



Dear Governor Inslee,

We are the Affordable Housing Implementation Task Force, with volunteers from Columbia and Walla Walla counties in southeastern Washington. We are advocating for the implementation of recommendations generated through a community-led study on affordable housing in 2018 and 2019, facilitated and published by Community Council. Before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, **our community identified affordable housing as the most pressing challenge in our region.**

Quick facts from the Community Council *Affordable Housing Study*, published prior to the pandemic:

- **41%** of households in Columbia and Walla Walla counties that paid rent or a mortgage did not have affordable housing.
- **50.2%** of renters in Columbia and Walla Walla counties did not have affordable housing; compared to 46.2% in the United States, and 45.3% in Washington State.

Now with the pandemic and economic crisis widespread, housing instability threatens to worsen public health risks and increase hardship for individual households throughout Washington State. These challenges are creating new burdens for already struggling communities.

We appreciate the steps you have taken as Governor in response to the COVID-19 to protect renters throughout Washington State. As your residential eviction moratorium is set to expire on August 1st, **we urge you to extend the eviction moratorium through March 2021.** Because extended unemployment insurance benefits are set to time out for many workers at the same time, the vast majority of low-income and unemployed renters will remain cost-burdened and at-risk of homelessness. Indeed, according to the Census Bureau's Pulse Survey, **247,959 renter households in Washington were unable to pay rent in June.** Each of those households could face eviction if the moratorium expires. Additional measures need to be taken to prevent hundreds of thousands of renter households' potential evictions and/or slides into unmanageable debt. Extending the eviction moratorium is a necessary first step. Keeping renters safely housed in their homes is also crucial to containing the spread of COVID-19.

In addition, **we urge you to enact a statewide mortgage forbearance through March 2021** to help prevent a large wave of foreclosures, protect small landlords, and contain the spread of COVID-19. Homeowners with federally-backed mortgages and insurance are currently protected by a federal foreclosure moratorium, yet homeowners with privately backed mortgages and private insurance are not. All home-owning households need to be able to stay in their homes, where they can effectively shelter in place.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting the health of all Washingtonians, and for considering our requests to address housing instability during the COVID-19 pandemic.