



County of San Mateo

Inter-Departmental Correspondence

Department: HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY

File #: 21-316

Board Meeting Date: 4/20/2021

Special Notice / Hearing: None
Vote Required: Majority

To: Honorable Board of Supervisors

From: Ken Cole, Director, Human Services Agency

Subject: Funding for Additional Community-Based Outreach and Application Assistance for the Emergency Rental Assistance Program

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt a resolution authorizing the allocation of \$631,000 to Samaritan House, operating as the fiscal agent for the Core Service Agencies, to provide community outreach and applicant assistance for the State Emergency Rental Assistance Program.

BACKGROUND:

The economic impacts of the pandemic have caused financial hardships for many San Mateo County residents, and those most affected have often not been able to pay their rent. Over the past year, the eight Core Service Agencies have distributed over \$11,000,000 in rental and utility assistance to 4,743 households through the County Emergency Financial Assistance Program. While this funding has helped many households, significant need for rental and utility assistance remains.

Two recently adopted pieces of legislation, the Federal Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2021 and State Senate Bill (SB) 91, have appropriated significant funding for rental assistance, utility assistance and assistance with other expenses related to housing incurred, directly or indirectly, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the Federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program (Federal ERAP) established under the Federal Consolidate Appropriations Act of 2021, San Mateo County received a direct allocation of \$22,791,546. The County's share of State Emergency Rental Assistance Program (State ERAP) funding (authorized under SB 91) is \$24,529,226.48.

Pursuant to SB 91, on February 9, 2021, the Board of Supervisors authorized the California Department of Housing and Community Development (HCD) to administer, on behalf of the County, the County's share of State ERAP funding as well as the direct allocation the County received under the Federal ERAP as rental assistance, utility assistance and assistance with other permissible related housing expenses to eligible County residents.

To be eligible for this assistance, a household must have a member who qualified for unemployment benefits or experienced a financial hardship related to COVID-19, demonstrate being at risk of

housing instability or homelessness, and have a household income below 80% of the Area Median Income (AMI). In addition, the State ERAP guidelines prioritize funds to the following groups in the following order: (1) households with incomes of less than fifty percent (50%) of AMI; (2) residents of communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19; (3) all other eligible households with incomes less than eighty percent (80%) of AMI.

The State ERAP also provides that participating property owners receive eighty percent (80%) of unpaid rent owed by qualifying tenants accrued from April 1, 2020 through March 31, 2021. By accepting the ERAP funds, property owners agree to credit 100% of the rental arrears owed by their tenant for the award period.

To administer the State ERAP, HCD contracted with Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a national nonprofit community development financial institution. To provide community-based outreach and client support, LISC is partnering with local agencies in each county that has opted to have the State administer the county's share of State ERAP funding on the county's behalf. In San Mateo County, Samaritan House (on behalf of the eight Core Service Agencies), Project Sentinel, Nuestra Casa, Bay Area Community Services, and International Rescue Committee, Inc. are the LISC partner agencies. Based on the demographics in the County, many applicants may require application assistance due to language barriers, understanding the submission requirements, technology assistance, or uploading documents into the State's application portal.

Each LISC partner agency is receiving \$125,000. With these funds, LISC partner agencies will promote ERAP and assist residents with the multi-page on-line application that requires applicants to scan and submit supporting documents. Although grants of \$125,000 were requested for each of eight Core Service Agencies, the State only approved one allocation of \$125,000 to Samaritan House as the fiscal agent for all the Core Service Agencies. Human Services Agency staff appealed this decision and requested \$125,000 for each agency, but the appeal was denied.

DISCUSSION:

The Core Service Agencies provide front-line safety net services in San Mateo County. Each of the eight agencies supports a unique community and has strong and trusted relationships with their community members. The LISC allocation of \$125,000 for all eight agencies is inadequate to provide the support that our most vulnerable residents will need to successfully complete a State ERAP application. The Core Service Agencies developed an outreach and assistance plan for State ERAP with a budget of \$1,150,000. The plan includes additional time-limited staff to provide hands-on support in appropriate languages for State ERAP applicants.

In addition to the \$125,000 in LISC funding, Samaritan House was awarded \$394,000 in SMC Strong funds from the Silicon Valley Community Foundation (SVCF) to support State ERAP outreach and client assistance by all the Core Service Agencies. The LISC and SVCF funding together total \$519,000, which leaves \$631,000 of the outreach and assistance plan budget unfunded.

To ensure that enough resources are available, it is recommended that the Board approve an allocation of \$631,000 to Samaritan House, operating as the fiscal agent for the Core Service Agencies, for ERAP outreach and client support. These funds will be reimbursed to the Core Service Agencies through Samaritan House based on actual expenses. If less support is needed for the State ERAP, then the total expenditure may be less than \$631,000.

On February 9, 2021, the Board authorized and directed the County Manager, or designee(s), acting in consultation with the County Counsel, to negotiate and execute, on behalf of the County,

appropriate agreements with the County's Core Service Agencies, other local non-profit organizations and/or other entities for the provision of technical assistance, education and outreach, and other services to facilitate HCD's administration and disbursement of emergency rental assistance on behalf of eligible households in the County under the State ERAP. Upon the Board's approval of the proposed funding allocation, the County Manager, or designee, on behalf of the County, will negotiate and execute a contract with Samaritan House, as the fiscal agent for the Core Service Agencies, in a total amount not to exceed \$631,000 for continued support of State ERAP outreach and client assistance.

County Counsel has reviewed and approved the resolution as to form.

FISCAL IMPACT:

The \$631,000 in funding to Samaritan House will be initially funded with County General Fund monies, subject to the application of and potential reimbursement from state and/or federal funds that may be made available in connection with the County's response to the COVID-19 pandemic.