

# FROM EVICTION CRISIS TO EVICTION CATASTROPHE

Virginia had an eviction crisis before the pandemic; now we are on the verge of a catastrophe. New data from the United States Census Bureau portends mass homelessness from evictions.

The U.S. Census Bureau recently launched a new survey, the [Household Pulse Survey](#), that is sharing weekly results for 90 days starting April 23, 2020. The survey is reporting answers to questions about employment status, spending patterns, food security, housing, physical and mental health, access to health care, and educational disruption.

The survey data on housing insecurity in Virginia suggest that low-income residents and residents of color are struggling to maintain a stable place to live. During the most recent reported week (May 14<sup>th</sup> through 19<sup>th</sup>), **just under half of Virginians living on \$25,000 or less reported they have a “slight**

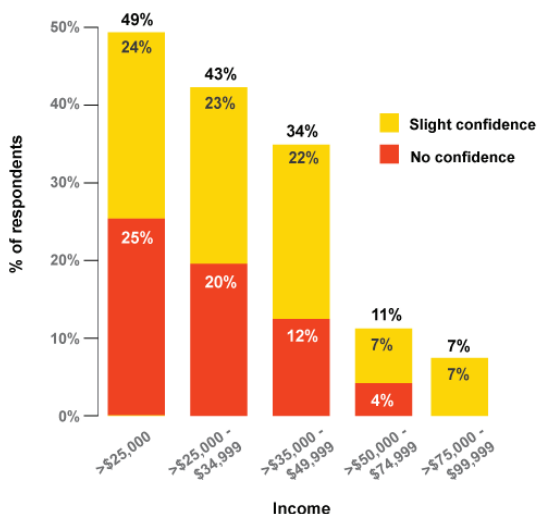
**chance” or “no chance” of making rent next month. 1 in 4 said there was “no chance.”**

More than twice as many Black and Hispanic residents reported concerns about making rent compared to white residents, with almost **1 in 2 Hispanic Virginians saying they have a “slight chance” or “no chance” of paying rent next month.**

These families are already on the brink of homelessness. **Last month, 25% of low-income (those making less than \$25k a year) Virginians did not pay rent. Nearly a third of Hispanic respondents and 20% of Black respondents did not pay rent.**

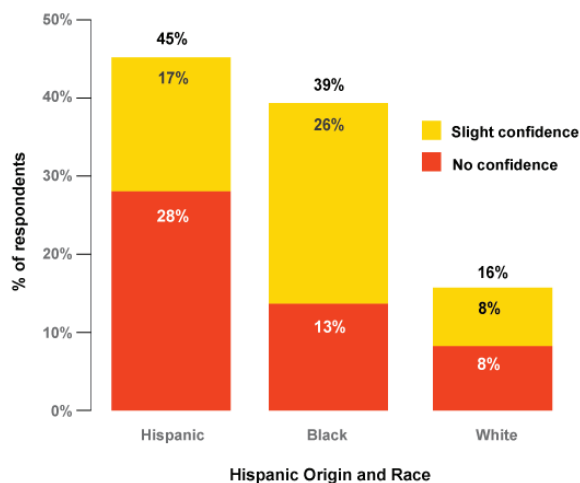
Due to intentionally racist policies that cause wealth disparities along racial lines to this day, Black

PERCENT OF VIRGINIANS WHO HAVE NO OR SLIGHT CONFIDENCE THEY CAN PAY NEXT MONTH'S RENT BY INCOME



Source: United States Census Bureau Housing Pulse Survey for the week of May 14-19, 2020

PERCENT OF VIRGINIANS WHO HAVE NO OR SLIGHT CONFIDENCE THEY CAN PAY NEXT MONTH'S RENT BY RACE



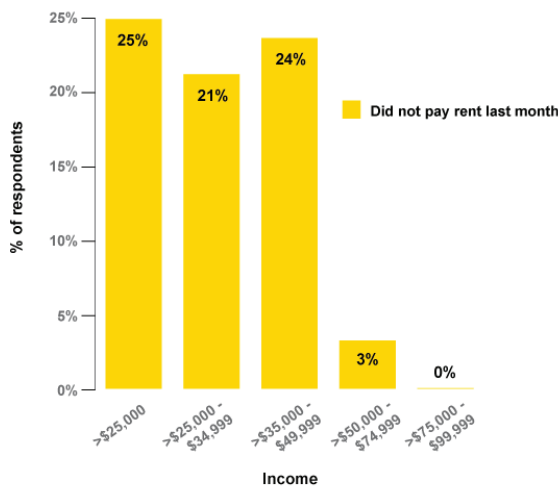
Source: United States Census Bureau Housing Pulse Survey for the week of May 14-19, 2020

and Brown Virginians already bear the brunt of gentrification, housing instability, and employment discrimination. While residents all across Virginia are struggling economically during this national health crisis—the unemployment rate in Virginia recently set a [record high](#) with 764,396 initial claims for unemployment insurance (or just over 1/8 of the state’s workforce) filed in Virginia from March 14 to May 23—residents of color are bracing for even more hardship with **nearly half of Black survey respondents expecting a loss of income in the next 4 weeks**. And although the survey data shows that people from across the socioeconomic spectrum have already experienced a loss of income, those living at lower income thresholds often don’t have savings to fall back on. A recent [Pew Research Survey](#) showed that 77% of low-income residents and 73% of Black residents did not have emergency savings that would cover their expenses for three months.

These survey results suggest that reopening state courts for non-emergency proceedings without taking aggressive rent relief measures will only lead to an avalanche of evictions, forcing low-income Virginians and Virginians of color to search for housing or experience homelessness during the continued global pandemic. In Richmond General District Court alone, 614 evictions are scheduled to be heard the week of June 15th, and this is just the beginning.

