

Author Matthew Desmond and Rep. Tom Emmer Discuss Evictions Amid COVID-19



Pulitzer Prize-winning author Matthew Desmond and Rep. Tom Emmer (MN-6) joined leaders from legal aid organizations for a virtual briefing on evictions amid the COVID-19 pandemic on June 22. The briefing explored the importance of civil legal aid for families vulnerable to housing loss due to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

Matthew Desmond, Maurice P. Daring Professor of Sociology at Princeton University and author of *Evicted: Poverty and Profit in the American City*, joined LSC President Ron Flagg to discuss how the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to spark an unprecedented spike of evictions across the country.

“Access to full legal counsel helps your case, it helps you immensely,” Desmond explained, citing research across the country that shows the difference access to an attorney makes for individuals and communities.

He added: "Studies that have looked at the effect of [having] a lawyer in Massachusetts, in New York, Philadelphia and other cities have found that this kind of upstream intervention is much cheaper than the downstream consequences of eviction, especially in terms of shelter costs and homelessness services and additional kinds of fallout of eviction."

Rep. Emmer and LSC Board Chair John G. Levi also offered remarks on the housing crisis.

"Over the past few months, members of our communities have faced financial and legal hurdles like never before," Rep. Emmer said. "This COVID-19 crisis has caused families to lose the income that they depend on. Households across our country have gone from financially stable to seemingly insecure overnight."

He thanked the legal aid community for its efforts on behalf of vulnerable communities: "Americans are in desperate need of advocacy, for lawyers like you who fight every day to keep these families from being uprooted and displaced."

LSC Vice President for Grants Management Lynn Jennings moderated a discussion with civil legal providers and a judge who are bracing for a surge in eviction rates. The speakers included Annamarie Johnson, Executive Director, Nevada Legal Services; Edward Josephson, Director of Litigation and Housing, Legal Service NYC; Judge Sergio L. De Leon, Justice of the Peace Court 5, Tarrant County, Texas; and Maria Thomas-Jones, Executive Director, Legal Aid of Northwest Texas.

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