

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Francis Calls on Bryan to Issue Rent Moratorium Before CDC Order Expires in January

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Senator Novelle Francis on Wednesday wrote to Governor Albert Bryan urging him to declare a rent moratorium in the Virgin Islands to ensure that residents will not be evicted from their homes upon the December 31 expiration of an eviction ban implemented by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

According to a release issued by Mr. Francis's office, the senator is appealing to Mr. Bryan to issue an executive order to prohibit tenant evictions through February 6, 2021, which is the end of the current state of emergency.

Mr. Francis, who has served as Senate president during the 33rd Legislature and hailed by many of his colleagues as one of the best presidents of the institution in part for his ability to work with members and gain consensus, said the local government must act quickly to protect its residents since there is no certainty that the federal government will extend the eviction ban, which was intended to halt the further spread of Covid-19. According to Francis, a rent moratorium has an added urgency during this time while the territory experiences a surge in Covid-19 cases.

"While it is entirely possible that the CDC will extend the moratorium, I believe it is important for local government to take its own steps to reassure Virgin Islanders during this critical time," he said. "Our own shortage of emergency housing and other safety nets to support those at risk reinforces the need to implement a local eviction moratorium."

He added, "No one should have to spend the holidays worrying if they will have a roof over their heads in the New Year."

Mr. Francis's call for the governor to act follows [a Consortium report Monday](#) that highlighted the daunting reality for many Virgin Islanders come January when the CDC order expires. The CDC halt on evictions covers states and territories, including the U.S. Virgin Islands, according to a copy of the order, seen [here](#).

Since Mr. Bryan's last order on rent evictions expired on Sept. 27, barring an extension of the CDC's order, Virgin Islanders would have to fend for themselves in court — leading to the possible overwhelming of the judicial system with eviction cases — if Mr. Bryan fails to take action.

According to the Wall Street Journal — citing housing-industry executives — the CDC will likely extend its order. Additionally, many landlords believe they are more likely to recover some rent by working with tenants as compared to evicting them.

The Consortium knows of at least one case of a landlord who is seeking to evict a tenant through the judicial system. According to WSJ, while the CDC order helps keep renters in their homes, it doesn't prevent landlords from beginning the eviction process in court.

Details of the current order

Renters must express that they would likely become homeless if they are evicted.

The Trump administration said renters could face jail time if they lie in the declarations. According to The New York Times, an administration official told reporters the order was not an invitation to stop paying rent and said renters should pay a portion of the rent if possible. Renters will still owe accrued rent and face penalties for failing to pay, the administration official told reporters, according to the Times.

The CDC order says renters could be evicted "for reasons other than not paying rent or making a housing payment."

In July, Americans owed more than \$21.5 billion in past due rent, estimated global advisory firm Stout, Risius and Ross.

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