



DATE: July 26, 2021

TO: Mayor Robinson and City Councilmembers

FROM: Marci McReynolds, Manager, 452-5288
Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center

Mike McCormick Huentelman, Assistant Director, 452-4089
Mac Cummins, Director, 452-6191
Community Development

SUBJECT: Eviction Resolution Program – Bellevue Conflict Resolution Center

This report is for information only.

To assure housing stability across the State, the Washington State legislature passed SB 5160, which establishes a role for dispute resolution centers to create local Eviction Resolution Programs (ERP) to help facilitate agreements between landlords and tenants to address payment plans for rent arrearages. Bellevue's Conflict Resolution Center (BCRC) is an official provider of the ERP for tenants and landlords of the cities of Bellevue and Kirkland. This service is provided at no cost for all participants.

BCRC officially launched the ERP on July 21, 2021, in coordination with a statewide launch. The local program works in partnership with Resolution Washington, King County Superior Court, Administration of the Courts (AOC), Housing Justice Project, King County Dispute Resolution Center, King County Eviction Prevention and EPRAP, TRAP (Washington Commerce), Eastside Rental Assistance Coalition, Lake Washington and Bellevue School Districts, and landlord and tenant organizations.

Background

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.

In October 2020, BCRC piloted a Rent Negotiations program to help landlords and tenants affected by the pandemic to make rent repayment plans. The local program was based on pilots at other dispute resolution centers across Washington State. Since November 2020, the Bellevue center has successfully negotiated 161 rent negotiation cases.

In April 2021, the Washington State legislature passed SB5160. A part of this legislation mandates that dispute resolution centers across the state provide an ERP to negotiate repayment plans between landlords and tenants as a prerequisite (or alternative) to

landlords filing unlawful detainer suits against tenants. Upon completion of good faith negotiations, landlords and tenants are provided with a Certificate of Participation.

Through the ERP, trained conciliators will provide help with:

- Free conflict coaching to help landlords and tenants resolve eviction-related issues
- Conciliating financial disputes that put tenants at risk of losing their rental housing
- Facilitating negotiations between tenant and landlord, to develop reasonable arrangements for unpaid rent
- Coordinating rental assistance (when available)
- Sharing referral and resource information
- Providing a Certificate of Participation once negotiation has ended to both landlord and tenant

Bellevue's Conflict Resolution Center does not:

- Assist those tenants or landlords outside Bellevue or Kirkland
- Offer legal advice or representation
- Offer financial rental assistance directly

Program Scope and Fiscal Impact

The ERP is anticipating a significant upsurge in landlord and tenant cases as the eviction moratorium ends. The program is anticipating a total of 300-500 cases in 2021 with an additional 300-500 cases in 2022.

BCRC annually receives capacity grant funding from Resolution Washington to support the caseload and administration of the program. For 2021, the program has already received \$24k in CARES ACT funding and ramp-up funding for the ERP. There will be additional funds from ResWA to support the ability to provide the ERP for Bellevue and Kirkland tenants and landlords for 2021-2022.

BCRC relies on the dedication and skills of community volunteers. At present, 14 volunteers are actively engaged on a weekly basis and four volunteers are trained with specialization in the ERP. Volunteers are highly trained and mentored, becoming certified conciliators and mediators, meeting and exceeding the requirements of State-wide mediation consortium, Resolutions Washington.

Next Steps

The ERP will be an additional program that will be added to the essential services provided by BCRC for 2021-2023. The BCRC will continue to provide its core essential services to Bellevue's community, including providing conflict resolution services that address community disputes between neighbors, businesses, and public entities.
