

At last minute, US government renews inadequate eviction moratorium for three months

Jacob Crosse
29 March 2021

Less than two days before it was set to expire on March 31, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced that it will be extending the federal eviction moratorium, first implemented in September of last year, through June 30.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has presented a historic threat to the nation’s public health,” CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said in her statement announcing the extension. “Keeping people in their homes and out of crowded or congregate settings—like homeless shelters—by preventing evictions is a key step in helping to stop the spread of COVID-19.”

The moratorium is all that is standing in the way between evictions and homelessness for an estimated 8.8 million households that are behind on rent according to a recent report from the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB). The CFPB also estimates that some 2.1 million families are behind at least three months on mortgage payments, the most since the Great Recession of 2008–2009.

Overall, the CFPB estimates homeowners owe nearly \$90 billion in missed payments, while delinquent rent payments are estimated to be up to \$57 billion as of this month. However, the moratorium does nothing for the mounting payments millions currently owe.

And while the misnamed American Rescue Plan enacted earlier this month and the December 2020 relief packages did allocate some \$50 billion in rental assistance, barely any of those funds have been distributed as the infrastructure to distribute the money only recently materialized.

Meanwhile, the latest Census Bureau survey found that more than 5 million Americans say they are at risk of eviction or foreclosure. Nearly 15 percent of adults in Mississippi reported that they are not current on rent or mortgage payments and have “slight or no confidence” that they will be able to pay next month’s rent or mortgage on time.

While Mississippi leads the nation, 13.8 percent of adults

in Alabama likewise reported to the Census Bureau that they have no confidence in their ability to pay next month’s rent or mortgage. This was followed by 10.6 percent of adults in New York and Ohio and 10.5 percent of adults in South Dakota.

Despite pleas from housing and tenants rights organizations, the Biden administration refused to update the language in the moratorium to prevent landlords from exploiting known loopholes in order to force tenants out.

Tenants can still be evicted for alleged breaches of the lease besides non-payment or if a landlord began eviction proceedings against a tenant before September 4, 2020. The moratorium only applies to single renters making \$99,000 or less and couples earning less than \$198,000. Those who wish to be eligible for the moratorium must sign a declaration saying they cannot pay rent because of COVID-related hardships and will become homeless if evicted.

However, as thousands of workers and families have found out in the last eight months, landlords have still been able to process evictions despite the supposed “protection” offered by the moratorium.

“There are so many loopholes in the moratoriums that the landlords and judges exploit,” Josh Poe, co-founder of the Root Cause Research Center, told the *Louisville Courier-Journal*.

The *Courier-Journal* found that between August and December 2020, when the state of Kentucky was covered by a state-wide and then the CDC moratorium, judges in the Jefferson District ruled against renters in 1,298 eviction cases.

“I think anyone who looks at this data should feel a sense of outrage about what’s happened. The fact is that the moratorium isn’t working,” said Poe. “There’s simply too many loopholes.”

In California, a review of public records conducted by KQED and CalMatters found that 527 evictions were processed in 9 counties between March 19 and December

31. In New Jersey, court records show that more than 50,000 eviction notices have been filed since the pandemic began in March 2020.

During a Florida Senate committee hearing in early January, Secretary Chad Poppell of the Florida Department of Children and Families acknowledged that “about 40,000” evictions had been filed between March 1 and December 31, 2020. Poppell underestimated the figure by over 7,000 according to the Office of the State Courts Administrator, which found 47,484 eviction filings during that time.

The Eviction Lab at Princeton University, which has been one of the only academic sources that has tracked evictions throughout the pandemic, showed over 278,000 evictions processed during the pandemic. The figure is a severe underestimation as the Eviction Lab has only been actively tracking in 5 states, not including Florida, the third most populous state in the country.

Even with the moratorium, landlords are still permitted to begin eviction proceedings, meaning as soon as it does expire, in as little as three months, potentially millions could be made homeless in a matter of weeks.

In an email to Politico, Diane Yentel, CEO and president of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, said that the extension was “essential” but did not go far enough in protecting tenants.

“It’s disappointing that the administration didn’t act on the clear evidence and need to also strengthen the order to address the flaws that undermine its public health purpose,” said Yentel.

“While the Biden administration is well aware of the shortcomings in the moratorium order that allow some evictions to proceed during the pandemic, the CDC director did not correct them,” she added. “She simply extended President Trump’s original order, leaving the loopholes and flaws in place, an unfortunate and shortsighted decision that will result in some continued harmful evictions during the pandemic.”

“The CDC did the bare minimum,” said Shamus Roller, the executive director of the National Housing Law Project, in comments to NPR on the moratorium extension. “And that will mean many more renters will lose their homes before the pandemic is over.”

Unlike in the majority of states last year, Democratic and Republican state governors alike have refused to enact their own statewide eviction moratoriums to complement the federal moratorium. This has allowed landlords to exploit the loopholes and proceed with evictions as the coronavirus and its new deadlier B.1.1.7 and P.1 variants spread unchecked throughout the country. The latest case numbers are exceeding the “summer surge” last year, with the seven-day average in the US showing upwards of 63,000 daily new

cases and 1,000 deaths a day.

The increase in daily new cases, up 16 percent nationwide compared to a week ago per Johns Hopkins University, prompted an urgent warning of “impending doom” from Walensky during a Monday press briefing.

“I’m going to pause here, I’m going to lose the script, and I’m going to reflect on the recurring feeling I have of impending doom,” Walensky said. “We have so much to look forward to, so much promise and potential of where we are and so much reason for hope, but right now I’m scared.”

Walensky’s professed fear is nothing to that of the hundreds of thousands of teachers who have been forced back into classrooms after Walensky and the CDC “evolved” their social distancing guidelines down from six feet to three feet, in order to fit as many children as possible back into classrooms and force parents back into workplaces to generate surplus value for the ruling class.

This “evolved” guidance did not make it into the latest eviction moratorium order. Instead, it correctly states that, “The virus that causes COVID-19 spreads very easily and sustainably between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet) mainly through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person, coughs, sneezes, or talks.”

The pandemic is a “trigger event” in world history: it has exposed capitalist society as it truly exists. Before the pandemic, millions of workers and their families faced eviction, homelessness and death due to skyrocketing rents, a dearth of affordable housing and stagnant wages.

Now, over a year later, as millions remain unemployed, with 10 million fewer jobs available compared to February 2020, coupled with rising housing costs, the preventable housing crisis shows no signs of abating. Meanwhile, a tiny layer of “pandemic profiteers” have enriched themselves fabulously over the bodies of over 560,000 Americans and over 2.8 million globally.

The elimination of homelessness and inequality is possible only through the abolition of private property and implementation of an international, scientifically coordinated socialist program.



To contact the WSWS and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:
wsws.org/contact