



Staying in Place

BY ANNE STOKES

COVID-19 has changed the way people live their lives across the globe and California has not escaped the pandemic's health or economic effects.

Unemployment rates are at record levels and millions are rightfully worried about being able to pay rent. But new regulations are offering temporary relief for tenants. Many local jurisdictions are passing regulations preventing evictions for renters who have lost income due to COVID-19, including Sacramento County and the cities of Sacramento, Rancho Cordova and Elk Grove.

"It allows tenants to have that safety and security ... at a time when folks are not supposed to be out and about. Searching for housing is ridiculously hard and also involves being out during the shelter-in-place order," said Sarah Ropelato, managing attorney at Legal Services of Northern California's Sacramento office. "If we didn't have protections, ... we'd be looking at a vast amount of hardship. Going forward, the reason folks need to know about this *now* is that there's stuff they have to do right now in order to benefit from these protections."

Ordinances differ among jurisdictions, but they typically protect tenants who:

- Are sick due to COVID-19
- Are caring for a sick household member
- Were laid off, lost hours or income due to COVID-19
- Can't work because they're complying with shelter-in-place orders
- Can't work because they have to care for a home-bound, school-aged child

While protections are in place to ensure

residents can safely shelter in place and help prevent the spread of coronavirus infections and deaths, there are steps tenants must take in order to be protected under local ordinances:

- Notify landlords of an inability to pay rent in writing
- Notify landlords before rent is due
- Prove that inability to pay rent in full is COVID-19 related
- Pay what they're reasonably able to

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**Sarah Ropelato, managing attorney
Legal Services of Northern California -
Sacramento**

In addition, ordinances require renters to catch up on rent payments after the governor's emergency declaration has been lifted.

Unfortunately, Ropelato said tenants are still receiving eviction notices. In such cases, Legal Services of Northern California is able to provide counsel, advice and other services. Fellow community groups like Sacramento ACT, Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE) and



Attorney Sarah Ropelato says tenant protections are needed to prevent vast amounts of hardship during the pandemic.
Photo courtesy of Sarah Ropelato

Sacramento Building Healthy Communities Hub are able to provide direct assistance, as well as outreach efforts to help educate tenants on their rights and responsibilities under the new ordinances.

"ACCE and Sacramento ACT are amazing organizations that are spreading the word, and we're trying to get them the information they need so they're able to tell folks what they need to know," Ropelato said. "It's a concerted effort that we all undertake together."

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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