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New Eviction Resolution Pilot Program Helps Tenants and Landlords

Program brings renters and housing providers together to find solutions on rent owed before filing for an eviction

BELLINGHAM, WA -- In coordination with Whatcom County Superior Court, the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center has officially launched a new eviction prevention program, requiring tenants and landlords in Whatcom County to try to resolve issues around rent owed through an eviction resolution specialist or mediation, before eviction cases may be filed in court.

Now operational in Whatcom County, the [Eviction Resolution Pilot Program](#) aims to stabilize housing and reduce a pending wave of eviction cases once Bridge Proclamation 21-09 expires on Oct. 31, 2021. A pilot program has been available in six counties since November 2020, and the program is now available statewide.

The ERPP connects tenants who are behind on rent with the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center team to problem solve together with their landlord, most often in some combination of rental assistance, legal aid, and mediation. The landlord and tenant may be able to access rental assistance, create a rent payment plan, or create a move out plan, without going to court.

“The decision to remove someone from their home is a significant one with long-term consequences for both the individual and the community,” said Whatcom County Superior Court Judge Evan Jones. “The Court is encouraged that housing providers and tenants will have the opportunity to come to the table and discuss this issue, including available rental assistance, before ending up in front of the judge.”

The ERPP is a mandatory step in addressing rent owed. Before legal action leading to an eviction, landlords must provide the tenant with an [ERPP Notice](#) with information about mediation services, legal aid, and rental assistance agencies, and must participate. The ERPP is free to the tenant and to the landlord, and is confidential and available regardless of immigration status. Language assistance is available.

“For nearly 30 years the Whatcom Dispute Resolution Center has provided landlord/tenant mediation services,” said Moonwater, WDRC’s executive director. “As impartial facilitators, we’re able to bring parties together in dialogue to create solutions that work for them. Just as we did

during the foreclosure crisis, it's our honor and privilege to partner statewide and locally to develop and provide services that meet emergent needs. We are eager to help reduce stress and strain, divert potential cases from Court, and support housing stabilization for landlords and tenants alike, throughout the County.”

As the COVID-19 pandemic endures, many tenants are unable to pay rent, and many landlords are not receiving payments. Recent estimates from the U.S. Census Weekly Household Pulse show that approximately 1 in 10 Washington renters are behind on rental payments and 24% of renters are concerned they may not be able to pay next month's rent. According to estimates in the recent [COVID-19 Community Health Impact Assessment](#), published by the Whatcom County Health Department, as of June 2021 at least 4,655 households are at risk for eviction.

“Housing is fundamental to health, a foundation of stability for individuals and families,” said Ann Beck, housing program supervisor with the Whatcom County Health Department. “We know that a loss of housing can have devastating consequences, so we’re incredibly grateful to our legal and non-profit colleagues who are stepping up with this important part of preventing homelessness.”

An eviction record, or even a filing, may appear on rental history, so avoiding an eviction can benefit the renter’s ability to find future housing. The eviction moratorium has also left many landlords shouldering significant financial burdens. This program helps to pull resources and people together in order to move forward.

The ERPP was developed by the state Superior Court Judges’ Association in partnership with the state Office of Civil Legal Aid, Dispute Resolution Centers, and other stakeholders, at the direction of the Washington State Supreme Court, codified by the Washington State Legislature, and supported by the Governor and the Administrative Office of the Courts.

Under RCW 7.75, Dispute Resolution Centers provide conflict resolution services including mediation, facilitation, and conflict resolution that can be an alternative to the court system and resolve disputes within the local community.

For more information:

www.whatcomdrc.org/erpp

www.courts.wa.gov/evictionresolutionprogram

www.atq.wa.gov/landlord-tenant

www.resolutionwa.org/erpp

www.opcco.org/basic-needs/housing/help-with-rent/

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