

CHAPTER 484

AN ACT establishing a task force to study the housing and eviction crisis in this State.

BE IT ENACTED *by the Senate and General Assembly of the State of New Jersey:*

1. The Legislature finds and declares that:

a. The majority of poor renting families in America spend over half of their income on housing costs, and eviction is transforming their lives. Yet, very little is known about the prevalence, causes, and consequences of eviction specifically, and housing insecurity in general.

b. In recent years, poor renting families have witnessed their incomes flatline while their housing costs have soared. In addition, only one in four families who qualifies for affordable housing programs receives any assistance. As more and more low-income families find it difficult to pay their housing costs, a growing number are living one misstep or emergency away from eviction.

c. Research has shown that the most vulnerable members of our communities are at the highest risk of eviction. Low-income women, especially poor women of color, have a high risk of eviction. Domestic violence victims and families with children are also at a particularly high risk for eviction.

d. Eviction causes individuals and families to lose their home. They often are also forced to leave their community, and their children have to change schools. Families regularly lose their possessions, which are piled on a sidewalk, or placed in storage to be reclaimed after paying a fee. Studies show that eviction causes job loss, as the stress and the lengthy process associated with being forcibly expelled from a home leads people to make mistakes at work and lose their job. Eviction has been shown to affect the mental health of those who experience it; one study found that mothers who experienced eviction reported higher rates of depression two years after their move.

e. The lack of affordable housing presents extremely difficult challenges to the most vulnerable residents of this State, and it is the foundation of a host of other societal problems, including homelessness, poverty, and educational disparities. This warrants a thorough understanding of the eviction crisis so that communities, policymakers, and researchers may adequately address these problems. Therefore, it is in the public interest to establish a task force to study the eviction crisis and submit recommendations for legislation and strategies to address this issue.

2. There is established the “New Jersey Eviction Crisis Task Force.” The purpose of the task force is to study recent trends in eviction actions against residents of this State, identify the impact of evictions on renters, landlords, local governments, and the State, and make recommendations for legislation and strategies to create more effective and efficient policies regarding housing and evictions in the State. The task force shall consider:

a. the causes and consequences of eviction at the State and local level;

b. the prevalence of eviction actions throughout the State;

c. the unmet legal needs of New Jersey residents facing eviction, including the costs associated with legal assistance and any funding mechanisms that may be utilized for the provision of legal assistance;

d. existing laws, rules, or regulations in this State that govern housing in general, and the eviction process in particular;

e. pending legislation in this State that addresses the eviction process;

- f. pending legislation and existing programs in other states or jurisdictions that address the eviction crisis in the United States;
- g. how affordable housing issues may exacerbate the eviction epidemic in this State;
- h. how the eviction crisis may impact rates of homelessness in this State;
- i. how the eviction process can be made more transparent, fair, and equitable for both residents and landlords; and
- j. any other considerations the task force deems appropriate towards improving the eviction crisis in this State.

3. a. The task force shall consist of 24 members as follows:

(1) the Commissioners of Community Affairs, Human Services, and Health, and the Attorney General, or their designees, who shall serve ex officio;

(2) two members of the Senate, to be appointed by the President of the Senate, who shall each be of different political parties; and two members of the General Assembly, to be appointed by the Speaker of the General Assembly, who shall each be of different political parties;

(3) two members appointed by the Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court, including one who shall be the dean of a law school located in this State; and

(4) 14 public members, who shall be appointed by the Governor no later than the 60th day after the effective date of this act, as follows: one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Apartment Association; one person upon the recommendation of the Fair Share Housing Center; one person upon the recommendation of the Legal Services of New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of the New Jersey Tenants Organization; one person upon the recommendation of the Bergen County Housing, Health, and Human Services Center; one person upon the recommendation of the Fair Housing Council of Northern New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of New Jersey Coalition to End Homelessness; one person upon the recommendation of the Supportive Housing Association of New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of Family Promise of New Jersey; one person upon the recommendation of the Anti-Poverty Network of New Jersey; and three members of the public who have a demonstrated expertise in issues relating to the work of the task force.

b. The Commissioner of Community Affairs or the commissioner's designee shall serve as chairperson of the task force. The task force shall organize as soon as practicable following the appointment of its members and shall select a vice-chairperson from among the members. The chairperson shall appoint a secretary who need not be a member of the task force.

c. The public members shall serve without compensation, but shall be reimbursed for necessary expenses incurred in the performance of their duties and within the limits of funds available to the task force.

d. The task force shall be entitled to call to its assistance and avail itself of the services of the employees of any State, county or municipal department, board, bureau, commission, or agency as it may require and as may be available to it for its purposes.

e. The task force may meet and hold hearings at the places it designates during the sessions or recesses of the Legislature.

f. The Department of Community Affairs shall provide staff support to the task force.

g. Vacancies in the membership of the task force shall be filled in the same manner provided for the original appointments.

4. The task force shall report its findings and recommendations to the Governor, and the Legislature pursuant to section 2 of P.L.1991, c.164 (C.52:14-19.1), along with any legislation that it desires to recommend for adoption by the Legislature, no later than 18 months after the date of organization of the task force.

5. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire upon the issuance of the task force report.

Approved January 21, 2020.