



HOUSING COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE MEETING

~ MINUTES ~

Wednesday, October 28, 2020

10:00 AM

Sullivan Chamber

The Housing Committee will conduct a public hearing to discuss legal protections and other strategies to prevent the eviction and displacement of Cambridge tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic.



HOUSING COMMITTEE - OCTOBER 28, 2020

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: I'm going to call this Housing Committee Meeting to order. The call of the Meeting is as follows: the Housing Committee will conduct a Public Hearing to discuss legal protections and other strategies to prevent eviction and displacement of Cambridge tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic. The meeting will be televised. Um, Madam Deputy Clerk, could you read the role of members present?

Madam Clerk: Vice Mayor Mallon, Councillor McGovern, Councillor Simmons. Uh, we know where Denise is? Where is she? Councillor Simmons. Yes.

E. Denise Simmons: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Uh, yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Zondervan. Absent. And a quorum is present with two members.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Um, the Governor's Executive Order, issued on March 12th, 2020, has authorized the use of remote participation at meetings of the City's public bodies in response to the threat posed to the public by the COVID-19 virus, and issued guidelines for the City's use of remote participation. In addition to having members of the Council participate remotely, we all- have also set up Zoom teleconference for Public Comment. Please be aware that Zoom is only being used for Public Comment. In order to watch the Meeting, please tune into Channel 22 or visit the Open Meeting Portal on the City's website. Uh, so, with that, uh, I, um, have some opening remarks, and then we're going to go to, uh, Councillor Simmons, uh, and then we'll go to Public Comment. We're here today because we're still in the midst of a pandemic, and housing is one of the most essential resources to stop the spread of COVID-19. In a City like Cambridge, it is nearly impossible to social distance without a space to call your own. While Governor Baker has allowed the State Eviction Moratorium to- to expire just as COVID-19, uh, cases are ticking up across the country, including here in Massachusetts, Cambridge's Moratorium remains in effect. This is- is especially important as Federal CDC Eviction Moratorium, uh, continues to include gaps. We're here today to better understand how the mechanics of our Municipal Moratorium will work, and what the City is doing to get out the word about it. Uh, I want to thank, uh, Maura Pensak, the City Manager's Housing Liaison, for being here, uh, Nancy Glowa, the City Solicitor, uh, and Iram Farooq and Chris Cotter from the Community Development Department. We also have representatives, uh, from Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services and City Life/Vida Urbana, who will present- be presenting. Um, Madam Co-Chair, uh, do you have, uh, opening remarks?

E. Denise Simmons: Uh, thank you Mr. Co-Chair- uh, Mister... yes. Uh, this is an important meeting, as you had said earlier. As the call expresses, it's our opportunity to discuss the legal protections and other strategies to prevent the eviction and displacement of Cambridge tenants during the COVID-19 pandemic

on Wednesday. S- w- so, we're having this conversation today, Wednesday the 28th. And many of you that had tuned in earlier would know that we recently just had a meeting, uh, talking about- excuse me, preferences. And one might ask, why so many meetings? We've lost so much time during this COVID-19, uh, pandemic, and it's placed an extra level of urgency on the already-critical housing situations that we find ourselves in. This pandemic has placed a new urgent challenge upon all of us as we work to ensure that people are not displaced from their homes while Cambridge continues working to mitigate the worst impacts of this pandemic. So, I'm really looking forward to this morning's discussion as we continue to determine what evic- eviction protections we can put in place, um, what's already in place, and how we can protect- continue to protect our tenants at this time. Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. I yield the floor.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you, Madam Co-Chair. Um, with that, we'll go to Public Comment. Uh, I believe the first person we have signed up, uh, is Diana Siniakova.

Mr. Clerk: Hold on.

Madam Clerk: Hold on.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Oh, sorry. Uh, one second. Great. Uh, so the first speaker we have signed up is Diana Senyakova. Uh, Diana, you can go ahead.

Naomie Stephen: Diana is not on the call. We will go to Lee Ferris. Lee, please go ahead.

Lee Ferris: Good morning. Can you hear me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yes, we can.

Lee Ferris: Great. Um, thanks so much for convening this important meeting. Uh, the Cambridge Residence Alliance, which I am the president of, uh, does support, uh, protecting our tenants from eviction. And we're really glad that the Council passed an Order calling for working with the Legal Department to include enforcement language in our Eviction Moratorium to prevent landlords from trying to force tenants out before a sheriff enforces an eviction. Um, I- I know that you have a lot of, um, business today. So, I'm going to- I've submitted my comments in writing. So, I'm going to, uh, simply mention some of the highlights of them, but please refer to the full, uh, comments. Um, I am a- a small landlord of a two family, and I've not yet received the City's information about the existing Cambridge Eviction Moratorium and the new tenant protection rules that began on October 14th. So, um, I think it would be good if... my understanding is that's going to come in the form of a postcard. And, uh, I think it would be better if that information, uh, were mailed out in a more complete form representing material that's on the City's, uh, website. And, um, I also think that there are lots of other ways that outreach could be done, uh, to publicize what we already have, like flyers delivered to groups that work with low-income people like the Cambridge Na- Non-profits, Margaret Fuller House, Community Art Centers, food pantries and so forth. The City could pay for banners on public buildings, uh,

with that information. I also note that the FAQ document, uh, currently is aimed at landlords...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Uh, sorry, Lee. You- you cut out. Are you still there?

Lee Ferris: I- I'm here.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Oh.

Lee Ferris: Uh, so, um, I was saying that the FAQ document is aimed currently at landlords and should be aimed at both. Um, Cambridge could, like Boston, create an Eviction Prevention Task Force. Uh, there's more information and a link to i- the report that their Task Force released, which has lots of great recommendations. And we could, like Boston, require an Eviction Prevention Plan for any developer that gets funds for, um, creating income-restricted housing. We could contract with tenant organizers such as City Life/Vida Urbana, who, uh, try to identify buildings at risk. We could ask our Immigrant Services and outreach providers to, uh, contact immigrants about our, um, bi- our, uh, Eviction Moratorium. And we could contract with a social service organization to do affirmative outreach to tenants whose cases are filed in court.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: That's the time, Lee. Uh, you can send the rest of the Public Comments. Thank you.

Lee Ferris: Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yeah. All right. Uh, next up, we have Benjamin Roberts. Uh, and after that will be Piper Winkler. Benjamin, are you on the line?

Benjamin Roberts: Uh, hello. Can you hear me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yes, we can. Thank you.

Benjamin Roberts: Hi, yeah. I'll keep it brief. Um, I just want to say, obviously, I support the Eviction Moratorium. And beyond that, I want to encourage City Council to keep pushing for more permanent housing solutions, um, because we know- there's immense evidence that homelessness isn't just d- isn't just dangerous physically. It's also da- it's also dangerous as a health issue, and nowhere is that more clear than the pandemic. We saw those early studies early on about ho- the incredibly high concentration of COVID-19 cases in homeless shelters. That's the natural consequence of incredibly tight-packed spaces for- for living. There- there are a ton of reasons why the Moratorium is important, and I- and, uh, reasons why housing, far beyond that... but the very simple one right now is that- how, uh, being unhoused is an enormous health risk, and it's going to continue to cause greater health consequences for the unhoused people and continue to spread co- coronavirus if we don't both house those already unhoused, and prevent those cu- um, prevent those currently at risk of eviction from being evicted. So, obviously, I support the Eviction Moratorium. I wa- just want to reiterate the importance of pushing for more permanent and serious solutions on housing beyond that. Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. Uh, we have- now have Piper Winkler, uh, and after that will be, uh, Huma Gupta. Piper, you can go ahead.

Piper Winkler: Hi. Can you hear me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yes, we can. Thank you.

Piper Winkler: Perfect. Okay. Thank you so much. Um, similarly to Ben, I'm interested in expressing my support for the Eviction Moratorium, but I'd also like to see this Moratorium and the general support for housing-insecure and unhoused people go even further during this extremely critical time. Um, as Ben has mentioned, and as we all know, um, being homeless or being housing-insecure poses a huge health risk, especially during a pandemic. Um, we know that the conditions the people currently face in shelters put them at a greater risk of becoming ill. And, um, in general, that- while the current Moratorium seems to hinge on a lot of people not being able to be physically removed during this time from their places of residence, it also seems that this information is not clear to a lot of people, and that landlords are able to capitalize on this lack of information and on this lack of power that, um, tenants have. So, I would again like to see the protections go further, obviously advocating for even stronger things. It would be amazing to see, uh, a rent freeze, a- a cancellation of- of rent, uh, at a- at a broader level, um, advocating at the- the state level, of course. And I think, obviously, that searching for more permanent long-term housing solutions for people experiencing homelessness is something that we can think about now because this pandemic just shows how important it is for people not to be facing unsafe conditions, whether living on the street or whether living in packed shelters, as it's my understanding that right now, it is extremely hard, uh, to find housing space... um, or not- not even housing space, but to find shelter space as an unhoused person in the area. Um, and of course, that- temperatures are getting colder, and now is an urgent time to- to seek action- to seek justice for people experiencing homelessness. Thank you so much.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. Next up we have, uh, Huma Gupta, uh, and after that we'll go to Diana Senyakova. Uh, Huma, you can go ahead.

Huma Gupta: Can you hear me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yes, we can. Thank you.

Huma Gupta: Wonderful. Hi. Uh, thank you for letting me speak here today. I want to build on what, uh, Ben and Piper, uh, Winkler have already mentioned, which is that... first and foremost, I reiterate my support of the Eviction Moratorium. Um, I'm still concerned that a lot of evictions are happening in ways that are informal and even illegal, where landlords are servicing- serving notices that are not necessarily formal notices, but are enough to intimidate people into leaving their housing. Um, I also think that the fact that Housing Courts have opened, even if they're not seeing all cases or, um, trying all cases right now, it sends a bad message to, uh, renters that they could be evicted because the Housing Courts have opened. I would advocate for shutting down Housing Courts

once again. I would also advocate for, um, there to be much more outreach with tenants all over Cambridge to let them know that they cannot be evicted at this time. Second, I want to reiterate again the concern with the unhoused population in Cambridge, which, of course, can increase if this pandemic, um, continues, and if more and more people, uh, find themselves to be in a place- position of being unhoused. And I want to kind of read, um, the current kind of international best practices that have been put forth by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Adequate Housing, Dr. Balakrishnan Rajagopal, who just presented these recommendations to the UN General Assembly. He wrote that, we need to house people experiencing homelessness in hotels and motels for the duration of the crisis and make plans to move people to permanent housing rather than back onto the streets. Homelessness should be tackled through a sharp increase in the appropriation of funding for temporary housing and for the purchase or expropriation of empty or vacant property for permanent housing. Thank you very much.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. And, uh, next up we have Diana Senyakova. Diana, you can go ahead.

