

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

March 24, 2021

The Honorable Marcia Fudge
Secretary
Department of Housing and Urban Development
451 7th Street S.W.
Washington, DC 20410

Dear Secretary Fudge,

As the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) works to ensure that individuals and families remain housed during the COVID-19 crisis, we write to urge you to include landlord-tenant mediation programs in these efforts.

Mediation helps prevent evictions by resolving disputes between landlords and tenants without the need for formal eviction proceedings. President Biden expressed his support for mediation as an innovative way to confront housing insecurity as part of his presidential campaign. While more work will be necessary to bolster such mediation efforts, including through additional funding like that included in the *Prevent Evictions Act*, we are glad to see states, like New Hampshire, are already using landlord-tenant mediation to prevent evictions during the COVID-19 crisis¹.

Safe and stable housing is essential to protecting renters and public health during COVID-19, which is why eviction prevention has been a core component of the COVID-19 response. Early last year, Congress created a federal eviction moratorium for nonpayment of rent at certain federally assisted properties for 120 days, and we strongly support President Biden's decision to extend the eviction moratorium. While we have focused on keeping people housed, we have also recognized the burden that puts on small landlords, and Congress provided more than \$45 billion in emergency rental assistance to protect renters overburdened by back rent and to ensure that small landlords were made whole.

Beyond this immediate relief, it is also vital that additional support programs are put into place to ensure that renters can remain in their homes in the long run. Recent data from the Census Household Pulse Survey shows that nearly 1.4 million renters feel eviction is "very likely" within the next two months and, similarly, more than 9.2 million renters are behind on their payments. In some instances, landlords are making good-faith efforts to keep individuals and families in their homes, and landlord-tenant mediation programs can build on these efforts to help prevent a wave of evictions later this year.

¹ "New program aims to keep landlord-tenant disputes out of court." WMUR. February 8, 2021.
<https://www.wmur.com/article/new-program-aims-to-keep-landlord-tenant-disputes-out-of-court/35452321>

Mediation programs facilitate mutually beneficial agreements between landlords and tenants – including fair rent repayment plans – which ensure renters remain housed and we were pleased to see President Biden highlight their importance during his campaign. Importantly, President Biden noted his support for encouraging localities to pursue mediation as part of their larger eviction prevention efforts.

We applaud the landlord-tenant mediation efforts which are already underway in our state through a pilot program within the Circuit Court system. This program will be free to both parties with the aim of finding a solution that meets the needs of landlords and tenants alike. We encourage HUD to pursue landlord-tenant mediation efforts at the federal level, using New Hampshire’s pilot program as a model, in order to ensure that all Americans can remain safely and stably housed throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

We look forward to working with you on this issue and thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,



Margaret Wood Hassan
United States Senator



Jeanne Shaheen
United States Senator



Ann McLane Kuster
Member of Congress



Chris Pappas
Member of Congress