



City of San Antonio

Agenda Memorandum

File Number:
{{item.tracking_number}}

Agenda Item Number: 3

Agenda Date: March 25, 2022

In Control: Planning and Community Development Committee

DEPARTMENT: Neighborhood and Housing Services

DEPARTMENT HEAD: Verónica R. Soto

COUNCIL DISTRICTS IMPACTED: Citywide

SUBJECT:

Briefing and possible action related to two proposed Ordinances accepting Emergency Rental Assistance 2 (ERA 2) Housing Stability Services grant funds from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) totaling \$6,729,404 and from the U.S. Department of the Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA1) Reallocated Funds (Round 2) for the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) and/or the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) totaling \$4,262,540.

SUMMARY:

The Neighborhood & Housing Services Department (NHSD) requests acceptance of two grant award funds from both agencies to support the departments' housing stability programs. The first grant is for \$6,729,404 in Emergency Rental Assistance 2 (ERA 2) dollars from the Texas Department of Housing & Community Affairs (TDHCA). The second grant is for \$4,262,540 in Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA 1) Request for Reallocated Funds (Round 2) from the U.S. Department of the Treasury (Treasury). In total, the City will receive \$10,991,944.

The TDHCA grant will be utilized to expand the Right to Counsel (RTC) Program and Resident Relocation Assistance Program (RRAP). The Treasury reallocated funds will provide financial assistance and housing stability services to current Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP), which will transition to be called the Housing Assistance Program (HAP).

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

The Right to Counsel program (RTC) began as a pilot on March 1, 2020. This program provides legal aid to renters at or below 100% area median income who are facing landlord/tenant issues such as eviction. The City contract is administered by Texas RioGrande Legal Aid, Inc. (TRLA). Through the program, tenants receive legal advice and representation. TRLA also conducts monthly tenant Know-Your-Rights trainings for the general public in English and Spanish and staffs mobile 'legal kiosks' events at community events and at eviction hot spots.

In June 2020 following the economic shut down that accompanied the pandemic, the program expanded with federal CARES dollars, and the contract was renewed in March and September 2021.

As of January 2022, TRLA has provided 1,504 households with Right to Counsel services, and reached over 1,100 San Antonians through public, bilingual 'Know Your Rights' trainings. Additionally, the program has administered outreach events at local properties and schools on site at rental properties with high numbers of eviction filings. Staff coordinated drive-up events with Districts 5 and 7 where the public has been able to apply for rental assistance and receive legal aid and other housing resources. There have been additional events coordinated with San Antonio Metropolitan Health District by working at the vaccination pop-up sites at Fiesta, Pride, and neighborhood events. In FY 2022, TRLA will work with NHSD, ITSD, and the Municipal Courts to ensure that upgraded kiosks in the Municipal Courts and other locations around the city can serve as a virtual access point for legal aid.

The San Antonio Legal Services Association (SALSA) coordinates pro-bono attorney services for overflow RTC cases. SALSA recruited 112 pro-bono attorneys to assist in housing-related cases and closed 135 cases since FY 2020.

The City established the Resident Relocation Assistance Program (RRAP) in 2019 to provide relocation assistance to households impacted by rising housing costs or certain code enforcement actions as part of the Risk Mitigation Fund policy. Eligible households receive up to \$7,000 to help them obtain new housing including support with moving costs, deposits, and temporary lodging.

RRAP provides individualized support to households facing housing instability or eviction. Financial assistance is provided in the form of application fees, deposits, and temporary housing.

The Risk Mitigation Fund, which became the Emergency Housing Assistant Program (EHAP) during the pandemic, will transition to be called the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) in spring 2022 and any current funds not expended on EHAP applications will be transitioned to the Housing Assistance Program. EHAP has been in place since April 23, 2020, and, to date, has approved

\$191.1 million in assistance to 160,932 household members seeking emergency rental, mortgage, and utility assistance (including administrative expenses). The emergency program has been funded with a variety of local, state, and federal resources including ERA 1 Reallocated Funds (Round 1). NHSD closed the EHAP application portal on March 1, 2022, as there were thousands of applications in the queue that would utilize most of the current funding. As of March 16, 2022, there are 7,500 EHAP applications in processing.

ISSUE:

On March 10, 2022, by vote of the Governing Board, the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs (TDHCA) awarded 44 applicants funding for projects and programs focusing on housing stabilization services. The City of San Antonio was awarded \$6,729,404 to expand both the Right to Counsel (RTC) Program and Resident Relocation Assistance Program (RRAP). THDCA is sourcing these grants from the U.S. Department of the Treasury Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA-2). On March 14, 2022, the city was notified by the U.S. Department of the Treasury that it had been awarded Reallocated Round 2 dollars from the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA-1) program.

The TDHCA grant will expand legal services and housing stability for community members that are considered low-income tenants (less than or equal to 80% of AMI) and are at risk or subject to an eviction. The continued focus is to serve populations that have been historically underserved, including people of color, persons with limited English proficiency, and persons with disabilities. The grant period is from April 2022 through March 2024 and will serve households in Bexar County earning up to 80% of the Area Median Income. NHSD proposes to utilize \$2,390,463 of the award be used to expand the existing RTC program through Professional Service Agreements with TRLA and SALSA who will provide advice and counsel to tenants, including full representation, helping craft a pro se defense, or filing an appeal.

The remaining \$4,338,942 will supplement and expand RRAP by funding three case managers who will provide individual counseling and benefits navigation to families while helping them find new, stable homes. One fiscal analyst will support the grant and oversee its spending. The funds will financially support families by covering application fees, moving expenses, utility deposits, and landlord incentives, as necessary. Temporary lodging, food, sanitary products, and clothing can be provided while appropriate housing is found. Bus passes will be available for those needing help attending a court hearing, visiting a potential home, or meeting with their case manager.

The ERA1 Reallocated Funds (Round 2) will be utilized for the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (EHAP) to support at-risk households currently in the queue for application processing. Treasury reallocation funds not expended on EHAP applications will be transitioned to the Housing Assistance Program to support eligible households seeking emergency rental, mortgage, and utility assistance.

FISCAL IMPACT:

There is no fiscal impact to the General Fund.

ALTERNATIVES:

If this Grant Funding is not approved, the City will not accept the Emergency Rental Assistance 2 Housing Stability Services funds from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs in an amount of up to \$6,729,404 and funding for RTC and RRAP will remain consistent with the FY 2022 budget and the budget for the Emergency Housing Assistance Program (to be transitioned to the Housing Assistance Program) will not increase to serve an additional 1,420 families.

RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the Planning and Community Development Committee forward the Ordinances to authorize the acceptance of grant funds.