

November 5, 2021

The Honorable Max Baer  
Chief Justice, Supreme Court of Pennsylvania  
c/o Office of the Prothonotary  
468 City Hall  
Philadelphia, PA 19107

FILED IN  
SUPREME COURT

NOV 08 2021

EASTERN  
DISTRICT

Re: **Response in Support of Pennsylvania Supreme Court Order No. 21 EM 2020  
Authorization for Continuation of the Philadelphia Municipal Court  
Landlord-Tenant Diversion Program**

Dear Justices of the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania,

I am writing to request your ongoing support for Philadelphia's nationally renowned use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in eviction proceedings. I appreciate your leadership in continuing to extend authority for Philadelphia to require landlords to apply for rental assistance and participate in Philadelphia's pre-filing Eviction Diversion Program, most recently via your Order dated October 28, 2021, No. 21 EM 2020. I would like to request that you continue to extend this authority beyond November 30, 2021. I further request that you grant this authority to other counties, so that residents there can also benefit from collaboration between the courts, rental assistance, and other stabilizing measures. To do so, I respectfully request that you issue a rule that allows a local county's President Judge to issue their own local rule creating or coordinating with Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) procedures in eviction proceedings, if they so choose.

I am a retired lawyer and have been volunteering as a mediator during the course of the pandemic. The program has been invaluable in reducing the number of families that are left homeless in the City of Philadelphia merely because their places of employment have been shuttered. It was very sad to see the number of homeless individuals seeking shelter in the underground areas of the transit system in Center City or sleeping in doorways and park benches. As a society, we need to address this issue and an extremely important step is to try as much as possible to keep families in their existing homes. The housing counselors who are assigned to each tenant in mediation work tirelessly to help find monies and assistance through various programs available making for successful outcomes for landlords who also need payment in order to meet their financial obligations. The process of mediation allows the parties themselves to work out sustainable agreements in most cases.

To effectuate this, the following measures are used and authority needs to be extended:

- Since April 1, 2021 Philadelphia Municipal Court has required that landlords apply for rental assistance and participate in Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion Program before filing an eviction case for non-payment of rent.
- Philadelphia is seeking authority from the PA Supreme Court to extend this requirement past its current expiration date Nov. 30, 2021.

- Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion Program began on September 1, 2020 and has helped over 2,300 landlord tenant pairs in reaching an agreement or resolution with the support of housing counselors and trained mediators in over 90% of cases. The Program has also helped an additional 7,000 landlords and tenants access rental assistance without the need for mediation.
- Philadelphia currently leads the nation in distribution of federally allocated rental assistance with over \$212 million distributed to over 34,700 households.
- Philadelphia as received national attention for these programs and the collaboration between the Court, the Diversion Program and the rental assistance program from the Department of Justice, White House, Urban Institute and major national media outlets.
- Philadelphia has avoided the wave of evictions predicted. Eviction filings in Philadelphia are less than a third of what they were pre-pandemic.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin Blumenfeld Switzenbaum

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robin Blumenfeld Switzenbaum".