Diana Senyakova: Um, good morning, uh, members of the Committee. Um, my thoughts are somewhat struggled this morning, and I'm sorry if I'm not able to communicate in a more straightforward manner. I'm- I'm very hurt, disappointed and heartbroken by my City. I was evicted yesterday morning despite the Moratorium that is well-publicized. What I have learned is that the laws and ordinances can be selectively applied even to our residents. This has cost me a lot personally. Yesterday, I lost my home. I was told that me and my air mattress were in the way of repairs when the Inspectional Services, through multiple inspections, told me that is absolutely not the case. I was told by some City Officials that they basically just didn't want to deal with the legal quagmire of a landlord with a persistent attorney. Well, if that- that was one landlord, there surely will be many other ones with more, uh, more- and, um, even more aggressive attorneys. That way, the Moratorium is not going to protect any residents. And that's something I think the Committee should deeply think about, how exactly I would stand up and protect the other residents. There's, I guess, not much hope for me now that I'm already on the street, cold. And yes, there are no shelter spaces. Um, I've- I have been told there haven't been any for about three months. Um, also, I- I'm- I'm- at the same time, I'm happy that an enforcement mechanism is being discussed. Um, the City was caught somewhat unprepared with that, and, uh, the current system allows for too much latitude- too much latitude for decision making, as happened in this case, and for, uh, people to fall through the cracks. I'm particularly concerned because I have basically, due to the limits of my disabled capacity, made this my full-time job to retain my housing and get the landlord to restore electricity and heating in my home. I have called the ISD, um, the Attorney General, the City Mayor's Office, um, the, uh, Housing Liaison, uh, here for months and months. I have literally made hundreds of phone calls to anybody who could step in, while others that may not have the time, and persistence, and- or all- all the

information to do this. And yet, w- despite all my efforts, I w- ended up on the street. How i- is it that other people who won't have the same resources or same information are also going to be protected? I am deeply, deeply concerned for other residents. Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. Um, so, that's all the speakers we have signed up for Public Comment. We, uh, will leave Public Comment open until 10:30, um, another 10 minutes or so, in- just in case anyone else comes. Um, I want to recognize that we also now have Mayor Siddiqui, uh, and Vice Mayor Mallon on the line. Uh, and with that, we'll start the presentations. We're gonna first go to Maura Pensak, the City Manager's Housing Liaison. Maura, you can go ahead.

Maura Pensak: Thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. Good morning to everyone. Um, so, I thought that I would start just by ex- uh, talking a little bit about what we do have in place, um, what has been in place and what we do have in place, and then talk about, um, the- some of the trends and the data that we're seeing, and then what we hope to be doing in- in the future to continue this work. Um, so, in terms of what we do have in place, I see it in three sort of, uh, areas of- of service. One is that we have robust financial assistance packages available, and I'll talk a little bit about them. The other is- that we do have is, uh, the legal protections, both the local Ordinance, um, and the CDC Order that we w- we'll talk a little bit more about. And the third and- and, uh, a very important, um, uh, resource that we have is our partnerships with a number of management companies and affordable homeownership... um, uh, I'm sorry, affordable- um, uh... sorry. My mind just went blank. Affordable, um, programs such as, uh, Cambridge Housing Authority. So, um, I'll just start with the, um, the financial assistance. As you know, we, um, have started- in- back in April with the Mayor's Disaster Relief Fund, and this serviced, uh, more than 1,450 households with that, and, uh, and afforded- um, spent more than \$3.2 million in funding. Um, we then picked up right away in, uh, June and July and, uh, initiated the second phase of funding the Housing Stabilization Program. Um, and to date, we've expended about 500 tho- or committed about \$500,000 of that, um, and have, um, been working with about 200 households. And the third, um, that's really important is the Rental Assistance, um, resources that the, um, Human Service Programs through the Multi-Service Center, um, of- uh, implements every year, and have been doing so again, of course, this year. And to date, they've serviced about 96 households. Interesting enough, a number of those have been, um, assisted with startup funds, um, and that's, I know, a separate issue, um, but it's- it's a very important one in that folks have been able to be leasing up in the City more than usual. Um, but in terms of eviction prevention, the Rental Assistance money, um, is often- has often been packaged with the assistance of the housing stabilization money so that we're really working with folks comprehensively to address both arrears and offer the housing stabiliz- stabilization money, um, that assists folks, uh, in going forward and being stable for four months. And then, in addition to that, the Multi-Service Center staff, um, works really closely with folks to, um, help them access the state funding, RAFT, um, as well as many other resources, um, and local

partners that have money, um, be they in the City, like Margaret Fuller House, or outside of the City, um, that services our City as well, including the j- um, Catholic Charities, Jewish Vocational Services, SWAN Society, and a- a multitude of other, um, financial resource, um, resources that are available through different agencies. And so, the- the staff really work to, um, make sure that we kind of piece together different funding packages to make sure that we make our tenants whole. And that- that, in effect, um, also helps, especially some of our small homeowners that are struggling. Um, they want to keep their tenants, but they also have to pay their mortgage. So, we see that, um, in offering these fi- the financial assistance resources as a win-win, um, for- for everyone. Um, and then, we have the legal protections. Um, I- I think everyone, um, you know, is very aware of the, um, Temporary Emergency Order that was, um, uh, uh, put in effect on April 3rd, and then amended on July 23rd. Um, and it both protects... it- it is still very much in effect. Um, it does, um, prohibit landlords from levying on executions for possession. And it also has very strict guidelines in terms of te- uh, owners and landlords going into units, um, if they do need to go in and, uh, or if the building is being sold and they want to show that- that unit to someone. So, there's very strict guidelines, um, to protect tenants in that way. Um, again, I think, uh, maybe not as known is the CDC Order, which protects tenants, um, with financial eligibility- um, within, uh, financial eligibility guidelines. Um, it is a little bit of a confusing, um, uh, protection, but we are working with- with tenants to help them understand that. And I know some of our- uh, especially our legal partners, are working with tenants, um, to help them walk through that- that, um, if they need to, uh, im- implement that, or use that, um, protection. And then, last, although it's not a strictly legal protection, but we do have the Ordinance that we put in place, um, the Tenant Notification, um, f- of Rights and Resources Ordinance, that, um, we are really working to get out, um, into the community to make sure that tenants, um, know about their rights, and- and especially their resources, um, both within the City, um, departments, uh, through myself, the Multi-Service Center, Community Development, um, as well as, again, our partners through Legal Services, and- and other types of resources. So, we're really trying to get that information out. It went into effect, um, on October 14th. And then, as I mentioned, um, I think, really importantly, we do have our partners. Um, Cambridge Housing Authority has, um, once again, I think, is leading the way in the Tenancy Preservation Pilot, um, where they have hired a social worker to work with, um, tenants who may be behind in rent. They are putting in a number of, um, of strategies to make sure that tenants are- are- that all of the managers in the min- um, in the different developments are reaching out to anyone who is behind in rent, talking with them, seeing if they can connect them to, uh, uh, to resources, um, and also working with folks who may be in trouble because of, um, other situations behi- besides just non-payment. So, they have, uh, a four-pronged strategy. Um, and, uh, they are really working hard to make sure that their first go-to is not to issue a Notice to Quit, but rather to outreach, uh, to the tenant and work closely with them. Uh, and then, and we're continuing to work with other management companies, um, both non-profit affordable developers, as well as for-profit. Um, and that is a big piece of our outreach to make sure that f- um,

these folks know about our resources and refer their, um, their tenants to us so that we can- so that we can help them. So, what do we know, and what is the data? Um, what are our trends? Um, we, you know, have not seen- right now, we've not seen a great increase, um, in arrears. Um, anecdotally, our affordable partners are telling us that they're not seeing a big change from last year to this year. We think that that's in part because of all of the financial resources that the City has employed, um, to assist folks, um, early- from early on until, you know, and it's ongoing. Um, but we are working with them to get some real data, to ,uh, look at- to compare last year and this year. Um, we also... um, you know, I think it's a little bit early to see how much of an uptick there will be, um, only because, uh, since the State Eviction Moratorium ended less than two weeks ago, if a owner issued a Notice to Quit, if it's a 14-day Notice to Quit, that has to expire before they go to court. So in terms of looking at the court data to see how much of an uptick there is, uh, we don't know that yet, but we will be, um, definitely watching that, um, and outreaching to tenants. The Multi-Service Center has, um, historically done that. They've outreached to tenants that they see on that- on the, um, in the court process and offer our services. So, um, we will- they will continue that- to do that. I will continue to work with them. And we'll, uh, work with our legal partners, uh, to make sure that, again, we're, uh, we're outreaching, uh, as much as we can. And I- so, I think, in terms of what we can do, um, uh, one of the speakers did talk a lot about, you know, had some good ideas. Um, we are, you know, doing- we- we do need to do more outreach. Um, to date, we've sent, um, information to more than 847, um, property managers. Um, we have, um, it- the information will be going out in CityView. Uh, we have issued- uh, sent flyers. Uh, we've done that- I c- actually, a couple times over these past number of months, um, sent flyers to, um, uh, developments, et cetera. Um, we do have social media, um, out there. So, we will continue to, uh, look at the different things that we can do, uh, and get the word out as much as we can. And with that, uh, I'll take questions, or...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Sure. Thank you, Maura. Um, that was, uh, helpful, and I know I have some questions. Other Committee members, uh, will, as well. I was thinking we could go with the other presentations, uh, just for the- the benefit of, uh, other Councillors, if there are questions, uh, for the City, uh, on the legal side, or sort of on the CDD side. We do also have, uh, Chris Cotter and Iram Farooq who can answer questions, as well. Um, uh, but we're going to go next to two housing organizations at Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, uh, and City Life/Vida Urbana to talk about the legal aspect, and the- the tenant protection aspects that they're seeing. Um, we'll go first to, uh, Jessica Drew, um, at, uh, s- Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services. Uh, she may be signed into the- the Zoom by a different name, S- uh, Sandra Tavares, I'm, uh, I'm being told. Um, uh, we also need to close Public Comment. Um, so, I'll, uh, accept a Motion, uh, from my Co-Chair to close, uh, Public Comment. Um, Madam Deputy Clerk, uh, could you, uh...

