

For Immediate Release:  
Community To Protest at Savannah Courthouse to Demand No COVID-19 Evictions

SAVANNAH, Ga. – Members of the community will protest to demand a moratorium on COVID-19 evictions, outside of the 122 Montgomery Street Courthouse in Savannah, from June 15, 2020, 9 a.m. to June 16, 12 a.m. “With the state of emergency ending in Georgia on June 12th, June 15th marks the first day for landlords to begin eviction proceedings that will allow members of our community to be kicked out of housing during a global pandemic,” says the organizer of the event, Savannah Comrades.

“Evictions historically have affected black and brown communities, and as such are a perpetuation of state-sanctioned violence against those communities. We are demanding that the city reallocate funding for police to funding for housing. Housing is a HUMAN RIGHT.”

Savannah Comrades demands the following from the City of Savannah:

1. We demand Savannah Chatham County implements a local level moratorium on evictions, rent, mortgage, utilities, and maintenance fees for at least 60-90 days after the expiration of the state of emergency. Governor Kemp placed Georgia under a state of emergency until June 12th. Due to widespread job losses and suspensions during the pandemic, once the state of emergency is over, people will still struggle with paying for all housing-related essentials. This 60-90 day period would give residents of Savannah time to find new employment, acquire their first check, and have enough funds to address increased debt accumulated as a result of the pandemic. This has been implemented at the local level in many cities including Miami, San Francisco, and San Antonio.
2. We demand the following protections for tenants who have experienced COVID-19 related financial hardships and are defendants in a dispossessory action related to owed rents:
  - a. Extend the time for the tenant to tender payment of the owed rents as a complete defense to the dispossessory action to thirty days from the service of the dispossessory warrant;
  - b. Waive any requirements that the tenant may only avail themselves to the tender defense once in any twelve-month period;
  - c. Exclude any lessor-charged fees or penalties associated with non-payment of rent and the lessor’s costs related to the dispossessory action from the amount that the tenant may tender as a complete defense to the dispossessory action;
  - d. Require the parties to attend mediation at no cost to the parties before any judgment is entered;
  - e. Prohibit lessors from recovering costs related to a covid-related dispossessory action from the tenant;
  - f. Prohibit lessors from reporting to any credit agency or bureau a tenant’s non-payment of rent or any related judgments against the tenant for owed rents; and
  - g. Prohibit lessors from collecting post-judgment interest on any judgments entered against the tenant.

- h. Commitment that all dispossessory proceedings related to owed rents due to covid-related financial hardship will not be recorded in the public record as dispossessory proceedings.
  - i. Prohibit lessors from charging to a tenant experiencing covid-related financial hardship fees, penalties, or other costs associated with non-payment of rent.
3. We demand that the Sheriff and County Police Department prioritizes the health and well-being of Savannahians by declining to serve dispossessory warrants and enforce writs of possession during this emergency. On March 12th, Miami-Dade County became the first known jurisdiction in the country to implement this proactive step to prohibit evictions during the coronavirus outbreak.
4. We demand immediate emergency housing for people without homes. Savannah can and should allocate funds to get hotel/motel/emergency shelter housing for people currently living without homes who cannot self-isolate, quarantine, or practice social distancing. Houseless individuals are members of our community; therefore, the city has a responsibility to invest in their wellbeing. We know that the City of Savannah has the means to do so, especially in a state of emergency where the safety of the public depends on social distancing.
5. We demand the redistribution of the city's tourism and development budget towards our housing crisis during times of emergency. To fully address the impact of COVID-19 on housing insecurity, Savannah must acknowledge the city's pre-existing housing inequality, which has been exacerbated by the tourism industry and development projects.
6. We demand that an automatic trigger that halts evictions on public housing during a state of emergency is created.
7. We demand that funds from Savannah Chatham County Police Department's \$ 63, 392,193 budget are reallocated to the city's Housing and Neighborhood Services. These services, which provide affordable lower-income housing to Savannahians, receive only \$1, 963,662 out of the city's budget. The reallocated funds should be used to create an Emergency COVID- 19 Eviction Prevention Program, which would assist citizens in paying rent and to address the pervasive housing inequality in Savannah.

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