

## MEMORANDUM

**Date:** August 26, 2020

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

**From:** Lauren E. M. Everett  
Graduate Research Assistant, PSU-HRAC

**Subject:** Updates on COVID-19 response, housing, and people experiencing homelessness nationwide, August 17–23.

### News

1. Homeless service providers reflect on the improvements they've seen in clients who have been participating in [hotel programs](#). "What we've realized is that the physical environment contributed to the stress and difficulties that people were under, and we had a lot of crisis events (in traditional shelters)," said Shelter Director Dan Malone.
2. Advocates in [Los Angeles](#) sent a letter this month to the Los Angeles Homeless Services Authority (the CoC for the metro area) alleging discrimination in the Project Roomkey program. Specifically, the letter describes the program's inability to meet the needs of disabled individuals who are not able to handle their own basic daily activities.
3. Meanwhile, unsheltered homelessness in [New York City](#) is increasing, as state leaders propose various policy responses. Mayor de Blasio announced Monday that the city will begin moving people experiencing homelessness [out of hotels and back into shelters](#). The *New York Times* details the controversy on the [Upper West Side](#). *Curbed* editor Alissa Walker makes the case for [continuing and scaling up](#) the hotel program. New York City has also unveiled an ambitious new plan to maintain and update its deteriorating [public housing](#) stock.
4. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell faces growing pressure to bring senators back from their August recess to vote on both a U.S. Postal Service bill and [coronavirus relief](#).
5. [Renters are facing difficulties during the pandemic](#) beyond the inability to pay rent.
6. In [Indianapolis](#), 19,000 tenants are currently on the waitlist for the rental assistance program following the state's eviction moratorium expiration on August 14. The total fund is about \$25 million and comes from the CARES Act, the city, and private philanthropy.
7. The First City Court Clerk in [New Orleans](#) is preparing for the wave of evictions that will be filed in about a week, as the 30-day notice period that was part of the CARES Act moratorium is set to expire. He reports that one property manager has already informed him of the intention to file 250 evictions.
8. [Seattle](#) Mayor Jenny Durkan extended the eviction moratorium (residential, small businesses, and nonprofits) until the end of the year or until the termination of the Civil Emergency declaration.

9. Service providers and advocates in [San Francisco](#) discuss an upward trend in deaths among people experiencing homelessness, which is thought to be mainly attributed to the combination of isolation in hotels and substance overdoses. This highlights the importance of incorporating harm-reduction strategies into hotel services. Meanwhile, City Supervisors approved a settlement with UC Hastings in the lawsuit that mandated a drastic reduction in tents in [the Tenderloin neighborhood](#). The city has cleared more than 87% of the tents and moved 615 people to alternate shelter sites.
10. In [Minneapolis](#), the unsheltered homelessness crisis continues to deepen and overwhelm service providers.

## National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (August 17)

**Paul Kealy, COO, NLIHC:** Congress is in recess despite the need for swift action on a coronavirus relief package for millions of Americans. They will not resume until early September. It's essential that we continue to contact members of Congress—particularly GOP members—and implore them to pass needed relief. Otherwise the homelessness situation will become worse than it is now.

**Senator Jeff Merkley, Oregon:** I first became immersed in housing in 1991 as the director of Habitat for Humanity. The slogan was 'a decent home in a decent community for every family in need.' I keep thinking about how we should have been able to accomplish this over the past 30 years, but wages have been declining and there's also underinvestment in education, housing, etc. Now we're dealing with a pandemic, and it's accentuating all of the problems we previously have experienced. Now the Senate is closed, and still has not addressed the HEROES Act which was passed in the House three months ago. Now the extended unemployment insurance has expired. We're going to see an eviction tsunami. A study by the Aspen Institute says that 19-23 million Americans will not be able to pay their rent by the end of September. Congress should be in session considering the HEROES Act or something similar, which contains \$100 billion in rental assistance. It is an unthinkable situation. We're asking people to stay at home to contain the virus, but at the same time millions will be on the streets because they can't pay rent.

An additional piece I wanted to mention is a moratorium on utility shut offs, including internet. Rebuilding the economy from the base up entails both of these moratoriums. We already had 3.6 million evictions a year nationally prior to the pandemic. As many as 40% of renters were rent burdened, and 20% were severely rent burdened. There are towns in Oregon where it's much higher than that. I introduced the Affordable Home Act which would provide rental assistance and infuse money into the Affordable Housing Trust Fund. It would establish an office of Restorative Housing Justice to address the long-term impacts of redlining and gentrification. Housing is a big piece of systemic racism in America, and we need to proactively address it. The Senate has announced they are going to repeal the Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing legislation of the Obama era so we're going backwards. We know how destabilizing eviction and foreclosure are, so

let's rebuild our nation better and stronger by investing more in affordable housing. The NLIHC is a powerful outside force to push Congress for change.

