

MEMORANDUM

Date: Oct 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 and disaster response, housing, and people experiencing homelessness nationwide, October 19 - 25.

News

1. Up to [eight million renter households](#) will face eviction when the federal eviction moratorium expires at the beginning of January.
2. In [New York City](#), a judge temporarily ruled against a group of residents in the Financial District trying to block a group of 240 men from being moved into their neighborhood from the Lucerne Hotel, which is providing shelter on the Upper West Side. The judge has permitted the suit to continue, but the men can be moved prior to the next hearing date. In a separate case, a judge granted the Lucerne tenants [a temporary restraining order](#) against the city-mandated relocation.
3. Service providers in [Minneapolis](#) are facing the impending combined crisis of COVID and cold weather. Meanwhile, several individuals whose property was destroyed in homeless [encampment sweeps](#) earlier this year are suing the city and other municipal entities.
4. City leaders in [San Jose, CA](#) voted to continue the emergency shelter program through the winter, which will serve more than 200 individuals. They also voted to purchase a 72-unit hotel to use as permanent supportive housing.
5. [This Georgia landlord](#) is one of the plaintiffs in the local case against the CDC eviction moratorium. It is one of several lawsuits nationwide that seeks to halt the moratorium.
6. In [California](#), the last \$30.7 million of the \$627 million Project Homekey funding has been allocated, ahead of schedule. The program includes 45 applicants and 71 projects, with a total of 4,646 units.
7. A recent survey of voters in [Portland, OR](#) revealed that homelessness was the number one concern, ahead of even COVID-19. Additionally, 52% of voters felt the city is on the wrong track dealing with the issue.
8. The [Oregon](#) Legislature's emergency board approved a \$30 million plan to turn hotels into shelters, less than half of what was proposed, in a new program styled after California's Project Homekey. Project Turnkey is expected to fund 500 units in five counties impacted by forest fires using general fund money.

9. In [Texas](#), local organization Building and Strengthening Tenant Action (BASTA) has been doing targeted outreach to tenants living in buildings where landlords have filed evictions over the past several months. Over the course of two weeks they placed 10,000 signs on tenants' door handles informing them about resources for learning about their rights.
10. [Oakland, CA](#) City Council unanimously approved a new policy that restricts where people experiencing homelessness can set up tents. Notably, the map excludes most of the city, including sites adjacent to parks, schools and homes. The policy also states that individuals will not be arrested for setting up camps in these sites.
11. The looming eviction crisis is prompting housing advocates across the country to call for a [Right to Counsel](#). New York City's successful program has resulted in a 40% decline in evictions.
12. A new study illustrates the impact of moving houseless people into hotel rooms early in the pandemic, in [King County](#).

National Low-Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC) weekly call and updates (October 19)

Paul Kealey, CEO, NLIHC: Negotiations over a new COVID bill are in their final hours. There are a number of significant policy differences. McConnell announced the Senate would vote on a targeted \$500 billion relief package with no funding for emergency rental assistance or homeless services.

Shawnell Willer, CoC Coordinator, North Dakota Housing Finance Agency: North Dakota is not doing well right now with COVID. A couple of challenges we face: back in March we rolled out hotel sheltering for people experiencing homelessness who tested positive or were awaiting test results. One of the biggest challenges was finding hotels to take this on. Security was provided at each hotel and meals were delivered. In July the state stopped the management of this program and passed it to local governments. FEMA was still funding 75% but the localities had to cover the rest. The other challenge was that a couple of shelters had closed because they were a winter shelter or due to social distancing guidelines. With no other shelters individuals were left on their own. One shelter had reopened since that time but they're currently full. The other shelter is opening November 1. Another one that closed has not reopened and is not sure it will. So that leaves many individuals on their own. On the CoC level we put a temporary prioritization policy in place that allowed providers to bypass the prioritization guidelines in the coordinated entry system, to get people into housing ASAP.

Our positive numbers for people experiencing homelessness have been pretty low, with 60 positive tests across the state (not including domestic violence shelters). I was able to get some numbers from DHS, and over 200 people used the hotel shelters. Considering the number of cases in the state, it's significantly low (among the homeless population). One other thing the state did was implement an emergency rent bridge for renters with lost income due to COVID and income limits (at or below 60% of Area Median Income or AMI). As of today, we have processed 3,590 applications and of those 931 households have received one or more payments, and over 300 have

been denied. The rest are pending. This money will continue with the CARES funding, and then it will transition to CDBG emergency funds at the beginning of the year.

Q: Many people are not being served by the emergency rent bridge, correct?

A: Yes there are a couple of reasons, one of which is that they have to meet that income level. Another is individuals who haven't followed up. Also, the landlords have to sign up as a recipient, so if they don't sign up the state can't make that payment. I'm not sure how they're handling that process, but they're working through it.

Gladys Cook, Resilience and Recovery Director and Tech Advisor, Florida Housing Coalition:

I'm going to give you an update on Hurricane Sally. It had very high rain and was slow moving so it dropped a lot of rain on the Pensacola area. FEMA approved assistance for five counties. So far there have been 24,000 registrations that have been approved for individual assistance. Pensacola is home to a naval air station and the bridge broke, so now people have very long commutes to and from the station. Right now we have FEMA disaster case management happening in adjacent counties from the last hurricane, and they've reached out to the Pensacola area. The most spectacular case of damage is a HUD Section 8 property that's privately owned, with about 200 units. The entire ground floor is uninhabitable, so over 70 families have been displaced. This is a good lesson about what happens when you keep building on the floodplain. The Escambia County Long Term Recovery Team formed recently to address the recovery effort in the area.

