

Millions across U.S. at risk of eviction as COVID surges

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People camp out on the steps of the US Capitol to highlight the upcoming expiration of the pandemic-related federal moratorium on residential evictions, in Washington, DC on July 31 [Elizabeth Frantz/Reuters]

Washington, July 31 (RHC)-- Millions of people across the United States could be forced out of their homes as a nationwide moratorium on evictions is set to expire at midnight on Saturday amid a spike in coronavirus infections.

With billions in government funds meant to help renters still untapped, President Joe Biden this week urged Congress to extend the 11-month ban on removals after a recent Supreme Court ruling meant the White House could not do so.

But Republicans balked at Democratic Party efforts to extend the eviction ban through mid-October, and the House of Representatives adjourned for its summer vacation on Friday without renewing it. And now Biden appears to go along with it and allow the moratorium to expire.

Progressive Democratic Congresswoman Cori Bush, Ayanna Pressley and Ilhan Omar slept outside the Capitol from Friday to Saturday to demand a moratorium extension.

"We [Democrats] control the House, Senate, and White House. We must keep people housed," Bush wrote on Twitter, urging Democratic House Speaker Nancy Pelosi to recall the chamber for a vote and Democratic Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer to extend the ban.

"So many people are at risk of homelessness in our district and many have already experienced it. We are out here for them," Omar also tweeted. The moratorium's expiration could put millions of Americans at risk of being forced out of rented houses and apartments.

More than 3.6 million Americans are at risk of eviction, some in a matter of days, as nearly \$47 billion in federal housing aid to the states during the pandemic has been slow to make it into the hands of renters and landlords owed payments. Evictions could begin as soon as Monday.

Landlord groups have opposed the ban on evictions, which the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) first put in place in September 2020 to combat the spread of COVID-19 and prevent homelessness during the pandemic.

More than 15 million people in 6.5 million U.S. households are currently behind on rental payments, according to a study by the Aspen Institute and the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project, collectively owing more than \$20bn to landlords.

The U.S. Supreme Court last month decided 5-4 to leave in place the CDC's moratorium. The CDC said last month it would not extend the ban past July 31st.

Tensions mounted late on Friday as it became clear there was no resolution in sight.

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