**Q:** How can we re-start negotiations?

**Merkley:** What we've been hearing is that GOP leaders are happy with the policy of the situation. By not acting, they've created an opening for Trump to rush in with Executive Orders and "save the day." So we have to establish that these orders are inadequate and ineffective. The idea that for eviction you just create a committee to talk about it is untrue. A deferment means you still owe money. If you just postpone payment, it means people struggle more down the line. The message is that these executive orders are not going to get the job done. There's also no support for rural hospitals and clinics, or for education other than in a situation where the kids are back in the classroom. So call your leaders, and communicate the message that we need action: America is suffering and this is a complete failure of leadership. So dear Senator, get back to DC and get this done.

**Q:** With the growing eviction threat it will disproportionately impact BIPOC renters, so what kind of message can we send about these systemic inequities?

**A:** I want to establish an office that addresses the past impacts of redlining and gentrification, so that's one way to affirmatively impact that. But obviously generous support of families that are experiencing it is important. The president has one order to defer payroll taxes, but that only helps people that have a job and they have to pay it back eventually. That doesn't help people who are hardest hit. What we know is that not only are families in BIPOC communities hardest hit by the legacy of housing inequities, but also broader economic inequities and the impacts of COVID as far as job loss. In addition, the health impacts are hitting BIPOC communities harder. We don't have healthcare justice in America. All those pieces are part of taking this on effectively.

**Q:** And they're also very much interlinked.

**Meredith Dodson, Director, US Poverty Campaigns RESULTS:** We have volunteers in almost every state who receive training and support to advocate for federal anti-poverty policy. The organization has been around for almost 40 years but we just started focusing on housing in 2019. There are a group of folks with lived experience who we consult with. We have focused on renters and addressing our underlying affordable housing crisis, including the links between housing and racism. About 59% of Black-occupied housing is rental, whereas 28% of white-occupied housing is rental. Renters of color were already struggling, but are now struggling even more. Our volunteer advocates have met with congressional delegations in 41 states, so 470 meetings in 2020. Our advocacy week was in June, and advocates have been doing a lot of follow up with the congressional offices over the past few weeks to push for rental assistance, a uniform eviction moratorium, etc. I will add a template for letters to the editor, and if you get published send it on to the staff. We've had the most success in building relationships with congressional staff over time, and sharing data routinely with them. This could be a new media piece, or data from the Pulse Survey, etc. Becoming

a resource is really key. We have worked ongoingly on a bipartisan basis. The messaging is that keeping renters stably housed has a public health value, and also underscoring the connection between housing and other issues.

**Barbara Poppe, Principal, Barbara Poppe and Associates (former ED, US Interagency Council on Homelessness):** We've been working on creating the Framework for an Equitable COVID-19 Homelessness Response. The ['at a glance matrix'](#) guide page is intended to help decision makers have a flow to sorting through all of the content out there. As we think of the different ways we can use this funding, we must first prioritize houseless people who are at risk, above all others. It starts from two different places: a high unsheltered homelessness count, and a low one. Recommendations include aspects like purchasing hotels or other properties, how to adjust and increase outreach, and diversion. We know that it's really challenging to prioritize high-risk unhoused people first because people will be asking for eviction prevention, but it's important to stay focused on people who are literally homeless because they will have the poorest outcomes. There's also a guide to different funding sources and what they cover. These are difficult and painful choices

**Q:** How is 'doubled-up' factored into this framework?

**A:** Unsheltered includes cars, tents, etc. Doubled-up doesn't meet the HUD definition of literally homeless, unless fleeing domestic violence. Those families would be eligible to receive diversion assistance.

**Susan Rief, Eviction Prevention Project Director, Georgia Legal Services Program:** I am the housing attorney for the organization. We are an LLC org that covers all of the state except the large urban centers. Our state did not issue an eviction moratorium, but we did close the courts to all non-essential actions, which includes evictions. So no evictions from March until early June, when courts were allowed to broaden their activities. By mid-July, we were back to a regular situation. There were 400 writs in the courts waiting to be sent to the Sheriff for processing and about 500 backlog cases. That doesn't even include new cases that the courts were waiting to process. So in the past few weeks we have had a high volume of non-payment eviction calls. We expect another wave to hit with the expiration of the CARES Act moratorium on federally backed mortgages. According to the Pulse Survey data, we're looking at about half a million evictions, and about 300,000 are low-income. It's about \$618 million in back rent, so we need rental assistance. In the larger cities that have received ESG funding we're seeing an impact, but it hasn't reached the rural communities. We're working to make sure that ESG rent relief money is combined with legal assistance to maximize the impact and stabilize their housing situation moving forward. I represent people with low incomes, and that's who I see being hit the hardest. I compare it to the foreclosure crisis, but the difference is that crisis hit all income levels. I wonder if that's why there's this lack of urgency to address the problem. In most of our rural areas there aren't homeless shelters, and we have seen some jurisdictions using ESG money for hotel vouchers, but that is limited.

