

Proposal for a Collaborative Effort to Maximize Access to Emergency Rental Assistance

Vermont Legal Aid, CVOEO, AALV and USCRI propose working together to ensure that as many eligible Vermont families and individuals as possible have access to the benefits of the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program to retain or acquire housing that can be maintained for the long term.

This collaboration between four independent organizations will build on the knowledge and experience gained providing housing-related services under the 2020 Rental Housing Stability Program funded by the CARES Act. While that program was successful in helping thousands of Vermonters retain their housing, we have identified ways in which the programs and services could be better targeted to try to reach vulnerable communities that were not adequately served by RHSP, such as people of color, individuals with refugee and immigrant backgrounds, and those living in mobile homes. The four Programs will coordinate on the following activities, which are further described in the attachments:

OUTREACH

All the organizations will target new resources to get the word out about the benefits available under the ERA. These will include,

- Increasing our efforts to maximize the number of Vermonters who learn of the ERA program, targeting the hard-to-reach communities mentioned above as well as victims of violence, and those living in sober homes or leaving prison.
- Increasing the number of staff members in community organizations who are trained on the ERA.
- Increasing Community Ambassador staffing for the statewide hotline serving people with limited English proficiency, providing services to community members who speak Somali, Mai-Mai, Arabic, French, Swahili, Nepali, and Spanish.

INTERPRETATION AND TRANSLATION

- Provide statewide specialized interpretation services and application assistance.
- Provide translations of essential documents, as needed.

APPLICATION SUPPORT

- Work with tenants to prepare applications and help obtain and assemble the necessary documentation to submit with the application.
- Identify and address any related support service needs that a household may require to fully comply with program requirements.
- Take appropriate action to address housing barriers and provide referrals to other programs.

LEGAL SERVICES

- Contact every tenant-defendant with a current eviction case, seeking to help them apply and receive rental assistance and dismissal of the court action.
- Work with currently homeless Vermonters and those in shelters and motels, to resolve benefit eligibility issues so that they can secure permanent housing.
- Where possible, represent tenants in substandard housing to access ERA funding to bring units up to rental housing standards.

- Provide training to community organizations on the ERA program and related housing laws.