

**GOVERNOR BAKER'S EVICTION DIVERSION INITIATIVE TO PROVIDE EXPANDED
RELIEF TO LANDLORDS AND TENANTS
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

Summary by: Robert W. Anctil, Esq.

On Monday, October 12, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker announced a \$171 million package of programs which will support tenants and landlords facing financial challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The main goal is to keep tenants in their homes while also supporting the ongoing expenses for landlords. The Eviction Diversion Initiative comes in anticipation of, and in preparation for, the end of the eviction and foreclosure moratorium which expired on October 17, 2020.

With the Massachusetts ban on evictions and foreclosures expiring on Saturday of last week, many experts have stated that there could be tens of thousands of evictions once the housing courts reopen. Governor Baker's goal is to provide relief to struggling renters and landlords. The package will expand on several existing programs, as well as create new relief programs.

Eviction Diversion Initiative

Governor Baker indicated that \$100 million will be allocated to expanding the state's main emergency rental-relief program, the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT). Additionally, up to \$12.3 million will be designated for providing both tenants and landlords with access to counselors, attorneys, and mediators prior to and during the eviction process. The goal of the mediators will be to help tenants and landlords work together to prevent evictions. Also, nearly \$50 million will be used for post-eviction rapid rehousing programs.

Some key highlights of the package include:

- Streamlining the RAFT and Emergency Rental and Mortgage Assistance (ERMA) programs.
- Allowing landlords who own fewer than 20 units to apply directly for RAFT and ERMA relief, with consent from tenants.
- Increasing the RAFT benefit from \$4,000 to \$10,000 per household, on the condition that tenancy can be preserved for 6 months, or until June 2021 for households with school-aged children, whichever is longer.
- Enabling Housing Consumer Education Centers to hire Special Housing Counselors to help households navigate available resources.

- Expanding the current upstream Tenancy Preservation Program (TPP), which assists households where a family member has a disability, and to serve other vulnerable households, including those eligible for Family Emergency Assistance, and low-income seniors.
- Offering financial assistance and case management services to families in the process of securing stable housing.
- Providing funds to households for periods up to 12 months to assist with moving expenses, rent, and security deposits, while transitioning into stable housing.
- Providing legal representation and related services to eligible COVID-19 impacted tenants and landlords to assist in navigating the eviction process.

Although Governor Baker expects the rental relief funds to last through June 2021, many housing advocates and landlord groups are urging the government to set aside additional funds.

Summary

While we all remain concerned about the future, Governor Baker's Eviction Diversion Initiative should prove to be a great resource for landlords and tenants. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions about the initiative and its potential legal implications, or any other COVID-19 matters that may be impacting your home or business.

The following links from the State provide an overview of the initiative as well as answer frequently asked questions regarding the Initiative.

[https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-eviction-diversion-initiative-overview#expansion-upstream-tenancy-preservation-program-\(tpp\)-](https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-eviction-diversion-initiative-overview#expansion-upstream-tenancy-preservation-program-(tpp)-)

<https://www.mass.gov/info-details/covid-19-eviction-diversion-frequently-asked-questions>