

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** July 6, 2020

**To:** Marisa A. Zapata, PhD  
Director, PSU-HRAC

**From:** Lauren E. M. Everett  
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**Subject:** Updates on COVID-19 response, housing, and people experiencing homelessness nationwide, June 29 - July 5.

### News

1. Tenants' rights activists in [Richmond](#), VA, which has the second-highest eviction rate in the country, protested the court hearing 1,500 evictions cases that were recently filed after their eviction moratorium expired. When two people attempted to enter the courthouse and stage a sit-in, they were wrestled to the ground and law enforcement officials deployed pepper spray on the larger group outside, as some additional protesters tried to force their way into the building.
2. In [California](#), only one third of Project Roomkey hotel rooms are occupied by clients. One issue behind these numbers is that FEMA funding only covers shelter for people who meet certain criteria: those who test positive, are symptomatic, have been exposed to the virus, *or* are medically vulnerable. The initiative has housed more than [14,000 individuals](#) in the three months since its launch.
3. [Vermont](#) has housed 2,000 homeless people in hotels at the peak of its hotel shelter program, and is now looking toward transitioning people into permanent housing. This effort is challenged by the lack of affordable housing statewide. The state has spent \$13 million on the program, and officials approved an additional \$5.7 million in CARES Act funding to keep the program in place until September.
4. [Minneapolis](#) has been allowing houseless residents to camp in public parks since the beginning of June. This week the Park and Recreation Board [voted not to take action](#) on a resolution that would limit the number of parks with encampments to 10, and the number of tents in each to 10. The city estimates that camps have been established in about 30 parks citywide.
5. [Representative Maxine Waters](#) (D-CA) made the case for \$100 billion in emergency rental assistance in an article.
6. A new report on [evictions in Boston](#) found that in the 18 months leading up to the state's COVID eviction moratorium, 70% of all evictions in non-subsidized housing were in census tracts where the majority of residents are people of color. This points to the dire effect that eviction moratorium expirations, many of which are [occurring this week](#), will have on communities of color and on low-income renters in general.

7. Housing advocates in [New York City](#) are deeply worried about the influx of houseless individuals and families if more funding doesn't become available for rental assistance.
8. The Wisconsin State Journal reports on an emerging trend of [houseless people exiting shelters for tents](#), out of fear of contracting the virus. The City of Madison, like others, has put up portable toilets and hygiene stations at some of these camps, and several nonprofit outreach organizations have been bringing food and masks to the camps.
9. In [Seattle](#), Amazon's recently opened family shelter provides private rooms and wrap-around services for families with children who have life-threatening medical conditions. It is the first homeless shelter to be located inside a corporate building. The shelter is run by nonprofit service provider, Mary's Place.

## National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) Weekly Call (Monday, June 22) and Weekly Updates

- **Elizabeth Warren:** She and Reps. Garcia and Lee introduced the [Protecting Renters from Evictions and Fees Act](#), which extends and expands the eviction moratorium to all renters until March 2021 and prohibits late fees. This is a separate but related effort to the [Emergency Rental Assistance and Rental Market Stabilization Act](#), which would allocate \$100 billion in rental relief. The latest census survey says 30% of renters say they have little or no confidence in making their full July rental payment. The racial breakdown is: White = 20%, Black = 40%, and almost half of Latino renters. What's next for Warren's American Housing and Economic Mobility Act? We need to keep going after we get relief passed. This will build more than 3 million housing units which is expected to bring down rents by up to 10%. This is paid for just by restoring the estate tax to pre-Bush levels and making tax rates more progressive for the highest earners. People are talking about expanding vouchers as the solution, but we have a supply problem. The market is not going to fix this. She has a separate bill that calls for Congress to address the public housing repair backlog. She wants to produce three million new housing units, but also wants to take care of the affordable housing we already have.
- **Daniel Davis, Director of Housing, UMOM New Day Centers:** Arizona is experiencing a COVID overload, and very high temperatures. The bulk of case management right now is crisis related. The organization has seen recent overdoses and suicides that are atypical of their populations, so they've been connecting clients to mental health supports. They've asked the community to help with laptops and other resources for folks. Trauma-informed messaging to promote safe behavior without fear mongering has been another strategy. Local churches have been making cloth masks for their clients. Clients are less likely to advocate for themselves, so they've been making weekly health checks and, in shelters, taking temperatures daily. Providing Rapid-Rehousing (RRH) and Permanent Supportive Housing (PSH) is cheaper than months of hotel shelter with wrap-around services, so they've been advocating for those vouchers. They've also partnered with Home Inc. on landlord outreach and placement. They're committed to centering POC and non-gender

conforming individuals with lived experience to approach this with an equity framework. They've seen an increase in people coming into the shelter system in the last few weeks. They've identified a few landlords that are supportive to speak to the media. Landlords have a business motivation, but the organization has been inviting them to help with the crisis in the context that helping those in need helps the whole city.

