



City Manager's

COVID-19 RESPONSE UPDATE

Thursday, May 21, 2020

City Manager Dee Williams-Ridley provided this update on the City of Berkeley's COVID-19 response to the City Council. The reports, which are issued most weekdays, can be viewed at cityofberkeley.info/covid19-city-manager-updates.

Housing retention grants help over 200 Berkeley families stay housed

Thanks to the leadership and support of the City Council, City staff working with two local nonprofits created a program to support renters in Berkeley facing financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Applications came quickly, and the need has been deep.

Health Housing and Community Services worked with the East Bay Community Law Center and the Eviction Defense Center to implement the program and disburse the \$1,000,000 allocated. Almost all of those funds have been exhausted.

As of May 20, 2020, the two nonprofits reported the following disbursements and projections:

- 214 households have been prioritized and are anticipated to be supported by this Relief Fund,
- 141 of the 214 households have had initial checks mailed to landlords totaling \$402,000 (approximately) in rent payments,
- The nonprofits project an additional \$587,000 in rental assistance for the 214 households through the month of July.

Additionally, the two nonprofits reported that:

- Inquiries continue to come in,
- Current and anticipated inquiries, represent racially diverse households who are most vulnerable including those who are less tech-savvy, non-English speaking households, and families,
- Without any additional outreach, there are 18 households who have met the prioritization criteria and have been placed on a wait list, with over 35 still under review,
- Both organizations are continuously updating their list and projected amounts to account for re-assessments, and
- Many of the checks that are going out are going to Berkeley-based landlords.



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Prioritization Criteria

The unprecedented societal and economic havoc created by COVID-19 pandemic has made it difficult to forecast the depth of demand and the level of need. As applications flowed in, it became clear that community demand far exceeded available funding. Therefore, in addition to the minimum eligibility criteria, the following framework was used to determine award eligibility.

Applicant had to answer “Yes” to each of the following questions:

- Demonstrated decrease of income due to COVID-19
- Tenant has unforeseen housing-related expenses -- such as rent, future rent, utilities and needed health and safety related home repairs that, if left unaddressed, will jeopardize occupancy.
- Rental assistance helps the tenant remain housed in their current unit for the foreseeable future (i.e. the tenant has not already expressed intent to vacate unit).

In addition, applicants also had to answer “Yes” to at least two of the following questions:

- Berkeley resident for at least 5 years
- Tenant lives in low income housing, lives in a BMR unit or holds a Housing Voucher, such as Shelter Plus Care or Section 8.
- At least one household member is a senior (62+) or is disabled as defined by the ADA.
- Current household income is less than 50% of AMI.
- They have partial or full custody of a minor child in the home.

Additionally, individual monthly rents over \$4,000 were not considered a priority.

This program has had a big impact.

Resources

CDC Resource: Living in close quarters

Because COVID-19 spreads easily between people who are in close contact, those who share small apartments or live in a household with large or extended families need to take extra precautions to guard against infection, especially if any members of the household



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are at higher risk. The CDC has a helpful webpage with [recommendations to help people living in close quarters](#) keep themselves and their families safe.

Dealing with debt during COVID-19

Many in our community are struggling to manage personal finances in the face of COVID-19 related financial losses or medical costs. The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau has published a series of blogs to help people know their rights and help mitigate long term financial impacts. Topics include [protecting your credit](#), [tips for working with debt collectors](#), and [protecting yourself from financial impact](#) related to the pandemic.