

MEMORANDUM

Date: August 10, 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, Aug 3 - 9.

News

1. This op-ed in *The Hill* explains why COVID is a golden opportunity for governments to [finally treat homelessness like the emergency](#) it has always been.
2. [New York City](#) recently announced that homeless outreach will no longer be the purview of the NYPD, and will instead be handled by the City's social services agency. However, Mayor De Blasio still faces criticism from advocates about not providing access to hotel rooms for enough of the city's unsheltered population. [New York City's](#) hotel program faces [opposition](#) from residents of some middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. Mayor De Blasio has asserted that [the hotel program](#), which is providing shelter to about 13,000 people, will continue for the duration of the pandemic. Meanwhile, current estimates put [400,000 households at risk of eviction](#) in the city, as the state's eviction moratorium expires this week.
3. Several partnerships in the [Bay Area](#) have created jobs for unemployed service industry workers, in new positions supporting the houseless community.
4. In [Tucson](#), one single mother found respite through her local hotel shelter program.
5. Tenant unions and other renters' rights groups have started using [militant direct action tactics](#) to address evictions - both legal and extra legal. Protesters in [New Orleans](#) chained themselves together to prevent entrance to the First City Court.
6. In [King County \(Seattle\)](#) the pandemic has fundamentally changed the homelessness system, and the result may be better aligned with addressing racial equity goals for housing placement.
7. Overcrowding continues to put low-income households at increased risk of contracting COVID. [Silicon Valley](#) is one region that is particularly impacted, due to the cost of housing.
8. As [San Francisco's](#) Tenderloin neighborhood is cleared of houseless residents, per a recent lawsuit, most people are being directed into city-sanctioned tent camps and congregate shelter. The open application period for hotel conversions in the Bay Area

under [Project Homekey](#) has garnered 20 applications, only one of which is in San Francisco.

9. A [Los Angeles County](#) judge upheld a partial preliminary injunction directing the city of Norwalk to comply with Project Roomkey. The city had enacted a moratorium that effectively banned hotels and motels from participating in the program.
10. In [Winston-Salem, NC](#), several local nonprofits have collaborated to renovate dilapidated housing with the help of volunteer labor and donations. The project will provide permanent homes for people experiencing homelessness, who are at high risk of contracting the coronavirus.
11. The City Council in [Oxford, U.K.](#), where houseless people have been sheltering in a local youth hostel, has extended their contract with the hostel through June 2021. It has also signed a lease with a student housing provider, for a total of 124 rooms for the same time period. Already 203 people have participated in the program, and 76 of these individuals have transitioned to permanent housing.
12. [This op-ed](#) in the *Baltimore Sun* defends local jurisdictions that have implemented emergency rent control. Nearly two dozen landlords have filed suit in the U.S. District Court.

National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (August 3)

Diane Yentel: The eviction moratorium has expired, the unemployment bonus has expired, and we are now set up for a crisis situation. It had been incredibly irresponsible of the GOP not to act on this. This crisis is predictable and preventable. Congress needs to establish a uniform eviction moratorium, \$11.5 billion for homeless services, \$100 billion for rental assistance. There are already bills on the table, so now all eyes are on Congress to act. Thanks to your advocacy at least a dozen GOP lawmakers have advocated for helping renters in the next package.

Senator Maise Hirono, Hawaii: Senate Republicans have not shared their sense of urgency and prefer to “take a pause” on dealing with the next package. They’re emphasizing the need to support corporations, and insulate them from liability, which means they wouldn’t have any incentive to create safe workplaces. It would be helpful if McConnell and Pelosi would get into the same room, but he hasn’t been willing to do that yet. We’ll negotiate with anyone who has the power to move Senate GOP leaders. We need to pass all the legislation mentioned above, as well as the \$600 weekly EDD bonus. This is a lifeline for people who are facing extended periods of unemployment. We’re facing quite a challenge with the Republicans and the president, who has provided little leadership around the pandemic or the crisis of systemic racism and how it intersects.

Diane: Can you talk about your affordable housing bill, to address long term needs?

Senator Hirono: We need a sustainable effort. This would allocate \$10b for ESG, \$10b for CoC, \$40b a year for the Housing Trust Fund to expand stock and fund the voucher program.

These are all ideas that are already around but there hasn't been the political will to really address and invest in this. There are a lot of people who are only one paycheck away from losing their home and now many people will lose their home because the COVID benefits haven't been extended.

The bill is called *S.2946 Pathways for Stable and Affordable Housing for All

[Why rent relief is needed.](#)

Bethany Snyder, Communications Strategist, Community Solutions: Their organization works to make sure that homelessness is rare and short lived. They are just starting to branch out into advocacy. They have been hearing from community partners who are interested in getting involved with advocacy out of a need to change policy that is hindering their efforts. They started with federal advocacy. Their strategy is to 1. leverage the strength of deep community connections, 2. Engage in highly targeted and strategic action, and 3. Organize virtual lobby day meetings with several key senators. They created an advocacy web page for their call-to-actions and resource sheets about policy they're asking people to engage with. Training for lobby days is also key, and they set up a few of those. For the lobby days they would start out with staff framing the conversation, and then turn it over to a community partner to get more on the ground detail and personal stories from their state. It's important to follow up with each staffer and ask each attendee to do the same.

