



Text File

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Bill No: 2020-0282, **Version:** 1

Committee: City Council

Status: Adopted

WHEREAS, as of April 13, 2020, there have been more than 24,000 confirmed cases of COVID-19 across Pennsylvania; and

WHEREAS, in Allegheny County, as of the same date, there have been more than 870 cases and 130 hospitalizations, with a significant portion of those cases occurring in the City of Pittsburgh; and

WHEREAS, measures such as social distancing and self-isolating help to curb the spread of the highly-communicable virus and have seen widespread adoption, enforcement, and compliance throughout Pennsylvania, including on the parts of governments, businesses, and individuals; and

WHEREAS, more than 1.3 million Pennsylvanians have filed for unemployment compensation between March 15, 2020 and April 12, 2020 due to businesses shutting down, cutting service, or ceasing operations, producing severe economic hardship of a rare scale and contributing to preexisting economic inequality and often debilitating financial constraints of working families and those separated from employment; and

WHEREAS, approximately 55% of Pittsburghers rent their homes, with a similar percentage of all housing units renter-occupied as opposed to owner-occupied in the City, and, according to a 2019 meta-analysis by Freddie Mac, 48% of all renters in Pittsburgh are cost-burdened, or dedicating 30% or more of their income to housing expenses, while 40% of total renters could be classified as severely cost-burdened, or putting more than 50% of their income toward housing-related costs; and

WHEREAS, on March 18, 2020, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court issued an order temporarily halting evictions and foreclosures through its declaration of a judicial emergency, and subsequently extended that emergency declaration and related court closures to April 30, 2020; and

WHEREAS, absent any guidance or policy prescription from state or federal authorities, renters are without protections against practices such as cumulative collections after the COVID-19 pandemic, late fees, or other actions that would further penalize renters for adhering to public health recommendations; and

WHEREAS, homeowners and other mortgage-holders are similarly without protections from lending institutions and face the threat of default due to harsh economic conditions; and

WHEREAS, the City of Pittsburgh has a limited a degree of latitude as to how it responds to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and, as a home rule charter municipality, its ability to respond in a more robust capacity is hampered by state-level preemption stemming from Pennsylvania's Second Class City Law and the state's institutionalization of Dillon's Rule; and

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WHEREAS, state preemption and state government supremacy in Pennsylvania vest considerably more power in the state legislature than in individual municipalities, including but not limited to the City of Pittsburgh; and

WHEREAS, the City of Pittsburgh doesn't have the requisite authority or powers to adequately respond to the economic effects of the pandemic in a truly meaningful and impactful way, whereas the ascendancy of the state and federal governments are better equipped to deliver considerably more resources and relief to municipalities and those who live within them; and

WHEREAS, further relief to working families, vulnerable populations, small businesses, and everyday Pennsylvanians beyond what individual municipalities such as the City of Pittsburgh are empowered to offer - including rent and mortgage moratoriums - should be delivered and can only be delivered through sweeping, comprehensive, and compassionate action by the state legislature; and

WHEREAS, other state legislatures have introduced legislation calling for increased resources for renters in response to COVID-19: Ohio has introduced House Bill 578 with the goal of creating a rental assistance fund, and New York has introduced Senate Bill S8140A to establish an emergency rental assistance program.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Council of the City of Pittsburgh hereby calls on the Pennsylvania General Assembly and the United States Congress to maximize the use of their powers and authorities during the COVID-19 pandemic to the benefit of working and vulnerable Pennsylvanians; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that this Council recognizes that housing is a human right and calls for the swift institution of policies and resources that protect renters from financial ruin or loss of housing during this emergency, as well as for the offering of resources to mortgage-holders for similar purposes.