

Renters in Maryland and COVID-19
Frequently Asked Questions
Date: April 1, 2020

1. Can the landlord evict me from my home during the COVID-19 crisis?

No. The Court has placed on hold all residential eviction orders, residential eviction cases, residential foreclosure cases, and tax sale foreclosure cases statewide. Open cases and any new cases are paused. Check the Court's website for updates: <https://mdcourts.gov/coronavirusupdate>

2. What if I can't pay my rent next month due to COVID-19?

Your landlord could still file an eviction case, but the court will not hear it yet. The Court has also placed a hold on all non-emergency court cases. Also, the Governor has ordered that tenants may have a defense related to COVID-19 in certain eviction actions. And, the federal government has stopped landlords in certain properties from filing new eviction cases and charging fees related to non-payment of rent until July 25, 2020. Seek legal advice about whether your property is covered under the federal law. You may want to send a letter or email to your landlord explaining why you cannot pay rent due to a job loss or illness. You may be able to enter into a payment plan. The landlord may agree not evict you or charge late fees if you stay on the plan. You should get any agreement in writing and keep a copy of any letter or email.

For financial assistance to avoid eviction, please call 211.

3. What if my landlord changes the locks or evicts me?

A landlord cannot legally evict a tenant while the Court order pausing evictions is in effect. If a landlord tries to evict you without a court order or without the Sheriff/Constable present or denies you essential services (water, electric, gas), that is illegal. If your landlord attempts to evict you, call 911 and ask for police assistance. If you are illegally evicted, you may consider seeking legal assistance and filing a complaint in court against your landlord. Because the courts are only hearing emergency cases, the complaint should be filed as an emergency matter if you are trying to get back into the property. You should keep track of any expenses, including hotel bills and lost property. In Baltimore City, you may also press criminal charges against the landlord by filing a complaint with the District Court Commissioner: District Court Commissioner, 500 North Calvert St. #200, Baltimore MD 21202, phone: 410-767-5774.

4. What if I have dangerous conditions of disrepair in my home?

You should communicate with your landlord about the problem repeatedly in writing (letter by certified mail, email, text) and keep copies. You may request a housing inspection from your local government. Many inspectors, though, are not operating except on an emergency basis (in Baltimore City, call 311). If your landlord fails to fix the problem, you may normally file a complaint for rent escrow. You would then place your rent into a special escrow account with the court until the landlord makes the repairs. Because the courts are only hearing emergency cases at this time, it may be difficult to move your case unless there is an emergency problem.

5. What happens when the pause on evictions is lifted?

For new or postponed eviction cases, you will receive a notice about the new trial date. If you receive notice of an eviction case, contact a legal services provider. Keep all documents about loss of income

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or health problems and all communications with your landlord. For eviction orders/warrants that were already issued, the Sheriff will schedule and execute the eviction once the hold on evictions is lifted by the Court. You may or may not receive additional notice of the new date of the rescheduled eviction.

6. I live in subsidized housing and I have to recertify my income or report a change in income. What should I do?

HUD has encouraged landlords in subsidized housing to conduct remote meetings (phone calls) about income changes. HUD has also encouraged Landlords to delay income recertification if you have limited or no phone service or if fear of exposure to COVID 19 prevents you from gathering materials to document income or signing the recertification. If you have a reduction in income then you should email, text or leave a note for your Landlord to report your reduction in income. If you have a Section 8 voucher, you should contact the housing authority by phone or email to report any loss of income.

7. Should my landlord be doing anything to prevent the spread of COVID-19?

Apartment complexes can take steps to avoid the spread of COVID-19. This includes screening visitors, limitations on visitors, closing common areas, limiting gatherings in common areas, and cleaning touch-points such as elevator buttons, entry doors, and other features of the building.

8. If my landlord is limiting visitors, can people who help me come to my house?

Yes. You should continue to receive any in-home support or services you need, like a nursing aide, meal delivery, cleaning service, case management, etc. But, landlords may limit visitors to only those that are “essential.” What is essential is based on an individual’s needs, not the landlord’s discretion. Your landlord may ask visitors a couple of questions before being allowed to enter the building.

9. Are fair housing and civil rights laws still in effect during the emergency?

Yes. all fair housing laws remain in effect during the COVID-19 crisis.

For more information and to seek no-cost legal advice and possible representation, please call:

- **Maryland Legal Aid**, 1-866-635-2948, www.mdlab.org
- **Public Justice Center**, 410-625-9409, www.publicjustice.org (non-subsidized housing, primarily Baltimore City)
- **Homeless Persons Representation Project**, 410-364-4198 (Monday - Thursday 9-2:30 pm., Friday 9-1 p.m.), www.hprplaw.org (vouchers and subsidized housing only)
- **Disability Rights Maryland**, 410-727-6352, www.disabilityrightsmd.org (housing issues related to disability)
- **Civil Justice Network**, 410-706-0174, www.civiljusticenetwork.org (free or reduced fee legal assistance on housing issues statewide)

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