

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** November 16, 2020

**To:** Marisa A. Zapata, PhD  
Director, PSU-HRAC

**From:** Lauren E. M. Everett  
Graduate Research Assistant, PSU-HRAC

**Subject:** Updates on COVID-19 and disaster response, housing, and people experiencing homelessness nationwide, November 9 - 15.

### News

1. Over the next few weeks [San Francisco](#) will start moving people out of hotel shelters, and advocates worry there is nowhere for them to go. Federal funding is expiring with no relief in sight. [The Mayor's office](#) released a statement Monday on their plan. During a hearing on Tuesday in a Board of Supervisors meeting several Supervisors and providers [spoke out against the plan](#). Meanwhile, voters passed [Measure K](#), which would authorize the city to develop and own 10,000 units of affordable housing for a mix of incomes. The funding will have to be secured in a separate measure.
2. In [Winston-Salem, NC](#), providers are forced by COVID to find new approaches for helping people experiencing homelessness.
3. A recent survey by the Housing Initiative at Penn revealed the depth of how COVID has exacerbated existing [housing instability in Philadelphia](#). It also found a financial strain on landlords in the city, and low levels of landlord participation in the rent relief program.
4. In [Boulder, CO](#) voters passed a ballot measure to provide legal counsel to renters facing eviction, through a tax on landlords. This type of policy is also known as a [Right to Counsel](#).
5. Voters in [Portland, Maine](#) approved a number of progressive ballot measures, including establishing a \$15 an hour living wage that would increase to \$18 in the event of an emergency; a rent control bill with annual increases tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI); and a rental board to mediate disputes between landlords and tenants.
6. In the face of 451 evictions having been carried out in the city already during the pandemic, [Baltimore Renters United](#) is advocating for a Right to Counsel in eviction cases.
7. In [Oregon](#), the State Legislature's Emergency Board voted to commit \$35 million to the purchasing and rehabilitation of hotels to be used as emergency shelters for people experiencing homelessness. The same proposal had failed to pass through the same committee two weeks prior, and those whose votes changed credited staff and stakeholders working with them to answer questions and address concerns.
8. In [Washington DC](#), tenants and landlords are locked in opposition over a bill that would expand the city's rent control ordinance to include newer properties and properties owned

by landlords who own at least three properties. The proposal would increase the city's stock of rent-controlled housing by more than 13,000 homes.

9. The men living in [New York City's](#) Lucerne Hotel as part of the city's COVID shelter program are under a temporary reprieve for relocation, but that could end Monday if a judge decides to move them into the Financial District. The situation has been volatile for months, with one group of local residents having filed a lawsuit against the city for locating the men in the hotel, and another group supporting their right to remain.

## National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (November 9)

**Diane Yentel, NLIHC:** Both Harris and Biden put forth bold housing platforms. Of course this all depends on gaining control of the Senate, which comes down to Georgia. It will still be split either way, so change will be much more incremental than many of us probably want. We vitally need for relief legislation to be passed, including rental assistance. Senator Brown is really the lead champion for rent relief now, and his leadership will be essential to preventing the eviction tsunami and also seeing broader change.

**Senator Sherrod Brown, Ohio:** My office loves the work the NLIHC does, and we're making sure the incoming electeds understand housing priorities. Diane said there will only be incremental change, but if we win in Georgia... McConnell sets the agenda so as hard as we've tried... if we win these two Georgia seats, I will then be chairman of the committee and can set the housing agenda with Kamala and Joe. They share the same commitment that pretty much everyone on this call shares. I'd rather not win important votes with such a close margin (50/50) but still, if we're setting the agenda things will change. We still have a lot of work to do. You all know the numbers about how many people are one life event away from eviction even before the pandemic. We now know how much harder it is for people. The package we passed in March was an important first step. The \$600 a week was probably the single most important thing we've done in the Senate in years. What has been happening since that \$600 expired, is that there are tens of thousands of people each day flowing into poverty. The HEROES Act passed in May only in the house and provided a lot of other relief sources, but after that rather than work with Democrats McConnell and Trump let it all expire. McConnell said he didn't feel that sense of urgency. Last night we watched the Lincoln movie. His staff is urging him to free the slaves, preserve the union, etc. but he's still worried about public opinion.