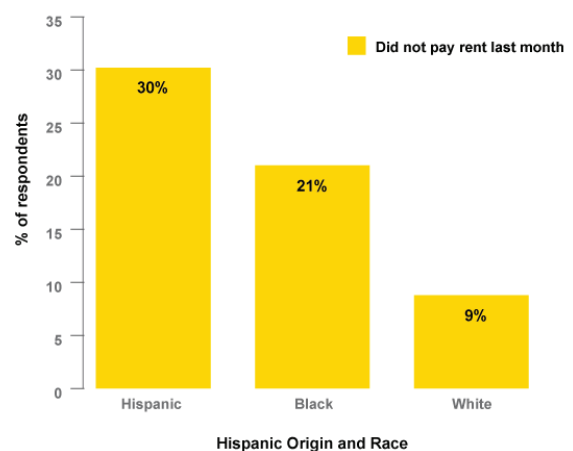
Just as living in large, open settings with easy access to healthcare, outdoor recreation, healthy food, and other amenities shields middle and upper-income earners from COVID-19, experiencing homelessness or overcrowded housing conditions exposes low-income communities to its worst effects. We have witnessed the disparate health impacts of COVID-19 on these communities, and we must take aggressive action to avoid even more devastating economic hardship and tragic health outcomes.

PERCENT OF VIRGINIANS WHO DID NOT PAY RENT LAST MONTH BY INCOME

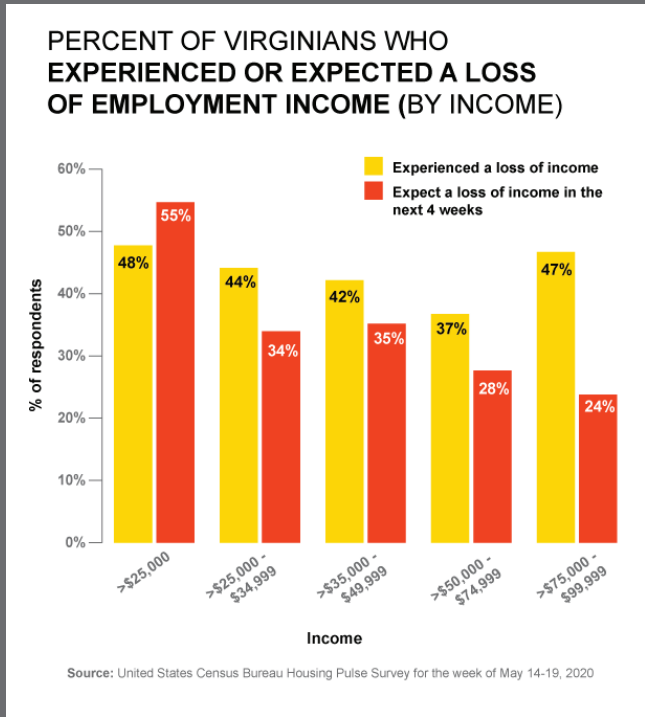
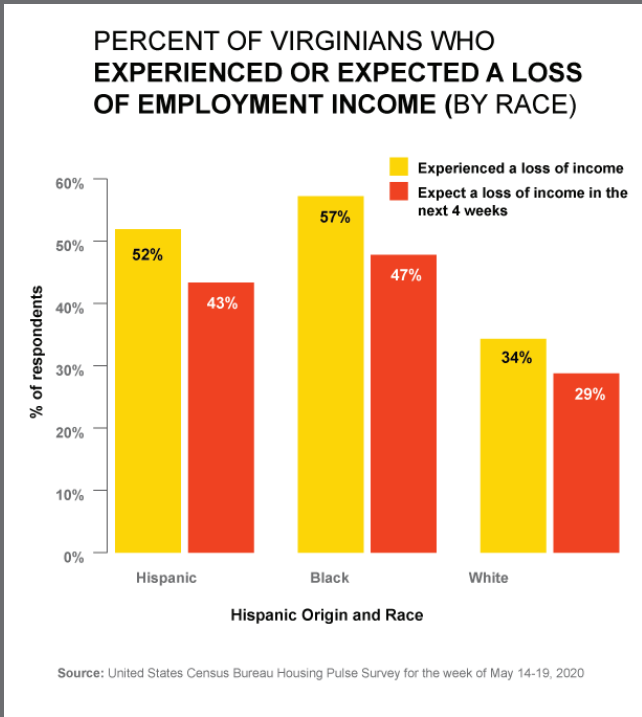


Source: United States Census Bureau Housing Pulse Survey for the week of May 14-19, 2020

PERCENT OF VIRGINIANS WHO DID NOT PAY RENT LAST MONTH BY RACE



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## A CALL TO ACTION

Legal aid organizations, legislators, and community groups have demanded action from the [Governor](#) and the [courts](#). We are still waiting for state officials to act aggressively to counteract the effects of the pandemic and the long history of discriminatory housing policies in our country and in our Commonwealth.

The **Governor** should use emergency powers to immediately enact a moratorium on evictions, or should allow localities to enact their own until the General Assembly can address tenants' mounting debt.

The **General Assembly** should create relief for tenants who are significantly behind in rent payments through a waiver or rent cancellation plan.

**Local leaders** should request approval of local eviction moratoria and advocate with statewide elected officials for rent and mortgage relief.

The **Supreme Court of Virginia** should issue new emergency orders halting eviction proceedings, allowing people to stay in their homes, which are often their only protection against the mortal threat that is COVID-19.

**Doing nothing cannot be an option.**