



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Liz Krueger

## Senators Urge Delay Of NYC Housing Court Reopening To Protect Public Health

LIZ KRUEGER June 12, 2020

| ISSUE: **HOUSING COURT, TENANTS' RIGHTS, CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC; COVID-19**



Sixteen Senators Sign Letter To Chief Judge Recommending Safety Plan, Supporting Effort By Legal Services Organizations

**Albany** – Today State Senator Liz Krueger and 15 other Senators released a letter to New York State Chief Judge Janet DiFiore, requesting that the Office of Court Administration delay the reopening of Housing Court for in-person proceedings until a comprehensive safety plan can be developed with input from key stakeholders. The letter from the Senators can be

[viewed here](#) and is reprinted below.

"Our Housing Courts are overcrowded at the best of times. But with tens of thousands of additional cases expected as a result of the pandemic, it is vital that we plan very carefully before returning to anything like business as usual," said **Senator Krueger**. "Before reopening, we must make sure that not only do we have plans to maintain proper COVID-19 protocols, but that we can address the unique circumstances and challenges faced by tenants as a result of the pandemic."

In the letter, the Senators argue that reopening New York City Housing Court prematurely could pose a significant public health risk to litigants, attorneys, and court personnel, and a particular risk for many of those already disproportionately impacted by Covid-19—low-income tenants of color living in communities hardest hit by the pandemic and older adults. They urge the Office of Court Administration to pause its current timeline for reopening Housing Court, and to work with legal services providers, public health experts, and City agencies to ensure the proper systems and safeguards are in place to protect public health and prevent mass evictions.

Housing advocates estimate that as many as 50,000 new eviction cases may be filed in Housing Court soon after the Governor's initial eviction moratorium expires on June 20th. Given the demographics of tenants facing the greatest housing hardships and the zip codes with the highest number of past eviction filings, it is extremely likely a disproportionate number of new non-payment cases filed after June 20th will be against low-income tenants living in zip codes hardest hit by the pandemic as well as older adults.

The Senators voiced their support for the recent request by the leaders of almost two dozen

legal services organizations for the Office of Court Administration to halt the reopening of Housing Court until a safety plan is developed with input from key stakeholders.

The letter from the Senators further points out that despite the fact that New York City began the first stage of gradually reopening its economy this week, tens of thousands of New Yorkers are sick or recovering, hundreds of additional residents are still testing positive for Covid-19 each day, and the city's contact tracing initiative only started last week. In addition, the New York City Health Department continues to urge residents to stay home as much as possible and to follow social distancing protocols when going outside; many New Yorkers, particularly those who are older adults and/or have pre-existing conditions, remain in self-isolation; and all New York City schools, day care facilities, public institutions are closed, and most city residents who are still employed continue to work from home.

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