

Missouri governor signs law enabling landlords to reject renters on public assistance

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In a direct assault on the working class and the most vulnerable sections of society, Missouri Governor Mike Kehoe signed legislation earlier this month nullifying local ordinances that protected tenants from discrimination based on their source of income. The bill, House Bill 595, gives landlords across the state the explicit right to refuse tenants who pay rent using Section 8 housing vouchers, Social Security, child support, disability payments or tipped income, which will lead to an increase in homelessness and housing instability across the state.

This reactionary law overrides limited tenant protections enacted in cities like Kansas City, Columbia, St. Louis, and Webster Groves. With a single stroke of the pen, Missouri's ruling elite has sided decisively with real estate investors, property management corporations and landlord lobbying organizations, all of which pushed hard for the bill in the name of "property rights."

The law is a green light for discrimination. Landlords are now free to filter applicants based not on ability to pay or rental history, but on whether their income source is deemed "desirable" by the market. It means that low-wage workers who rely on tips, veterans living on federal stipends and disabled tenants living on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) can be turned away with impunity. Families receiving child support can be excluded, as can thousands of low-income Missourians participating in the Housing Choice Voucher Program, commonly known as Section 8.

Over the last decade, rents across Missouri have steadily outpaced wage growth, particularly since the pandemic, pushing housing costs out of reach for a growing segment of the working class. Rent increased 33.1 percent from 2019 to 2023 in Kansas City.

According to a report put out by We The Tenants, rent for a two-bedroom apartment in St. Louis increased from \$1,000 per month in 2014 to \$1,425 per month in 2022, a 42 percent increase. In 2023, Missouri had the highest rent increases of any state, and St. Louis itself saw 17 percent rent increases.

With the number of available affordable units plummeting, the state legislature and governor have chosen to protect the private profits of landlords. The state government's decision reflects the ruthless subordination of social needs to private wealth accumulation. Housing, in this context, is treated not as a right but as a commodity—a means of enrichment for a parasitic layer of the middle class and financial elite.

The bill's backers, including the Missouri Realtors Association and the Show-Me Institute, cloaked their support in the language of "free enterprise." But the real message is clear: workers are on their own. They are to compete in a brutal market rigged against them, and if they fail the system will offer no lifeline.

In defense of this program of open discrimination, Governor Kehoe, a Republican, has remained silent on the concrete implications for families. What will happen to the single mother denied housing because her income comes from child support? Or to the disabled worker whose Section 8 voucher is no longer accepted anywhere in the city? These are not hypotheticals—they are the daily realities of life under American capitalism.

This attack is not an aberration. It comes on the heels of Missouri's rollback of paid sick leave guarantees—a voter-approved protection stripped away by the state's Republican-led government. This is part of a broader pattern: the same governor who nullified local tenant protections has also moved to override voter-approved measures on wages, reproductive rights and public funding, redirecting state resources to billionaires while

leaving disaster victims and working families to fend for themselves. The clear pattern is the dismantling of every basic social right fought for over decades by workers.

The Democratic Party, for its part, has done nothing to seriously oppose the measure. In cities like Kansas City and St. Louis, where Democrats dominate local government, they offered only symbolic protest, opposing any strategy to mobilize the working class against the state's escalating assault.

The defense of housing rights cannot be entrusted to either party of big business. It requires the independent political organization of the working class, acting in its own interests, through rank-and-file committees and mass mobilization.

What is required is a socialist program that expropriates the landlords and financiers who treat housing as a speculative investment. Decent, affordable housing must be guaranteed to all as a social right—not doled out according to market logic. This means a massive expansion of high-quality, publicly owned housing—free from private profiteering—and a rational reallocation of resources based on human need, not corporate gain. The wealth hoarded by corporate landlords and financial institutions must be expropriated and redirected to guarantee safe, affordable housing as a social right.

The fight for such a future demands the building of a new political leadership in the working class, committed to the overthrow of capitalism and the establishment of socialism. The Socialist Equality Party calls on workers across Missouri—and throughout the US—to take up this fight.



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