

# California Assembly Approves Bill to Extend Statewide Eviction Protections Through End of June

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News

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Protesters rally in front of Santa Clara County Superior Court in San Jose on Jan. 27, 2021, demanding stronger state eviction protections during the pandemic. *(Beth LaBerge/KQED)*

The state Assembly overwhelmingly approved a bill Monday to extend eviction protections for millions of California renters, just days before those safeguards are set to expire.

Assembly Bill 2179, which now heads to the state Senate for approval, would prevent landlords from evicting tenants who are still waiting to receive rental assistance, through June 30. Under the current law, landlords can begin evicting tenants on April 1.

“It would be cruel,” Assemblymember Tim Grayson, D-Concord, who co-authored the bill, said Monday. “It would be wasteful and unfair to subject Californians to eviction or the loss of rental income now, when they have done everything that they have been asked, and also the distribution of their emergency rental assistance is imminent.”

Fewer than half the people who have applied to the state’s emergency rent relief program, called Housing Is Key, have received payments, according to the state’s dashboard. The deadline for new applications is March 31.

The state received more than \$5 billion from the federal government to assist renters who fell behind on payments due to the pandemic. Some of that money has reached tenants through cities that have their own rent relief programs — data not reflected on the state’s dashboard.

More than half a million people have applied to the state’s program since it rolled out in March 2021. About 35% of those applicants reported receiving an eviction notice or some other active threat of eviction at the time they applied for the funds.

Ending eviction protections for renters still waiting on assistance “undermines the entire premise of the program,” said Sarah Treuhaft, vice president of research for PolicyLink, an Oakland-based research and advocacy group.

“If we do not protect those who are already in the program from being evicted as they’re waiting for the program to deliver on its promise, it will be a failure,” Treuhaft added.

In a recent research paper, Treuhaft estimated it would take the state, at its current pace, through the end of November to deliver rental assistance to everyone who’s already applied.

Despite ultimately voting in favor of the bill, some lawmakers argued it should have gone further to protect tenants. Assemblymember Richard Bloom, D-Santa Monica, said the bill should extend not only eviction protections but also the time renters have to apply for rental assistance — a window that closes on Thursday.

“I fear that there are many people out there who, because of language difficulties or other issues, will not have submitted an application,” he said at an Assembly Judiciary Committee hearing Monday.

A survey of 58 organizations helping tenants apply to the rent relief program found many were still having trouble with the application process, running up against problems like language barriers, excessive wait times, a lack of status updates, insufficient community outreach, and gaps in coordination between state and local agencies, among other issues.

Some lawmakers also voiced concern that the bill overrides stronger, local protections that were set to go into effect on April 1, including those in Los Angeles and San Francisco.

“LA County did in January pass a pretty comprehensive renter-protections ordinance that extends to December,” Faith Conley of the California State Association of Counties said at the Assembly Judiciary Committee hearing Monday. “It’s a very thoughtful, phased-out process that offers a lot more protections than are considered in this bill.”

But the California Rental Housing Association, a landlord group, is balking at the proposed extension of eviction protections. Speaking on behalf of the organization, lobbyist Kate Bell said extending protections would harm small landlords.

“As the state has reopened and the pandemic regresses, there is no longer a need to have a statewide eviction moratorium,” she said.

Assemblymember Buffy Wicks, D-Oakland, the bill’s other co-author, admitted during Monday’s Assembly hearing that the legislation “is not perfect.”

“I fear that if we don’t move this bill forward, we’re going to see a mass wave of evictions in all of our communities,” she said.

Representatives from the California Department of Housing and Community Development, which oversees the rental assistance program, did not immediately respond to questions about how it plans to ensure that all qualified applicants receive aid by the new June 30 deadline.