

Eviction filings in US spike in week following end of moratorium

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Following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling which ended the eviction moratorium, millions of renters stand the risk of losing their housing amid the new surge of the pandemic. Eviction filings have already skyrocketed for the week ending September 4, with four of six states monitored by the Princeton University's Eviction Lab having already exceeded historic averages.

The U.S. Census Bureau's weekly Household Pulse Survey for the week ending August 26 found that 3,511,056 respondents are facing the "likelihood" of eviction in the next two months. This is taking place as the Biden administration has allowed the expiration of federal unemployment benefits for 7.5 million jobless workers, who will be left with nothing, and the end of the \$300 supplement for another three million workers still receiving meager state unemployment benefits.

While data is only out for the first four days of the month, within these days dramatic increases in eviction filings have already been observed. Out of the 31 cities that the Eviction Lab tracks, 13, or more than a third, have seen an increase in evictions above and past their respective historic averages for the same period. The three largest increases seen as of September 4 were recorded in Charleston, South Carolina, at 232 percent the historical average; Wilmington, Delaware, at 238 percent; and Dallas, Texas, at 134 percent.

Five states saw filings increase relative to historic averages in previous months, with Delaware seeing a 130 percent rise. Before September, Delaware saw eviction filings consistently at half or less of its 2016-19 averages at virtually every point following March 2020, when the moratorium was implemented.

Indiana is now 22 percent above average. It had also stayed under historical averages since March 2020. New Mexico has seen a similar increase, with evictions

averaging now at 140 percent the state's 2017-2019 averages and reaching the highest point since the Eviction Lab started tracking the state. Other states like Minnesota and Connecticut did not increase past their historical averages but saw increases nonetheless relative to the months preceding the end of the moratorium.

Rental assistance funds of \$46.5 billion have been allocated, but the vast majority of the money has not been distributed. Treasury Department Secretary Janet Yellen has warned that she would begin to move funds from jurisdictions that have failed to distribute assistance by the end of September to ones that did. In other words, the Biden administration will allow poor renters in areas with unwilling local governments to be deprived of federal rental assistance.

In a hearing on Friday, California Democratic Congresswoman Maxine Waters said state and local governments have only distributed 11 percent of the emergency rental assistance funds available. "There is no question that the funds are not reaching landlords and renters quickly or widely enough," she meekly complained.

One of the major reasons for the failure to distribute the funds is resistance from landlords themselves who have exploited the landlord-friendly character of the measure, which gives them veto power over whether to accept it or not.

The solution the congressional Democrats advocate would be even more favorable to landlords. The Expediting Assistance to Renters and Landlords Act of 2021 bill, introduced by Waters, would allow landlords to directly apply for back-rent themselves, in what essentially amounts to a bailout of the landlords.

Slumlords who maintain illegal units will simply throw out residents late on payments and get new,

desperate renters. The recent flooding in New York City caused by Hurricane Ida exposed that hundreds of thousands of low-income residents live in illegally converted basements. In Los Angeles County, with a population of 10 million, there are an estimated 200,000 such illegal units.

In addition, the *New York Times* noted, “Federal and local officials, housing experts, landlords and tenants cited an array of problems that slowed the flow of aid: bureaucratic missteps at all levels of government, onerous applications, resistance from landlords, the reluctance of local officials to ease eligibility requirements for the poor, difficulty raising awareness that rental aid even existed, and a steep rise in rents that increased the incentive for kicking out low-income tenants.”

Housing assistance has also been decimated by decades of bipartisan attacks on the remains of the social safety net in the country. The only comparable program to the Emergency Rental Assistance Funds program is the Section 8 voucher program, a federal program that provides funding to make up the difference between what tenants pay and what the going market rate is for housing by paying landlords and nonprofits.

As the *Times* notes, Section 8’s funding has been “stagnant for decades” and waiting lists “of up to 10 years are not uncommon in many cities.” Given the onerous nature of the certification requirements, Section 8 was unable to provide any sort of useful means for the new money to be directed. That is, no preexisting infrastructure was in place for the relatively small amount of funds to be distributed for rental assistance.

By contrast there is a vast governmental infrastructure for the various bailouts of the financial and corporate oligarchy, which has received trillions of dollars looted from the public treasury. This includes the bailouts following the 2008 global financial crash and many other “small” bailouts of individual industries, such as the airlines in 2001, as well as GM and Chrysler in 2009. The bipartisan CARES Act has funneled trillions more to the largest corporations, including purchases of their bad debts, and the Federal Reserve pumps \$120 billion in virtual free credit into the financial markets *every month*.

In other word, a well-oiled infrastructure exists for

distributing aid to the ruling class, which has enriched itself during the pandemic, while tens of millions of people are being threatened with destitution and homelessness.



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