



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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STATE PROGRAM CONTINUES AIDING FAYETTE COUNTY RESIDENTS

Uniontown, PA – As the federal eviction moratorium deadline looms, the Fayette County Community Action Agency is still offering financial relief for eligible citizens.

In March, Pennsylvania Gov. Tom Wolf introduced the Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), which uses federal funds allocated through the U.S. Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 for distribution to families facing risk of eviction or loss of utility service as a result of hardships during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

Fayette County received an \$8.5 million ERAP grant to directly assist its citizens, with the Community Action Agency, Fayette County Board of Commissioners and Fayette County Housing Authority working in partnership to administer the funds.

As of Friday, July 16, Community Action had received nearly 1,000 applications and processed nearly 300 approvals, awarding nearly \$1 million in funding to local families. More than 500 applications are still being processed.

Community Action Agency Director of Customer Service Rita Masi said the program is running smoothly but has picked up considerably, with an average of 13 new applications now being submitted daily.

“The eviction moratorium is scheduled to expire at the end of July, so our residents need to get their applications in if they’re behind on rent,” Masi said. “Everything is so time sensitive, so if someone wants to guarantee receipt of funds, we need to ensure they have a complete application - not just the online portion, but all the documents we need to go with it.”

Community Action Agency Project Manager Heather Pirl said Community Action’s primary goal is to keep people in their homes and prevent potential homelessness.

“We’ve been able to help so many so far, and that’s been amazing, but we know there are still others out there that haven’t applied,” Pirl said. “Our fear is that, as July 31 gets closer, people will realize the seriousness of getting that rent caught up and we’ll be flooded with applications all at once. There’s also the potential for an increase in people calling to say they’re homeless because they’ve already been evicted, so we want to avoid that all together.”

The state legislature recently extended ERAP through Sept. 30, 2022, in its most recent budget session - a move Masi said her office is grateful for.

“The project being extended is phenomenal, but - I hate to say it - the early bird gets the worm. We’ve already processed hundreds of applications, and folks need to know assistance is limited,” Masi said. “It’s about reaching the people we’re missing. Lots of people know about us, but there are still so many that don’t, and we’re really trying to get the word out to them.”

“We’re happy it was extended, so we’ll continue to process applications as we receive them and hope we can reach as many folks in need as possible,” Pirl said.

Some key things to remember when applying for ERAP are:

- Funding can be used for both outstanding rent and utility bills. Households may be eligible for up to 12 months of assistance to cover past-due or future rental and/or utility payments.
- The program is only available for renters at this time. The state is slated to launch a program for homeowners this September.
- Residents can begin the application process on the state’s website, www.compass.state.pa.us.
- Landlords can contact Community Action on behalf of their tenants, but those tenants must be willing to participate and currently occupy the rental unit.
- Community Action staff members are striving to contact all those who submit applications within one business day to advance the process quickly.
- Applicants should provide an accurate email and phone number at the time of submission.
- Landlords do not have to agree to participate in the program for tenants to receive assistance.

Fayette County Commissioner Chairman Dave Lohr said tenants and landlords alike have been impacted by the pandemic, and ERAP is making a difference in helping both sides.

“It is a means of ensuring that tenants do not fall further behind and that landlords are able to pay their bills. Thanks to the hard work of the excellent team at Community Action, hundreds of applications have been approved to date, with hundreds more in progress,” Lohr said. “With the eviction moratorium set to expire, I encourage any tenant who is behind in rent or utilities to contact Community Action immediately.”

Commissioner Vince Vicites said Community Action has done an excellent job overseeing the ERAP funding distribution.

“By working cooperatively with the Fayette County Housing Authority, Community Action has expanded the outreach at the grassroots level to further extend the distribution of these funds to the community,” Vicites said. “It was a necessary partnership that has been extremely successful, and both offices are to be commended for their dedication to helping our Fayette County residents in need.”

Commissioner Scott Dunn said the Community Action team is outstanding at providing - not only ERAP funds - but all services to our citizens.

“They took on the task of administering the Emergency Rental Assistance Program with open arms and have already processed countless applications. Substantial funding has been approved to assist renters and landlords who would otherwise be scrimping and scrambling to avoid eviction,” Dunn said. “It’s overwhelming to think about, and much gratitude goes out to everyone at Community Action.”

For more information about ERAP, including a full list of requirements, visit www.dhs.pa.gov or contact the Fayette County Community Action Agency at 724-437-6050.

To learn more about Fayette County, visit www.FayetteCountyPA.org.

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