



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Brian Kavanagh

## Sen. Kavanagh, AM Cymbrowitz & Advocates Announce Expanded Bill for COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program, Renewed Push for Federal Funds

BRIAN KAVANAGH July 1, 2020

| ISSUE: [HOUSING](#), [COVID-19](#), [HOMELESSNESS](#), [EVICTION PREVENTION](#), [RENTAL ASSISTANCE](#)  
| COMMITTEE: [HOUSING, CONSTRUCTION AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT](#)



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**Sen. Kavanagh, AM Cymbrowitz & Advocates Announce Expanded Bill for COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program, Renewed Push for Federal Funds**

**New York, NY --** New York State Senator Brian Kavanagh and Assemblymember Steven Cymbrowitz, the Chairs of the Senate and Assembly Housing Committees, today introduced amendments to their legislation to create a COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program (S8140B / A10248A). The amendments would enhance the program to prioritize those with the greatest need, including those who experience homelessness or are at imminent risk of eviction during the COVID-19 public health and economic crisis, while maintaining broad eligibility to cover many other New Yorkers who are having difficulty paying their rent and would not normally qualify for housing subsidies.

The legislation, first introduced on March 29, 2020, would bring urgent relief to those whose ability to pay their rent has been diminished or eliminated during the crisis, by providing them with emergency rental vouchers. The program would require tenants to pay 30% of their current adjusted income in rent, with the voucher covering the rest, up to 250% of the fair market rate for the area. For example, in New York City, rent of up to \$4,877.50 for a two-bedroom apartment would be eligible for coverage. The program would also cover utility costs.

This updated proposal follows the recent enactment of the Emergency Rent Relief Act, also sponsored by Kavanagh and Cymbrowitz, which provided \$100 million of rental assistance for some of those with greatest need, utilizing funds appropriated through the federal CARES Act. The new program would be premised on much larger appropriations of federal funds that elected officials and advocates across New York have called on Congress to include in the next COVID-19 relief package, expected in Washington later this Summer. The HEROES Act, passed by the U.S. House of Representatives as their proposal for such relief, included \$100 billion nationally for rent relief, of which New York could expect to receive roughly \$10 billion, depending on the formulas used to allocate the funds.

**Senator Brian Kavanagh (D-Manhattan and Brooklyn), Chair of the Senate Housing Committee** said, "The program we are proposing would protect New Yorkers who are in the especially precarious position of being homeless during the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the many thousands of people who are in danger of being displaced from their homes or enduring long periods of housing instability and financial hardship as they struggle to pay rent. We need both a substantial infusion of federal funds and a well designed program that is tailored to the needs in our state and ensures that we will be able to get assistance into people's hands expeditiously once the funds are available."

"The Emergency Rent Relief Act was designed to start the flow of limited resources already available to the State while we fight to secure the funding necessary for a more comprehensive program -- one that can meet the enormous financial challenges being faced by tenants and landlords while helping to keep New Yorkers safely at home," **said Assemblyman Steven Cymbrowitz (D-Brooklyn), Chair of the Assembly's Housing Committee.**

"These amendments will help ensure that the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program can do just that, by prioritizing those with the greatest need, including families and individuals who are homeless or at risk of homelessness."

"New Yorkers deserve to feel secure in their homes even as the State continues to recover from the public health emergency, and real rental assistance will help provide that security," **said Jolie Milstein, president and CEO of the New York State Association for Affordable Housing.**

"The holistic approach here builds on the Emergency Rent Relief Act, ensuring that federal relief will reach the most vulnerable New Yorkers, and is yet another example of all stakeholders coming together to provide real solutions to the challenges families face across the state."

"New York renters are reeling from the economic and health effects of the pandemic," **said Rachel Fee, Executive Director of the New York Housing Conference.** "An estimated 1 million

New Yorkers will need rental assistance to avoid eviction. This bill introduced by Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Cymbrowitz will create a fair framework for a state rental assistance program using federal funding. Now we need Congress to pass legislation providing \$100 billion for rental assistance to keep people housed.”

