

Legislation Text

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Recognizing and honoring Mayor James F. Kenney's administration, the First Judicial District, and organizational partners for establishing Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion and Rental Assistance programs that have succeeded in keeping individuals and families housed, as well as protecting the public health during the COVID-19 pandemic, and becoming a model program for the nation.

WHEREAS, The global COVID-19 pandemic and associated widespread shutdowns beginning in March 2020 caused many Philadelphians to lose their income, endangering their housing stability and thereby threatening public health at a time of mandatory "stay at home" orders; and

WHEREAS, In June 2020, City Council passed the Emergency Housing Protections Act, a package of bills designed to keep families housed amidst an unprecedented crisis. The legislation authorized the creation of a mandatory Eviction Diversion Program to connect renters and landlords to counseling, resources and mediation in an effort to avoid evictions, provide funds for landlords, and keep people housed; and

WHEREAS, The Eviction Diversion program launched in September 2020 with immense dedication from partnering agencies. Mayor Kenney's administration worked tirelessly to implement the Eviction Diversion Program as well as the other legislated protections, and to integrate them with the Rent Assist program. This collaborative effort brought together outside organizational partners including nonprofit legal services, landlord associations, professional mediators, and city agencies including the Philadelphia Department of Housing and Community Development, the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority, the Health and Human Services Cabinet, the Philadelphia Law Department, the Philadelphia Fair Housing Commission and others to institute groundbreaking programs and protections for families in danger of eviction; and

WHEREAS, An instrumental partner in this effort was the First Judicial District of Philadelphia, under the leadership of President Judge Idee Fox of the Court of Common Pleas, President Judge Patrick Dugan of the Municipal Court, and Supervising Judge Matthew Wolf of the Municipal Court Civil Division, which acted responsibly to protect health and safety by issuing orders and moratoria to prevent evictions during the height of the pandemic and ensure the safe operation of the court system. Acting together, the City of Philadelphia and the First Judicial District have been partners on a transformative effort to improve outcomes for both landlords and tenants; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia's rental assistance program, PHL Rent Assist which had launched with less than \$3 million in January 2020, quickly ramped up through the pandemic, and has already distributed over \$65 million to more than 14,000 families; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia has led the state in distributing rental assistance funds, acting quickly to establish an online portal for landlords and renters to apply for assistance, conducting robust education and outreach, coordinating amongst a variety of community organizations, and streamlining and innovating the application process rapidly along the way - for example providing pre-registration pathways for landlords. This success has made Philadelphia's rental assistance program a national model at a time when many jurisdictions have struggled to distribute these funds to those who need them; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s Eviction Diversion Program has held more than 1,300 mediations with approximately 90% of cases resulting in tenants and landlords reaching an outcome other than eviction. The diversion program is particularly noted for these mutually beneficial outcomes; and

WHEREAS, The number of evictions filed in Philadelphia in 2020 plummeted to less than one-fourth of the 20,000 evictions that occurred in the previous year, in part due to the efficacy of the Eviction diversion and rental assistance programs; and

WHEREAS, A University of Pennsylvania study showed how the Emergency Housing Protections Act helped prevent an estimated 53,000 additional cases of COVID from spreading in Philadelphia by keeping people safely housed. The study shows that minimizing eviction protects not only those who may otherwise have become unhoused, but the entire community in which they live by preventing viral spread; and

WHEREAS, In April 2021, the First Judicial District adopted eviction diversion as mandatory practice, requiring that landlords apply for rental assistance for their tenants and participate in mediation before seeking a court-ordered eviction. This was a first of its kind model that distinguished Philadelphia’s model from all others; and

WHEREAS, Philadelphia’s eviction diversion program has been hailed as a national model with the *New York Times*’ editorial board calling it an “elegant” solution and a “strategy others should emulate” and praised locally by the *Philadelphia Inquirer* editorial boards; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, THAT THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, Recognizes and honors Mayor James F. Kenney's administration, the First Judicial District, and organizational partners for establishing Philadelphia’s Eviction Diversion and Rental Assistance programs that have succeeded in keeping individuals and families housed, as well as protecting the public health during the COVID-19 pandemic, and becoming a model program for the nation.