



People's Emergency Center

Nurturing Families, Strengthening Neighborhoods, Driving Change

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

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,

On behalf of People's Emergency Center (PEC) and its clients, we write to request your ongoing support for Philadelphia's nationally renowned use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in eviction proceedings. We 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. We request that you continue to extend this authority beyond November 30, 2021. We further request that you grant this authority to other counties so that they too can benefit from collaboration between the courts, rental assistance, and other stabilizing measures. To do so, we 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.

In the last fiscal year PEC provided housing stabilization support to nearly 200 families throughout Philadelphia, and our case managers saw firsthand how useful the Eviction Diversion Program was for our clients. Many tenants we worked with were experiencing unchecked harassment and threats from their landlords and were terrified of losing their homes. The EDP's housing counselors provided essential mediation support to them and connected them to rent assistance programs like ours to reduce their debt and eliminate the need for a court hearing. For our clients, the EDP is the only mechanism they can access to avoid an eviction that will leave them homeless, damage their credit, and limit their housing access for years to come.

Consider, for example, one of our clients who owed \$11,000 for almost a full year of rent. Her landlord refused to work out a payment plan with her and instead threatened to evict her. The only thing that stopped the landlord from doing that immediately was the Eviction Diversion Program. Once enrolled, this client and her landlord were referred to PEC for rent assistance. We were able to pay a portion of

Administration
Rowan House
325 North 39th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
P: 267-777-5880

Families First
3939 Warren Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Gloria's Place
3902 Spring Garden Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
P: 267-777-5868

Email: pec@pec-cares.org
Website: pec-cares.org
[Facebook.com/PeoplesEmergencyCenter](https://www.facebook.com/PeoplesEmergencyCenter)
[Facebook.com/LancasterAvePhilly](https://www.facebook.com/LancasterAvePhilly)
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her debt, and the EDP's housing counselors negotiated a payment plan for the remainder. If it weren't for this program, this client and many others would be homeless right now. On behalf of our clients and all tenants facing eviction in our city, we urge you to extend the pre-filing requirement for the Eviction Diversion Program, and we thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jessica Humphries

Jessica Humphries
Manager, Prevention & Diversion Services
People's Emergency Center

Administration
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325 North 39th Street
Philadelphia, PA 19104
P: 267-777-5880

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