“New York had a homelessness crisis well before COVID-19; now experts are predicting another 50,000 New Yorkers may face eviction, most of whom are poor and people of color,” **stated Laura Mascuch, Executive Director, Supportive Housing Network of New York.** “While this is an unimaginable human tragedy in and of itself, the cascading impacts on public health as well as on hospitals, shelters and other systems of care is inconceivable. We applaud Senator Kavanagh and Assembly member Cymbrowitz for their leadership on mitigating these impending disasters and urge our leaders to support this critical legislation.”

“Coalition for the Homeless is very pleased to support amendments to the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program needed to include unsheltered and sheltered homeless New Yorkers as well as those at risk of losing their homes. Too many individuals and families have lost their livelihoods and homes during this pandemic, and we are faced with a catastrophic new wave of homelessness as well as disproportionate vulnerability to COVID-19 among our neediest neighbors unless New York State ensures that people have the means to retain their housing and move into safe homes. We thank Senator Kavanagh and Assemblymember Cymbrowitz for this legislation, which is needed to ensure that anticipated Federal Emergency Rental Assistance is provided to individuals and families facing homelessness in the midst of the pandemic,” **said Shelly Nortz, Deputy Executive Director for Policy, Coalition for the Homeless.**

“The Long Island Builders Institute, the largest residential building trade association in the state, continues to strongly support this initiative and the amendments to the legislation only make it more important for both houses of the State Legislature to take action as soon

as possible,” said **Mitchell H. Pally, Chief Executive Officer of the Long Island Builders Institute.**

“This legislation will provide significant new benefits to those most in need of housing in our state while at the same time ensuring that our property developers and owners can have the funds necessary to pay their property expenses and real property taxes. It is time for the State Legislature to act and this amended legislation is the key to such action on this issue.”

“During this time of fear and confusion, clear, thoughtful leadership is incredibly important. This bill is an example of that,” said **Michael Johnson, spokesman for Community Housing Improvement Program.** “By providing a well crafted program to provide rental assistance to those who need it, this bill is a model for how best to help tenants and building owners. With adequate funding, it could match the scale of the problem before us. Now is the time for all of us to unite and pressure Congress to provide the relief funds necessary to implement a program like this, and make sure no New Yorkers are left behind.”

“Senator Kavanagh and Assemblyman Cymbrowitz continue to recognize the government’s vital role in assisting those struggling to pay rent as a result of COVID-19. Most importantly, their solution of direct rental assistance to tenants is the only economic sound option that can address this immediate and growing economic crisis. These amendments are a cogent and rational policy that ensures the finite dollars that are available go to those who can demonstrate genuine financial need over an extended period of time. Therefore, the Association for a Better Long Island stand in support of Senator Kavanagh & Assemblyman Cymbrowitz’s bill to amend the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program,” said **Kyle Strober, Executive Director, Association for a Better Long Island,** the region’s leading economic development advocacy organization.

Changes to the proposed COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program include:

- ***Duration of Rental Assistance.*** While the prior version of the bill, written in the very early days of the COVID-19 crisis, capped rental assistance at three months, the amendments take into account the extended duration of the crisis, and would make assistance available for at least six months for those experiencing financial hardship, or longer if the executive orders constituting the NY Pause restrictions in their area extend beyond six months.
- ***Vouchers for those Experiencing Homelessness.*** In addition to renters struggling to stay in their homes, the program would be available to homeless families and individuals, who would be eligible for up to two years of rental assistance.
- ***Prioritizing Those with the Greatest Need.*** The program would prioritize applicants with the greatest economic and social need, including those with little or no income during the crisis, and limit assistance to those whose income does not exceed 120% of the median income in their area.
- ***Streamlined Application Process.*** The new bill includes provisions that would authorize the state housing agency to set standards for the application process to facilitate rapid approval of all eligible New Yorkers.

The bill has 31 sponsors in the Senate and 25 sponsors in the Assembly and is supported by affordable housing organizations, tenant advocates, and property owners.

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