E. Denise Simmons: I mo-...

Madam Clerk: Vice Mayor Mallon.

Alanna M. Mallon: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor McGovern. Absent. Councillor Simmons.

E. Denise Simmons: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Zondervan.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Yes.

Madam Clerk: And Public Comment is closed on the affirmative vote with four in favor.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: I also want to, uh, recognize that we have Councillor Nolan, uh, on the call with us, as well. Um, we will now go, uh, to Jessica Drew from Cambridge and Somerville, uh, Legal Services.

Jessica Drew: Good morning. Are you able to hear me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: We are. Thank you.

Jessica Drew: Okay, great. Well, thank you so much for having me. Um, I guess my job today is to give you a little bit of background and overview on the CDC Moratorium, in addition to, um, what my organization is seeing in terms of the end of the State Moratorium here in Massachusetts, as well as what the likely aftermath would be, um, once the CDC Moratorium ends, um, December 31st of this year. Um, so first, I'll s- I'll begin by saying that the CDC Moratorium went into effect on September 4th, but for Massachusetts, it didn't go into effect until O- excuse me, October 18th. And the reason for that is, um, we had a State Moratorium, which was much more broad and protective. And so, that Moratorium was in effect until, um, midnight on October 17th, in which, um, then, the CDC Moratorium kicked in on October 18th because our own State Moratorium ended. So, colleagues around the country have been dealing with this Moratorium for longer than we have in Massachusetts. Um, we understand that there is currently some litigation pending, um, to challenge the legality of the CDC Moratorium. To date, um, courts have declined to offer injunctions on those cases. So, um, just to give... by way of context, um, landlords' attorneys have been filing for preliminary injunctions, basically trying to prevent the CDC Moratorium from going into effect, um, while the case is pending before the courts to determine if it's actually legal or not. And so far, courts have declined to prevent, um, the enactment of the- the Moratorium. Whether that continues to be the trend, I don't know. Um, nothing has been filed here in Massachusetts. But again, I think that's because it's early- because we haven't really had to deal with the CDC Moratorium here, um, until very recently. Um, and again, that could change. I don't- I don't want to speculate as to what, you know, may get filed or what judges may end up doing. But as of right now, the CDC Moratorium is in effect. And so, far judges are declining, um, to prevent it from being used by

tenants. Um, so, in order to avail yourself to the Moratorium, a tenant would have to submit a Declaration to their landlord. Um, we are urging tenants to do that as soon as possible. Um, we are collaborating with the Multi-Service Center, as we do on many of our cases, and they've been provided training and materials on how to assist tenants with filing that CDC Moratorium Declaration. And we are encouraging people, if they even think that they might be covered by the Declaration, and I'll get into the specifics on that in just a moment, um, that they should reach out to the Multi-Service Center to assist with the Declaration. Um, in addition, there are resources through my organization's website, www.gbls.org/made. There's a fillable form that tenants can access to fill out that Declaration. In addition, the National, um, Low Income Housing Coalition also has resources and forms that tenants can fill, um, to submit, uh, the Declaration to their landlord. Um, it has to be in writing, and we are encouraging people to do it by either email or text message, um, if that- because there are some issues with the mail, as we know- um, certified mail. A lot of people are not getting signatures. They're not picking up mail. There's delays. So, we've been encouraging people to try to do it through email or text message because we think that would be the easiest and fastest way to get it to the landlord. So that way, you can avail yourself to, uh, the Moratorium. And you do have to do that Declaration. Um, so, in order to be covered by the Moratorium, there's five criteria that an individual or family would have to meet. Um, the first is financial. You had to have made less than 99,000 in 2020, or 198,000 joint, or you've received a stimulus check this year, or, um, you were not required to report any income i- to the IRS in 2019. Number two, you were unable to pay the full rent due to loss in income, due to extraordinary medical expenses. Um, it does not necessarily have to be COVID-related. So, the job loss doesn't necessarily have to be due to the COVID- um, the income loss doesn't necessarily have to be due to COVID. Um, but there does have to be a decrease- a shown decrease in- in wages or income. So, chances are- so, likely, this Moratorium is not going to cover people in subsidized housing because they're going to report those income losses to the Housing Authority, um, or their, um, subsidized housing provider. So, the Moratorium is probably not going to cover those properties, but certainly would cover somebody in private housing who's had a substantial loss of income, um, this year. You need to use best efforts to obtain government or Rental Assistance. So, you can do that by contacting the Multi-Service Center, trying to apply for RAFT funds, City funds, um, private and local donation, you know, funds of that nature. Um, you have to show that you're likely to become homeless, or have to double-up, or be in an unsafe living situation if, um, you are evicted. You have to promise to make timely partial payments to the best of your ability and the best of your- close to the amount, um, of your rent as possible based on your individual circumstances. So, we're trying to suggest that people should try to pay 30% of their income towards rent. Even if it's not the full rental amount, at least you're attempting to make those payments, um, to the best of your ability if you can do so. Um, all of these statements can be challenged by the landlord, so it is important that when you are- when tenants are filling out this Declaration, that they are being 100% truthful and accurate with the information that they're

declaring, that they can honestly say that they've had a loss in income, that they meet the income guidelines, that they're promising to make efforts to pay back the landlord, and that they're trying to obtain Rental Assistance. Um, and it's really also important to note that while this Moratorium prevents people from being physically evicted from their homes, it does not waive the rent, and it does not, um, waive your obligation to pay the landlord, so that debt is still going to be owed. That is something that the Moratorium is not going to change. It's just going to allow- it's going to, um, allow you to stay in your home, but you're still going to have to pay that rent. So, we are encouraging tenants to try to make those rent payments if at all possible, and to also make them aware that they do owe that rent, and this is in no way, um, interfering with that obligation whatsoever. Um, the other thing I wanted to mention is that courts are treating the, um, CDC Moratorium differently. So in Housing Court, they are still allowing landlords to file eviction cases, even if a tenant has timely provided the landlord with a Declaration availing themselves to the Moratorium. Um, they're taking the position that they can continue to go through the trial process. It just means that the landlord cannot physically evict the person from the property, um, until after, um, 12/31. Um, whether that's legal or not, um, there's there's inter- there's, uh, different people are interpreting the language differently. Uh, I don't know that that's the correct interpretation of the law. Um, and I- but I don't want to really go into the details of what the Housing Court is thinking or what their strategy is. I'll just say that they're allowing trials to go forward. It's just- you can't be physically evicted from the home. District Court, however, is staying the proceeding. So, if you can show that you provided the Declaration to the landlord, at whatever, um, step in the process that you are in that court case, the court case stops. It just- they're staying the proceedings until, um, the Moratorium lifts. Um, and so, they're treating it very differently than Housing Court. And I say this for a couple of reasons. One, because it just shows that, um, nothing is really, um... everything's kind of, um, in flux, and things are changing rapidly, and interpretations are being made about the Moratorium, so I can't say definitively one thing or the other. And two, if a landlord files a- a court case in H- in District Court, many times, tenants will then try to remove that case to Housing Court, and to be in the Housing Court jurisdiction. But given that the District Court is allowing those proceedings to stay until t- 12/31, whereas Housing Court isn't really doing that, it might benefit tenants to stay in District Court, as opposed to having their cases moved to Housing Court. Um, so, that's- that's really what's going on, very generally, with the CDC Moratorium. Um, on the ground, uh, we haven't... the courts are dealing with cases that were stayed due to COVID back in March. And so, those are cases that are going through the court system now. Um, uh, tenants who were, um, supposed to move during this time period but didn't have to because the Moratorium was in place, those cases are now starting to move forward in the- in the courts. And so, the courts are dealing with those cases, excuse me, first. And new cases really haven't been filed yet because we're still in the Notice to Quit period, whether there be a 30-day no-fault or fault eviction or a 14-day Notice to Quit for non-payment of rent. Those cases are now just getting, you know, the Notices to Quit period. And so, it's going to be a little

bit of time before those cases start moving through, um, to the courts. I would say probably the end of November, December is when you're going to start seeing all those cases start to crop up. Um, and jury trials probably aren't going to happen until early- to mid-2021 at the earliest, um, just because of e- everything that we're arranging in terms of, um, social distancing, and the cases are on the rise, and we don't want people entering the courthouses, and all these kind of things. So, um, jury cases probably aren't going to be heard until early- to mid-2021 at this point. Um, and then, the aftermath... I- I don't- I mean, I don't have a crystal ball, but, um, certainly, I don't know how many tenancies are really going to be impacted by the Moratorium- how many tenancies will really be able to avail themselves to the Moratorium- the CDC. So, I can't really say what the aftermath will be, except that, you know, after December 31st, there really won't be any of these broader protections for tenants to stay housed except for the fact that, um, perhaps Cambridge's, um, Moratorium will still be in effect at that point because the State of Emergency won't- probably isn't going to lift, um, anytime soon. Um, and so, even if there are all these Moratoriums, you know, the State Moratoriums ended and the CDC Moratoriums ended, you know, the Cambridge one, which prevents the physical eviction of tenants, would still be in place. Um, of course, there are landlords who are itching to challenge that- um, to challenge that the City doesn't actually have authority to- to do that. Um, nothing has been challenged thus far, but we are certainly anticipating that someone's going to try to file something. Um, and we don't know how the courts are going to treat it, either- how judges are actually going to treat, um, these individual City Moratoriums like Cambridge and Somerville, um, because we haven't really had to avail ourselves to that at this point just yet. So, you know, we're working through it, um, as is everybody else. We're just trying to get through and figure things out as they come along. Um, so, I think that's generally i- it for- for what we're seeing in Legal Services. And, you know, as I always say to everyone, is- please reach out to, you know, Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, or DeNovo, or Harvard Legal Aid. You know, reach out to the Multi-Service Center. We have a great working relationship with them. Um, and if you are in trouble of any kind with your housing, or you're behind on rent, you know, please contact us, or contact, um, Multi-Service Center staff, because we really do want to help you and keep people- as many people housed during this pandemic as possible.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Great. Thank you. That's, um, super helpful in understanding the Federal Moratorium, and sort of some of the gaps, and how it's being, uh, interpreted and used so far. Uh, really highlights the importance of our City Moratorium, as well. Um, so, with that, um, and, uh, Jessica if you're a- able to stay on the line, there may be folks with questions. But if you have to- to run, uh, also, feel free. Um, thank you so much for coming. Um...

