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Ask the Mayor

Muriel Bowser
Mayor

Mayor Bowser Announces New Programs to Support Rental Assistance and Housing Stability

Thursday, June 18, 2020
Rental Assistance Programs, Affordable Housing Budget Priorities, and Eviction Protection Prioritized as Impact of COVID-19 Continues

(Washington, DC) – Today, Mayor Muriel Bowser announced new rental assistance and eviction prevention programs to support District residents impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency. The programs are funded as part of $40 million in federal relief funding from the CARES Act awarded to the District from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

"We know that this public health emergency has brought unexpected and difficult economic circumstances for many of our residents, especially our renters with low or reduced incomes," said Mayor Bowser. "This federal funding will be directed to new and existing programs coordinated across multiple agencies to help residents get current on rent and ultimately keep people in their homes."

The Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) announced today that it will launch the COVID-19 Housing Assistance Program (CHAP), a $6.2 million program for low-income renters that can provide up to three months of rent arrears since April 2020. DHCD will direct approximately $2 million each to three local nonprofit organizations to administer the relief: Housing Counseling Services, Greater Washington Urban League and United Planning Organization.

CHAP is being delivered in conjunction with the Department of Human Services' (DHS) Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP). Eligible applicants who earn less than 125% of the Federal Poverty Level can obtain assistance through ERAP; those who earn above that would be routed to one of the three local nonprofits to qualify for CHAP.

These programs follow two previously announced efforts to support rent relief: the Tenant Based Rental Assistance Program and 202 Assist with the John Wall Foundation.

"DHCD pivoted our operations swiftly to step up new programs for the most effective use of our federal funds" said DHCD Director Polly Donaldson. "With rental assistance and support for our nonprofit community partners, we are creating solid recovery programs that will be ready to receive additional funding as it becomes available."

DHCD also announced today that it will make $2 million in grants to assist housing

and community development nonprofit organizations to support COVID-19 relief and recovery efforts and services such as housing counseling and legal support.

At the onset of the public health emergency, the DC Council passed legislation to ensure that residents cannot be evicted for the duration of the public health emergency plus sixty days; nor can they be charged late fees for the duration of the public health emergency. Rent increases are also prohibited during the COVID-19 public health emergency plus 60 days.

A sub-group of the District's Economic Recovery Team (DERT), coordinated by the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development (DMPED), is working proactively to expand the coordinated set of programs available to protect renters from eviction due to the impacts of COVID-19 following the end of the prohibition period. The District's eviction prevention program will include rental assistance, mediation and legal aid, counseling and homelessness prevention services.

Part of the federal relief funding includes $23 million authorized by the CARES Act in Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), a program administered at the Department of Human Services. ESG funding can be used to support individuals and families experiencing homelessness in response to the COVID public health emergency, including homelessness prevention activities. The Department of Human Services and Interagency Council on Homelessness (ICH) are working on a proposal for this funding and will share with the community for feedback.

"The public health emergency underscores for all of us the critical importance that a safe and stable home plays to our health and wellbeing," said DHS Director Laura Zeilinger. "ESG funds are needed more than ever to prevent homelessness when possible, as well as to ensure residents have the support needed to regain and sustain housing during these exceptionally challenging times."

Federal relief also comes to the District as Housing Opportunity for People with AIDS (HOPWA) funding to the DC Department of Health, $500,000 of which is being used for short-term, emergency needs such as homelessness prevention, including overdue rent or mortgage payments and utility costs. Funds are also being used for support services, including housing counseling, food assistance, and essential needs. The program serves people living with HIV or directly affected by HIV.

Mayor Bowser reaffirmed her commitment to investments in affordable housing with her Fiscal Year 2021 budget proposal, recognizing that both short- and long-term efforts must be ongoing to preserve housing affordability and stability for all District residents. The Mayor's FY21 budget proposal includes an investment of $100 million in the Housing Production Trust Fund – for the sixth consecutive year – and a $1 million investment in the Housing Preservation Fund.

Additional program and application information will be available on the Housing Resources page at coronavirus.dc.gov on Monday, June 22.