New Report: Five-Year Court Delays Are Destabilizing D.C. Affordable Housing

Survey of 621 D.C. landlords documents years-long cases as SMOA calls for HIPA deadlines, congressional oversight and full court funding.

WASHINGTON, DC, UNITED STATES, September 30, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Seven in ten D.C. landlords with completed Landlord and Tenant Court cases waited at least a year to recover possession of their units, according to a new report from the Small Multifamily Owners Association based on responses from 621 D.C. landlords and rental housing providers.

> “Fund the courts, investigate the delays and pass enforceable hearing deadlines. The District’s affordable housing system cannot survive the status quo.”
>
> *Dean Hunter, CEO, Small Multifamily Owners Association*

The report, The Cost of Delay, finds that five years of court delays are destabilizing the District's affordable housing system. Cases remain unresolved for a year or longer while tenants fall deeper into debt, repairs are postponed and financially distressed landlords consider selling their properties.

Among the report's other findings:

35 percent of landlords with pending cases reported that their longest tenant delinquency had already exceeded two years.
58 percent delayed or canceled maintenance and capital improvements.
68 percent considered selling their properties.

The delays harm tenants as well as landlords. Nearly 90 percent of respondents reported that few or none of the tenants involved resumed regular rent payments while their cases were pending, so balances kept growing month after month. By the time a case is finally heard, many tenants owe more than they can realistically repay, and options such as rental assistance or a payment agreement are no longer workable.

Case volume alone cannot explain the delays. Landlord and Tenant filings remain substantially below pre-pandemic levels, yet completed evictions have risen above pre-pandemic levels as unresolved balances grow beyond what tenants can repay.

"Delay is not neutral," said Dean Hunter, CEO of the Small Multifamily Owners Association and chairman of the D.C. Housing Recovery Coalition. "Early hearings give tenants an opportunity to obtain assistance, enter payment agreements or resolve disputes before the amount owed becomes unmanageable. When a case remains unresolved for a year or two, those options begin to disappear."

SMOA and the D.C. Housing Recovery Coalition are calling for three immediate actions:

First, the D.C. Council should pass the Housing Investment Protection Act with enforceable court deadlines, including a requirement that an initial Landlord and Tenant hearing be held within 60 days after a case is filed.

Second, Congress should issue a formal letter of inquiry requesting information about the staffing, scheduling practices, caseload, hearing capacity and performance of the Landlord and Tenant Branch.



The Cost of Delay: Documents how prolonged D.C. Landlord and Tenant Court delays are destabilizing the District's affordable housing system.

Third, Congress should reject the proposed reduction in funding for the D.C. Courts and provide the resources necessary to address staffing shortages, strengthen court operations and resolve cases promptly.

The D.C. Housing Recovery Coalition is seeking a meeting with the office of Representative Dave Joyce, chairman of the House Appropriations subcommittee that oversees D.C. Courts funding, to discuss the proposed cuts.

"We oppose cutting the court's budget and are prepared to petition Congress to secure the resources the court needs," Hunter said. "But the proposed budget cuts cannot become an excuse for five years of delay or a reason to reject enforceable hearing deadlines. These problems predate the proposed cuts. Funding and accountability must go together."

The Cost of Delay, was produced by the Small Multifamily Owners Association. The D.C. Housing Recovery Coalition was established to engage the federal government and the federal courts in addressing the District's housing crisis.

Dean Hunter
Small Multifamily Owners Association
+1 202-660-1333
email us here

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