

Tampa Bay Times

Florida housing officials take action to curb rent spikes on low-income families

Officials filed an emergency rule to provide landlords an incentive to hold rent steady a week after the Tampa Bay Times reported rent could go up on more than 210,000 low-income families statewide.

By Josh Solomon and Emily L. Mahoney | April 30, 2020

Florida housing officials on Wednesday filed an [emergency rule](#) that penalizes landlords and property managers who raise rent on low-income tenants during the coronavirus pandemic.

Officials with the Florida Housing Finance Corp. implemented the rule a week after the *Tampa Bay Times* reported that landlords across the state could legally [raise rent on more than 210,000 families](#) in low-income, rent-controlled housing, even as the economic shutdown in response to the pandemic has kept many from working. Florida Housing is a public corporation created by the state to administer money to affordable housing programs.

The reason is a routine update from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Last month officials there released updated median income figures, which are used to calculate the maximum amount of rent that landlords can charge in properties overseen by Florida Housing.

Since the median income numbers are based on years past, before the economy was ground to a halt by the coronavirus, median incomes went up. That meant the ceilings on rents went up, too, allowing — but not requiring — landlords to charge more in rent, in some cases \$50 or more a month.

State and federal housing officials discouraged landlords from increasing rent, even though they legally could.

Wednesday's rule further discourages rent spikes, this time by applying a financial incentive. Now, landlords who choose not to raise rent during the crisis will get preferential treatment when it comes time to apply for state funding. Any landlord who increases rent will go to the back of the line.

“This emergency rule will put developers on notice that implementing any rent increases during the Public Health Emergency could impact their ability to receive funding from the Corporation in the future,” officials wrote as part of the rule package delivered to the Florida Department of State.

Officials said it was necessary for the rule to become effective immediately “because of the immediate danger to the public welfare.”

One of the state's largest affordable housing companies, Concord Management, almost raised rent on residents. In an April 1 letter, Concord alerted low-income tenants to upcoming rent increases. A week later, the company walked that back, saying rents would not go up for tenants who paid on time.

Florida Housing Executive Director Trey Price said tenant complaints and media coverage of the Concord case sparked the emergency rule.

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He said that Concord was “by and large ... a pretty isolated case.”

“I think most landlords are not increasing rent because they realize this is a pandemic and it’s not a good look,” Price said. “For a few months a \$50 increase in rent that landlords don’t see isn’t going to make an apartment complex fail. We oversee that and know they have reserves for problems that may arise.”

Article last accessed [here](#) on May 1, 2020.