

Seattle Mayor Durkan allows winter eviction ban to become law, proposes more funding for prevention

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Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan delivers her third annual State of the City speech, Tuesday, Feb. 18, 2020 in Seattle. 213029 (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times)


By [Daniel Beekman](#)
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Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan is allowing the City Council’s moratorium on some residential winter evictions to become law. At the same time, the mayor is proposing that the city spend \$200,000 more on eviction prevention services next winter.

Durkan opposed [the moratorium](#) pushed by Councilmember Kshama Sawant and could have vetoed [the legislation](#) that won unanimous council approval [on Feb. 10](#). But the council could have voted to override her veto.

Instead, the mayor has returned the legislation to the City Clerk without her signature, [repeating her concerns](#) but not standing in its way. In a news release Tuesday, Durkan argued [her proposal](#) to increase funding for prevention services would do more good.

That plan is how the mayor is trying to make an impact on the evictions question and take charge politically after her recent showdown with Seattle’s [hard-driving progressive council](#).

The city’s \$200,000, combined with about \$500,000 in private donations, could help an eviction prevention program such as United Way’s Home Base serve an additional 150 households next winter, Durkan said. That’s about how many evictions are enforced during the winter in Seattle.

“Being progressive means more than slogans,” the mayor said in a statement apparently directed at Sawant. “If City Council wants to accomplish our shared goals to prevent winter evictions, then they should pass a bill to actually help people facing winter evictions.”

Councilmember Andrew Lewis will champion the new proposal, he said. “We need to do everything we can to keep people inside,” he said.

The council’s winter moratorium will seek to pause evictions between Dec. 1 and March 1 by providing tenants covered by the ban with a defense in court.

It will apply to tenants at or below the area’s median income who miss rent payments or are accused of violating some other lease terms. It won’t apply to tenants above the median income, nor to tenants who engage in criminal or nuisance activities. It also won’t apply to tenants whose landlords own four or fewer housing units.

Landlords will still be able to file evictions during the winter, requiring tenants to respond in court by citing the ban. Tenants protected under the legislation will still accrue debt for missed rent, and landlords still will be allowed to evict them in March.

Supporters said the moratorium was needed to keep people struggling to make ends meet from being forced onto the streets during the coldest and wettest months of the year.

Sawant initially proposed legislation that would also have covered the months of November and March. Other council members voted to trim the period and added exemptions.

Landlord groups opposed the legislation, arguing more rental assistance would be better. Durkan warned the winter ban wouldn’t stop tenants from being evicted in the long run, and could mire Seattle in a costly legal battle.

She reiterated those positions Monday in a letter to the City Clerk.

“I would rather spend those litigation dollars directly helping families,” the mayor wrote, adding, “My first priority throughout the debate (over Sawant’s legislation) has been to protect our vulnerable renters, particularly those who could slip into homelessness.”

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In an interview, Sawant said Durkan’s continued criticism of the winter moratorium is “a reminder that she’s a dogged representative of the corporate landlord lobby.”

Sawant said she will support the mayor’s proposal, arguing the push to ban winter evictions put pressure on Durkan to take action. “When people fight for progressive measures they end up winning other progressive measures, as well,” Sawant said.

The Home Base program is operated by the United Way of King County and was launched last year with money from private donors such as the Seattle Mariners. It provides qualifying tenants with emergency rental assistance, case workers and volunteer legal representation.

Home Base helped residents of more than 800 households across King County avoid eviction last year, including several hundred in Seattle, according to the mayor’s office.

The mayor and council budgeted \$3.3 million this year for other emergency rent-assistance programs run by various nonprofits.

Durkan said Tuesday she intends to send the council [a bill](#) that would allocate an additional \$200,000 for eviction prevention services. The measure would also pave the way for the city to require landlords notify tenants about how to obtain such help.

The \$200,000 in the new bill would come from budget savings related to a delayed bond sale with lower-than-expected debt-service costs, Durkan spokeswoman Kamaria Hightower said in an email. No programs would be cut, she said.

A mitigation fund for low-income tenants and landlords, created by Lewis as part of the council’s moratorium but not yet funded, may no longer be needed, given the mayor’s plan, Lewis said Tuesday.

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