



# PHILADELPHIA BAR ASSOCIATION

**Hon. A. Michael Snyder (Ret.)**  
CHANCELLOR

Philadelphia Bar Association  
1101 Market Street | 11th Floor | Philadelphia, PA 19107-2955  
Phone: 215-238-6348 | Fax: 215-238-1159 | E-mail: [chancellor@philabar.org](mailto:chancellor@philabar.org)

November 24, 2020

Jamie R. Gauthier, Chair  
Committee on Housing, Neighborhood Development and the Homeless  
City Hall, Room 586  
Philadelphia, PA 19107-3290

**Re: Bill No. 200616**

Dear Councilmember Gauthier and Members of the Committee on Housing,  
Neighborhood Development and the Homeless:

As Chancellor of the Philadelphia Bar Association, I am providing this written testimony to express this Association's strong support for Bill No. 200616, which will extend the highly successful Eviction Diversion Program in Philadelphia.

A diversion program is a powerful tool to keep tenants housed and landlords financially secure. Even before the pandemic, the Pew Charitable Trusts 2019 State of the City Report (Pew Report), found that nearly 54 percent of renters in Philadelphia are considered "rent burdened," meaning they spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing.

For landlords, the cost of purchasing a rental property has increased markedly. The Pew Report indicates that real estate prices in the city have increased 63% in the past decade. Higher purchase prices plus increasing costs of ownership put pressure on landlords to increase rents while facing diminished profit margins. Consequently, by the time the Pew Report was released, more landlords were finding themselves to be just a few lost rental payments away from defaulting on a mortgage.

These strains on the rental housing market, along with other factors, result in one of every 14 renters in our city facing an eviction each year. An eviction is not a victory for either party. For tenants, a displacement through eviction can result in homelessness, job loss and family instability. Moreover, an eviction is a permanent stain on the tenant's record, making it more difficult to find affordable housing. For landlords, an eviction usually means the loss of several months of rental income plus the costs of proceeding through the courts.

The COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the prospects for many landlords and tenants. This past summer, when City Council first considered a bill to create the Eviction

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1101 Market Street | 11th Floor | Philadelphia, PA 19107-2955  
215-238-6300 | Fax: 215-238-1159 | [philadelphiabar.org](http://philadelphiabar.org)

Diversions Program, the economic dislocations caused by the pandemic endangered the housing security of thousands of Philadelphians. Sadly, as we approach the Thanksgiving holiday, the crisis has not eased. More than a quarter million Americans have perished from COVID-19. Cases and hospitalizations are rising rapidly, with no clear end in sight. In our city, by last weekend the City's Department of Health reported 59,081 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and a staggering 1,952 deaths due to this terrible disease. As the pandemic wears on, the economic impact on our community is massive and distressing.

As a city that strives to do what is best for our residents, it is imperative that we keep in place the Eviction Diversions Program to stabilize housing markets and reduce homelessness in our neighborhoods. Key to the success of the Eviction Diversions Program is early involvement in the dispute, a speedy process, housing counseling and a mediation conference to bring the parties together to find common ground. A mediation conference can result in agreements between tenants and landlords that provide tenants with a "clean slate" by helping them avoid displacement and having an eviction on their rental history, while helping to guarantee that landlords are paid back the money they are owed, usually through a payment plan.

Just a few months old, Philadelphia's Eviction Diversions Program has already achieved a track record of success. As of last week, Good Shepherd Mediation Program reports that 528 requests received through the City's Eviction Diversions Program web portal have been approved for mediation. Of the 173 mediations that have been held in which both parties appeared, agreements were reached in 142 cases. Only 12 mediations ended with no agreement reached. In the remaining 19 cases, a formal agreement was not achieved because of missing information, although the parties agreed to continue to negotiate and return to mediation as needed. As a professional mediator, I can tell you that this is an extremely good success rate.

Hundreds more cases are pending with mediations scheduled into December. Requests continue to be submitted through the City's web portal at a steady clip.

The need for the Eviction Diversions Program is clear. The success of the program to date is apparent. I urge City Council to pass Bill Number 200616, extending the Eviction Diversions Program through June 30, 2021.

Thank you for your efforts on behalf of all Philadelphians.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "A. Michael Snyder". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Hon. A. Michael Snyder (Ret.)  
Chancellor, Philadelphia Bar Association