

JOSHUA G. COLE
Post Office Box 73
FREDERICKSBURG, VIRGINIA 22404

TWENTY-EIGHTH DISTRICT



COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS:
EDUCATION
AGRICULTURE, CHESAPEAKE, AND
NATURAL RESOURCES
PUBLIC SAFETY

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Contact: Eric Sundberg
(804) 999-3268

Delegate Joshua Cole requests Governor freeze rent, mortgage, and utility payments during COVID-19 crisis

FREDERICKSBURG, Virginia – Delegate Joshua Cole, yesterday, sent a letter to Governor Ralph Northam, Attorney General Mark Herring, and Secretary of the Commonwealth Kelly Thomasson to request the Administration enact a moratorium on the payment of rents, mortgages, and utilities until working families can recover.

“These are unprecedented times and they call for unprecedented solutions. Working-class Virginians are starring an impending disaster in the face: eviction. We must take a path that will protect everyday people, our true economic base.”

The letter recommended the Administration put a moratorium on rent, mortgage, and utility payments until July 10, 2020, thirty days after the current effective date of Governor Northam’s Executive Order 55, which ordered a temporary stay at home order. Delegate Cole stated as well that this freeze on mortgage payments also must be extended to landlords to prevent foreclosures on properties used for rentals.

Additionally, the letter recommended late fees not be issued and collected until August 9, 2020, and asked that sheriff’s offices not evict occupants from residential properties until July 10, 2020.

“Our office has requested the Governor to exercise executive power to enact safeguards to ‘Flatten the’ economic ‘curve.’ Just like our hospitals, if millions of Virginians face eviction or debt at the same time then we will see a complete collapse of our economy.”

Delegate Cole stressed to the Administration that Virginians were already facing a difficult financial and economic reality before the COVID-19 epidemic. In the letter, he pointed to the Commonwealth’s high eviction rates as a concerning metric for economic wellbeing.

“Richmond, Hampton, Newport News, Norfolk, Chesapeake, and Virginia Beach had eviction rates exceeding 7% per year in 2016. Richmond had an eviction rate of 11.4%, which is the second-highest in the nation. My home of Fredericksburg also had an eviction rate above the national average. Working families were already struggling – now with unemployment skyrocketing we are looking at a disaster that will devastate everyone.”

Delegate Cole, who is also a reverend, stated he had heard from numerous constituents asking for a rent freeze, but he added his faith helped him arrive at the position.

“I’m a delegate, but I’m still a pastor. Isaiah 32:18 says ‘my people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.’”

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