It's pretty clear that Trump and McConnell aren't listening to the pain of the American people. The CDC did issue the moratorium, but too many renters are falling through the cracks, and people who are currently protected won't be able to pay the back rent. The GOP view is saying people should just have to fend for themselves, but we know that isn't right during a once-in-a-generation crisis. The wave of eviction will make it hard to keep people healthy, hurt many families, and is inexcusable. I've probably said this every time I've spoken to you but it's my [favorite quotation](#) from Dr. King's Letter From Birmingham Jail. He rejected incremental change and said "progress never

rolls in on the wheels of inevitability.” So progress is not just organizations, it’s you calling your representatives and sharing your stories, and that’s really important to continue doing.

**Diane:** We are urging the Biden team to extend the eviction moratorium. We’ve put together [a set of recommendations](#) for how the administration should fix and improve it. We’re also of course advocating for the COVID relief package, and looking to the long term. It’s a 30-page memo and is pretty detailed, starting with the first 100 days and then longer term.

**Jennifer Wood, ED, Rhode Island Center for Justice:** Our effort has been a partnership between our organization, a student housing advocacy group at Brown University, and the Governor’s office. Because the CDC moratorium is not self-executing, as soon as the CDC’s order came down we realized our top priority was going to be getting declarations into the hands of all tenants who need the protections. We asked the courts to include an information packet in the documents that are served for eviction (the “pleadings package) but they didn’t feel comfortable. The governor’s office agreed to assist with this, but the challenge was in identifying which tenants needed the information and the courts wouldn’t help. Brown University was really the key ingredient. Students agreed to do research in the court portal. The information is public but it doesn’t include addresses. So we created a formal relationship with HOPE student researchers and made them officially legal researchers for our firm so they could use our log in credentials. They developed a list of over 1,000 tenants who were facing eviction, and then we sent the declaration and information on the moratorium to everyone. The packet includes all relevant information in English and Spanish.

**Abby Barton, undergraduate student at Brown University, HOPE Project:** We mobilized a team of six to record over 1,400 eviction cases. We also recognize that this type of intervention is a short-term solution, so we are trying to look to the long term in order to support tenant organizing and other advocacy efforts.

**Jennifer:** One of the biggest assets was the support of a state agency that was willing to do the physical mailing. Then as Abby and Lucas pointed out, this is really labor intensive and none of our organizational partners felt like they had the bandwidth to look up the address for each and every defendant. So partnering with HOPE was really crucial.

**Q:** How did you make the connection with the state agency?

**A:** We had an open dialog with the governor’s office about extending the eviction moratorium, so when the CDC moratorium came down we asked if they would help get the word out (since they weren’t willing to extend the state moratorium). So it was that dialog we had already started.

**Renato Rocha, Deputy Director for PIF & Senior Policy analyst, Center for Law and Social Policy:** There are three agencies and three sets of regulations that touch on Public Charge policy. The State Department and Department of Homeland Security have pursued changes to public charge policy. The State Department policy was blocked by a preliminary injunction and applies to applications for visas and greencards coming from outside the US. For the DHS policy, it has been implemented, and applies to applications within the US. It is under litigation, but is proceeding in

the meantime. The DOJ has not yet proposed changes to their regulations. Right now people who apply for a visa (or citizenship?) must apply to a public charge test. Officials review all of an individual's circumstances, and they also consider whether a person has used certain benefits. This includes SNAP, federal and Section 8 housing, and Medicaid. Many programs are not considered in the public charge test, for example shelters, school lunches, and food banks. Some people who would not be impacted by public charge may still decide to disenroll a US citizen child out of fear. Research has illustrated these effects. The PIF campaign will soon release tools to address the public charge and accessing housing benefits.

**Q:** We're seeing a lot of college students with F1 student visas who are facing eviction but are afraid to use rent relief due to public charge limitations.

**A:** There's [an info sheet](#) about what public assistance is available for people who are not US citizens during the pandemic, and how that would impact the public charge.

[More information.](#)

### **Additional resources:**

1. Opportunity Starts at Home's FAQ on [racial inequities in housing](#).
2. The [NLIHC's recommendations](#) for the Biden administration's housing policy.
3. The National Alliance to End Homlessness' [five key facts about efforts to end veterans' homelessness](#).
4. The NLIHC's recommendations for how [FEMA](#) programs to house people experiencing homelessness in non-congregate shelters can be improved.