



House and Senate Lawmakers Announce Relief Plan for Rental Assistance Fund

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HARRISBURG – February 16, 2022 – Lawmakers from the state House and Senate held a news conference today to outline plans to restore Pennsylvania’s depleted Emergency Rental Assistance Program and help thousands whose incomes were affected by the pandemic.

State Senators Vincent Hughes, Art Haywood and Nikil Saval, along with Reps. Elizabeth Fiedler, Rick Krajewski and Sara Innamorato, were joined by housing experts from the state’s largest counties to discuss their legislation that will direct \$500 million into ERAP to provide relief for tens of thousands of renters and landlords whose applications were stalled when their counties ran out of funds.

“President Biden, Vice President Harris and Congressional Democrats made providing rental assistance to low- and middle- income families a top priority through two COVID-related bills; unfortunately, the need for assistance has far outpaced available funds,” said Hughes, Democratic Chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee. “Our proposal is tailored to get additional resources to those communities where the need is greatest and there is the greatest number of applications without funding.”

Philadelphia shut down applications for ERAP in the first week of January, estimating that more than 50,000 applications were still pending when funding ran out. Berks County shut down their program in 2021. Allegheny County is expecting to run out of funds with 30,000 applications pending.

"Housing is a human right and rental assistance is an emergency need for thousands of families across Pennsylvania," said Haywood. "This legislation will help our communities to recover from the devastating pandemic."

Parallel legislation introduced in the House and Senate would use \$500 million of the Commonwealth's remaining American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds to provide additional assistance for the program.

"During the pandemic, when so many of our social structures were buckling under prolonged hardship, emergency rental assistance was a tool to keep people in their homes, safe and sound," Saval said. "For the first time ever, we had the means to prevent poverty-based evictions. That counties have run out of rental assistance funds is proof of the immense and ongoing need. The pandemic isn't over, and we need to keep investing in the program with a proven record of saving lives by keeping people safely housed."

Rachel Mulbry, the Housing Programs Manager at Community Investment Group in Philadelphia, said the rental assistance program ramped up quickly during the pandemic and built an organization that brought national recognition for efficiency before the money ran out.

"We're really proud of the strong foundation we've built and we're ready to keep it going," she said.

Kyle Webster, the general counsel at Action Housing which runs the Allegheny County rental assistance program, said the program continues to receive hundreds of new applications every week.

"At the pace we're going, we're going to be denying thousands of people just because of a lack of funds," he said. "I talk to desperate, scared people who are facing real instability every day."

The Senate version of the legislation has been introduced as [Senate Bill 1059](#). Fiedler said she and House colleagues plan to introduce the House version.

"During an incredibly difficult time, the Emergency Rental Assistance Program has been an incredible success: preventing a tsunami of evictions over the last two years. Fully funding the program is an investment in the physical and mental health of our families and neighbors," she said. "These dollars will ensure that our neighbors keep a roof over their

head, that children can stay focused on school, and their parents can get to work. No applicant who filed for help should be turned away. Housing is a human right!"

"My district office has received calls every day throughout this pandemic from distressed constituents who have been laid off from their jobs, unable to find work. Now, in the midst of all this pretending to be normal, our struggling constituents, who haven't been able to receive a paycheck in months, are being told rent is due," said Krajewski. "During this public health crisis, our government has a responsibility to care for the wellbeing of our residents and to uphold housing as a human right. Investing \$500 million into the Emergency Rental Assistance Program is the way to do it." City Council member Helen Gym call it "unconscionable" for Pennsylvania to sit on the largest revenue surplus in its history while communities continue to struggle with the aftermath of the pandemic.

"We know bold policies can drastically reduce evictions and keep people housed — our diversion program and rent assistance made that a reality in Philadelphia," she said. "It's unconscionable for our state legislature to sit on billions of dollars in relief funds while so many of our communities struggle with the ongoing economic and public health crises. Let's be clear—these funds are part of a federal rescue plan intended to serve communities in crisis. I am grateful to have strong partners in our Philadelphia legislative delegation, and strongly support their work to deliver the rental assistance our communities desperately need and are rightfully owed."