

Inslee extends eviction ban in Washington through Sept. 30

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Washington Gov. Jay Inslee, shown on June 3, 2021, announced June 24 that the state was extending its moratorium on evictions. (Ted S. Warren / AP)

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OLYMPIA — Gov. Jay Inslee Thursday announced an extension of the ban on evictions through Sept. 30 in an effort to help Washington tenants navigate the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic.

The existing moratorium is set to end June 30, and the extension announced Thursday is a new and different version.

Under the new version, landlords are

prohibited from evicting tenants for past-due rent accrued during the pandemic, until a rental assistance program and an eviction-resolution program are operational in their county.

That time frame includes rent that was due between Feb 29, 2020, and July 31 of this year.

Starting Aug. 1, renters will be expected to pay full rent, unless they have already negotiated an alternative with the landlord or are actively seeking rental assistance money.

Meanwhile, landlords under the new order must offer tenants a repayment plan before the eviction process is started.

The new ban also removes some types of housing from the existing order, including hotels and motels, Airbnbs, long-term care facilities and other nontraditional housing.

Thursday's order is intended to buy more time to get needed help to renters and landlords.

The Legislature this spring approved a host of programs — including an expansion of eviction-resolution services — and budgeted hundreds of millions of dollars aimed at preventing a cascade of foreclosures and evictions.

That includes \$658 million in federal virus aid dollars [in the new state budget](#) for rental assistance. But that budget doesn't start until July 1. It will take weeks, if not months, to get that money distributed.

That funding comes in addition to the \$500 million already released by the state, which has provided rental assistance to more than 80,000 renters and landlords, according to the governor's office.

Inslee first used his emergency powers in March 2020 [to put the temporary moratorium in place](#), after unemployment rose steeply as broad swaths of economic and social life closed down amid the pandemic.

The governor has since extended the eviction ban several times.

This spring, lawmakers took several steps intended to keep renters from being evicted and make sure landlords get paid during the pandemic as the moratorium ends.

That approach has become a cornerstone of the government response to housing instability during the pandemic.

But the rollout of rent assistance has so far been slow.

While the federal government had already allocated hundreds of millions of dollars in such assistance to be distributed by county governments, much of that money has not made it to landlords' bank accounts.

In King County, about 2,600 landlords and 9,000 tenants have registered to receive assistance. But the state's most populous county has yet to distribute its latest round of rent help.

King County doesn't expect payments to begin until mid-July, according to Mark Ellerbrook, director of the county's Department of Community and Human Services.

Building a database to manage King County's \$145 million (with more on the way) has contributed to the delay, Ellerbrook said. Counties have also pointed to new documentation requirements that add time to processing applications for help.

Money has started flowing, however, to landlords in other Puget Sound counties.

Snohomish County has begun distributing about \$58 million from the federal

and state governments. So far, 716 households have received about \$6.4 million, according to Jackie Anderson, division manager at the Snohomish County Human Services Department.

Pierce County has so far spent about \$19 million for rent and utility help, of roughly \$69 million from various sources, according to the county.

About 2,200 households have received an average of \$9,000 per household, said spokesperson Kari Moore. The process from application to payment takes on average 57 days, Moore said.

Statewide, Washington [has received](#) nearly \$1.2 billion for rent assistance from federal stimulus packages last year and this year, according to the Department of Commerce.

As of last month, counties had billed the state for only about \$127 million, though the department cautioned that billing lags so the number may not be up to date.

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