- **Chris Martin, Legislative Advocate - Homelessness, Housing California:** Project Roomkey currently has 15,687 rooms secured, and about 11,000 of those are occupied. Project Roomkey is now Project Home Key, which signals a shift toward long term. This new phase uses COVID relief funds to acquire and operate hotels, at a total expenditure of \$500 million. The state legislature approved \$50 million of their operating fund in the interim, as well as some regulatory and administrative rule changes to streamline the process, as the relief funds must be spent by December. The state is looking at both federal bills (mentioned above) for tenant protection/eviction moratorium and rent relief. There are also bills that look at zoning reform and density bonuses to create more supply. The idea is to use this crisis to jump into a more comprehensive approach. Thus far the motel placements have been focused on the "FEMA three:" tested positive, awaiting results, or high-risk.
- **Raphael Ramos, Eviction Defense Project Director, Legal Action of Wisconsin:** Wisconsin does not have a 'right to counsel' (free legal services for low-income households under threat of eviction) law. Less than 1% in Milwaukee have legal representation, so they're working on that issue. The pandemic has shifted the boundaries of poverty and put more people at risk than ever before. Many people are now vulnerable to evictions, except those in properties backed by the federal government. There has been an increase in eviction filings, though the pace seems to be decreasing. Two weeks ago they were being filed at a 44% higher rate than last year. Now it's 14% higher than last year. They think the reason for the reduction is the increased availability of pandemic-related resources such as CARES funding for rents. Service providers have been encouraging landlords to be patient with tenants and give them time. The issue is that the resources are finite. Evictions are still being filed - 3,000 this month alone. The federal property evictions ban ends in July, and they expect evictions to increase. Their office reallocated a lot of their attorneys to tenants who are being evicted for nonpayment due to COVID.

#### **Bobby Watts, CEO, National Health Care for the Homeless Council**

- They support 300 health care for the homeless programs across the country
- Medical respite programs for people without homes but who no longer have a medical reason to be in a hospital.
- They're guiding partners on providing care during the pandemic. They've learned a lot of lessons and are pivoting to prepare for the second wave. For example, those who are newly homeless often have a different set of needs from people who have been homeless longer term.

- Working hard to support communities around the country with healthcare, testing, and medical respite. Especially alternative care sites.

## **The Camden Coalition of Healthcare Providers' National Center for Complex Health and Social Needs, the National Alliance to End Homelessness, and the Corporation for Supportive Housing webinar (June 30): *System-wide strategies for re-housing in the COVID-19 era***

### [Webinar recording and slides](#)

- **Annie Bacci, Corporation for Supportive Housing:** Use different types of funding strategically: e.g. FEMA can only be for emergency health & safety and for shelter & temporary housing ops, while CDBG can be used for permanent housing, and ESG can be used for services for that housing. Familiarize yourself with your state's plan for these funds. [This spreadsheet](#) has info on each state. Re-housing recommendations: understand the need, align and update housing prioritization methods, estimate the need and prioritize permanent housing, understand and align on timelines, employ a number of re-housing strategies. Do you have people with lived experience on your team? And people who understand funding streams and the timing of when they expire? It's important to look at a number of re-housing strategies at once.
- **Phil Ansell, Director, Los Angeles County Homeless Initiative:** The stage for LA County's COVID homelessness response was set by Measure H and the collaborative work around allocating those resources. Project Roomkey is a collaboration between the state, county, and LAHSA. In six weeks they had: 35 hotels, 3,600+ rooms, 3,330+ rooms occupied, 3,700+ people staying at Project Roomkey sites (some couples).
- **Kristi Schulenberg, National Alliance to End Homelessness:** Systems must have a coordinated approach, like in the LA County case (see above). Establish a re-housing strategy with clear goals rooted in data to show need and racial equity. Determine funding allocations based on re-housing strategy goals & strategically align resources. Key implementation steps are: funding solicitation strategies, scaling up effective re-housing strategies, ensuring program capacity. It's vital to strengthen current re-housing strategies. Scale up and/or invest in new strategies: rapid re-housing, permanent supportive housing, diversion. It's essential to have the staff in place to do this work. Housing identification and case management. There's a lot of federal funding right now (ESG) for rapid re-housing. Prioritize getting houseless people into housing before using it for prevention. Examples of strategies: housing surges (concerted effort that cuts through bureaucratic red tape), purchasing hotels/motels, and Public Housing Authority & Multi Family Partnerships. Established strategies: Provide support and capacity building to new or smaller providers in grant management and program design; and onboard new staff or reassigned staff in RRH & PSH program delivery. Update ESG and CoC written standards on RRH to support program

flexibility and alignment with community re-housing goals, and train providers to understand re-housing through a racial equity lens.

