



DAVID E. RYU
COUNCILMEMBER, FOURTH DISTRICT

March 23, 2020

Governor Gavin Newsom
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: Suspension of Rents and Mortgages and other actions needed during the COVID-19 crisis

Dear Governor Newsom,

I thank you for your leadership during this uncertain time. The critical steps that your office has taken to safeguard Californians from further spreading of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) – as difficult and disruptive to our daily lives as these necessary changes are – will save thousands, if not millions of lives.

However, the longer the crisis goes on, the more devastating the economic impact will be for California's working families and the most vulnerable among us. That's why I signed on to support a broad-based anti-poverty coalition's letter imploring you to take action on a number of fronts.

With the Los Angeles City Council meeting cancelled tomorrow for social distancing concerns, instead of introducing a resolution, I am writing directly to urge you to take a number of steps to ensure the health, safety, and well-being of all Californians:

1. A Moratorium on Rent Increases, Evictions, Foreclosures, and Execution of Writs of Possession

In Los Angeles, we have already taken action to prohibit evictions, and I am working with the Mayor's Office to prohibit rent increases for the duration of this crisis. But swift action by the State for a blanket moratorium will ensure Californians stay housed. Even small increases can make-or-break a family that is living paycheck to paycheck. And by directing law enforcement to cease executing all writs of possession will ensure that people are able to stay home, and not further spread the virus by being displaced.

2. Moratorium on Encampment Sweeps, Closures, and Vehicle Towing

Actions displacing our unhoused neighbors in this time of crisis are especially inhumane and dangerous from a public health standpoint – unnecessary movement can further spread

exposure to the virus. The City of Los Angeles has stopped enforcing its ordinance requiring tents to be taken down during the day, so that people are able to maintain some sense of social distance at such a critical time. The State should take action to ensure enforcement protocols are consistent statewide. The City of Los Angeles is also opening thousands of new emergency shelter beds for unhoused Angelenos who would like to come inside, and long term, we will need assistance from the State to keep people housed.

3. Emergency Rental or Mortgage Assistance

We must provide financial support for the workers who have lost income through no fault of their own, regardless of whether they are employees or independent contractors. While unemployment insurance is available, it does not apply to many Californians. Creating an additional pool of potential resources that could be accessed would encourage workers to stay home when they are sick rather than spread the virus. Rainy Day reserve funds are a potential source of funds that could be used to defray mortgage and rental costs.

4. Suspension of Rents and Mortgages

Here in Los Angeles, we are taking steps to protect tenants the best we can. We have halted evictions due to job loss from the coronavirus, and I am working to freeze all rent increases and utility increases during this time.

But we must go further. As the entertainment capital of the world, Los Angeles has an extraordinary number of freelancers who work project-to-project, and billions of dollars of our local economy depend on the tourism trade – including many hourly workers in service jobs that have disappeared. What we need is a temporary suspension and forgiveness of rents and mortgages for a period of time during the coronavirus crisis so that people don't fall into insurmountable debt.

We need the State to call on the banks and lenders to suspend mortgages, including the accrual of interest, to provide financial relief for both landlords and homeowners, and we likewise have to suspend rent payments for tenants. So many Californians are severely rent-burdened already, one study estimated 721,000 people in LA County spend more than 50% of their income on rent.

5. Prohibit Utility Shut-Offs and Rate Increases, Halt Application of Late Fees, and Reinstitute Services Immediately

Vulnerable individuals and families are going to quickly fall behind on payments for basic services like water, gas, electricity, phone service and internet. In Los Angeles, we are working to prohibit increases in utility charges and placing a moratorium on shut offs for the Department of Water and Power. However, we need assistance from the State to call on all utilities, public and private, to cease disconnections for non-payment, to freeze rates at current levels, and halt late fees and interest. Access to utilities at this critical time when we all need to be sheltering in place, couldn't be more critical.

Before the Coronavirus, California was already facing unacceptable levels of people experiencing homelessness and housing unaffordability. We must take these actions now to ensure that this is not exacerbated with millions more people now out of work.

While these may seem like unprecedented steps, these are unprecedented times. But I know that working together we will get through this.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "D. E. Ryu". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "D." starting with a large, looped capital letter.

David E. Ryu
Councilmember, City of Los Angeles, District Four