



## Toledo rental assistance program to now accept public housing applicants



BROOKS SUTHERLAND AND SARAH ELMS  
The Blade

JUL 22, 2020

5:31 PM

Amid pressure from local housing activists, the city has agreed to tweak its rental assistance program application requirements to allow renters who live in public housing the opportunity to apply for the emergency funding.

Mayor Wade Kapszukiewicz announced the program, which is committing \$2 million in federal coronavirus aid, in late May as a way to provide emergency assistance to support financially vulnerable populations amid the ongoing coronavirus pandemic. The move was met with wide praise from city leaders and housing officials. But the ineligibility of individuals who receive public housing to apply was viewed by activists as a major barrier to

ensuring housing stability throughout the city during uncertain financial times.

Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority CEO Joaquin Cintron Vega called news of the city's adjustment to the application process a "win for the city."

"At the end of the day, it is about providing help to the poorest of the poor," Mr. Vega said over the phone Tuesday. "That is the statement of the program. So, our request always has been, 'If we are dealing with these specific populations why not make that rental assistance available to them?' The city, on a very positive note, understood that, and they agreed to move forward."

Mr. Vega said his agency and the city came to the agreement after some "meaningful and productive discussions." Those discussions prompted Rosalyn Clemens, who leads the city's department of neighborhoods, to reconsider the impacts LMHA has been facing during the pandemic and consider the growing needs of renters in public housing.

The assistance program didn't initially include renters in public housing because there was concern that it would overlap with funding from the CARES Act intended to help LMHA recoup its loss of rental income during the pandemic, Ms. Clemens said.

But LMHA is reporting tenants owe nearly \$300,000 in rent, a number that has been greatly exacerbated by the pandemic, Mr. Vega confirmed. Ms. Clemens said local officials called the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development and worked out a way to make tenants eligible for the aid.

Tenants who receive any government housing subsidy cannot be evicted for non-payment of rent during a moratorium imposed by the federal CARES Act that expires on July 27.

To qualify for the city's assistance, a renter must live in Toledo and be able to demonstrate a loss of employment or loss of income because of the coronavirus. LMHA must also adjust a tenant's rent amount in accordance with their new income level.

The city's assistance program can cover up to three months of rent and fees beginning in April. The city will cover April's rent at the pre-coronavirus level, but will only provide rent for a second and third month once the housing authority properly adjusts the rental fee based on the tenant's loss of income, Ms. Clemens said.

Ms. Clemens is hopeful expanding the rental assistance program to public housing units will help both housing agencies and the tenants.

"It's a tool to help. It will save some people, really, from going into eviction or homelessness," she said.

The assistance is capped at \$2,500 per person and the city has only allocated about \$500,000 so far, Ms. Clemens said.

Housing activists such as Reem Subei, an attorney with Advocates for Basic Legal Equality, say they're working diligently to ensure the money set aside for the program reaches individuals truly in dire financial need.

"We know that the program is not being accessed as much as it should be," she said. "Because there is money that continues to not be fully spent in a city that has high needs for rental assistance. ...We know there are barriers and we know that the program can be advertised better and should be made more accessible."

NeighborWorks Toledo and Lutheran Social Services of Northwest Ohio are managing the program and as of Tuesday received 705 applications, Ms. Clemens said. Of those, 402 were incomplete.



MENU



Ms. Clemens said officials are calling the people who turned in applications with missing information to ensure they can take advantage of the much-needed aid. She acknowledged there are a lot of pieces to the application but said they are all essential to ensure the money is going to those experiencing a coronavirus-related hardship.

Alicia Kingston, a staff attorney for Legal Aid of Western Ohio, said the change, which allows individuals who receive public housing to apply for funding is “a really great first step,” but hopes the city will “go further” and include individuals with vouchers, often called section 8, who are currently ineligible to apply for the rental assistance program.

“I think that there is still a ways to go,” Ms. Kingston said. “But this is a really good step to making sure our most vulnerable have protections in place, especially with the CARES Act expiring.”