

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,

As a volunteer mediator with the City of Philadelphia's Eviction Diversion Program, I am writing to request your ongoing support for this program. The City's program has gained national attention and has become a model across the country for its use of Alternative Dispute Resolution in eviction proceedings and its ability to distribute assistance to those in need in an efficient manner. 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.

Since the inception of the program, I have mediated over 70 cases between landlords and tenants under this program. It has been a privilege to be part of a program which is utilizing resources in effort to find acceptable solutions for both of these parties during very stressful times. The program has encouraged respectful dialogue between parties and has helped multiple landlords and tenants see the situation from the other's point of view. I have seen multiple mediations where having this dialogue coupled with removing the fear of Court intervention has made tenants more vigilant about returning to work and finding a way to satisfy their arrears. The program has prevented homelessness in more than one of my cases. Even in cases which aren't immediately resolved, the mediation process in and of itself has been productive in helping to narrow issues, put parties on the same page, and collectively make a plan for moving forward to satisfy the needs of both parties.

The positive statistics speak for themselves. Since it began on September 1, 2020, the EDP has helped over 2,300 landlord tenant pairs reach 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. Because of the ongoing nature of the program, eviction filings in Philadelphia are less than a third of what they were pre-pandemic, lessening the burden on Court resources.

Philadelphia has received national attention for the Eviction Diversion Program from the Department of Justice, White House, Urban Institute, and major national media outlets. One of the cases which I mediated was highlighted in a story which ran on National Public Radio. It was personally heartwarming to hear that, as a result of having gone through mediation, the landlord and tenant in the case had learned to not see each other as enemies and take defensive positions, but were able to continue to engage in dialogue outside of the program in an attempt to resolve their ongoing housing issues.

Philadelphia has become a leader and a model for proactively creating and implementing a successful program which not only utilizes ADR to benefit both the parties and the court system, but which productively utilizes collaboration between the Court, the Diversion Program, and the rental assistance program. The benefits of this program to both the residents of the city and the court system are numerous. I have been honored to be a part of a program which has had such a positive impact both regionally and nationally and hope that it will continue.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "megen karakelian/KB".

Megen Karakelian, Esq.

cc: Sue Wasserkrug, Esq.,
Program Administrator, CORA Good Shepherd Mediation Program