To the UC Davis and City of Davis Community:

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, we have all faced uncertainty. Housing for students during COVID-19 has been particularly challenging with most university students residing in rental housing that has for many years been in short supply, prompting students to sign up early for securing housing in the next academic year.

In March 2020, COVID-19 upended our shared UC Davis and City of Davis community, and the personal plans for thousands of people around us. Within a few days, UC Davis and the City of Davis restructured our collaboration and placed emergency services, pandemic controls, and housing coordination as the highest priorities for immediate action.

We have heard directly from students and their families of catastrophic examples of students who have lost income, lost family financial support, and are experiencing health effects that could be exacerbated by the COVID-19 virus. In many of these cases, the ability to cancel a residential lease would help and would make the upcoming year much more certain.

For students with UC Davis housing contracts, maximum flexibility has been provided, with full refunds, contract cancellations and deadline extensions to accommodate changing circumstances.

Recognizing the crisis faced by many in private housing (on and off-campus), our discussions have included the issues of rent relief, basic needs support, homelessness resources, eviction moratoriums, and lease cancellations. With hard work and creativity, we have made progress on some housing issues, but have not found a solution for the key issue of lease cancellations that remains pressing for many students.

For UC Davis, we have considered options for the on-campus public-private (P3) rental complexes that are not controlled by UC Davis, such as the Sol apartments at West Village. For these P3 complexes, we have explored whether UC Davis could compel P3 landlords to allow lease cancellations or rent relief. At this time we have found no avenue for successfully providing such lease modifications for on-campus housing that is operated by P3 landlords.

For the City of Davis, we have explored whether options exist that would provide rent relief or lease cancellations, and have found no possible solutions that would provide such relief while remaining consistent with state law.

Many students have pointed us to an ordinance adopted by the City of Berkeley, that states that students can terminate leases early “without penalty.” Likewise, we have reviewed a resolution adopted by Solano County, that allows tenants to terminate leases early for COVID-19-related reasons “without penalty.” Unfortunately, some news reports initially overstated the effect of these actions, which only prevent landlords from assessing a penalty on tenants in addition to the
damages landlords are allowed to collect from tenants under state law. State law allows landlords to collect lost rent payments from tenants as long as the landlord attempts to re-lease the unit. If a landlord cannot find a new tenant to take a unit, these damages may be substantial. Cities and counties cannot adopt regulations that are in conflict with state law. Therefore, neither Berkeley’s nor Solano County’s actions would allow students to terminate leases without incurring financial responsibility for lost rent revenue, which is usually the bulk of a tenant’s damages. The City and University are limited by state law in terms of interfering with the rights of landlords or tenants.

Our collaboration will continue with Yolo County and with other universities, and we will carefully review updated court decisions as well as state and federal government economic relief measures that could assist students in need.

UC Davis is working to be responsive to students who are experiencing hardship as a result of the pandemic, including initiatives to provide financial and support services such as:

- Repackaging Financial Aid Offers: With remote learning extended into the fall quarter and the associated changes to housing status for students, Financial Aid and Scholarships is reallocateing University Grant funds to enhance aid to eligible students in the following ways: a) the eligibility date was extended resulting in approximately 800 additional students now having access to University Grant funds; and b) Students who were initially awarded the University Grant as part of their financial aid package may receive an increase in grant funding. The award amounts will vary based on need.

- Off-Campus Housing Help Desk: The Division of Student Affairs is exploring the creation of a help desk to support students and families in understanding their options, developing budgets and seeking resolution to a range of challenges they are now facing given the pandemic and the impact to off-campus housing arrangements.

- In partnership with the ASUCD, the Division of Student Affairs is expanding the legal resources available through the existing ASUCD lawyer consultation program, which will result in longer consultation sessions and evening hours to accommodate the increased demand. In addition, a zoom webinar is being planned to increase awareness of the most common challenges/questions students are experiencing.

The City of Davis also provides resources for tenants with an emphasis on knowing your rights as a tenant. Items the City of Davis is now offering include:

- City of Davis Rental Resources Program (https://www.cityofdavis.org/rentalresources)

- Yolo Conflict Resolution Center (www.yolocr.org) provides free and low-cost mediation services for anyone including roommates, tenants, landlords, neighbors, etc.

- California Apartment Association COVID-19 Resources for Tenants (https://caanet.org/tenant-resources-page/) has tips for communicating with landlord, links to EDD and other financial assistance.
Whether your lease is with on-campus or off-campus rental housing, we strongly encourage tenants to reach out to their landlord to discuss options. We are hearing that some local landlords are working with tenants on a case-by-case basis to help if at all possible. Throughout this year, we will continue to work for ongoing solutions to these housing needs.

Sincerely,

Mayor Gloria Partida
City of Davis

Chancellor Gary S. May
UC Davis