Jessica Drew: Yeah. Thank you. And I- I'll continue to stay on if people have questions.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Great. Um, so, with that, we'll go to, uh, the folks from City Life/Vida Urbana. We have Steve Meacham, um, and Ruby Saucer on

the line. Um, if it's possible to unmute them, uh, uh, we'll let whoever, uh, of the two wants to- to go first- to start.

Naomie Stephen: Steve and Ruby, you will need to unmute yourself and turn on your camera.

Ruby Saucer: Hi. My name is Ruby, and I've been with, um, City Life/Vida Urbana for about- with Steve, City Life/Vida Urbana, for about 10 years or more, fighting to stay in my home in 2010. And now, it's twenty-e- 2018. In May of 2018, a previous landlord sold the building. And in August of 2018, um, Michelle Huon and I received a letter from- a letter from- that- he said rent would be increased \$700, and the first payment is due- was due in 20- December of 2018. I said, no, I am not doing it. So, first of all, I couldn't afford to pay the \$700. And why should I have someone come in and tell me what I should pay them to stay in my home without any explanation or why? Just because he said so. I said no. It's like, uh, we can't say- we don't have a right to say no. And plus, they didn't do anything in the apartment to deserve the \$700. So in September, Michelle and I went to- took our letters and went to see City Life/Vida Urbana. City Life lawyers and I fought the new landlord from 2018 to 2020. Um, before we came to- to- up to an agreement, the owner agreed to negotiate after we did a rally in front of his home with the lawyers. The outcome was three years lease with a three percent, um, increase each year. I thank the members of City Life/Vida Urbana, and the wonderful lawyers- awesome warriors. They are awesome, and I thank them for the w- hard work that they did for Michelle and myself. That's why it's so important everyone- to- everyone let the Governor- let Governor Baker know he has let his people down and put them in harm's way for not extending the Moratorium during this COVID-19 pandemic. Now the Moratorium is over, and 130,000 people- residents may lose their homes. Um, there's no substitute, nothing to help the residents stay in their homes. We hold Governor Baker responsible for kicking people out of their homes in the COVID-19 pandemic. So, please contact everyone in the State House, Councillors, men, women, Councillors-at-Large, and your Legislature. Stop the mass eviction. Stop the eviction, please, and demand that Governor Baker pass Bill H5018, the Guaranteed Housing Stability Bill, and prevent this mass eviction. Governor Baker took the easy way out. He put a little bit of money in the RAFT Program and expect that that would take care of the problem, but it won't. He washed his hands of it. But no, Governor Baker. Big mistake. Thank you.

Steve Meacham: Thank you, Ruby.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. Uh...

Steve Meacham: Um...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Oh, I was just going to say th- uh, thank you, Rubin. If you can, uh, email the comments, that would be helpful to include in the record. Um, with that, uh, Steve, uh, Meacham, if you'd like to go ahead.

Steve Meacham: Sure. Thanks, Ruby. And, uh, thank you to, uh, the Cambridge City Council for having the- the hearing. Um, one reason that it was important to start with Ruby's testimony was that, um, the housing crisis really s- you know, existed in a- in a terrible way- in a pandemic way before the pandemic. And it's important to realize that because our responses to what's happening in the pandemic reach back to what we were doing beforehand. Uh, City Life has specialized in a method of organizing and responding to the threat of displacement that we refer to as the sword and the shield. That combines the shield, legal defense, uh, knowing your legal rights, with the sword, which is, uh, Mass Public Meetings and Mass Actions. We're going back to the Boston Eastern Housing Court tomorrow for another Action at 10:00 in the morning. Um, the, uh, the s- the sword part of this really brings to bear an understanding that this is fundamentally a moral crisis. It was a moral crisis before the pandemic, and it is certainly a moral crisis now. It's a Public Health crisis before the pandemic, and it's certainly a public crisis now. It's a Racial Justice crisis before the pandemic, and certainly a Racial Justice crisis now. And that has got to frame everything that we're trying to do- is to bring to bear a moral lens on the possible displacement of 100,000-plus households in Massachusetts, which is, just, you know, a travesty beyond words, to tell you the truth. Um, I think it's really important... I want to echo a couple of things that were said by speakers earlier. Um, what's being put forward now to offer some protection for these 100,000-plus households 100,000-plus households, other than the, uh, other than local ex- efforts like, uh, what is- Cambridge is doing or Boston's doing. What's being put forward is the CDC, uh, Moratorium. And I agree with a lot of what Jessica said. Um, the CDC Moratorium will likely have some benefit for the 11,000 families whose cases were already filed before the pandemic and whose cases are coming up now. We just stopped an eviction that was going to happen yesterday morning that was, uh, filed before the pandemic. But it was a- it's an- it's- this case was a case where a tenant, uh, a single mom with two children, uh, did not pay January, March, and- uh, January, February, and March, got approval from RAFT to pay those months. Their RAFT worker, uh, uh, left the Metro Housing Agency, and- and so the case was lost. And even though she paid her rent from April through October, the landlord was bringing an Execution against her, uh, for those first three months. Um, and so, we were able to use the Federal Moratorium to stop that. And she signed up for RAFT again, and hopefully will get that money paid. So, it's likely to benefit people whose cases were filed before the pandemic. Uh, for people who are getting their Notices to Quit now... I think Jessica drew this conclusion, also. Um, the Federal Moratorium is not going to have any effect at all because they're not going to get- their trial is not even going to come up until after the first of the year. Now, the other thing that's being offered is the- the RAFT Program, the beefed-up RAFT Program, that is supposed to include new, uh, finances for lawyers, new finances for paralegals, but none of that has appeared yet. It's supposed to include new financing m- for new staff to administer the Program. That hasn't appeared yet. Uh, there's more money in the- in the pot, but maybe a quarter of the total arrearage that's likely to be necessary to- to avert the crisis. So, new money, but woefully inadequate, and no- no- none of the- none of the staffing

that's supposed to appear has- exists yet. So basically, what we've done is- what the Governor has done is- is, uh, terminated the Moratorium, or refused to extend it, um, uh, opposed passing 5018, we believe, and instead just offering this program that's, uh, that's not going to really prevent anyone from being evicted, at least not in the short run. So, all of that to conclude what Ruby said, that we think that it's vitally important that in addition to whatever Cambridge does, uh, in terms of its local Ordinance, that adds its voice in the most powerful way possible to passing H-5018, which can still be passed this year, and would still make a tremendous difference in the lives of hundreds of- 100,000- and maybe 200,000 people. So, I think it might be good for me to stop there, um, and just, uh, take questions. I- I- I would just add that right now, s- we have a hotline in- both in English and Spanish, and that hotline has been taking calls since the pandemic began, since the State of Emergency, and now has about 2,400 calls coming through. And- and those calls, right now, are all w- in the last couple of weeks, uh, and have all been, I got a Notice to Quit. Um, I'm behind on my rent. What do I do? So, uh, it- it's going to be impossible to take this... we're going to do our best, but it's going to be impossible to take this case-by-case. There's- there has to be some larger solution, and that solution is 5018. Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. That was, uh, really helpful, um, both, uh, Ruby and Steve. Um, we'll open it up now to questions, uh, from- first from members of the Housing Committee, and then any other Councillors, uh, who are on and would like to ask questions, as well. Um, I'll go first, uh, to the Co-Chair, um, Councillor Simmons. Uh, and if there are any other Councillors, uh, who have questions, if you could raise your hand in the chat. Uh, th- after that- uh, after Councillor Simmons, we'll have Mayor Siddiqui.

E. Denise Simmons: Thank you, uh, Mr. Co-Chair. Uh, first of all, to, uh, our speakers, to Ruby Saucer and Steve Meacham and Jessica Drew, I think it is, and of course, to Maura, thank you. Um, that information is really helpful. Um, I don't have, uh, any questions, uh, that we haven't already s- asked. But when he w- when Steve was saying 501, I didn't know if he was saying 501, the letter A or 5018. And I was...

Steve Meacham: 5018.

E. Denise Simmons: Eight. The numeral eight. And I...

Steve Meacham: Yeah.

E. Denise Simmons: ... wasn't quite sure... you're saying it would help if we could get it passed. S- what would you then ask us to do, by way of advocacy or pressure, to see if we could force the hand of the Governor to- to- to rel- make that go th- go through? What- is there anything else that we can do now? Now, of course, you know, you've heard what we're doing locally in terms of trying to extend our Moratorium, um, while we figure out how legal that is. But if this has more teeth in it, and, of course, has a far- a far reach because it's statewide, what might we be able to do on our- in our role as- as, uh, local Elected Officials to help you get that over the finish line?

Steve Meacham: I think the key thing now is for the leadership of the House and Senate to bring H5018 to the floor for a vote, and to override the Governor's veto if necessary. Um, that can be done through Resolutions, but with all the work that Cambridge is doing to, um, to handle individual cases, I would make examples out of many of those cases. You know, obviously, uh, it's easier to not do the right thing at the state level if there's...

E. Denise Simmons: Mm-hmm.

Steve Meacham: ... no human face on what's happening. Cambridge...

E. Denise Simmons: Okay.

Steve Meacham: ... has the ability to put a human face on what's happening, and so does City Life, and that's what we're trying to do just to- to show the stories. Uh, we have a whole, um, a whole section of our website that's devoted to people coming on the website and using the Soapbox app to basically tell us 60- to 90-second story really briefly, and then to accumulate those. So, I- I think that raising up all those cases that Cambridge is dealing with and say, this is why we need 5018. This is why... we're doing everything we can locally, but it's not enough. The state has to act.

E. Denise Simmons: Uh, thank you. And through you again, Mr. Co-Chair, one other question. Is there any particular individuals in the s- in the state, in the Senate or in the House, that we should talk to? Assuming that the Cambridge Delegation is all on board, uh, with this, is there anyone else that we should turn our particular attention to that will help expedite this to the floor? If you can say.

