

Robust Rental Assistance Needed to Protect Tenants

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Governor Cuomo has extended the state’s limited eviction moratorium until September 4, 2020 but the application window for the state’s [\\$100 million COVID Rent Relief program](#) closed on August 6, 2020. Many of New York State’s renters require assistance above and beyond the programs and protections currently in place.

The COVID Rent Relief program has limitations. It will only provide up to four months of rental assistance for those earning below 80 percent of the area median income (AMI) and it will only cover *the difference between the household’s rent burden on March 1 and the increase in rent burden for the applicable months*. Additionally, applicants are required to have been spending more than 30% of their income on rent and lost income in any month between April and July.

While this program will provide limited relief to some of the state’s most vulnerable renters, it has serious flaws. First, it does not include any assistance for back rent owed. Second, it leaves out a large swath of struggling renters. For example, those not eligible would include low-wage essential workers who remained employed during the pandemic, but are housing cost-burdened and workers who have lost income, but were not spending more than 30 percent of their income on housing before the pandemic (though they presumably would be now).

COVID-19 Rent Relief Subsidy Scenario for an Eligible Renter Living in Buffalo, NY. Single parent, one child.						
Monthly Earnings Pre-COVID	Monthly Rent	Pre-COVID Monthly Cost Burden (dollar amount)	Monthly Earnings During COVID (April-July)	COVID Monthly Cost Burden (dollar amount)	Monthly Difference between pre-COVID rent burden and COVID Rent Burden	Total Max Subsidy
\$2,250	\$843	\$168	\$1,540	\$381	\$213	\$852

[Recent data](#) from the Household Pulse Survey show that of New York State’s 6 million renter households, over 1.6 million (27%) reported not paying rent in June. Of the renter households reporting that they had not paid rent, over 1 million, or 62 percent, were Black and Hispanic households. Nearly half of respondents had household incomes below \$25,000 annually, and 87 percent of respondents reported experiencing a loss of household income.

While many of these households may qualify for the state’s COVID Rent Relief program, the assistance could fall short on their ability to prevent evictions.

With the coronavirus pandemic growing across the United States, and COVID-19 fatalities more likely to impact people and communities of color, policy leaders must act with urgency to protect the health and safety of vulnerable renters. Increased federal and state funding will be necessary to provide rental assistance programs that offer real relief to tenants throughout New York State.

Recommendations

- Extend and enhance the eviction moratorium.
- Utilize any remaining Coronavirus Relief Funds to provide emergency rental assistance to individuals and families most at risk for homelessness.

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The Fiscal Policy Institute is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit research and education organization committed to improving public policies and private practices to better the economic and social conditions of all New Yorkers. FPI's Immigration Research Initiative looks at immigration issues in New York State, and around the country.