



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Pamela Helming

Column: Get rental assistance money out the door now, small landlords and renters have waited long enough

PAMELA HELMING May 17, 2021

New York has known since last December that it would be getting billions in federal aid to assist tenants and landlords devastated by the pandemic. Here we are almost six months later, and the state still has not gotten the money out the door and into the hands of people who need it.

There are reports that New York City's tenants alone owe more than \$1 billion in back rent. Across the state, that number for all renters will likely exceed \$3 billion. The State Legislature dedicated \$2.4 billion for rental relief in the recently enacted state budget.

I and my Senate Republican colleagues called for this federal aid to be removed from the budget process in order to expedite the distribution of this money to those who need it. Senate Democrats refused our request.

Small landlords and renters are now waiting on the New York State Office of Temporary Disability Assistance (OTDA) to release details about the application program and eligibility. Yes, this takes time. But again, the state has known for months that this money would be available. This process should have been completed a long time ago. Imagine all the people who could have been helped and the pain that could have been avoided.

New York's bureaucratic inaction continues to hurt small landlords and tenants who need help the most. I recently learned of the experience of an 88-year-old small landlord who is facing eviction from his own home because he has not been able to collect rent on the 10-unit building he has owned for decades.

Legislation I co-sponsor, Senate bill S.6597, would help him and others by exempting property owners with 10 or fewer residential units from the state's eviction moratorium.

Many of these small landlords are your neighbors. They are middle-class people who count on this income to support their children and families and pay the mortgage. They are senior citizens who rely on rental income to pay for their prescriptions and heating bills. They are small property owners who work hard to maintain their properties for the good of their communities.

For the last six months, state officials have been moving at a snail's pace. The state must unlock the money dedicated to rental relief immediately, and without unnecessary layers of bureaucracy that would only cause more harm.

New York will forfeit this funding if immediate action is not taken to get at least half of the money out by September 30. This is a use it or lose it scenario.

Distributing these funds must be the priority. Our state's economic recovery depends on it. We must help people get back to work. We must support small landlords who want nothing more than to be treated fairly. They all deserve better.