Steve Meacham: Um, I probably don't have to tell you the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate.

E. Denise Simmons: Very good. All right. Thank you. Mr. Chair, I yield the floor. Thank you, Steve.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you, Madam Co-Chair. Um, we'll go now to Mayor Siddiqui, uh, and then, after that, Councillor Zondervan.

Sumbul Siddiqui: Uh, thanks. Uh, uh, just a quick question, um, and then I'll- I'll yield to the, uh, Housing Committee members. Uh, uh, s- Mr. Meacham, you had mentioned... and thank you for all the- the work that your organization does. You had ment- you talked about a case, um, and y- a hotline. And, uh, you know, I'm wondering how many Cambridge residents have been contacting City Life, and if you have that information that you could share.

Steve Meacham: Um, I don't have that information at hand. Uh, we could probably get a rough estimate. But, um, you know, City Life's located primarily... n- most- most of its work is done in the City of Boston, although that's changing now. Uh, so, that's the preponderance of calls.

Sumbul Siddiqui: Great. That's all I wanted to know. Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. Uh, I'll go down to Councillor Zondervan, and after that will be Vice Mayor Mallon.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. And through you, uh, my thanks to the presenters. Um, I have two clarifying questions. Um, the first one is to Ms. Pensak. You mentioned that, uh, the Multi-Service Center has historically been reaching out to tenants based on the court process. Could you clarify that? Are we watching for individual cases, uh, against Cambridge tenants, and then reaching out to them? I- I didn't quite understand what you meant.

Maura Pensak: Thank you for that question, Councillor. Um, I- Maria Melo is on the phone, and since it's really, uh, her team that does it, I'm going to ask her to answer that question if that's okay.

Maria Melo: Hello. Hi, everyone. Um, so, yeah. To clarify, the question is that, you know, um... over the last couple of years, our outreach efforts have been to send flyers to- to the tenants who are on the dockets for, um, uh, a court hearing, um, just to let them know our services are available and we're here, um, and sort of that outrea- uh, ou- outreach efforts will continue, uh, during the- the pandemic. And, um, you know, again, I think we'll probably start seeing some Eviction Notices, probably in mid-November or so. And it's our plan to continue to reach out to these, uh, out- out to people to let them know about our services in that way. Um, we also, um, you know, have great relationships with many other management companies in Cambridge. Um, they also know to refer to us when they're struggling to pay their rent, or are having other situ- housing situations that they're facing. Um, so we do a lot of great work with, uh, Greater Boston Legal Services- I mean, sorry, Cambridge Somerville Legal Services, um, DeNovo, um, and are able to sort of connect people who need some, uh, legal representation. Um, and we certainly, um, are here and available to meet with clients who are facing eviction- are having housing-related issues, and- not just evictions, and, um, are- are having other difficulties in their units. Um, and we can guide them through the process, whether it's, uh, you know, a referral to Inspectional Services, or it's a referral to Rental Assistance, or it's a, you know, even just basic need, um, whether it's a food bank or a, um, a need for, um, you know, medical care, or applications to SNAP, um, our office provides that for our community. Thank you.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: All right.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Cou-...

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you so much. And, um, uh, thanks for that explanation. Uh, are you seeing any challenges in terms of your resources and ability to respond to people? Are you seeing, uh, the same level as- as usual?

Maria Melo: Um, no. In fact, I think that we continue to provide the same level of service that we have. Um, and I think that, um, although the Moratorium was in effect, we were, uh, still preventing households from, um, becoming homeless through our efforts with our Rental Assistance funds, and- and, um, making

people whole so that they, uh, were in a better place when the Eviction Moratorium ended. Um, uh, we certainly, you know, have not seen, um, a huge increase. I think our numbers are about the same for rental arrearages as it was last year, just looking at our numbers, um, uh, recently. And, uh, you know, we continue our efforts. And I think we are, uh, financially in a good place right now for the City to be able to provide funding. And we also collaborate with many of the agencies like RAFT, um, uh, in- in our, uh, sort of virtual co-location with them, and can direct people directly- uh, refer people directly to them. We have a- a contact there that we send our clients to. We, you know, also do the outreach to the Jewish Family and Children Services for funds. We can, um, sort of package things together, and if someone qualifies for the Housing Stabilization Program, we would be making that referral for the, uh, for the tenants, as well. So, um, yeah. We continue the work. And our hope is to, you know, um, get people in a place where they're not going to be evicted.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Councillor Zondervan, do you have any other questions?

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you. Yes, I have one more question. Um, Ms. Drew stated that the CDC Moratorium would probably not apply to tenants in our Affordable Housing Programs. I didn't understand why not.

Jessica Drew: Yeah. So, the reason why I say that they probably are not going to qualify if you're living in subsidized or affordable housing is because your housing... um, so, for example, if you live at the housi- the Cambridge Housing Authority, your rent is based on your income. And so, if you have no income coming in, or you've seen a decrease in your income, then you would report that decrease to the Housing Authority, and your rent would be adjusted based on that decrease in income. And so, for that reason, because the Moratorium requires you, um, to make best efforts to obtain Rental Assistance and to pay what your income will allow, if you're in, uh, subsidized housing, you're already going to be doing that. So, if you've seen a decrease in your- if you're not paying your rent in subsidized income, the Moratorium is probably not going to, um, protect you because your rent is based on your income anyway. Does that...

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you. I...

Jessica Drew: ... make s-...

Quinton Y. Zondervan: I appreciate that. Uh, I- I guess I- I'm interpreting it as, people in th- in those circumstances don't n- need this protection because they already have protection against income decline. Is that- is that right?

Jessica Drew: Yeah, essentially. That's, you know, when you're in subsidized housing such as the Cambridge Housing Authority, the point is, is that you're already paying a por- you know, 30% of your income, or thereabouts. Um, and so, you wouldn't necessarily need this protection because there would be protections in place against that. And the Cambridge Housing Authority, throughout this pandemic, has been working with tenants who have seen a decrease in income to

do rent recertifications. Um, and certainly, we tell people to reach out if you're having trouble with that, to reach out to the Multi-Service Center, even our organization. Um, to my chagrin, because I'm not a big fan of doing rent calculations, because I don't like math, we do do rent calculations. And we will take a look at people's, um, rents if they don't- if they think they're paying more than they should. And we acknowledge that that's really important, especially now, where people are facing food shortages, not being able to pay utilities, and are really pinching every penny to try to survive. So, we understand the importance of not paying more than you absolutely have to.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Great. Thank you so much. Yeah. W- we've worked, uh, with your office and- and with the CHA on, uh, helping tenants in the past. So, thank you for your work. And, uh, Mr. Chair, no further questions.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. We're going to go down to, uh, Vice Mayor Mallon.

Alanna M. Mallon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, um, to the team who spoke here today, I just want to thank everyone for being here to talk about this critical issue. I also wanted to, um, shout out to Mayor Siddiqui, um, for really working with the Cambridge Housing Authority to put together the Tenancy Preservation and Eviction Prevention Pilot that I think will really help a lot of our tenants that are in the Housing Authority. And a huge thanks and shout out to Maura Pensak, to helping so many residents with their rent recertification over the last eight to nine months. I think that has helped a lot of people stay in their homes, and that kind of work is often in the background and unnoticed. But thank you, um, from me, from the City, for doing that work. Uh, you know, this certainly is a Public Health crisis. I think we heard the Governor yesterday talk about how over 50% of new cases are coming from social gatherings, but also household transmissions. And should eviction- evictions go up, um, the risk of doubling up and increasing the number of, uh, people in your household, um, will only exacerbate this Public Health crisis. So, it's critical to keep people in their homes, um, both for their own stability, um, but also to keep, um, to ensure that we don't have more cases, um, unnecessarily. So, the way I understand, um, Maura, um, and Maria, you know, because the Moratorium- the statewide Moratorium- Moratorium ended less than two weeks ago, we don't have a lot of data around, um, the court filings, and that will be coming up soon. My question is... I have two for Maura. One, um, given that that is probably going- that data and those Eviction, um, Notices are going to start coming up, how will you be communicating the number of evictions that we're seeing to the City Council? So, that's the first question. And then, the second question is, uh, I understand that you are just one person, and this is about to be a big issue. Um, I know that we have a number of community partners, and thanks to Maria Melo and Jessica over at the Legal Services. But I- I know we haven't- we, uh, funded an emergency position for you to help. Where are we in that hiring process? So, those two questions to Maura, please. Thanks.

Maura Pensak: Thank you, Vice Mayor, and through you, um, Mr. Chair. Um, uh, I'll start with the second question. Um, we are in the middle of that hiring process, so hopefully within the upcoming weeks, uh, we will- we will have filled that position. Um, but we are- we're just doing interviews at- at this time. Um, and in terms of reporting numbers, um, that is a very fair and great question. And I think that, um, working with Maria, we can, you know, put that data together, and certainly offer that, um, a- as- as you wish. And I'll work with the City Manager and kind of figure out how that should- how we should share that information.

Alanna M. Mallon: Thank you. Mr. Chair, through you to Ms. Pensak. Um, yeah. I- it is going to be a highly evolving and changing situation. I think it'll be important for the Council to understand where we are, um, as it's happening so that we can direct more resources if necessary to help you and your Office and the Multi-Service Center connect residents to the resources that they need. Um, you know, as you know, evictions are a fast-moving, um, issue. And I- you know, that's- that's one thing. And then, I- I think it's really important, um, moving on to a different topic, thinking about communications and how we are communicating with residents, uh, as a City. So, you know, I think Maura mentioned a number of ways that we're getting information out to tenants and landlords, uh, through letters. Um, a Public Commenter said that as a landlord, she still hasn't received a postcard in the mail. I'm wondering when those postcards are going to be sent out. But even more importantly, um, you know, you, Ms. Pensak, you mentioned social media. I will note that on Twitter, there have been exactly three Tweets on this, and one Facebook post. So, we need a much stronger digital communication strategy to get the word out on the resources that are available. Maura's phone number, the FAQs, who to call... um, I cannot stress this enough, that we cannot send out a letter and a late postcard and a couple of Tweets and hope that we've solved this problem. The communication strategy needs to be stronger from the City, and I- I- I don't know how- um, wh- I don't know how many more times I- or how much more strongly I can say that. And- and maybe there's somebody from the City Manager's Office or Communications team that can put together, um, a communication strategy that's stronger. Maybe it's videos, maybe it's FAQs, maybe it's- I- I don't know. Um, I just- the communication has not been enough for the gravity of this issue, um, in the City. So, like th- I'll yield the floor at this time. But, um, you know, just hoping that Maura's team can- can really communicate with the Council about where eviction data is and how many cases she's seeing. Um, I think that'll be important. And then, really hitting hard the communication and digital media strategy. Thank you.

