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TO: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

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Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center (BCRC)  
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Community Development

SUBJECT: BCRC Housing Accord Program

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This report is for information only.

## Background

The Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center (BCRC) is a dispute resolution center formed under Chapter 7.75 of the Revised Code of Washington to provide for all people in Washington equal access to justice. BCRC receives funding and professional guidance from Resolution WA, a state-wide consortium of 22 dispute resolution centers. BCRC is the only dispute resolution center in Washington supported by a city government.

In 2023, the Conflict Resolution Center closed 1,926 cases (including 223 neighborhood cases, 1,552 Eviction Resolution Pilot Program cases and 151 Housing Accord Program cases). BCRC cases are frequently referred by Code Compliance, Bellevue Police, Transportation, Utilities, Fire, and Land Use, as well as direct requests from the community. These cases can address right of way, land use, noise, construction activity, boundary issues, and the relationships between commercial and residential neighbors.

The type of disputes varies. Most cases are neighborhood related, involving issues such as health and safety, dogs barking, parking, property lines, fence maintenance, and HOA conflicts. The program also provides conflict resolution for foreclosures, multifamily tenant/tenant disputes, landlord/tenant disputes, and business-consumer conflicts. Post pandemic, there has been an increase in landlord/tenant issues, rent arrearages, and safety concerns.

Services provided are confidential, voluntary, and free, available to people who live, work, or go to school in Bellevue, and are provided by staff and trained volunteers from the community. The average resolution rate of closed cases was 78%.

## New Housing Accord Program

In 2023, the BCRC initiated a voluntary landlord-tenant conflict resolution program, the Housing Accord Program, to help keep rental housing stable and to provide an alternative to court-based

solutions, often eviction, for rental related issues. This voluntary program builds upon BCRC's experience with the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program (ERPP), which provided landlords and tenants facing rent arrears the alternative of mediation and conciliation before going through an eviction in court.

The primary goal of the Housing Accord Program is to help ensure safe and stable housing in Bellevue and Kirkland by empowering low income and immigrant people living and working in rental housing to resolve conflicts and strengthen their communities. The program will provide the following services:

1. Cases. Facilitating voluntary conflict resolution of disputes about rent, maintenance issues, lease violations, and tenant relationships.
2. Referrals. Providing referrals to up-to-date resources including rental assistance and social services, legal aid, and City services. Maintaining close ties with our referral network.
3. Teaching skills. Strengthening conflict resolution skills by offering workshops in communication, difficult conversations, listening, and de-escalation to both landlords and tenants.
4. Building community in multi-family complexes. Strengthening cross cultural connection and collaboration by creating opportunities for common ground and facilitating collaboration around shared needs.

The Housing Accord Program will provide a neutral third party to aid in decreasing the frequency and severity of lease violations, address tension between tenant-to-tenant disputes, and seek to deter future eviction filings through connection to available rent assistance and negotiations of sustainable and mutually agreeable repayment plans. More information on the Housing Accord Program can be found at <https://bellevuewa.gov/resolve>.

## **Next Steps**

BCRC has already provided training for 25 new volunteers in conciliation practices to support new Housing Accord dispute cases. Ongoing work with property managers and landlords has helped to determine which elements of the new program would best serve their communities. In the coming months, BCRC will reengage with Bellevue's nonprofit providers to offer these new support services. Additionally, BCRC is working on a pilot program with an affordable housing provider to build community and to better connect residents with the new Housing Accord Program and available City services.