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TO: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

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Community Development

SUBJECT: Update on BCRC's Housing Accord Program

Bellevue's Conflict Resolution Center (BCRC) has been helping increase the problem-solving capacity among people who live and work in Bellevue for almost 30 years. The Conflict Resolution Center provides conflict coaching and conciliation services to help resolve conflict situations between neighbors, consumers, businesses, families and landlords and tenants. The services provided are both confidential and free to residents of Bellevue and Kirkland.

BCRC is a dispute resolution center formed under Chapter 7.75 of the Revised Code of Washington. BCRC is a member of Resolution Washington, a consortium of 21 dispute resolution centers in Washington.

Pandemic Response

As part of the pandemic response, BCRC provided a core service to landlords and tenants as the operator of the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program for Bellevue and Kirkland. The Eviction Resolution Pilot Program operated statewide November 1, 2021, to June 30, 2023, bringing tenants owing rent and their landlords together to resolve conflicts with the impartial assistance of trained negotiators. BCRC provided rent negotiation and other resources for over 2,800 households and over 9,000 people in Bellevue and Kirkland and their landlords. This program established new partnerships and practices to ensure that tenants remained in their homes and landlords were paid during the pandemic emergency.

The Housing Accord Program

The Housing Accord Program builds on the new practices and partnerships established under the Eviction Resolution Pilot Program. It is a voluntary landlord-tenant program that focuses on coaching and conciliation for landlord-tenant cases and training for property managers and other community groups. Its purpose is to reduce evictions and prevent homelessness through building positive relationships between tenants and landlords and among tenants themselves. From September 1, 2023, to August 15, 2025, the Housing Accord Program handled 454 landlord-tenant cases and provided training to over 100 property managers.

BCRC has developed several practices which contribute to the early success of the Housing Accord Program:

- **Nurturing Relationships with Property Managers:** BCRC provides case consultation, workshops, referrals to community and City partners for cases with special needs tenants, “coffee and consultation” gatherings for property managers, and community building activities for multi-family housing complexes.
- **Phone Conciliation:** Phone conciliation is used to negotiate repayment plans, move-outs without penalty, and agreements on maintenance and other issues noted in “Comply or Vacate” notices. Phone conciliation is particularly useful as it balances power, is easier to schedule and takes less time than in-person mediations.
- **Coaching and Education:** Coaching has become a core practice for helping parties sort out options, especially as rent assistance decreases. Conciliator-coaches help residents sort out issues such as financial resources, and where else they might live.
- **Volunteer Power:** Each year, BCRC trains volunteer conciliators, who are mentored by veteran volunteers and staff until they are ready to take on cases. Volunteer conciliators support over half of BCRC’s annual caseload and provide over 1,000 hours of assistance.
- **Asset-Based Community Building:** Housing Accord is working with multi-family housing managers to facilitate resident-led initiatives that help residents, often from diverse backgrounds and cultures, get to know one another, share needs and create community.
- **Community and City Partnerships:** Housing Accord seeks to build lasting coalitions to establish a safety net for residents to interconnect with services such as legal, housing, financial assistance, and in-home care needs.

National League of Cities Eviction Prevention Learning Lab and Early Referral Pilot

In August 2024, BCRC was selected to be one of 10 cities to contribute to the National League of Cities Eviction Prevention Learning Lab. The nine-month learning lab consisted of monthly learning labs that focus on cities sharing innovative practices in eviction prevention, court support, and tenant-landlord outreach, communication and engagement.

Through participation in this learning lab, the BCRC developed and implemented an Early Referral Pilot. The purpose of this five-month pilot was to receive cases early in the eviction process to increase the likelihood of early resolution and avoid evictions and homelessness. King County Housing Authority and Allied Residential property managers from 24 multi-family housing complexes, with a total of 3,614 units, participated in the Early Referral Pilot from November 2024 through March 2025.

The design of the pilot was straightforward: when property managers attached Pay or Vacate notices on the tenant’s door, they also included an Early Referral program flyer

which refers tenants to the Housing Accord program. Property managers reported to the BCRC the numbers of notices given out each month.

The results of the pilot demonstrate that early referrals can help parties avoid eviction and promote housing stability. More tenants called BCRC than in previous time periods. Overall case resolution rates rose to almost 90%. Coaching proved to be particularly effective with a case resolution rate of 96% compared to a resolution rate of 57% for cases that involved conciliation between the parties. The lessons learned were shared at the National League of Cities Eviction Prevention Learning Lab capstone presentation on April 16.

Training for Statewide Housing Stability

With a focus on housing stability, dispute resolution centers across Washington state through Resolution Washington have been working to coordinate eviction prevention efforts statewide. To support this effort, Bellevue's Conflict Resolution Center provided four hour-long training sessions for the state-wide dispute center network. These tutorials and presentations have been archived for training purposes.

Next Steps

Going forward, BCRC's Housing Accord program will continue to nurture relationships with housing providers, residents, and community organizations. Multi-agency collaboration, data-informed strategies, and community-building are key to sustaining progress, expanding early referral best practices, and promoting conflict resolution as an effective alternative to eviction.

Attachments

A. Early Referral Report