

Pass Statewide Just Cause Protections to Prevent Homelessness in Pierce County

Members of the Pierce County State Legislative Delegation:

On one day in January 2020, 1,897 people experienced homelessness in Pierce County, according to the most recent Point in Time data. Simultaneously, due to the COVID-19 pandemic compounded with our pre-existing housing crisis, more than 175,000 people statewide are currently behind on rent and at risk of eviction once the moratorium is lifted. As evictions are the top cause of homelessness, please ensure that tenant protections are in place to prevent a massive increase in homelessness. You can start by passing HB 1236.

I am concerned that the ability for landlords to issue 20-day, no cause evictions will exacerbate the impacts of our current economic and health crisis. Research shows that policies that limit evictions reduce COVID-19 deaths by 11%, while evictions are associated with higher rates of infection and death.

Currently, the Washington Residential Landlord Tenant Act, which governs the landlord-tenant relationship for most of Pierce County, allows a landlord to kick a tenant out of their home without having to provide a reason. This creates a giant loophole in our fair housing protections by allowing landlords to issue notices to vacate to tenants based on unfounded suspicions or biases, often discriminatory or retaliatory. Landlords can also use 20-day vacate notices (60 days in Tacoma) in place of other pay-or-vacate or comply-or-vacate notices, which require proof of wrongdoing to issue, whereas the 20-day notice requires no proof or accountability on the part of the landlord. The tenant simply must move, and they have no legal defense.

In Pierce County, where average rents have risen to nearly \$1400 and the majority of homes require first month, last month, and security deposit in order to move in, being forced into an involuntary move is nearly impossible for low-income renters. Pre-COVID, 60% of Americans could not cover a \$1000 emergency expense. In our current housing crisis, being forced to move with 20-days' notice constitutes an emergency for many, especially if they have lost income during the recession.

HB 1236 provides a generous list of legitimate causes that a landlord must cite in order to evict a tenant, and it plugs a gaping loophole in our laws that has undermined all other tenant protections for years. It prevents discriminatory evictions and requires legitimate justification for kicking someone out of their home. HB 1236 was needed before the pandemic, and it will be needed more than ever this legislative session.

Of particular concern is that once the eviction moratorium is lifted, without just cause protections, landlords will be able to evict tenants, even after the landlord has accessed rental assistance and caught up on their payments. This puts our state at risk of investing hundreds of millions of state dollars into rental assistance, only to see many be evicted anyway. Putting just cause protections in place would ensure that every person helped by rental assistance would be able to remain stably housed. As such, it is a necessary policy to ensure proper stewardship of our taxpayer dollars.

The undersigned individuals and organizations respectfully request your "Yes" vote on HB 1236. This is the time to take steps to prevent a landslide of evictions.

* Required

I am signing this letter as a(n): *

- Individual
- Organization
- Elected Official

Name (First & Last) *

Your answer

Email address *

Your answer

Organization Name

Your answer

City *

Your answer

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