

Healthy LA Statement on SB-91 Local Programs

Nearly a year into the pandemic, [hundreds of thousands](#) of Angelenos are behind on rent. [Almost 70%](#) of all low-income households in Los Angeles County have lost income since March 2020 due to the pandemic. An estimated [1 in 3 Angelenos](#) has been infected with COVID, and low-income communities of color are [disproportionately impacted](#), experiencing higher rates of infection, hospitalization, and death. This moment demands a long overdue government response that meets the need: [a policy](#) to forgive rent debt and suspend the obligation to pay rent for all impacted tenant households, along with relief for struggling small landlords and nonprofit affordable housing providers. **SB-91 is not the policy we need. Healthy LA strongly encourages Los Angeles jurisdictions to opt out of the SB-91 framework and implement a more effective local program.**

We support SB-91's extension of critical eviction protections. However, the legislation was drafted behind closed doors without input from tenants and tenant advocates, showcased by the deeply insufficient rental assistance framework developed by the state and failure to adopt a truly health-protective approach. The framework does not adequately address the rent debt or ongoing rent obligations facing Los Angeles tenants. Under the SB-91 rental assistance framework, landlords have near total control over the amount of rental assistance a tenant receives. This does little to resolve the dilemma that has undermined our public health measures: tenants face a daily choice of staying home to keep their families safe, or working, at risk to their and their families' health, to pay the rent. We are deeply concerned that the tenants who will be left out under this framework are the ones who need relief the most. Further, as designed, this program will use limited public dollars to benefit corporate landlords who [do not need relief](#).

Given the significant shortcomings of the SB-91 rental assistance framework, we call on Los Angeles County, and cities within it receiving direct federal allocations, to opt out of the state's framework and use their direct allocations to establish a more effective local rent relief program. Local governments can use this funding to begin implementation of Healthy LA's comprehensive rent and mortgage cancellation proposal, by forgiving rent debt and suspending rent payments while using relief funds to support the small landlords and nonprofit affordable housing providers with the greatest need.

If local governments remain reluctant to use their substantial powers to provide the comprehensive relief needed, there is still much they can do to improve on the state's framework. Direct allocations should be used to adopt a "public health first" approach that focuses on forward looking rental assistance to tenants covering at least the next three months and allowing tenants to remain safer at home. Landlords should not have a say in whether tenants receive this assistance. Local jurisdictions must work closely with the Department of Public Health to make funds available to the most impacted tenant households and neighborhoods. At the same time, eligible tenants will still be able to receive relief through the SB-91 state rental assistance fund to address rental arrears. And, in order to truly support Angelenos, we must also strengthen tenant protections by stopping all formal and informal evictions, pass and enforce strong tenant anti-harassment laws, guarantee a right to counsel for all tenants, and ensure the courts uphold these protections.

We demand that our elected leaders adopt a rent relief program that is proportionate to the level of economic distress facing our most vulnerable residents. Our leaders must listen to the voices of impacted communities and adopt Healthy LA's [policy framework](#). Healthy LA will continue to fight to ensure that all tenants can come out of this pandemic healthy, housed, and rent debt-free.