Allison Bovell-Ammon, Director of Policy Strategy, Children's Health Watch: Their org is committed to health equity for children, and they do research on the frontlines of pediatric care. One of the top concerns housing, and particularly the ability to remain stably housed. Housing quality is especially an issue now because people are spending so much time at home. We're calling for bold federal solutions in these domains, to promote equity over the long term. They conduct research to inform policy advocacy. They've been working to support comprehensive solutions to support young children. We need both short term solutions related to the pandemic, and long term sustainable solutions. [Resource](#) to learn more.

Emma Mehrabi, Director of Poverty Policy, Children's Defense Fund: Housing is a human right and is foundational to children's development. Over the last few months we've published some briefs. Our asks are the \$100 billion in rental assistance, the eviction moratorium, etc. Also the [McKinney-Vento children's education program](#) for children experiencing homelessness. Housing is a racial justice issue, and the situation was already dire before the pandemic.

Rachel Stucker, ED, Housing Alliance Delaware: They're the CoC for the Balance of State. They were one of the earliest states to launch a rental assistance program on March 26 with \$5.6 million in state and local funding. They also had an eviction moratorium at the state level. The rental assistance program received over 5,000 applications in a four week period and was eventually closed down. Now they're preparing to launch the next round of the housing assistance program. The statewide moratorium was lifted a few weeks ago. The courts are still not holding or scheduling hearings, but are processing new filings. They placed some additional

criteria on evictions: it must be found by the court to be “in the interest of justice to do so.” We have yet to see what that would look like. In any case, the courts *have* done these things to help. We’re expecting at least \$14 million available for the next round of the rental assistance program. The new design is connecting it to the Justice of the Peace Court. They’re going to launch a dispute resolution program and require tenants and landlords to participate in this program. The landlord would then be required to accept the rental assistance rather than evict.

Eligibility for rental assistance is below 80% AMI and with income loss related to COVID. The concern is that people might fall through the cracks if they don’t have legal help, so they’re thinking about opportunities to fund legal assistance. We’re also concerned that \$14 million won’t be enough funding to cover the need. The court has indicated they are holding off on scheduling evictions to look at the data and get a sense of what the need will be. We’re hoping to have access to that as well. In addition to the rental assistance program, we also have our local Housing and Urban Development (HUD) jurisdictions and Community Development Block Grants (CDBG) funding, and are looking at ramping up funding for homelessness prevention. So there would be two rental assistance buckets. We are cautiously hopeful but remain concerned, with the eviction moratorium having been lifted. There’s been a lot of coordination with HUD funding. We used the first round to provide hotels, provide PPE to shelter providers, invest in rapid rehousing. We still have about 200 people who are experiencing unsheltered homelessness. Shelters are at about 50% or regular operating capacity. We’re still working hard with local HUD jurisdictions to get the funds out to people who need them.

Kate Watson, ED, Kansas Statewide Homeless Coalition: We are the balance of state for Kansas. The counties we don’t cover are the highest population centers. Thank you to the NLIHC for providing funding for the work we were doing. We used some of that to provide hotel vouchers for people experiencing homelessness so they could get out of harm’s way. We are one of the lower funded CoCs but are moving up steadily with help from the NLIHC and others. The numbers are still coming in on the hotel voucher program. Outreach is a challenge due to the large area they cover and the rural nature of the communities. We’re looking at the social determinants of health and getting some policies in place. We need to connect with our healthcare partners. We’re already connecting with our local healthcare systems but have more work to do there. We’re working on adding COVID models to our HMIS system. The media across the state has been reaching out to us, which gives us the opportunity to communicate through interviews about the work we’re doing. We only have a staff of three people and are trying to grow so we can do more of this work.

Thomas Adams, ED of Housing & Services, CommonBond Communities (Minnesota): The organization is a mission-driven property manager and developer serving 13,000 residents in Iowa, Wisconsin, and South Dakota. We joined a coalition of other advocacy groups to press for rental assistance and to extend the eviction moratorium, but we were not able to get it done before the Legislature took a break. We decided we would not evict tenants for non-payment as a result of COVID. The governor of Minnesota dedicated about \$100 million a few weeks ago for rental relief, but the issue is that it can also be used for foreclosure prevention. We are asking

everyone to continue to advocate and support additional relief. The \$100 million is not going to be enough.

Other resources:

1. As HUD prepares to initiate a new [Housing Choice Voucher Mobility Demonstration](#), The Urban Institute reviews what we know about the program's effectiveness over the years.
2. HUD webinar, Responding to the Housing Challenges Posed by the Pandemic, is happening August 12. Register [here](#).
3. Texas Housers (Texas Low Income Housing Information Service) released a white paper about the [rent relief programs](#) in major cities and counties throughout the state.