

A photograph of a city street scene. In the foreground, a person is walking in silhouette, carrying a bag. The background features several tall buildings with many windows. A traffic light is visible on the left, showing a red light. A street sign is also visible. The overall atmosphere is somewhat somber and quiet, reflecting the impact of the coronavirus pandemic.

DISPATCHES FROM THE EDGE

**Personal stories from the week
that coronavirus changed everything.**



TUESDAY, MARCH 17

Now I Can Only Sit, and Wait, and Worry

By Mee-ok

I am disabled and live in government-subsidized housing. I'm terrified.

Most of the people I live with are elderly, sick, or both. Many of us use oxygen tanks and get around in highly specialized wheelchairs. I have a severely compromised immune system and require the assistance of a caretaker, so I have feared COVID-19 since January. I already have trouble breathing and get sick easily. I know that our whole building could be decimated if the virus came here, me included. For this reason, I've been isolating myself since Washington Governor Jay Inslee declared the first state of emergency, in his state, at the end of February. I've only gone out for essential health appointments.

But, in the first week of March, we were notified that it was time for the annual inspection of every apartment in our sprawling building [of more than 300 units]. Before those happen, the management company does its own inspections, which take a week, followed by another week of more strangers coming to fix things. A great inconvenience at any time, but this year, it's life-threatening. Social distancing will be impos-

sible. Even if I could leave, the inspector will have already gone through other apartments in a building that's like a cruise ship docked on land. I called and e-mailed management, asking it to postpone these visits and only address urgent matters. I was told that the staff will wear gloves and masks before entering my unit. I called the state's Department of Health, the Massachusetts hotline for infectious diseases, and the governor's office. I called my state representative, too, and asked how I could stop them for their protection and my own.

My representative told me the state can't prevent a private company from inspecting its buildings. But he did call the Housing Authority, which asked management not to inspect my apartment. Unfortunately, it had already sent someone. He wasn't wearing a mask, and I didn't let him in. I worry that won't stop cross contamination from

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happening in other units.

Last week, the town's head of health services had scheduled a coronavirus education session in our community room. Then, Governor Baker declared a state of emergency. I urged the director to cancel the event. He refused, saying people were told not to come if they're sick. But I was never told that, and the fliers implored everyone to come.

This week, management finally did call off any routine maintenance. It closed the community room, too. Now, I can only sit

and wait for the outbreak I can feel coming. I've lived here for almost seven years, and I've never heard any of my neighbors. But yesterday, I realized that whoever lives below me was hacking and moaning.

Mee-ok is a Boston-area essayist and poet. Send comments to magazine@globe.com.