

Seattle Mariners put \$3M toward keeping people from eviction in King County

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By

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The Seattle Mariners have pledged \$3 million for a new effort to prevent low-income renters facing eviction from falling into homelessness.

The team's contribution to the Home Base partnership will beef up staffing at the Housing Justice Project, a legal clinic sponsored by the King County Bar Association (KCBA) that provides legal advice and counsel to area renters. The partnership will also provide funding to help tenants facing eviction pay fines and back rent.

About \$2 million of the Mariners' contribution will go into the fund for renters who are in arrears. The rest will go toward hiring additional case managers and lawyers to staff clinics in Seattle and Kent.

The partners estimate they could help as many as 4,000 people. The move follows a [September report](#) by the Seattle Women's Commission and KCBA revealing that more than half of Seattle renters who were hit with evictions notices in 2017 owed one month's rent or less, or a median cost of \$1,250. The report found that many who were eventually evicted ended up homeless.

The investment by Mariners, who are a funder of The Seattle Times Project Homeless, also comes amid increasing calls on the private sector for a stronger response to the region's homelessness crisis.

Fred Rivera, the Mariners' executive vice-president and general counsel, said the team has been on the lookout for opportunities to address the region's ongoing homelessness crisis in an innovative way. After reading a draft of the evictions report, Rivera, who sits on the boards of both the KCBA's charitable foundation and United Way, contacted both organizations to talk about how they could partner to address the problem.

"I was shocked and surprised by it," Rivera said Friday. "When you look at the costs related to homelessness, the amount of money that people were in arrears is a really small amount."

Working with the United Way and KCBA, the team designed a program patterned after initiatives in New York City that provide funding for people who can no longer pay their rent and facilitate mediation with landlords. Advocates say that even if a person has to vacate an apartment, mediation can help renters avoid a blight on their credit record, which could make it hard to find housing in the future.

"I think this is a good step toward addressing the eviction crisis," said Xochitl Maykovich, Seattle Women's Commission co-chair and one of the lead authors of the evictions report. "I do want to emphasize that lack of resources is not the only problem for tenants facing eviction. We need City Council members and state legislators to take action to reform our archaic and inhumane eviction process."

Lauren McGowan, United Way senior director, said Home Base will create a "one-stop shop" for people facing evictions.

"If we're really going to make headway on this issue, prevention is a way to do it," she said. "We're going to try to halt whatever is about to happen and keep people inside if we can. But if they are already evicted, we need to get them to homelessness system."

The Mariners' contribution will pay for the first year of the initiative. McGowan said the partners will look for additional funding to keep the initiative going.

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