Dear county officials,

Across our state, Kansans are suffering.

At a time when we are told to stay home in order to stay safe from COVID-19, too many of us, our friends, family members, and neighbors face losing our homes or have already been displaced due to no fault of our own—from Dodge City to Smith Center to Kansas City and beyond.

Since March, hundreds of thousands have lost their jobs, been furloughed, cannot work due to vulnerability to the virus, had work hours reduced and lost income in tips.

The federal government’s recent eviction moratorium may halt some evictions through December 31, but it does nothing to provide relief to those already behind on rent. Unless something is done about rent already owed, Kansas and the rest of the nation will experience an avalanche of evictions during an ongoing pandemic in one of the coldest months of the year.

In June, the Kansas Legislature entrusted you as an elected county leader with the power to address this health and economic crisis. It’s time for you to deliver.

To that end, as your constituents, we demand the following:

• **Suspend rent and mortgage payments:** No late fees, no interest, no back-rent. Without relief from the rent, Kansans are already unable to pay. Existing moratoriums only delay the inevitable eviction crisis. Similar to federally-backed student loans, mortgage payments must be placed in forbearance through the recovery period. These solutions work together to protect all Kansans from housing insecurity.

• **Strengthen the eviction and foreclosure moratoriums.** No one should lose their housing during this pandemic. Both the state- and federal-level moratoriums still allow for Kansans to become displaced or unhoused during this crisis. In your capacity as county officials, you should pass a comprehensive eviction and foreclosure ban for all residents, regardless of circumstance, and implement penalties for those who violate these moratoriums.

• **Ban utility shut-offs and implement universal services.** Heat, water, and electricity are essential for Kansans’ safety during the best of times. As this public health disaster continues into the winter,
these are more important than ever. Counties must ban shutoffs and restore utilities to those who have been disconnected. Landlords who attempt informal evictions by shutting off utilities must be held accountable to the highest extent possible. As the weather gets colder and schools are back in session, it’s imperative that residents have access to gas, water, cell service and landlines, internet, and electricity.

- **Protect persons experiencing homelessness by providing housing and expanded services.** Thousands of Kansans do not have shelter during the pandemic. Their situation makes them drastically more vulnerable to the virus. Counties should look toward vacant properties to provide housing during this crisis as well as expand sanitation sites and resources to create pathways for people to access safe housing, including long-term, truly affordable options to provide housing both during and after the crisis. Furthermore, communities must decriminalize homelessness now and in the future.

It’s become clear that we cannot rely on federal relief in a timely manner. State leaders may continue to debate efforts to help working- and middle-class Kansas, but the next legislative session does not start until late January. And Kansans can’t wait. The looming eviction crisis is completely preventable: We ask that you work with your community and leverage CARES Act funds and additional resources to meet our demands.

As the late John Lewis once wrote, “We may not have chosen the time, but the time has chosen us.” With leadership lacking elsewhere, now is your time.

Respectfully,

**RZKS**

*Rent Zero Kansas is a statewide coalition of tenants and allies fighting for our survival and beyond—and it starts with housing. Learn more at rentzerokansas.org.*