



BRANDON M. SCOTT
MAYOR

100 Holliday Street, Room 250
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Honorable Halee F. Weinstein
Administrative Judge
District Court of Maryland for Baltimore City
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Honorable L. Robert Cooper
Judge-in-Charge, Civil Division
District Court of Maryland for Baltimore City
Robert.Cooper@mdcourts.gov

Friday, September 10, 2021

Dear Judges Weinstein and Cooper,

I am writing to thank you for your support of Baltimore City's eviction prevention work to date, and to request your continued partnership as we work to strengthen our eviction diversion efforts. My administration is seeking the Court's partnership in recommending voluntary postponements of pending evictions, promoting the Baltimore City Pandemic Rent Court Program, and sharing eviction filing information with my administration so that we can best serve Baltimoreans in need.

Earlier this summer, the Department of Justice urged all state courts to implement eviction diversion strategies that "encourage landlords and tenants to resolve disputes without formal adjudication and increase the chances that tenants can stay in their homes."

On behalf of the city and its community partners, I am grateful for the court's contributions in building this program and getting it to a place where it can now launch. The Baltimore City Pandemic Rent Court Program will allow litigants to apply for back-rent assistance – on-site at rent court – through the Eviction Prevention Program, which is administered by the Baltimore City Community Action Partnership (BCCAP) in the Mayor's Office of Children and Family Success (MOCFS). The program:

1. Allows landlords and tenants to work with BCCAP staff before and during rent dockets;
2. Enables judges to refer litigants to on-site BCCAP staff to apply for back-rent assistance;
3. Uses continuances, stipulated dismissals, or stays to allow time for an Eviction Prevention Program resolution to play out; and
4. Maximizes avoidance of trial, judgment, warrant, and eviction where litigants are eligible for back-rent assistance.

My administration is scheduled to launch the Baltimore City Pandemic Rent Court Program on Monday,

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September 13. To ensure a strong start to the program and its long-term effectiveness, I am calling on the court to leverage its authority to proactively promote the Baltimore City Pandemic Rent Court Program with tenants and landlords to maximize eviction diversion. Specifically, I am asking that:

- Judges, as a matter of practice, invite landlords to consider and agree to a voluntary postponement, and refer them to onsite BCCAP staff to apply for payment of back rent through the Eviction Prevention Program. BCCAP commits to escalating such cases and processing payments in 45 days; and
- When landlords file for eviction with the Court Clerk, the Court immediately share this information with BCCAP so staff can contact the landlords about a diversion resolution, with a goal of keeping residents housed.

I realize the latter request may impose an administrative burden on the court. Please know that BCCAP is happy to utilize Eviction Prevention Program funds to provide the necessary staffing support. The hope is that we can keep these cases from coming to court in the first place, which will reduce backlogs and proactively provide assistance to all parties.

Baltimore City is committed to partnering with the Court and community organizations like the Public Justice Center to implement a robust eviction diversion effort for Baltimore City. Our goal is maximizing the best possible outcomes for tenants and landlords — outside the judicial process — that keep residents and families housed during this pandemic and beyond.

I look forward to hearing back from you about these concrete steps we can take together to chart a collaborative path forward, and to ensure that our city's eviction prevention dollars fulfill their purpose to keep renters housed and landlords whole.

In service,



Brandon M. Scott

Mayor

City of Baltimore

CC:

Mayor's Office of Children & Family Success

Baltimore City Community Action Partnership

Baltimore City Sheriff's Office

District Court Help Center

Homeless Persons Representation Project

Pro Bono Resource Center of Maryland

Public Justice Center

University of Baltimore Court Navigators

Maryland Multi-Housing Association