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Evictions could increase demand for homeless services

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MANKATO — If Gov. Tim Walz doesn't extend Minnesota's eviction moratorium Wednesday, nonprofit leaders anticipate an uptick in people seeking homeless services.



Walz's halt on evictions — a relief for people who've lost their jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic — lasts until his peacetime emergency expires. That date was supposed to be Wednesday, although lawmakers expect the governor to extend the emergency, according to the Star Tribune.

Some nonprofits serving homeless populations have reported not seeing an increase in clients during the pandemic, but resuming evictions would easily change that.

"Whatever that date is that evictions can happen because of nonpayment of rent, we're just going to have more people," Jen Theneman, executive director at Partners for Affordable Housing, said last week.

Her nonprofit has so far been able to keep up with demand. Spring and summer often bring lower client volumes for nonprofits serving homeless populations.

If more people do become homeless once evictions resume, there won't be any overnight shelters in Mankato open for them. Connections Ministry and The Salvation Army both operate seasonal shelters that closed more than a month ago.

Connections Co-director Erica Koser said resources are slimmer amid the pandemic. Many community spaces and amenities normally available to people experiencing homelessness — such as libraries and public restrooms — aren't open now.

So the date when evictions start up again looms large, Koser said.

"I definitely think that lifting that eviction moratorium will have a huge impact with so many people out of jobs," she said. "We will probably see an uptick in phone calls."

She could even see a knock-on effect extending into the fall, leading more people to need the shelter once it reopens.

"We fully expect in the fall it'll be much busier," she said.

Partners is still operating its various housing options for people experiencing homelessness, which include emergency and transitional housing. Theneman praised her staff for implementing safety procedures while working through the pandemic.

“We have an amazing group of people who show up every day,” she said. “People experiencing homelessness are more likely to get COVID-19, and the staff takes that risk and believes strongly in our mission.”

The nonprofit went into the pandemic down two staff members. One had moved away while another was on family leave.

Meal donations have helped staff fill in the gaps. More donations can always help, Theneman said.

On top of evictions potentially resuming, a shelter director in New Ulm pointed to another potential cause of increased demand. NUMAS Haus Director Karla Diehn said if domestic violence rates rise, which some have feared will happen during the stay-home order, it could lead to more people needing emergency housing in New Ulm.

Fleeing domestic violence is a common reason leading people to seek emergency housing. The New Ulm nonprofit — housing three families at a time — also has weathered the pandemic without any upticks in demand so far, Diehn said, but the need could easily increase as the pandemic wears on.

“I anticipate as this continues, and the rise of domestic violence is supposed to increase, we will see that uptick,” she said. “It just hasn’t happened yet.”

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