Maura Pensak: And if I just may respond, through you, Mr. Chair, thank you, Vice Mayor. And, um, absolutely hear that, and we'll definitely be working on that.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Okay. We're going to go now to Mayor Siddiqui.

Sumbul Siddiqui: Yeah, thank you. I think, um, the Vice Mayor took a lot of, um, the- the comments that I was going to make. I'll just piggyback on it. And on the eviction filings piece, that has been done, um, by interns in the past, uh, at

CDD because we... the Council has put in numerous orders- this is pre-pandemic- about, where are eviction filings coming from? And so, we have data up until 2017. You know, this data is available only, really, through Mass courts, and so it's tedious. And so, I think, um, uh, you know, ha- ha- having, um, CDD or some intern really help you, um, at the City Manager's Office to do that, um, I think is the best, um, approach because, um, you know, you- you know, you- you just- right now, it's just you. And so, I think we can- I- I've been pushing for some kind of data person... and maybe, um, Ms. Farooq has an update on that. Um, but we've been talking about how we collect this data for a while, um, and- and have a- maybe a more, um, not another dice- diet- data scientist, but someone really working on- on f- watching these closely. And on the other- there's other piece around, um, eviction filings. I had sent Mike Johnson a report last term, um, around from the Massachusetts Law, um, MRI, uh, Law Reform Institute around the impact of evictions. And, you know, uh, to CHA's credit, they, you know, they were like, this is a really helpful report. Uh, we're- we're gonna really look at this and- and think about, uh, redu- you know, really, how we can reduce, uh, our evictions because it's actually costing us more, uh, to go in and, uh, you know, file these, uh, and, you know, weighing that against the impact that has. And I know that landlords in, um, Boston have taken this pledge, uh, to- to prevent evictions. We have that Order, um, that a few of us put in around, uh, you know, working with everyone to... not taking this pledge, per se, but really thinking about, systematically, how, um... and it goes back to the communication piece, too. How are we going to actually, uh, prevent these filings which have an impact? Uh, uh, because that- that alone, um, as y- you know, I won't go into, like, all the... we already know all the- the reasons why that- very active eviction filing is- i- is bad. So, it's more of a comment, but I think we- we can work on, um, working together to- to working... and we already have some good relationships with those landlords. But them really taking some kind of pledge, working with the City to say, look, we're going to work with our tenants, um, and- and avoid any eviction filings, and utilize the resources that we have in the community. So, Ms. Farooq, sorry. I- I know you want to jump in, I think, on the, uh, the filings piece. Um, we don't have... I know last term, we had, um, pieces around, uh... and you've already- you've- you have responded to that with data- um, with, um, information about how you're tracking. But is there any update?

Iram Farooq: Um, so, uh, through you, Mr. Chair, um, to the Mayor. We- whoops- uh, we- we have, since that time, actually hired a- a data analyst who would be able to step in and, um, and assist with creating a- a- an updated tool to, um, to scrape the data. The- I- I would say- I would actually, um, say that the City Solicitor's Office probably is a very, very, uh, key part of this conversation because when, uh, we were working on this the- the last time, the biggest challenges were around, um, sort of the- the technical legal data, and making sure that we were, um, parsing the right components, uh, so that we were not making public information about individuals that, um, th- that becomes much more easily accessible if it is, uh, in a- in a City data source as opposed to, um, just at the Registry of Deeds or in the court system. And so, um, I don't know if the Solicitor has other thoughts on this. I would say that that's probably the bigger part of the

puzzle, uh, than the- the technical piece, which we would be able to, um, I think, solve relatively expeditiously.

Sumbul Siddiqui: Thanks. And, um, just one more comment. Thanks, um, Sir Chair. The- I think where the data is so useful is... even looking at the 2017, and th- those filings to see who has- who had filed the most, right? And we know those management companies. So, reaching out to those and saying, you know, sign this pledge. I think that could be a starting point, um, because it's, you know, the data is after the fact they've already filed. But how do we use it? And so, um, it is- I think we already- we can- we have a starting point based on some of the reports that CDD has provided the Council, uh, last year. Uh, and then, hopefully, we can get some more information moving forward from the data analysts and ho- r- rope in the, um, City Solicitor's Office. Thanks.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you.

Marc C. McGovern: Mr. Chair.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Oh, yeah. Uh...

Marc C. McGovern: Just, uh...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Councillor McGovern.

Marc C. McGovern: Sorry- Councillor McGovern. I was unfortunately unable to make the start of the Meeting. Um, but I am here now. So, I just wanted to register my attendance.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Okay. Thank you. Councillor McGovern, uh, is at the Meeting. Um, duly noted. Um, we're gonna go now to, uh, Councillor Zondervan.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Through you, just a quick reaction to the discussion on data collection. I guess I'm a little bit confused again, because I thought we just heard that Somerville Legal Services is going through the court cases and, uh, identifying tenants being evicted. So, are we doing double duty, or is there- are- are there different tasks here that- that need to get done?

Jessica Drew: Well, I mean, our office does keep track of the dockets, but we don't... I mean, we have- so, we have done some research in terms of tenants who are facing eviction or have been evicted. But as, um, Mayor Siddiqui, or, I for- or somebody... I'm sorry. Somebody noted earlier that wi- with the Solicitor's Office is that- the concern is- is that we don't want to be providing, um, data that would be readily accessible to landlords, um, evictions of different tenants because what we know about eviction records is that it's a black mark on you, that if a landlord can see that you've been evicted for any reason, or been- really been taken to court for any reason, they'll use that against you, and it'll be really hard to rent. So, the City has to be very careful about how they collect the data, how they use the data to prevent landlords from accessing that data to use it against tenants. Our office also has ethical obligations that we have to protect as lawyers. So, we don't share information outside of this o- our office unless we're given explicit permission to do so. And even in other circumstances, we choose not to share that information

because it could prejudice our clients, or could violate our ethical obligations as attorneys. So, the information that we have is sometimes distinct from the information we can share from- we could share with the City, or we work and collaborate with the City because of those ethical obligations and because our job is really to protect our clients and to provide representation for their interests. And so, our sole focus is, what does the client want? What does the client need and how do we get that for them in a legally sound way? Um, which is distinctly different than what the City's trying to do to just capture data to really see where the bad acting landlords are, where w- you know, tenants may be struggling, why some properties are facing more evictions than others. You know, that would be distinctly different than what my office is trying to do, which is just work with clients and protect their, um, legal interests. I hope that answered your question.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: All right, great. Thank you. Yes, that definitely helps. I- I happen to be, uh, a data expert, so I un- I understand the concerns and issues around privacy and data sharing, but it- it may be possible that there's an opportunity here to do some aggregate data sharing where you're collecting data about individual clients, but maybe there's a way to aggregate some of that data and share it with the City so that there's no chance of privacy violation, um, but we might gain some efficiencies that way in terms of our data collection. So, uh, I won't belabor the point. I- I appreciate the explanation, and- and I hope that we can, uh, find some ways to- to do that. Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you. Um, I had a few questions myself, and the first one, uh, is for the City Solicitor. Um, and just getting a better understanding of how the City's Eviction Moratorium, uh, will operate in a courtroom, uh, or afterwards. Um, if I'm understanding correctly, property owners may be allowed to go through with an eviction case, uh, but won't be able to levy on Execution. Um, so, after they go through the- the court case, will they be told by the judge, uh, that they can't Execute? Um, just trying to make sure, because the law only works if folks know about it or if someone's there to enforce it. Uh, so, what exactly will happen if a property owner doesn't know about our local Moratorium and starts going through with the- the property to carry out an eviction?

Jessica Drew: Uh, well, hopefully, um, if they attempt to do so... I don't know what judges are likely to say in terms of the local Moratorium for Cambridge. I don't know what(sic) they're going to treat it. I can't- and I know that a lot of judges have different interpretations, and when you're in Eastern Housing Court or District Court, you could be before a variety of different judges, especially now, because there's going to be an influx of- supposedly, they're going to be hiring even 15 more judges to the dockets- um, to clear the dockets, I should say. Um, so, I don't know what judges are likely to do with it. But even if a judge were to allow the Execution to issue, that's where the- the constables and the sheriffs become really important. And- and- and, um, hopefully, what would happen is- is that even if they got the document, the sheriff or the constable would say, there's nothing I can do with this because I'm working in the City of Cambridge, and Cambridge has a local Moratorium, so I'm not going to levy on this. Um, and so, really, the hope is- is that we're educating the courts on the local Moratorium, and

we're also educating the Officials who carry out these evictions, namely the constables and the sheriffs, um, because they're the only entity that's going to be able to physically evict people from their premises. And if they know that this Moratorium is in effect, then they should be telling landlords, I don't care what the court said. There's a Moratorium in place, and we're not going to physically evict these individuals from their properties.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Got you. That's hel-...

Jessica Drew: I...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Sorry.

Jessica Drew: I'm sorry.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Go ahead.

Jessica Drew: Sorry. I don't want to- to, um... and- and I will say, my office, we are making that a defense. You know, when a client comes to us in the City of Cambridge, we do make the courts aware that there is a City Moratorium. And we put it in the pleadings and the af- affirmative motions, and we definitely get it on the record that the Moratorium is in effect in Cambridge. And so, even if this court case were to proceed, there's nothing you could do with it because Cambridge is not allowing the levy of those Executions.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Got you. That's really helpful. That was one of my other questions about, if the local Moratorium had been invoked yet, uh, or if, because of the Federal Moratorium, it- it hadn't quite yet, but it sounds like it is being brought up. So, that's great to hear.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yeah. I- I've- I- I have personally mentioned it in a couple of cases that I've dealt with, and I know my colleagues have also, uh, alerted the courts of that fact, as well.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Great. Thank you. Um, Solicitor Nancy Glowa is also on the line, and I believe wants to respond.

Nancy Glowa: Um, thank you, Mr. Chair. Can you hear me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: We can. Thank you.