**David Klein, Great Plains Housing Authority:** Our agency oversees Section 8 in six counties in rural areas in North Dakota. Each area has its own challenges, including food insecurity, landlord discrimination against voucher holders, unemployment ended and many never received it, concerns about school starting and childcare, many doubled-up households, and an increase in domestic violence, suicide, and child neglect. Some of the pieces we'd been putting together prior to COVID, we had a good amount of resources at that time so few wait lists. Now we have wait lists in many places and are trying to get a lot of people into the program as quickly as possible. Project Renew is a statewide effort to help communicate with children, co-workers, providers, and clients. First Link/211 is the statewide resource referral system. It covers the suicide hotline and domestic violence. The internet connection issue is also important with remote learning. Internet needs to be treated more like a regular utility.

**Margarita de Escontrias, CEO, Cabrillo Economic Development Corporation:** Our services are oriented toward farmworker communities. We own and manage over 1,200 housing units and our median rent is over \$2,000 and every year it increases about 8%. Here in Cabrillo, CA we have an eviction moratorium that expires at the end of September. I'm very concerned about the CARES resources and how they have been allocated in rural communities. I've worked with HUD for over 30 years, and I know the formula they use. Rural communities have many of the poorest communities. The undocumented farmworker does not qualify for any type of rental assistance or pandemic assistance. Federal anti-poverty strategies have never addressed our rural communities in an equitable manner. We need to urge members of Congress to issue federal relief to issue interim emergency relief to those most impacted by COVID, especially BIPOC communities.

### ***NLIHC Emergency Rental Assistance in Response to COVID-19: Themes, Challenges and Early Lessons Learned (webinar), August 19***

NLIHC has been [tracking](#) 320 rental assistance programs. About 25% have exhausted funding. About 60% use first-come, first-served or lottery, and 80% fund three months or less. The funding is totally inadequate and Congress has not acted. It is urgent that negotiations be restarted as soon as possible, so please contact your members of Congress and demand that they get back to work. We've launched an in-depth survey on program design and implementation, so if you have a connection to a program please contact me: [ryae@nlihc.org](mailto:ryae@nlihc.org)

**Claudia Aiken, Director, Housing Initiative at Penn:** We've been working with practitioners as they develop their programs. LA, Oakland, Cleveland, Philly, Baltimore, and Atlanta in particular. We're also doing a formal evaluation of their rental assistance program with a longitudinal survey on renters who both did and didn't receive assistance. Also surveying landlords. Finally, by comparing program implementation we can better understand what works and what doesn't. [Housinginitiative.org](http://Housinginitiative.org).

**Whitney Demetrius, CHAPA:** Our mission is to develop affordable housing in Massachusetts. Many communities don't have a strong pro-housing advocacy group, so our mission is to build that out.

Many communities have been contacting us about starting emergency rental assistance programs. We've put together a [webinar](#) with best practices about where to get started and what funding streams folks can tap into. We also put together a survey to reach our 351 cities and towns in MA to ask whether they have developed a program or have considered developing one. The idea is to help nonprofits and state agencies coordinate with each other to develop these programs. In the future we'd like to do a follow-up webinar.

**Greg Heller, Philadelphia Housing Corporation:** The organization has been the city's nonprofit intermediary for a range of housing projects since the 1960s. This includes home repair, grant and loan programs, managing the city's rental assistance programs, etc. We launched a rent relief program May 12, and the state launched their own program so we ran that in Philly. We have a third program we launched pre-COVID that provides subsidies. We also have two loan programs that we made available during the pandemic for small landlords with 15 or fewer residences in their portfolio. So we're supporting both landlords and tenants.

**Domonique Williams, Deputy Director, Office of Housing Stability in Boston:** We offer housing crisis assistance, develop resources and workshops for tenants, and develop policies to stabilize renters. Our work has put us in the position to quickly set up a rental assistance program. The city allocated \$3 million in April, \$5 million in June. There were a couple of challenges in getting the project off the ground. Technology was a major barrier for some applicants who don't have internet service. So we enlisted volunteers to call people back and help them fill out the application online. We also needed interpretation services as many people (24%) of our calls were coming from monolingual Spanish speakers. We have one of the strongest eviction moratoriums in the country, so that helped give us the time to set up this program.

