Homes and
Community Renewal (/)

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New York State Homes and Community Renewal Announces Nearly $40 Million Being Provided to Tenants Through Covid Rent Relief Program

New York State Homes and Community Renewal Commissioner RuthAnne Visnauskas today announced nearly $40 million will be distributed to more than 15,000 households through the COVID Rent Relief Program. This includes $23.2 million already distributed and about $16.8 million in currently pending payments.

“We are proud to have delivered much-needed relief to thousands of New Yorkers in line with parameters established by the Legislature for the Rent Relief Program as the pandemic continues to take its toll,” **said Commissioner Visnauskas.** “As the administrator for the program, HCR is disbursing nearly $40 million to more than 15,000 households with the first $23 million already provided within 85 days of closing applications. While we continue to execute the program, we anticipate delivering nearly $17 million more in assistance to eligible tenants under the Legislature’s requirements.”

Today, HCR issued a report on the status of the program to the State Legislature, which includes breakdowns of payment information by county, by average payment amount, and disbursements made by race/ethnicity. The report is available online at: https://hcr.ny.gov/RRP#rrp-report (https://hcr.ny.gov/RRP#rrp-report)

The report also highlights the Agency’s efforts to promote the program to ensure assistance would be provided to those who needed it most.

These efforts began with Commissioner Visnauskas and HCR staff providing detailed presentations to members of the State Senate and Assembly prior to the launch of the program. These sessions offered lawmakers an opportunity to learn how their legislation was being implemented. Similarly, HCR held several public outreach events to help community stakeholders understand the program and how they could help their constituents apply for and receive assistance. More than 100 organizations participated in these events.

The Agency also made concerted efforts before launching the program and throughout the application period to reach non-English speaking New Yorkers. The program's online application was available in both English and Spanish, and HCR provided translated applications in six foreign languages – Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Haitian-Creole, Korean, and Bengali. HCR's website also provided tenants who speak these languages with supplemental materials such as Frequently Asked Questions, attestations, and other program documents. Similarly, applicants were offered the opportunity to fill out a paper application if they lacked access to the internet.

HCR also extended the program application period to ensure those most at-risk and rent burdened after losing income due to the pandemic had the opportunity to apply.

About the COVID Rent Relief Program

In May, the New York State Legislature passed the Emergency Rent Relief Act of 2020 to assist a subset of low-income renters in New York impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. HCR was charged with administering the COVID Rent Relief Program which provides a one-time subsidy for tenants who lost income due to the pandemic.

Designed to reach households with the greatest need, the rental assistance subsidy covers the difference between the household's rent burden on March 7, 2020 and the increase in rent burden for the period the household is applying for assistance. Households were eligible to apply for up to four months of rental assistance.

The legislation required applicants for the program to meet all of the following criteria:

- Must be a renter and have a primary residence in New York State;
- Before March 7, 2020 and at the time of application, household income must have been below 80 percent of the Area Median Income, adjusted for household size;
- Before March 7, 2020 and at the time of application, the household must have been "rent burdened," which is defined as paying more than 30 percent of gross monthly income towards rent; and
- Applicants must have lost income during the period of April 1, 2020 to July 31, 2020.

Additionally, the legislation directed HCR to consider cash benefits, including unemployment benefits, in calculating applicants' income. Tenants receiving Section 8 Housing Choice Vouchers for their housing costs or those who reside in public housing where their rent cannot be more than 30 percent of their income, were also ineligible to receive assistance under the statute.

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