

PRESS RELEASE

CONTACT INFORMATION

Molly Martin, Director of Strategic Initiatives
Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless
Phone: (440) 666-8549
3631 Perkins Ave. #3A-3, Cleveland, OH 44114



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Ohio Organizations Call for State-Wide Eviction and Utility Shut-Off Moratorium

Leaders Call on Ohio to Follow Other States in Freezing Move-Outs and Utility Disconnections as well as Providing Emergency Housing Funding

Yesterday, the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless delivered a letter to the Governor's office signed by 80 organizations and leading individuals from across the state calling for a state-wide moratorium on evictions and utility shut-offs, and an immediate influx of emergency housing dollars.

The letter states that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic demands urgent need for immediate state-wide action. "We have already seen shelter-in-place orders come from the Bay Area and it seems other large cities are next. We cannot possibly put quarantine measures in place at the same time that we forcibly remove Ohioans from their homes, for any reason, or make it impossible for them to remain there because of utility disconnections" said Demitra Brown, Housing Justice Co-Chair of the Cleveland Democratic Socialists of America.

This situation is moving quickly. Just yesterday, we saw the President ask for a freeze on evictions and foreclosures for HUD-connected homeowners. We need consistency and clarity across the state. Those measures should also apply to low-income renters, who are particularly vulnerable during this crisis. This is no time to be evicting people or shutting off utilities.

"Ohio, led by Governor Mike DeWine and Director of Public Health Dr. Amy Acton, has been leading the nation in responding to COVID-19" said Rebecca Maurer, an attorney and housing advocate based in Cleveland. "We are asking that they lead yet again on this issue. There should be no more move-outs and no more utility disconnections until the economy has stabilized and the health risk has dissipated."

The letter explains that the evictions and move-outs are a risk not only to those who are moved, but to the entire, already-strained shelter systems across the state. Each family that is moved may end up in the shelter system as rentals and economic activity slows down because of social distancing. Crowding the shelters and adding new individuals creates the type of health risk the State of Ohio is trying to avoid. It is critical that we prioritize homelessness prevention resources to minimize any new shelter entries during this time period.

The letter to Governor Mike DeWine and the list of signatories is below.

The mission of the Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless is to organize and empower homeless and at-risk men, women and children to break the cycle of poverty through public education, advocacy and the creation of nurturing environments.

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March 18, 2020

Dear Governor DeWine,

We want to begin this letter by thanking you for your extraordinary leadership in recent days. The work of your office along with the work of Director of Public Health Dr. Amy Acton has been swift, decisive, and will ultimately save lives over the course of the COVID-19 outbreak.

We are writing now because we believe simple, comparably small measures, must be taken now to complement the efforts already made by your office to protect vulnerable Ohioians. Namely, using the Governor's emergency powers, the state of Ohio should:

1. **Ban enforcement of all eviction judgments** by stopping court-ordered move-outs, including those that were scheduled before COVID-19 caused larger social disruption.
2. **Ban utility disconnections** and automatically turn on any utilities disconnected in the last 60 days
3. **Issue emergency homelessness prevention dollars** across the state in partnership with local non-profits that are able to efficiently disperse to at-risk households.

Both actions are necessary for the health and welfare of Ohioans and support our existing work towards social distancing and community health. Enforcing an eviction move-out will put an Ohio family onto the streets. Re-housing families is already hard, but it will only be harder as social distancing and our slowed economy make finding and moving into a new rental harder. An evicted family will be more likely than ever to enter the shelter system, which we know is already a point of strain in our management of COVID-19. For the moment, our best chance to keep families healthy is keep them where they are for the course of the outbreak. Across the state, every shelter system is at capacity and it is imperative that we prevent overcrowding in congregate settings while we manage the spread of COVID-19.

Similarly, banning utility disconnections and re-instituting recent disconnections will keep our families from being constructively evicted from their homes because of lack of utility service. Utility disconnection will cause the same likelihood of strain on the shelter system.

Under the first two provisions, the money owed will not change. Rent and/or utility payments can continue to accrue and can be collected at a future date. We recognize that there may come a time where mortgage or rental payments might be suspended nationally, but stopping the physical movement and/or the physical disconnection of utility services can be taken at the state level without affecting the underlying amounts owed. In addition, once the short term crisis is addressed, we would advocate for any and all measures from the Statehouse to support tenants and homeowners with rent and mortgage payments that have accrued during COVID-19 related work stoppages.

Eviction and utility disconnection moratoriums have already been implemented in San Jose, California, Miami-Dade County, Florida, and Atlanta, Georgia. We believe the number of localities considering these measures will grow in the coming days. Ohio has already been a step ahead of other states and we believe it should be a step ahead in this measure as well.

Thank you again for your time, consideration, and for your efforts during this time.

Sincerely,

Senator Nickie J. Antonio

Northeast Ohio Coalition for the Homeless
Cleveland Democratic Socialists of America
Maurer Law LLC

Action Tank
Akron Democratic Socialists of America
All Together Divine
Anna Hass Morgan Club
Arukah Ministries
Carve Your Own Path, Inc.
Catholic Charities Housing Corporation
The Center for Community Solutions
The Center for Health Affairs
Church of Our Saviour/La Iglesia de Nuestro Salvador
CityMusic Cleveland
Cleveland Bi+ Network
Cleveland End Poverty Now Coalition
Cleveland Jobs with Justice
Cleveland Nonviolence Network
Cleveland Owns
Cleveland Stonewall Democrats
Clevelanders for Public Transit
Coburn's Creative Arts
Columbus Democratic Socialists of America

Community Shares of Greater Cincinnati
Cuyahoga County Progressive Caucus
Disability Law Society of CWRU
Disability Rights Ohio
DSA Metro Cincinnati & Northern Kentucky
Equality Ohio
Equitable Landlording Collaborative
Extended Housing
The Fair Housing Center, Toledo
Fair Housing Resource Center
Family and Community Services
Fair Housing Center for Rights & Research
The George Gund Foundation
Grace Communion Cleveland Church
Greater Cincinnati Coalition for the Homeless
The Haven Home
Healthy Moms & Babies
Heights Community Congress
Intercommunity Justice and Peace Center
Interfaith Hospitality Network of Greater Cincinnati
InterReligious Task Force On Central America & Colombia
Iris Your Life
Kent State Young Democratic Socialists of America
Lakewood Community Solar Co-op
Learn to Earn Dayton
Levin Family Foundation
Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry
Lydia's House of Cincinnati
May Dugan Center
The Metanoia Project
Miami Valley Fair Housing Center, Inc.
Montgomery County Homeless Solutions Policy Board
Mutual Aid Northeast Ohio
Nueva Luz Urban Resource Center
Ohio Organizing Collaborative, Ohio Student Association
OPAWL: Building AAPI Feminist Leadership in Ohio
Organize! Ohio
Our Revolution Ohio
Partners in Health Engage, Case Western Reserve University
Policy Matters Ohio
Positive Education Program
Regional Autism Advisory Council of Southwest Ohio
Safe Families for Children Cleveland
Silver Phoenix Design

Single Payer Action Network of Ohio
Slavic Village Development
St. Edward High School Labre Ministry
St. Paul's Community Outreach
The Sub Zero Mission
Sunrise Ohio
Unitarian Universalist Justice Ohio
University Settlement
The Ursuline Sisters of Cleveland
Vincentian Ohio Action Network
West Shore Unitarian Universalist Church
West Side Catholic Center