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Wolf Administration Partners with General Assembly, Pennsylvania Counties to Launch the Emergency Rental Assistance Program

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Human Services, Press Release

Governor Tom Wolf today announced the launch of a program that will deliver rapid relief to millions of Pennsylvanians at risk of eviction or loss of utility service. With federal funds allocated through the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021, the Wolf Administration built the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) in partnership with the General Assembly through Act 1 of 2021 to distribute about $569 million to Pennsylvania households through partnerships with local leaders. An additional $278 million in rental assistance was directly allocated to Pennsylvania's largest counties by the federal government.

"With thousands of COVID-19 vaccines administered to Pennsylvanians every day, we are starting to see the light at the end of this year-long tunnel. But we must remain focused on the fact that so many of our neighbors are still struggling to cope with the pandemic's economic fallout," Governor Wolf said. "Millions of Pennsylvania households are less financially secure today than they were a year ago because a pandemic stole jobs and income from Pennsylvania workers. The ERAP is designed to provide housing security and utility assistance for these families and individuals so that they can focus on caring for their loved ones, getting back to work and healing from this traumatic experience."

Effective today, Pennsylvanians can submit applications for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program online at www.compass.state.pa.us. Forty-seven counties have opted to collect applications from county residents through the COMPASS website provided by the Department of Human Services (DHS). DHS will route applications submitted through COMPASS directly to counties for processing. The online application is available in English and Spanish. Applicants can also download and print an application or obtain an application from their county ERAP office. DHS has also translated the paper application into Russian, Vietnamese, Arabic, Chinese and Cambodian and made those available to all participating counties.

Twenty counties have opted to accept applications from county residents through their own application process. However, residents of all counties can visit COMPASS for information on how to apply for ERAP, including residents of counties that have developed their own process. If a person tries to apply through COMPASS but indicates that they reside in one of the 20 counties with its own application, they will be provided with information about how to apply, including a link to the county application if available.

"The Department of Human Services designed this program to quickly and efficiently get help to people who need it. We stand ready to work with our partners in every Pennsylvania county to make this program a success," DHS Secretary Teresa Miller said. "I encourage all Pennsylvania families and individuals struggling with rent and utility bills to apply for assistance through ERAP."

Households may be eligible for up to 12 months of assistance to cover past-due or future rental and/or utility payments. The amount of a household's monthly rent or utility bills does not preclude eligibility, but the amount of ERAP assistance provided to a household is determined by program administrators at the county level.

Assistance can be provided to a tenant for future rental payments, and for unpaid rental or utility arrears that were accrued on or after March 13, 2020 on a residential rental property. Counties may choose to provide additional assistance to eligible households if funds remain available.

Residential tenants can apply for themselves, or a landlord/utility provider can apply on behalf of a current tenant. Additionally, landlords do not have to agree to participate in the program for tenants to receive assistance.

To qualify for assistance, a household must be responsible to pay rent on a residential property and meet each of the following criteria:

- One or more people within the household has qualified for unemployment benefits, had a decrease in income, had increased household costs, or experienced other financial hardship due directly or indirectly to the COVID-19 pandemic; AND
- One or more individuals in the household can show a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability; AND
- The household has an income at or below 80 percent of area median income, which varies by county. Income limits by county are available on the DHS website. Resources (like bank accounts and cars) are not relevant to ERAP eligibility.

Applicants will need to provide the following information: head of household's personal information; income information for all household members 18 and older; rental lease and amount owed; landlord's name and contact information. If applying for utility assistance, applicants must provide utility expenses and utility provider information.

Applicants should be prepared to provide documents that substantiate information provided, such as pay stubs, tax filings, unemployment letters, and rental/utility arrears. However, if applicants do not have documents, county ERAP offices will work with applicants to obtain documents or written attestations.

The program will end when all funds have been expended, which DHS expects to happen by September 2021. Per Act 1 of 2021, all funds must be spent by December 31, 2021.

More information about ERAP can be found at www.dhs.pa.gov.