Eric Shupin, Director of Public Policy, Citizens' Housing and Planning Association:

We're a statewide housing advocacy group in Massachusetts. Our eviction moratorium—which was one of the strongest in the nation—just recently ended. We fought to extend it, but the governor chose not to extend it. Leading up to the expiration, advocates had focused on securing resources for eviction prevention, and on efforts around new legislation to extend protections. For resources, the governor announced [an eviction diversion initiative of \\$171 million](#) from various state and federal COVID funds. First he announced that \$100 million would be allocated for emergency rental assistance. It provides up to \$10,000 in assistance per household for six months, or if there are children it would be through June. It also includes \$49 million for Rapid Rehousing (RRH), and \$12 million in legal assistance for low-income households facing eviction. It's still not enough money, and we need congress to act. We need \$40 million per month. The second thing is that the state moratorium provided stronger protections than the federal one, so we're asking what that means moving forward. Before COVID there were 10,000 eviction cases pending. With the ending of the state moratorium all those cases can move forward.

Advocates have been focused on passing statutory protections like extending the state moratorium for at least another year, and providing resources for landlords against foreclosure. The question is what the state legislature is going to do now. We're still waiting to pass the state budget and are hopeful they will address this soon, and the governor will make good on his promises for these resources. It's going to take weeks to get these programs up and running and meanwhile court cases are proceeding. We're going to be watching how many evictions are filed. An estimate is

upwards of [60,000 evictions](#) filed through the end of this year. We're also looking at how quickly we go through these resources.

Q: How is the rental assistance being targeted?

A: It's being targeted at households making 50% or less AMI. The other thing is that the household must be financially impacted by COVID. In MA we have other resources for assistance, and that reaches up to 80% AMI, but that won't provide \$10,000 like the new initiative.

Q: Where does the \$40 million per month come from?

A: A report by a regional planning agency here in the state. They provide assistance to municipalities about planning and other aspects.

Q: What about availability of legal assistance, and the timeline for getting these resources versus eviction timelines?

A: Yes we absolutely need to work on processing time for these applications. The due process protections and the timing may not always line up, which is why there's been a call for additional statutory protections.

Sarah Hunter, Managing Director, Center for Housing Justice, National Innovation Service:

We just released some new documents as part of the [Framework For An Equitable COVID-19 Response](#). We convened a group of people with lived experience with homelessness and housing instability to have discussions about their experiences and suggestions for doing things differently. We had a series of focus groups with marginalized communities and disaggregated their priorities by group (e.g. race, ethnicity, formerly incarcerated, living with disabilities). Top priorities and action across all the groups are:

1. Implement a crisis response that ends the use of large congregate shelters, and creates dignity-based, safe, temporary crisis options as a bridge to long-term housing.
2. Build, support, and fund dignity-based services led by the communities most impacted.
3. Develop affordable housing in the most impacted communities and target housing and rental assistance to those most impacted by structural inequality.
4. Divest from policing in the homelessness response system and invest a portion of the funds in housing and services to communities most impacted by police brutality.

Q: Were there any surprising differences between the different groups?

A: The feeling that the systems aren't organized to focus on us, and it feels like they're for someone else was consistent. That was a theme across everything that folks said. I think for some groups there was articulation of some things that are currently working well, but for other groups not so much.

Q: Do you have organizing strategies and tactics to build a stronger grassroots movement?

A: That wasn't something that came out of this process. I can say broadly that we are making intentional efforts to have conversations with simple fact finding. What these documents don't do is

hedge what people recommended into easy things to do . These are difficult things to accomplish and I think (not proposing to have all the answers) gives it integrity. If you can create an environment where there is trust and credibility, the potential for organizing these fundamental shifts (e.g. divesting from police) to take root is greater.

Q: What was the geographical variation?

A: We put together a network of city, county and state groups across the country and they then recruited people with lived experience. So there's a good geographic representation.

[Read more about the research.](#)

Andrew Aurand & Rebecca Yae, NLIHC:

Aurand: The Coalition started tracking emergency rental assistance programs in late spring of 2020. We continue to track them. We learn of them through a variety of sources who keep us alerted to the program. Once we learn about a program we collect as much information as we can about them. To date we've identified over 400 of these programs, and [you can visit our website](#) to see the map. We're going to release a research note later this week to talk about some of these programs and what we've learned. We update this database regularly and will update this week's report as well. This database and tracking is one piece of work we're doing, but we're also partnering with the Housing Initiative of the University of Pennsylvania to learn about the challenges of implementing these programs from the administrators.

Yae: As of October we were tracking 414 programs and \$3.64 billion. A lot of these funds come from emergency federal funding, especially the CARES Act, which accounts for 77% of total funding. Most programs ask households to demonstrate COVID-related hardship, income eligibility, and proof of residency. For programs using AMI as part of their eligibility, only 3% of them target extremely low-income households making 30% of AMI or less. The majority (65%) of funding goes to people making up to 80% of AMI. Funding for programs is totally inadequate, and 30% of all programs are already closed. Over half of all these programs used first-come first-served rather than being able to support all qualified applicants. Also, 82% of programs are short term. We're doing other research related to rental assistance. We've found the program administrators have been able to adapt and be flexible, but must navigate difficult trade-offs. Intake and administrative capacity is an issue, as is documentation requirements and auditing risks. We're also curious about concessions to protect tenants, and the correlation with landlord participation. For example, the requirement that a landlord not raise the rent for a certain period in exchange for receiving the relief funding. When the requirements are more stringent for landlords, they are deterred from participating, especially in higher rent areas.