**Greg:** We also have a moratorium through the end of August (city level), and we've had a lot of renters without internet access and who have translations needs. We have housing counselors under contract who were able to assist with this (30 people). We were also in the process of designing a rental assistance program pre-COVID with \$30 million. We were going to do a five-year program with 1,000 tenants. Then COVID came and there were budget deficits so our program got cut. With Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds, the assistance has to go directly to the landlord, so we had to do it a little differently than how we had set it up. Now we have a great back-end system set up that we can hopefully use to continue with the rental assistance program after the pandemic. One of the biggest challenges has been the landlord not responding with needed information, which is why the direct-to-tenant model is preferred.

**Domonique:** In the first round tenants were having trouble obtaining documentation so in the second round we required an affidavit instead. We also removed the requirement to verify income again, if they had already done it in the first round. We've also had challenges in the number of people who have responded and completed applications.

**Claudia:** Many cities and localities have not had these programs before, so helping them set up and get the resources to deploy the program and process the applications has been a challenge. With the

more decentralized models, outreach might be easier (through service providers), but you also can't do bulk processing, and might have equity issues if some orgs are limited in their capabilities.

**Whitney:** There are language challenges with both landlords and tenants, and issues where there are informal arrangements and landlords are wary of entering into these agreements.

**Q:** How are you addressing a shortage of staffing or capacity?

**Domonique:** Our office is a small team of seven. We've received 5,000 calls in the second round alone, and have opened 1,500 cases. We couldn't handle it so we had to reach out to city offices to help with the case management.

**Greg:** We got 12,000 applications in our first round and have received 10,000 so far in the second round. We worked with our housing counselors and Legal Aid, who already has a hotline. We recruited staff from the rest of our department to do income reviews, and also retrained some people. We now have 15 people doing this work and are hiring eight more. We worked with the Mayor's office to put out a call from other agencies and got 23 volunteers.

**Q:** What are some outreach strategies?

**Claudia:** What I've seen that is innovative is when there's a lottery and there's a time window, it's useful to analyze where in the city or county the applications are coming from and then to target outreach accordingly.

**Greg:** As our five-day application window was open, we were tracking data on where they were from, if people said they are Hispanic or not, and did outreach based on that. We did outreach to the Spanish-speaking news outlets, for example, to be proactive.

**Whitney:** Keeping it simple helps getting the applications out and completed. The hard and soft applications, allowing photos to be taken on your phone (of documents), and drive-through applications.

**Claudia:** Some places have asked landlords to forgive part of the rent in order to get assistance, but it's a trade off because some landlords don't want to register with the city at all.

**Greg:** We require that landlords pass a habitability inspection.

**Domonique:** We have a requirement for mediation programs in case there is some kind of problem down the line. For the third round we are providing a rental arrearage agreement.

**Claudia:** It's useful in some cases to sit down with landlord associations and see what's reasonable and what they would agree to.

**Greg:** We have also been meeting with landlord associations and they've helped design some of the programs. Before landlords are allowed to apply for eviction, they have to go through the eviction-diversion program.

**Q:** Have you been using other funds, beyond federal funds?

**Domonique:** For the first round we used general operating funds, second round federal, and third CDBG.

**Q:** Can you speak to concerns about duplication of benefits and getting funding out the door quickly?

**Domonique:** In Boston one of the administrators of the city lottery is also doing the state lottery so they can cross reference. That's a unique situation, but that's one of the few ways to prevent that.

**Greg:** My agency also administers both city and state so we can cross reference.

**Whitney:** We've seen some programs where people have to apply for one funding source and if they're denied, can apply for another. But we started seeing a lack of response to applications because of a delay in time. So they started relaxing that requirement. My organization doesn't get in the weeds with this because we aren't administering the aid ourselves. We've been hearing a lot of feedback about lessons learned and organizations shifting.

**Q:** Do you ask for proof of income loss, or ask people to self-certify?

**Claudia:** That kind of proof can be very hard to get. If an applicant was never given notice they were laid off for example, or if they left work to take care of children. In some instances we've seen provider agencies go with self-certification.

**Greg:** We did self-certification in phase one, but the state won't let us do it in phase two. Income documentation in general is difficult because many people just don't have it.

**Claudia:** Evaluation is key to sustaining this program in the future, but that's not always something that organizations have the capacity to do. It's important to make the point that this assistance really had an impact on peoples' lives. For example, when one's child wasn't able to go to school, the parent could stay home from work and take care of them. This information will enable us to sustain these programs.

**Greg:** Congress could make Section 8 an entitlement and decide that housing is a human right in this country.



### Additional resources:

1. HUD guidance for tenants on [negotiating rent repayment](#) plans.
2. HUD tools for landlords [dealing with tenants](#) impacted by COVID-19.
3. NAEH guide to supporting academic success and safety for [youth experiencing homelessness](#).
4. NAEH's Homelessness Research Institute's findings on [how providers and CoCs have been responding](#) to the pandemic.