen low- and middle-income housing affordability, and 3.) share growth equitably. Over the preceding months, we have witnessed the maw of the housing crisis widen across the nation, especially for low-wage workers and communities of color. These urgent times have required us to look to the federal government; the only institution that is big and bold enough to help Americans transcend this unprecedented plight.

We strongly support legislation that improves and strengthens vital federal housing programs, such as your 2019 Affordable Housing Credit Improvement Act. The Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) is among the most successful federal housing programs in history, producing or preserving 41,634 units in King County alone since 1986. Provisions in the bill to increase state LIHTC allocations by 50% and stabilize the 4% credit make perfect sense to meaningfully advance the national and local stock of affordable homes. With the gross underproduction of housing in Washington state over the previous several decades, it is of critical importance that we strive to build enough homes to meet the needs of everyone, regardless of income bracket. **At this time, we believe that such profoundly crucial housing supports must necessarily be coupled with immediate emergency rental assistance.**

We therefore encourage you to endorse the Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act (H.R. 6820 / S. 3685). As you well know, the CARES Act was a helpful first step to

support businesses, housing providers, and individuals but more is needed for American rental households threatened with the highest unemployment in generations. According to the Urban Institute, renters have less access to credit, lower job stability, lower median incomes, and less savings than homeowners; they are more vulnerable. As we approach our fourth month of dealing with the far-reaching effects of COVID-19, rent is still due. The moratorium on evictions may have been extended in Washington until August, but with accumulating arrears this order is a temporary measure to stave off a wave of looming evictions—it is not a full solution alone. To keep our economy and communities intact, we need sufficient emergency rental assistance without delay. This interest is shared by renters, landlords, lenders, and housing developers alike who all need a functional housing system to contribute and live their lives.

If you are unable to endorse H.R. 6820 / S. 3685 and it comes to a vote within the HEROES Act or alone, then we urge you to vote ‘YES’. Emergency rental assistance is too imminently important to neglect at this inflection point in our nation’s history. We only increase our shared future costs by not taking care of each other now. In fact, **no matter what coronavirus relief bill comes up in the U.S. Senate, we recommend that emergency rental assistance be included** and that it adheres to the following principles:

1. The funding must be sufficient to cover everyone who is impacted by coronavirus so that they do not lose their rental homes or fall too far behind on rent to recover
2. The disbursement of relief funds should allow for maximum flexibility at the state and local level with no match requirement, while using proven housing programs with the capacity to handle the volume. This ensures that the funds reach those in need expeditiously
 - a. Rental assistance can be either tenant-based or project-based
 - b. Funds should cover all affected renters in all rental housing types in all areas (urban, rural, & tribal)
 - c. Rental assistance should *only* be used for future rent payments, unpaid rent arrears, and some utility and operating expenses in response to the COVID-19 pandemic

We honor your dedication to national investment in housing and thank you for your strong advocacy and leadership in both Washingtons. Please let us know how we can further support you.

Sincerely,

Seattle for Everyone

<https://seattleforeveryone.org/>

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