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*Equal Access to Justice for All*

April 2, 2020

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

### **Residential Tenants Impacted by COVID-19 Must Take Action to Receive Protection Under Governor's Order and other Relevant Ordinances**

Residential tenants who cannot afford to pay all or part of their April rent due to negative impacts from COVID-19 must take certain steps to gain legal protection available from the Governor's recent Executive Order regarding evictions. According to Executive Director Jennifer Smith, "tenants must take timely action to protect their rights" if they have been impacted by COVID-19. The protection is not automatic. All tenants impacted by COVID-19 should seek legal assistance regarding their situation as soon as possible.

The Governor's Executive Order applies to residential tenants statewide who have been impacted by COVID-19. The order may delay some evictions, but only if renters take certain steps. Renters who have been negatively impacted COVID-19 must notify their landlord in writing within 7 days of rent being due. The notice must include specific information and renters should keep proof of the COVID-19 impact to provide to the landlord as soon as it is available.

Tenant rights and responsibilities vary depending on where they live. Tenants in Santa Barbara County who have been impacted by COVID-19 may have additional rights and responsibilities under emergency ordinances or decrees passed by the City of Santa Barbara, the City of Goleta, the City of Lompoc, and the County of Santa Barbara. The common requirement in most of these orders/ordinances is that tenants impacted by COVID-19 must timely send a letter to their landlord to explain why they cannot pay rent, and provide proof of the COVID-19 impact.

Landlords may also be eligible to defer mortgage payments. "We strongly encourage landlords and tenants to work cooperatively together during this public health crisis," says Jennifer Smith. "We all share a common interest in keeping everyone sheltered and safe to avoid the spread of COVID-19. The courts are already postponing routine eviction cases and the sheriff's office is not currently enforcing lockout orders, so landlords have incentive to resolve disputes without a costly and lengthy court process."

Tenants who can afford to pay rent should continue to pay rent. Nothing in the Governor's order, nor in any local ordinance, relieves tenants from their legal obligations to pay rent. "The best way to avoid an eviction lawsuit is to timely pay rent if you can" says Ms. Smith.

Emergency orders and ordinances may change, so it is important for tenants to seek legal advice regarding their situation. The Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County is open and providing services by phone. The courthouse Legal Resource Centers, which provide self-help assistance in civil matters, are also open and providing service by phone. Others seeking a referral to a private attorney may contact the Santa Barbara County Bar Association Lawyer Referral Service.

**Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County**

Website: [www.lafsb.org](http://www.lafsb.org)  
Santa Barbara: (805) 963-6754  
Lompoc: (805) 736-6582  
Santa Maria: (805) 922-9909

**Legal Resource Centers**

Santa Barbara/Lompoc: (805) 568-3303  
Santa Maria: (805) 691-2457

Governor’s Executive Order EO-N-37-20 (March 27, 2020)  
<https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/3.27.20-EO-N-37-20.pdf>

NOTE: The information provided in this press release is meant to for general information only and is not considered legal advice.

*About the Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County*

The Legal Aid Foundation of Santa Barbara County (Legal Aid) is a non-profit law firm that provides free legal assistance to Santa Barbara County residents. Its mission is to provide high-quality civil legal services to low-income and other vulnerable residents in order to ensure equal access to justice. Legal Aid changes lives through direct representation, legal advice and information, and community education. Since 1959, Legal Aid has provided legal services to those most in need in our community. Its offices are located in Santa Barbara, Lompoc, and Santa Maria.

[www.lafsb.org](http://www.lafsb.org)

