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OPINION

Lind: Implementation of tenant/landlord assistance programs is critical

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Michelle Lind

By Michelle Lind

Arizona businesses continue to be affected by the economic impact of COVID-19. Particularly hard-hit are those individuals whose business is the ownership and management of rental homes throughout the state.

As tenants struggle to make ends meet, landlords were mandated by an executive order to adjust their rent collections schedules, allowing tenants upwards of eight months abeyance on payments. While this order provided needed relief to the tenants, it created additional

hardship for the landlords, whose own financial stability often relies on the income generated from these rental properties. And although no rent was collected, the landlords were still expected to meet their financial obligations.

Arizona Realtors is dedicated to the protection of private property rights. As such, we question why the available financial pandemic assistance to both those living in rental homes and the owners obligated to make mortgage payments and pay taxes, insurance, and maintenance fees on those homes have not been widely distributed.

The Arizona Department of Housing's rental assistance program has only \$5 million in available funding. These funds are not legislative or federal COVID-19 relief funds. More than \$12 million in rental assistance applications have been submitted, and only 7% of those applications have been processed. To make matters worse, only about \$2.1 million of the allocated \$10 million has been provided to those in need.

Nearly five months after landlords and tenants began facing hardship, the need continues to escalate.

Retirees, families, individuals, couples and small businesses have invested substantial portions of their life savings in real estate. These owners are not big companies turning a profit; they are real people struggling in the same ways' renters are struggling to stay afloat financially.



The governor's eviction moratorium has deprived these small property owners of the income they need.

If the state and local government funds are at appropriate levels to address the needs of tenants in the form of rental assistance and landlords in the form of foreclosure prevention, as stated by the governor's office, then there is no need for an eviction moratorium. This is necessary only because funds are far below an appropriate level, and the government is not dedicating the resources to award qualified applicants assistance at the appropriate speed.

Arizona Realtors continue to advocate in every way possible to get available financial pandemic assistance to both those living in rental homes and the property owners. We continue to ask Gov. Ducey to heed calls to properly fund and implement effective and accessible tenant and landlord assistance programs so that evictions and foreclosures are not tomorrow's reality.

Property owners across the state have done so much to support Arizona's more than 920,000 rental households. It is now time for the governor's office to do its part to properly fund tenant and property owner assistance programs.

Editor's note: Michelle Lind is CEO of Arizona Realtors, a trade association representing approximately 52,000 Arizona Realtors.

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