

RICHMOND, VA
Mayor Levar Stoney

EVICITION DIVERSION PROGRAM

Job loss, material hardship, school absenteeism, and regression of mental and physical health are impacts felt by those who lose their homes due to what has become a crisis in many cities across the country: evictions. Children and families, many of whom are already living on the social margins, are being pushed out of their homes in staggering numbers and forced to bear the brunt alone, often without supportive services or a helping hand. For adults, an eviction often leads to transportation challenges, which may lead to job loss and continued financial burden. For youth, evictions affect school attendance as well as academic performance and behavior. The traumatic experience of an eviction for an individual, family and community and, ultimately, for society as a whole, is real and devastating.

In April 2018, a *New York Times* article detailing the extent of the eviction crisis nationwide identified Richmond as having the second highest eviction rate in the country – the result of long-standing State housing policies that favor landlords over tenants and disregard the long-term impacts of evictions on individuals, families, and communities, with low-income individuals, single parent families, and communities of color disproportionately affected.

As the result of immediate action taken by Mayor Levar Stoney's Administration, in January 2019, the City of Richmond announced the creation of a first-of-its kind voluntary eviction diversion program targeting the city's most vulnerable citizens. The ultimate goal is to stop the devastating spiral for children and families often caused by evictions. The goal for the pilot program's inaugural year is to reduce evictions in the city by hundreds.

Partnering with the City on the program are the Central Virginia Legal Aid Society, Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, and the Richmond court system. Key program elements include:

- Use of pro-bono attorneys as in-court mediators to negotiate agreements between tenants and landlords;
- Financial assistance for tenants who meet program qualifications;
- A payment plan to ensure rent that is due is paid on time;
- Financial literacy education for tenants; and
- Tenant referrals to supportive services provided by Richmond's Department of Social Services and community partners.

Under the program, tenants would be able to stay in their homes and get the benefit of a clean slate; landlords would get the rent owed and avoid the expense associated with an eviction and locating a new tenant.

The Mayor's innovative eviction diversion program is now coupled with other housing-related efforts, including creation of new affordable housing units and addressing homelessness, and adds another dimension to the Administration's overall commitment to creating equitable opportunities for all Richmonders and setting priorities that are inclusive of those in need.

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