

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATEMENT: Tenant Protections in Proposed Budget Will Leave Too Many Virginians At Risk of Eviction

During this national emergency, tenants in Virginia need a comprehensive eviction moratorium to protect themselves, their families, and the community. While the language in the proposed budget provides some protections for tenants who cannot pay their rent, it falls far short of the comprehensive eviction moratorium Virginians need to keep themselves and their families safe during this pandemic. While we are grateful for the tireless work of our representatives to improve the language, we are disappointed that it does not provide more help to families in need.

First, the budget language only provides protections against eviction for nonpayment of rent, which leaves out anyone facing eviction for reasons other than rent. Any evictions during this pandemic create an increased public health risk for anyone who is then forced into homelessness or housing instability, no matter if they are evicted for not paying rent or for any other lease violation. We have heard from tenants across the commonwealth whose landlords have attempted to evade the CDC moratorium by alleging pretextual non-rent related issues.

Next, the budget language allows a landlord to evict a tenant for nonpayment if their application for rental assistance isn't approved within 45 days of when it is first submitted. A tenant can do everything right but still be evicted for reasons outside of their control – because their local RMRP administrator is unable to process their application in time due to insufficient staff or other administrative barriers. In Richmond, for example, the local administrator is operating at an over three-month backlog because demand is so great.

Finally, we're pleased to see the language directing landlords to apply for rental assistance—as the landlord application process is far more streamlined and efficient—but we're very disappointed that the language allows landlords to shirk this responsibility if a tenant has already applied, especially given the lengthy wait time for approval of tenant applications. This language creates a huge hole in the protections, and we fear that tenants will slip through into homelessness and worse. The solution to an inefficient process should not be the eviction of tenants who do everything they can to make the process work.

We thank our representatives who fought hard to protect Virginians from homelessness during the pandemic, in particular Senator Ghazala Hashmi and Delegate Josh Cole who carried bills that could have provided the holistic protection needed in the eviction crisis, and the Virginia Legislative Black Caucus who advocated for these broad reforms. We will continue the work with legislators, community groups and advocates by listening to tenants and fighting to keep people in their homes.