Nancy Glowa: Thank you. Uh, so, yes. Um, going back to Councillor Zondervan's question first. Um, Ms. Drew is correct that- that- or- or the points that she made are the points that we would make, uh, and have made to the Council before about the data collection question, uh, which is privacy. And there is no confidentiality when we collect that data. So, we have explained, both to Council and in our internal meetings, about trying to see what we could do to respond to the Council's request in that regard, that if we go and collect data that's in the dockets, which is public information but not widely disseminated, then it would be made public in our, uh, files whether we report it to the Council or not. And there may be some ways we could keep some of it from being disclosed, pursuant to privacy concerns, but we can't guarantee that all of it would be dis-

um, protected from disclosure, particularly since we're- I'm gleaning it from public records in the first place at the Courthouse. So, we agree with the concern that landlords would then have access to that information. The second part of the question that the Council had asked was to try to find out more about why people are being evicted, or- or at the end of the day, at the end of a court proceeding, why not? You know, what the details were. And And the only way- we have advised that the only way to really find out more about these individual cases would be to contact the individuals involved. And again, we don't have any attorney-client privilege with those people. And to the extent that we provided such information to the City, then that would be public information. So, those were our concerns. And we're very happy to hear that, uh, GBLS Castles is collecting some of that data on behalf of their clients, but that they are able to preserve the confidentiality of their clients so as to protect the tenancies involved. So, just wanted to answer that question. With respect to the Order, uh, we have sent a letter to the Middlesex Sheriff and to all constables who are authorized to serve process in Cambridge, advising them of the existence of the Order and asking them not to levy upon Executions in Cambridge pursuant to our Order.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Uh, Councillor Zondervan, do you have a follow-up?

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes. Um, and through you, thank you to the Solicitor for that explanation. And that's- that's very helpful. And it, um, makes even a stronger case for having a third party, uh, like the Legal Services collect the data and then share it with us in- in an aggregate form so that there's no, uh, privacy concerns, and that the private data i- remains in their custody, and- and, uh, remains inaccessible to, uh, landlords or other, um, people we might have concern about- about seeing it. So, um, I would hope that there's some way that we can work that out so that we can benefit from that data collection while, uh, continuing to address our privacy concerns. Thank you.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Great, thank you. Are there, uh, other questions from Committee members, uh, or members of the Council who aren't on the Committee? Okay. Uh, with that, I'll just make some final remarks, uh, and then go to the- the Co-Chair to see if she has any. Um, I want to echo the concerns of others about, uh, getting the word about th- about this to all our residents, uh, both tenants, uh, who could be potentially affected, as well as landlords, property management companies, uh, anyone on the other side of this, to know that, uh, we have a City Eviction Moratorium, that it remains in effect. Um, getting the word out, uh, through multiple languages, uh, on a postcard with all of it, um, or in o- any other form we can. Uh, we have the billboard in front of City Hall, the banner across Mass Ave. Everyone, uh, should know about this. In the way that it feels like, uh, the State Moratorium, the Federal Moratorium are widely out there, the City Moratorium for Cambridge, uh, should be something that's- that's, uh, in place- uh, that everyone knows about, as well, uh, especially because the CDC Moratorium is only in effect until December 31st. Uh, and as we heard from, uh, uh, folks today, this- it won't help people getting Notices to Quit right now because by the time they, uh, are being brought to court, uh, it will be in the new year. Our local Moratorium will still remain in effect. By that point the, State

Moratorium, the Federal Moratorium will not. So, our local protections are really, uh, important for our residents. Um, we also, uh, need to do more, uh, at the state and federal levels. Um, there's only so much we can legally do, uh, as a City. Um, and that's one of the reasons the- the Legislation needs to pass, uh, H5018. And, uh, we need to be vocal about, you know, the effect that it will have on our residents, uh, as well. Um, and to- making sure we're getting the word out, uh, to folks who are- are not getting that formal Notice to Quit, uh, or that eviction, but are just being threatened, uh, more informally by landlords, to know that the resources are there for them. Uh, I want to thank all, uh, of the presenters today, um, the staff, uh, the Solicitor Marau Pensak, uh, Iram Farooq from CDD, uh, Chris Cotter, um, and the folks from CLVU, uh, and from Castles, as well. It was, uh, really great to get a better understanding of this. And I think by having this Meeting, we've helped get the word about, uh, about our local Eviction Moratorium, as well. Um, so, with that, I'll- I'll turn it over, uh, to the Co-Chair to see if she has any final remarks.

E. Denise Simmons: Uh, thank you, Mr. Co-Chair. And I- and I do, just very quickly. Uh, uh, it actually is a question. It came up at another meeting. It was, um, some- some tenants... I think Ms. Drew talked a little bit about it when she was talking about how some of these programs work. Some tenants think an Eviction Moratorium means they don't have to pay their rent. Uh, and I don't know how- what approaches either she, or Steve, or- or, um, anyone else have used to get that information out. In other words, this is a- this is- a Moratorium, meaning that your landlord cannot evict you at this time. But if you have, uh, the wherewithal to pay, even if it's paying a small amount, you need to pay that. Is there an effective way of getting that information out to tenants so they don't see it as, oh, I can't get evicted. I don't have to pay now. So, that's just, uh, my question. And then, I have a- a Closing Remark through you, Mr. Chair.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Great, thank you. Is that...

Jessica Drew: Um...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Sorry. Go ahead.

Jessica Drew: Sorry. Was that question for me?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Uh...

E. Denise Simmons: It kind of was.

Jessica Drew: Okay. Um, so certainly, um, when meeting with the Multi-Service Center staff, they know that this is, um, a Moratorium on the physical eviction, but not necessarily on owing the rent. And so, we work with our community partners to get that message out. Um, certainly- and I- I don't want to speak for Mr. Meacham and City Life/Viva Urbana, but I imagine that they have had lengthy conversations with tenants about what the Moratorium means and what it doesn't. Um, and when-...

E. Denise Simmons: Mm-hmm.

Jessica Drew: When we go through the Declaration, whether you're going through it with somebody at City Life or the Multi-Service Center, you know, in order to avail yourself to that, um, Moratorium, you have to note that you're promising to try to make partial payments.

E. Denise Simmons: Okay.

Jessica Drew: And at that point, you know, you can discuss with them, and that's because you still owe the rent. That- no matter what the Moratorium does in terms of moving you out, you're still going to owe that money, and you got to pay it. And unfortunately, there aren't any federal or state programs that would waive the rent, except, you know you could try to get Rental Assistance through RAFT, for example. Um, so, I mean, I- and I do community outreach like this. I speak to politicians and community groups and tenants individually, and, you know, we disseminate that information, and then through social media. So, we're trying to get the word out about what the Moratorium means and what it doesn't mean. Um, and, I- I mean, I wish it did waive rent. Believe me, I- I wish that we could wave a wand and keep people- everybody housed and have reasonable rent, but unfortunately, that's not the state of things. And so, that- those are some of the strategies our office is utilizing. And again, I'm sure Mr. Meacham can share what his, um, organization is doing, as well. But again, I don't want to speak for him, or for anyone else. I'm just, you know, sharing from our perspective.

E. Denise Simmons: Uh, thank you. And- and, uh, Mr. Meacham- Steve, do you have anything to add to that, or Maura? I know- I have discussed this a little bit with- with Maura, trying to figure out strategies because I have heard f- people say, oh, so we don't have to pay our rent? And I said, no, that's not quite it. So, uh, Steve, do you want to add anything to this? Through you Mr. Chair. Or Maura?

Steve Meacham: Um, I would just say, we have all those conversations that Jessica was just describing with people who are calling through the hotline all the time, and we make it clear that- that it's not, uh, not getting rid of their rent obligations. Certainly, I would say that, um, you know, the vast, vast majority of people who call through our hotline are actually desperate to pay rent, and they just- they feel terrible that they can't. They feel- they really want to know what can hap- uh, uh, they'll say things like, I've always paid my bills, and now I can't. I feel so bad. So...

E. Denise Simmons: Mm-hmm.

Steve Meacham: Um, that's- that's- that's the overwhelming number of people who are calling. Um, I should- we should add that the likeliest way to kind of make the debt disappear without people having to pay s- pay it somehow, which they can't, would be...

E. Denise Simmons: Mm-hmm.

Steve Meacham: ... if the, uh, you know, the Heroes Act passed by the- by the National House of Representatives included \$100 billion for back rent help. So, if that was to ever be released or get passed to the Senate- I don't know how mi-

how that might happen. Um, if that was to ever happen, that would make a huge difference, and might actually be able to pay off some of that rent- back rent debt.

E. Denise Simmons: Thank you. That's very helpful. Um, the only- last thing I want to say... Mr. Chair, through you to the Committee m- members. Around info- info sharing, I certainly- I- I would... it's interesting- um, it's an interesting way to try to do outreach. And I don't know if Mayor Siddiqui's still around. A number of our families that go to our schools are tenants. And is there a vehicle through the schools where we might be able to send this information out to families, uh, about this tenant pr- pr- program, number one. And the second thing is, I- I still meet regularly with the Interfaith Mayor and, uh, with the interfaith community th- th- at the early part of every month, and I'll certainly bring this to them, uh, to let them know, and to our Senior Advisory. But the question is- I guess is better put to the Mayor as maybe food for thought. Is- can we send this important information to families through the schools?

Sumbul Siddiqui: Yes. And we can, uh, you know, I think something was sent, but we'll make sure it's in the next Superintendent Agenda, uh...

E. Denise Simmons: Great,

Sumbul Siddiqui: ... Message.

E. Denise Simmons: Right. Not only to the parents, uh, maybe to the principals, because if a parent or family...

Sumbul Siddiqui: Yes.

E. Denise Simmons: ... have some problem, they're going to probably- maybe say something- I don't know what we're going to do. We might have to leave Cambridge because we're about to be evicted. And if the principal has that information, they can say, oh, have you taken advantage of this? Okay, very good. Thank you. Uh, this was w- this has been a great meeting. Um, I really appreciate everything that I've heard. It- it- it shows we still have to be vigilant. There's still a lot of gaps in the safety net that we're trying to put together, but I think we're doing yeoman's work. Um, hats off to our staff that I know are working all the time, overtime, and each time to make sure they're serving all the citizens of the City of Cambridge. So, thank you very much for all your efforts. Mr. Chair, with that, I yield the floor. And I thank everybody...

