



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 6, 2021

Sonoma County Emergency Rental Assistance Program to launch on April 19

SANTA ROSA, CA – The County of Sonoma will begin providing support to households impacted by COVID-19 through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) starting on April 19. The program will provide payment assistance for tenants who are behind on rent and utilities. ERAP additionally provides options for landlords to participate and receive financial assistance. This program is open to all County residents, regardless of immigration status, who are renters or landlords requiring rental assistance.

Signed into law by Governor Gavin Newsom on Jan. 29, 2021, California has appropriated \$1.5 billion of federal funds for the State Rental Assistance Program. The program extends key tenant and property owner protection provisions, including extending the eviction moratorium to June 30, 2021. Consumer protections for property owners whose requests for mortgage forbearance were denied will also be extended to Sept. 1, 2021. It will also provide new protections for tenants impacted by COVID-19, including debt treatment and civil procedures.

The Board of Supervisors gave final approval for the ERAP program on Tuesday by authorizing the acceptance of \$17.5 million in state Block Grant funds to self-administer the ERAP to assist households unable to pay rents. This funding will be combined with a Federal allocation of \$14.7 million for a total of \$32.2 million to be administered countywide. The Board also directed the CDC to contract with Legal Aid of Sonoma County to provide counsel services at no cost to tenants for \$712,000 annually.

“The vaccine rollout has allowed us to finally see a light at the end of the tunnel, but we cannot ignore the financial strain it has placed on residents,” said Lynda Hopkins, Chair of the Board of Supervisors. “This relief is a needed resource that will help alleviate stacks of unpaid rental or utility bills, for our most vulnerable populations.”

To be eligible for the program, renters have to be at or below 80 percent of the [Area Median Income \(AMI\)](#) with prioritization for those under 50 percent AMI. Tenants who apply must have a declaration of financial hardship directly or indirectly related to COVID-19 and have an obligation to pay rent. Individuals who have qualified for unemployment benefits, or are at risk of experiencing housing instability may also qualify for rental assistance under ERAP.

Assistance can be used to pay unpaid rent or utilities including power, water, gas, and Internet services. Financial assistance for arrears can be from April 2020 to March 2021, up to 12 months. The assistance will only be provided for three months after which individuals will need to apply again. The program will prioritize the payment of rent and utility that are past due.

“COVID-19 has been a burden on Sonoma County residents, with a growing number of unpaid rent and utility bills,” said Assistant Director Tina Rivera of Community Development Commission. “This program will serve individuals and families countywide. There is no wrong door. Any household can apply for assistance to get back on their feet and look forward to 2021 instead of being haunted by 2020.”

Landlords have the option to accept or decline participation in the program. Landlords who accept participation in the program will be compensated for 80 percent of an eligible household’s rental debt accumulated from April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021. Under this program, if the landlord agrees to accept the 80 percent payment as payment in full of the rental debt owed by the tenant, the landlord forgives the remaining 20 percent of the debt. In this case, the rental arrears, or debt, will be paid directly to the landlord. If a landlord declines to participate in the program, the County can compensate 25 percent of the eligible household’s monthly rental arrears accumulated from April 2020 to March 2021. In this situation, payment of rental arrears can be paid directly to the tenant.

A tenant or a landlord can apply on a tenant’s behalf for ERAP services. The household must certify that the ERAP assistance requested does not duplicate any other assistance, including federal, state, or local assistance provided for the same costs. Duplication of assistance is subject to County verification. Only one application per residence will be permitted. Applicants can apply starting April 19 on [SoCoEmergency.org](https://www.socoemergency.org), by calling 2-1-1 for an operator to assist in English and Spanish or visiting the online [page](#) to see a list of community based organization providers who can assist in applying for rental assistance.

Individuals may select for the application to be printed and mailed to their home address. Printed applications can be uploaded to the website or can be mailed directly to the rental assistance program.

Legal assistance will also be available for tenants in the program. Legal Aid of Sonoma County will be providing services on behalf of the County, and more information can be found at their webpage for tenant resources at <https://legalaidsc.org/tenant-resources/>.

ERAP continues Sonoma County's support of individuals who have been most impacted by COVID-19. In February, the Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted two urgency ordinances to strengthen protections on evictions and sick leave during the pandemic. For more information, including how to apply, income eligibility, full list of providers, and application status please visit SoCoEmergency.org or call 2-1-1.

###

Contact Information:

Gilbert Martinez

publicaffairs@sonoma-county.org

575 Administration Drive, Suite 104A

Santa Rosa, CA 95403

209-649-7393