

RILS HOUSING LAW CENTER: COVID-19 UPDATES

With nearly all Americans being told to stay at home, COVID-19 has underscored the importance of housing stability for all Rhode Islanders. Approximately one third of Rhode Island families are cost burdened by housing, and thousands more have housing that is not stable, safe or secure. During this rapidly evolving state of emergency, Rhode Island Legal Services' ("RILS") Housing Law Center remains dedicated to keeping Rhode Islanders informed about housing-related COVID-19 developments. And while RILS is not accepting appointments in order to thwart the spread of COVID-19, we remain open and are monitoring relevant events as they unfold. Important housing-related updates are summarized below.¹

1. Evictions Halted Until At Least April 17, 2020

- On March 17, 2020, Chief Justice Paul Suttell issued Executive Order 2020-4. The Executive Order provides, among other things, that non-emergency matters in Rhode Island courts will **not** be heard until after April 17, 2020. This includes evictions. But remember:

- If you can pay your rent, pay it. The eviction moratorium is not an invitation to stop paying rent.
- There is an exception in the Executive Order for emergency situations, which can include matters involving violence or other safety risks. If an eviction case can fairly be characterized as an "emergency," it may still go forward.
- The Executive Order does not prohibit a landlord from sending out required notices (such as rent demands) or from giving you a complaint that has been filed. The Executive Order simply means the case will not go forward until after April 17, 2020. The Executive Order does extend filing deadlines for 30 days. This means if your landlord files an eviction with the court before April 17 you will have additional time to file your response when the courts reopen.
- Even though new eviction cases are temporarily halted, sometimes landlords try to evict people without going to court. **Evictions without a court order are still illegal.** If your landlord threatens to evict you without going to court first, contact RILS immediately.
- You can read a copy of the Executive Order here: <https://www.courts.ri.gov/Courts/SupremeCourt/SupremeExecOrders/20-04.pdf>

¹ Readers are encouraged to review the underlying documents referenced here and reminded that this bulletin is for informational purposes only. It does not create an attorney-client relationship.

- We encourage you to call your attorney (or the court clerk if you do not have an attorney), with additional questions.

2. FHFA Halts Single Family Foreclosures (and Evictions) For 60 Days

- On March 18, 2020, the Federal Housing Finance Agency directed Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac to suspend foreclosures and evictions on single-family homes for at least 60 days. The precise details of this directive are not yet clear.

- Read more here: <https://www.fhfa.gov>

- If you are having trouble paying your mortgage (or any bills) contact the company you owe money to so you can find out whether they have a forbearance policy. The sooner you do that, the better.

3. Stay Informed

- The websites below can provide you with other useful information.

- Centers For Disease Control & Prevention (CDC): <https://www.cdc.gov>

- RI Office of the Governor, Gina Raimondo: <https://www.governor.ri.gov>

- US Dept of Veteran Affairs: <https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus>

- Social Security Resources: <https://www.ssa.gov>

- Medicare & Medicaid Resources: <https://www.cms.gov/medicare/quality-safety-oversight-general-information/coronavirus>

- RI Coalition for the Homeless
<https://www.rhomeless.org/covid-19>

- United Way Rhode Island
<https://www.uwri.org/2-1-1>

RILS is committed to helping Rhode Island families through this difficult time. As always, our Providence office can be reached at [401.274.2652](tel:401.274.2652) and our Newport office can be reached at [401.846.2264](tel:401.846.2264). In the meantime, stay safe and we thank you for your continued support!