



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: HOUSING

File #: 20-638

Board Meeting Date: 9/15/2020

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors
From: Raymond Hodges, Director, Department of Housing
Subject: COVID-19 Housing Impact Program - Legal Services, Education and Outreach for Tenants and Residential Rental Property Owners

RECOMMENDATION:

Accept this informational report on the status of the Legal Services, Education and Outreach component of County's COVID-19 Housing Impact Program.

BACKGROUND:

On August 4, 2020, the San Mateo County Board of Supervisors adopted Resolution No. 077641, authorizing the County Manager and his designees to identify existing additional programs and develop and implement new programs for tenants and residential rental property owners adversely impacted by COVID-19 or the government response to COVID-19, including but not limited to incentive programs for landlords and tenants to compromise on back rent, legal services, information and referral services and educational programs. In addition, through this Resolution, the Board authorized the County Manager and his designees to negotiate and execute appropriate agreements on behalf of the County for the implementation and/or funding of such programs, directing the County Manager or his designees to present on these programs to the Board at its meeting of September 15, 2020 and authorizing and directing the allocation and distribution of up to \$1,000,000 in CARES Act, Measure K or other funds as determined by the County Manager towards these programs.

DISCUSSION:

Since August 4, 2020, the Department of Housing (DOH) staff, in consultation with several local non-profit legal services providers, has developed the following strategies to address the impacts of COVID-19, or government response to COVID 19 on tenants and residential rental property owners:

- Expand services/programs provided through existing contracts with Legal Aid of SMC, Community Legal Services of East Palo Alto (CLSEPA) and Project Sentinel including:
 - One-on-one legal representation, as well as online legal clinics to assist tenants in responding to unlawful detainer actions during ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

- Legal assistance to tenants to prevent eviction based on rent-debt accrued due to COVID-19 and navigate a multitude of local, state and federal regulations to determine their legal rights and obligations.
- Settlement fund for tenants engaged in negotiations with residential rental property owners to informally resolve unlawful detainer actions.
- Expand mediation and counseling services, mortgage counseling for property owners, and outreach and education efforts provided by Project Sentinel.
 - Rapid intervention through dispute resolution services: mediation and telephone conciliation to resolve landlord-tenant issues, including those around deferred rental payments due to COVID-19;
 - Negotiated rent reduction and repayment plans;
 - Tenant referrals to rental assistance;
 - Additional targeted outreach and education, including webinars and other educational opportunities to inform tenants and residential rental property owners about legal developments and resource opportunities; and
 - Mortgage counseling and assistance for small residential real property owners.
- Increase staffing capacity of Legal Aid of SMC, CLSEPA and Project Sentinel to respond to the increased need/demand for these services.
- Implement technology improvements for Legal Aid of SMC, CLSEPA and Project Sentinel to expedite onboarding of tenants and landlords in need of assistance, collecting and processing documentation required to provide needed assistance, and provide counseling, support and/or mediation including:
 - Develop a single, centralized, on-line application for legal assistance and rental assistance.
 - Provide user arrangements with publicly available office equipment and/or set up publicly available document stations to enable clients who have little or no access to technology to access services and provide relevant documents required to receive services.
 - Secure and maintain ongoing hosting of cell phone micro-app, with legal confidentiality protections, for legal services requests, registration and messaging.
 - Create a registry of Wi-Fi Boost locations with sufficient bandwidth to support video conferencing.
- Establish an ongoing outreach and education program in collaboration with community partners to provide residents of San Mateo County with information and resources regarding the legal and financial implications of federal, state and local laws, ordinances and regulations enacted to respond to the impacts that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on tenants and residential rental property owners.

Legal Aid of SMC, CLSESPA and Project Sentinel have received prior funding from the County and have experience offering comparable services to clients throughout San Mateo County. Prior County funding will be sufficient to provide ongoing services in the near-term, however, the new funding will allow these organizations to expand capacity and increase flexibility so they can serve more clients as the need and demand for these services is expected to increase in the coming months due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact associated with accepting this informational report.