

Mayor Turner Tells Landlords Not to Evict Flood Victims in Response to Pastors' Pleas

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Hundreds of evacuees at the George R. Brown Convention Center the week of the storm. Photo by Doogie Roux

Landlords threatening out-of-work flood victims with eviction. Demanding rent for borderline uninhabitable apartments. Threatening to take away the deposit if tenants try to find a better place to live.

These are the situations that pastors with **The Metropolitan Organization** told Houston City Council that their church members are finding themselves facing as rents are due, and yet flood victims can only think about how to remove the mold and musty smell and damaged sheet rock from their homes. The pastors called on the city to ask the landlords to give tenants a grace period during the month of September to pay rent and to halt evictions while everyone is just trying to recover. Many of the tenants the pastors knew were also undocumented, making things worse, they said.

"Landlords are demanding the rent and these people haven't worked in nine or ten days," said the Reverend Ed Gomez of San Pablo/St. Paul's Episcopal Church. "Many of them work in the service industry — busboys, waiters, bartenders — and they do make a living and they do pay their rent, but with the flooding and all the businesses shut down, they lost a lot of the work. I spoke to a couple of property managers and some were gracious; however, others were threatening that they were gonna call immigration or call the police on them, that they're gonna evict them if they don't have their rent — and then there's late penalties."

Mayor Sylvester Turner and council members were largely receptive to the clergy's request for leniency. Turner even asked Gomez if he could provide a list of all the apartment complexes and landlords that were threatening tenants, and Councilman Mike Laster said that if the apartment complexes don't get their acts together soon, they should be shamed. Ultimately, Turner called on landlords to have a heart.

"We hope apartment complexes will not be evicting people because they're unable to pay because they're victims of the flooding situation," Turner said. "We've got to be calling on them not to do that, and certainly not to be asking tenants to pay rent for apartments that are not habitable. This is one of those times when we all have to sacrifice. So it's my request that apartment complexes not evict people who are flooding victims trying to get back on their feet. This is not the right time to evict them, and there's not adequate housing for them to go to if they're evicted."

[As we reported last week](#), Houston's precarious housing market may soon cave as thousands of people seek temporary housing while others, their homes or apartments totally destroyed, look for a permanent and affordable new home. And while Houston was already amid an acute affordable housing crisis, Tory Gunsolley, president and CEO of the Houston Housing Authority, told the *Houston Press* that finding a \$600-a-month apartment after the flood may be nearly impossible.

On Wednesday, City Council took another step to address the post-Harvey housing problem, introducing a proposal to open a former a Star of Hope homeless shelter as a long-term emergency shelter for displaced Houstonians needing a place to stay while they wait on housing help. The former shelter, located at 419 Emancipation Avenue, would house 296 people for up to a year. The city would prepare a management agreement with New Hope Housing, Inc., and would take \$500,000 from its TIRZ affordable housing fund to go toward the lease and management of the shelter.

Council is expected to vote on the item next week.