## **Nonprofit Quarterly webinar (July 1): *Housing Justice amid COVID-19: A Roundtable Discussion***

- **Amina Kirk, Detroit People’s Platform:** The current situation is an exacerbation of a crisis that has been going on for many years, including a sustained foreclosure crisis that did not abate after the recession. Tens of thousands of homes in Detroit are lost to tax foreclosure each year, and there has been insufficient funding for affordable housing in decades. Luxury housing is being built, exclusively. They’ve lost a lot of LIHTC (Low-Income Housing Tax Credits) and subsidized properties over the years. People are doubling up or homeless because there’s nowhere to go. The eviction moratorium expires July 15 so they’re expecting mass evictions after that time. There is \$50 million for rental assistance but that’s only a fraction of what is needed. The courts have estimated 75,000 eviction cases for the state.
- **Andreanecia Morris, Housing NOLA:** This situation is similar to Hurricane Katrina, as far as the government failure and resulting inequity. The government told people to shelter at home, but Housing NOLA has not seen an effort from officials to provide places to live. About 38% of essential workers were cost-burdened during the pandemic. The legislature just passed a solution to give essential workers a one-time payment of \$250, at a cost of \$50 million total. This is just a drop in the bucket. Meanwhile, 1,000 voucher holders are looking for apartments and are unable to find housing despite 7,000 empty apartments on the market, in addition to hotel vacancies and empty vacation rentals. We have enough housing for everyone but housing placement is not happening. Investment is going into stabilizing small businesses but not the workers and customers. There’s a lack of understanding of how our economies really work.
- **Miriam Axel-Lute, Shelterforce:** Many statewide eviction moratoriums have just lifted, but many people who have lost their jobs aren’t going back to work and unemployment claims are still behind. This is an impending disaster. There are two possible approaches to help renters: rent relief is targeted payments to those who need help, and rent cancellation means that rent does not need to be paid, and then entails figuring out a way to help the owners cover necessary costs. Pros to the latter would be that it includes everyone who needs it. Whereas if you have to be eligible for help, you will leave out some who need help but don’t qualify (already unemployed, undocumented, etc.). The fear is if you don’t assist small landlords there will be a wave of foreclosures like in 2008, and that will have a negative impact on everyone. Can we make a rent-relief program that reaches everyone in need? Can we forgive rent in a targeted way to help those who really need it? Can we capture rental property sales that will inevitably happen either way?

- **Amina:** The biggest problem is adequate funding. This has been an issue for decades, and the reason we don't have it is a lack of political will. It's just not a platform priority for electeds. Affordable housing is under-resourced while the need continues to grow. Meanwhile a lot of money is being made off of housing. We just need more affordable housing stock, and not housing built using public funds to give abatements to luxury housing. If the Area Median Income (AMI) threshold isn't meeting the need, we need to take a look at that. We need permanent rental assistance. Urban Institute said one fifth of households have lost income. Even if we get back to where we were pre-pandemic, that's still not a good place. Increasing the cost for eviction filings is one strategy that has shown to be effective. We need to listen to the people who are impacted, like we listen to academics and technocrats. The process needs to be iterative: put the policy in place, track it, look at the data and adjust as needed. **When we talk about defunding the police, housing is one place that funding should go because data shows that when people are stably housed there are less interactions with the police.**
- **Miriam:** We should support shared-equity housing models.
- **Andreanecia:** One of the biggest obstacles to expanding affordable housing is the racial bias implicit in it, e.g. the 'welfare queen' trope that is embedded in both conservative and liberal thinking.
- **Amina:** We have a concept that certain kinds of housing go to certain types of people. And there's an idea of a right, because one has worked hard to own their home, they have a right not to live around "those people" and those people are usually Black people.
- **Miriam:** That ties back to the property values argument, which revolves around building home equity. A lot of the affordable housing world has leaned on the idea that owning one's own home is the best possible solution. And people should be able to own if that's what's best for them, but the equity issue complicates it.
- **Andreanecia:** The bias is implicit in the lack of programs that help low income people own their own homes.
- **Amina:** Property values are tied to racial purity. If people were not racist, we would not see that shift in value. In Detroit we are a majority renter city but we don't see that in our policies. We still see a large focus on home ownership. We could make it difficult to live in an isolated neighborhood with white people but we don't do that.
- **Steve Dubb, Nonprofit Quarterly:** And we know that the mortgage interest deduction exceeds all HUD subsidies.

- **Andreanecia:** When the homeowner argues that paying property taxes should give them a more significant voice, that's actual larger owners - in NoLa it's hotels. So it's no surprise that we're letting them call the shots. We need to change that.
- **Miriam:** Property tax reliance keeps us from looking at regional solutions. There's also a 'freeloader effect' with people who live in the suburbs and use the city for various purposes but do not pay taxes in the city.
- **Andreanecia:** The 'deserving poor' narrative is deeply entrenched, when we're talking about subsidies and assistance.

## Other Resources

1. NAEH guide on [prioritizing ESG funds](#)
2. The Alliance conducted [a survey](#) on community-level responses of homeless assistance programs in May.
3. A guide for what to do when you receive [an eviction notice](#).
4. Public Health Institute [webinar on Advancing Health Equity](#) During and Beyond COVID-19: Addressing Housing and Homelessness is on July 10.