



COVID-19 Harris County Housing Stability Task Force

December 4, 2020



LISC
HOUSTON

[1] Responding to Requests from City & County Leadership	[2] Work Groups: Rental Assistance, Access to Justice	[3] Develop shared knowledge base of TF members
<p>National Scan on Policies: Will work to convene a policy response group in the following weeks to prioritize potential policy recommendations from the Task Force.</p>	<p>Rental Assistance WG: Had the last meeting yesterday to discuss group comments and feedback on recommendations for Rent & Direct Assistance programs.</p>	<p>Eviction Tracker: January Advisors shares bi-weekly Updates on Eviction filings And Tenant Representation rates</p>
	<p>Access to Justice WG: Wrapped up recommendations & gathered feedback from the group on overall recommendations to the County around upstream programmatic strategies.</p>	<p>Rental and Direct Assistance Updates: Baker Ripley & Catholic Charities share updates on their active Rent & Direct Assistance Programs</p>
	<p>Landlord & Property Stabilization WG: Gathering preliminary recommendations and will continue to workshop potential projects and initiatives to support small and medium sized landlords during the COVID-19 crisis.</p>	<p>Bi-Weekly Presentations: Local and National practitioners and subject matter experts present on diverse topics related to the Housing Instability crisis during COVID-19.</p>

HSTF Rental Assistance WG Recommendations

1. Prioritize Direct Assistance Programs early in the crisis.

- In order to reach the most vulnerable residents and increase effectiveness of funding allocation, the Work Group recommends the City and the County to consider Direct Financial Assistance Programs over Rent Assistance Programs.
- The preference is to have both types of assistance available to cover a wider range of residents' needs.

2. Align City & County Rent, Utility and Direct Assistance

- Establish clear eligibility requirements.
- Define priority populations by considering economic, demographic, and geographic factors.
- Include requirements for tenant and landlords that promote long term housing stability.

3. Communicate effectively with all stakeholders

- Communicate a clear message about the available programs and use multiple venues to get the word out.
- Prioritize user experience and their needs and preferences.

HSTF Rental Assistance WG Recommendations

4. **Build Local Capacity for Rent Assistance Efforts beyond emergencies and post-disaster contexts.**

- Build the capacity of neighborhood-based programs, local CBOs, and local governmental departments to improve housing services
- Build upon existing/ongoing direct assistance infrastructure (governmental and non-governmental) to ensure an effective implementation strategy.
- Develop innovative methods and systems to distribute rent and direct financial assistance.
- Consider coordination with other social, financial, legal and housing assistance organizations to leverage the rental assistance

5. **Commit to a rigorous, independent evaluation of the rental assistance programs to determine the impact and outcomes achieved.**

- The results of this evaluation should be made widely available to the public and be used to inform improvements in future rental and direct assistance program efforts.
- Host roundtables where the stakeholders review the results of the independent evaluation with public sector representatives, service providers, and recipients.

HSTF Access to Justice WG Recommendations

1. Focus on Early Dispute Resolution & Tenant-Landlord Mediation:

- The work group recommends two types of interventions in tenant-landlord disputes: (1) Early Dispute Resolution upstream of a potential eviction being filed, (2) Tenant-Landlord Mediation at the Courts before a scheduled eviction hearing.
- The Work Group recommends Harris County allocates funding towards emergency financial assistance and legal assistance to support mediation efforts or to appeal court determinations.
- Increase awareness of the benefits of tenant-landlord mediation through public education.

2. Provide Tenant Education and Reporting through the Centralized Web- Resource for Tenant Assistance

- Prioritize the development of a web-based resource for all renter assistance information. This web-resource should be at minimum: coordinated and centralized, accessible across multiple languages representative of local demographics, mobile friendly, and effective in meeting user needs.
- Start the development of the Web-Resource through a proof of concept/pilot project. Using a User Centered Design approach.
- Identify a long-term owner and manager of this web-resource that is a neutral actor open and committed to the engagement of a cross-sector stakeholders and user representatives that can provide the necessary insights on content, navigation of the tool and usage to make it successful.

HSTF Access to Justice WG Recommendations

3. Convene a rapid-response cross-sector group to coordinate outreach efforts and distribute Urgent and Essential Information, such as the CDC order to halt evictions due to non-payment and information about available assistance.

4. Additional Recommendations:

- Develop legislation and programs that add protections to tenants at risk, including protections to immigrant status families.
- Increase access to information, legal services and technology to low and very low income renters.
- Include in the legal Citation easy to understand bilingual or multilingual instructions on how to obtain free legal assistance for an eviction hearing through the Harris County Eviction Defense Coalition.
- encourage local JPs to utilize attorney of the day programs available through the Harris County Eviction Defense Coalition.

HSTF Landlord and Property Stabilization WG

Preliminary Recommendations

- The work group is developing recommendations to address the needs of three types of landlords: (1) “the strategist” who cares about certainty of future income and cash flow, (2) “the novice” who doesn’t do much planning and lives too close to the edge, (3) “TBD” who isn’t extremely educated about the business and could end up giving up if money stops coming in.
- **For the Strategist:** Property tax credits / Property Tax Reductions or Delays, Emergency assistance grants, Assistance directed to property maintenance and repairs, Property Tax Relief, Low Interest/Interest Free debt or lines of credit, Payment Plans, guidance/support if property repairs are requested by city or county.
- **For the Novice:** Property Tax Credits/ Property Tax Reductions or Delays, Lines of Credit, Capacity Building, Technical Assistance and Trainings, Peer to Peer learning opportunities, Payment Plans for Property Tax, Financial support for maintenance and repairs
- **For the TBD:** Property Tax Credits/ Property Tax Reductions or Delays, Short-term relief, Small grants, Peer to Peer learning opportunities, Payment Plans for Property Tax, Financial support for maintenance and repairs

Next Steps:
**Follow up email next week with link
to WG recommendations
for Task Force review & approval.**

National Scan: How are other Jurisdictions addressing Housing Instability?

	Instability (Pre-Eviction)	Non-payment (At Risk of Eviction)	Eviction Proceedings	Rehousing (After Eviction)
Policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Housing Stability & Tenant Protection Act Immigrant Tenant Protection Law 			
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Receipt on Paid Rent Rent Control /Stabilization Ordinance 14 days notice to pay rent– 60 day notice to increase rent bill 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emergency Eviction Moratoriums/Utility Shut-offs Grace Period Ordinance Limit/Cap on Tenant Late Fees Ordinance (% of monthly rent or a max value) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clean Hands to bring eviction actions Just Cause Eviction Ordinance * Right to Counsel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban Eviction Blacklist Eviction Record Sealing Pro-bono legal representation Tenant Opportunity to Purchase Law Increase funding for Rental Housing Counseling
Programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Financial Education and coaching * Access to New job opportunities * Tenant-Landlord Education on Rights and Responsibilities * Rent Registry 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rental and Utility Assistance Unemployment Assistance Tenant-Landlord Mediation/Early Dispute Resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eviction Diversion Landlord Assistance / Property Stabilization Programs Court Navigation Tenant-Landlord Settlement Conferences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pro-bono legal representation Supplemental Shelter Allowance Residential Assistance for Families in Transition

**Regular Updates on:
housingstabilitytaskforce.org**