Steve Meacham: Councillor Simmons, one- one...

E. Denise Simmons: Yes.

Steve Meacham: One other quick comment, if y- if I might.

E. Denise Simmons: Yes.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Please go ahead.

Steve Meacham: Um, the mechanism that you're using to enforce, the, um, you know, the- the Moratorium on evictions in Cambridge going through the constables...

E. Denise Simmons: Mm-hmm.

Steve Meacham: Now, Boston passed a- a Home Rule Petition, uh, called the Jim Brooks Act that was designed to have constables send a copy of any Notice to Quit to the City. Um, you know...

E. Denise Simmons: Oh.

Steve Meacham: One of the- one of the things that people have brought up here in this discussion is that a lot of evictions take place without ever going to court. They take place at the stage of tenants receiving Notices to Quit, and they move. Um, so, the idea of the Jim Brooks Act was to require that landlords of a certain size and above- that anytime they sent a Notice to Quit to a tenant, they would also send a copy to the City, thus providing the City with the opportunity of informing those tenants of their rights.

E. Denise Simmons: Excellent. Um, then that raises the question... uh, Mr. Co-Chair, uh, through you to Ms. Glowa, if she's still on the c- on the call. Is that something that Cambridge could do? Because if it is, I would- I would offer that you and I co-Sponsor a Motion to put that on the floor, have the Council as a whole, um, vote on it, and then have it expeditiously executed. So, Mr. Chair, through you to Ms. Glowa. Is that something that we can do?

Nancy Glowa: Uh, through you, Mr. Chair, to Councillor Simmons. I'm not familiar with this Act.

E. Denise Simmons: L- uh, all I can see is your eyebrows.

Nancy Glowa: Sorry. Um, sorry, Councillor Simmons. Um, I am not familiar with that Act. We would be happy to look into it. And if it's something that we can do here in Cambridge, we can put together a Home Rule Petition, um, for the Council's consideration as expeditiously as we can, and we will do that.

E. Denise Simmons: Thank you, Ms. Glowa. Then, M- Mr. Co-Chair, then I would move that we do that- that we, uh, advise our City Solicitor to look into the Jim Brooks Act, similar to what they've done, I think Steve Meacham said the City of Boston, with a view toward being able to apply this, uh, widely in the City of Cambridge to support our- our tenants.

Iram Farooq: Madam Co-Chair, may I, um, say one thing? Um, which is...

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Go ahead.

Iram Farooq: W- we are familiar with the Jim Brooks Act. And my, uh, understanding is that that Home Rule Petition, uh, was not upheld by the Legislature. So that is not in effect, which doesn't mean that Cambridge cannot attempt that again, but just to provide that background.

Steve Meacham: That's...

E. Denise Simmons: Uh...

Steve Meacham: That's...

E. Denise Simmons: Through you, Mr. C-...

Steve Meacham: ... definitely true.

E. Denise Simmons: Th- uh, through you, Mr. Chair, to Mis- um, Ms. Farooq. Um, thank you, uh, for that information. I guess my answer back would be, nothing ventured, nothing gained. So, um, if we try it... and maybe it's a brand new day, and a brand new time, and maybe you have a brand new attitude, and we can get a little further down the road than we did before because being able to have constables tell us that they're executing Notices to Quit or Eviction Notices would be a huge step forward in terms of being able to inform tenants about their legal right at the p- time they're getting this Eviction Notice, because at that point, they're probably like a deer in headlights. They're not receiving information. They're not looking for information. They're in a full panic. So, we could get that information to them through some- some, uh, uh, horrible, uh, uh, but reliable source, which is the constables themselves. I think that would be a great help.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you, Madam Co-Chair. Yeah. I can follow up, uh, with you offline about getting a- a Policy Order together for a Home Rule Petition, which I think is a great idea. Um, we're getting a couple last minute questions and comments. Um, we're gonna go to the- Mayor Siddiqui, uh, and then Councillor Zondervan.

Sumbul Siddiqui: Thanks. Um, this was, uh, related to an earlier point. And, uh, I think Councillor Zondervan had said, you know, we should maybe, you know, work with, um, Cambridge and Somerville Legal Services, have a third party involved in data... um, and I- I just think that, you know, I- I- I'm a- I've done legal aid and, um, I know that Jessica and the team over there, and DeNovo, um, you know, they do a lot. And I d- I- I just don't want this conversation to- for them to feel like we're adding this data... you- even that ask, I don't think it's appropriate. Um, I think there's a different way to- to do it, um, because I just don't think- I think they're... obviously, the priority is making sure people, um, are going to be in their homes. Uh, and I- I'm pretty sure there's no capacity to do data collection or data sharing. Um, so, I don't know if Jessica has anything to add there.

Jessica Drew: Thank you, Mayor. Um, it's true. Um, you know, our primary initiative is not a data collecting agency. We have done it in the past where we thought it would better serve our clients or provide us with insight in how to do better outreach, to figure out, you know, who has pending cases, what areas those cases are in, to try to figure out how we can, you know, get in contact with those individuals who might need legal representation. Um, but we don't do it en masse. It's not our primary focus. It's not even our secondary focus. Um, it's just something that we do sometimes that just helps us better serve our clients. Um,

and I just don't know, you know... and then, piggybacking off of what the Mayor just said, I- I don't know that there's a ethically sound way for us to share that data without any kind of concerns that it would then be traced back to our clients. Um, and I don't think we would want to engage in that, even if we could find those ethical boundaries, just because I would not want that information to get shared with landlords in any capacity, and I don't want to make it easier for them to access that data. Um, you know, we're already trying to f- to close, um, access to Mass courts and, uh, e- eviction ceiling. And I don't want to do anything, um, that would be contrary to that mission because we really do want to protect, uh, tenants from having their evictions used against them in order to find stable housing in the future.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: All right. We're going to, uh, Councillor Zondervan, and then, uh, Mayor S- uh, Vice Mayor Mallon.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and through you. I- I certainly, um, didn't mean to ask for anything. I- I was merely suggesting that we explore that possibility. And if it's not possible, it's not possible. Um, but it seemed like a potential solution to me, given that the City is trying to keep data private, and given that a private entity has more ability to do so. Um, but I'm happy to have that conversation offline. And- and certainly, um, I- I asked earlier if Ms. Drew had sufficient resources. And- and certainly, if it's a resource issue, if the City is contracting with someone to collect data, presumably, we would compensate them for that effort. But, uh, again, I'm sure we can talk about that later. Um, I- I did want to comment on the constables question. We- we did have a- a situation, um, with a tenant, and- and we ended up, uh, contacting the Sheriff's Office, and- and they were not aware yet of the Moratorium in Cambridge. But, um, it turned out the sheriff had decided, uh, to not enforce any Moratoriums in- in Middlesex County, uh, which was a great decision on his part. Um, but the part that confused me a little bit, particularly around the Jim Brooks, uh, Act discussion, uh, which the Council has- has grappled with before, um, is that we hire the constables. And so, why can't we simply instruct them to notify us of- of any evictions that they are enforcing?

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Does someone want to respond directly?

Nancy Glowa: Mr. Chair, this is Nancy Glowa. Through you, if I may, w- we don't hire constables. The City Manager appoints constables and reports that to the City Council. So, they're- they're not actually agents of the City.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you for that clarification. None- nonetheless, they are appointed by the City Manager. So, uh, do we have no ability to regulate their activities, or to- to request, or even require that they provide us with certain information?

Nancy Glowa: Through you, Mr. Chair, not to my knowledge. Uh, again, I mean, they have- they're fulfilling statutory responsibilities that are established by law, and I do not believe they have any obligation to report to the municipality that appoints them, but I'm not sure. I have not researched that question.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Thank you. So, that would seem to me a more fruitful avenue to explore, because as, um, Mr. Meacham explained, the- the Jim Brooks Act was not actually allowed by the Legislature. And so, pursuing that avenue is- is unlikely to be fruitful, and- and certainly wouldn't be timely. Um, but pursuing an- an approach where we are, uh, able to get information from the constables that we ourselves appoint, that might- might be a- a quicker way to get there.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Uh, good. We're going to go now to Vice Mayor Mallon.

Alanna M. Mallon: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just, um, adding on top of that. I think, um, I've had a few conversations with Sheriff Koutoujian, and he seems very, um, committed to the idea of not, um, carrying out evictions during the pandemic. And this might be a conversation to have with the Sheriff's Office around what is possible, because, um, you know, as Ms. Farooq pointed out, the Jim Brooks, uh, Housing Stabilization Act, um, did not pass- pass in the Legislature, and it was, uh, it was more than just this one thing. It was sort of, uh, uh, um, a menu of things that, um, provided tenant protections. So, this might just be a quick conversation with the Sheriff's Office to say, is there anything that we can do here in terms of getting th- those notices earlier? Um, I always think a good- a good place to start is havi- having that conversation with, um, the players, um, and see if there's something that we can do outside of the Legislature that might be an easier, as Councillor Zondervan said, more fruitful, uh, avenue. So, um, I just wanted to say that- that the sheriff right now seems to be really amenable to, um, to protecting tenants. So, we might want to just have a quick conversation with him in his office.

Madam Clerk: Vice Mayor Mallon.

Alanna M. Mallon: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor McGovern.

Marc C. McGovern: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Simmons.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Are there any, uh, last questions from Committee members or other Councillors? Great. With that, uh, thank you again, uh, for everyone for making time. I think this was a really i- uh, great and productive meeting, and, uh, it's given us some useful next steps, uh, from here. Uh, I'll accept, uh, a Motion to adjourn, uh, from the Co-Chair. Uh, Madam Deputy Clerk, could you take the roll?

E. Denise Simmons: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Sobrinho-Wheeler.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Yes.

Madam Clerk: Councillor Zondervan.

Quinton Y. Zondervan: Yes.

Madam Clerk: And the Meeting is adjourned.

Jivan Sobrinho-Wheeler: Thank you, everyone.

CERTIFICATION

I, Froste Williams, a transcriber for Intellectix, do hereby certify that said proceedings were listened to and transcribed by me and were prepared using standard electronic transcription equipment under my direction and supervision; and I hereby certify that the foregoing transcript of the proceedings is a full, true, and accurate transcript to the best of my ability.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto subscribed my name this 1st day of October 2024.

Froste Williams