

Wolf Administration Releases Guidance on Emergency Housing, Quarantine Sheltering, Resources for People Experiencing Homelessness



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Harrisburg, PA – The Wolf Administration today outlined housing policies and recommendations in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and mitigation efforts. The departments of Human Services (DHS) and Community and Economic Development (DCED) the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA), and other state agencies have collaborated to issue recommendations to stem foreclosures, evictions, and utility shut-offs as well as serve the needs of those experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 emergency.

“Access to safe, secure housing can greatly impact a person’s health. As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the importance of safe housing is more essential than ever,” said DHS Secretary Teresa Miller. “Every Pennsylvanian needs to take Governor Tom Wolf’s stay-at-home order seriously to stop the spread of the coronavirus, regardless of their current housing circumstance. That’s why we are working to provide housing resources for those who need them.”

In response to these housing and sheltering needs, DHS activated the commonwealth’s Sheltering Taskforce, which is made up of local, county and state agencies and other partners and stakeholders. The taskforce focuses on sheltering and service needs for individuals who cannot self-isolate, including people who are experiencing homelessness, survivors of domestic violence, and others who may have household members who are vulnerable to exposure.

The taskforce worked with PEMA to document the process for people who are experiencing homelessness and who are waiting for COVID-19 test results or are not feeling well to access a sheltering site for quarantine. The federal Department of Housing and Urban Development has also [issued guidance](#) on preventing & managing the spread of infectious disease for people experiencing homelessness. The taskforce is coordinating potential sheltering resources with county emergency management agencies and is serving as a communication hub for those providing shelter to people who do not have housing in which to quarantine.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court has ordered a halt to eviction and foreclosure proceedings during the COVID-19 emergency, and the Office of the Attorney General has reiterated this policy. Additionally, rental assistance in the form of security deposits and/or rents is available to counties through the Housing Assistance Program (HAP) for both immediate needs and likely future increases in demand due to COVID-19 mitigation efforts. HAP is accepting program waivers and requests for unused funds through the program resource account at RA-PWHAPOIM@pa.gov.

DCED has prepared plans for issuing Emergency Solutions Grants to assist with the rapid rehousing of people experiencing homelessness, street outreach, homelessness prevention, and emergency shelter activities. The federal stimulus package includes funding for these grants and includes the ability for Continuums of Care and domestic violence support providers to conduct needed work around the COVID-19 response without funding barriers of current funding sources.

“COVID-19 has had a major impact on communities across Pennsylvania, and this funding will serve as a critical resource for Pennsylvania’s most vulnerable residents,” said DCED Sec. Dennis Davin. “By working together with the federal government, we can safeguard the health and wellbeing of individuals across the commonwealth.”

PHFA has halted foreclosures and evictions and is offering forbearances with late fee waivers to homeowners with a PHFA mortgage who are experiencing a financial hardship due to COVID-19. PHFA is encouraging Low-Income Housing Tax Credit building managers to be flexible on April rent payments and to waive late fees for tenants whose employment has been affected by the crisis. It’s also asking those apartment managers to temporarily halt eviction actions. Additionally, it is providing helpful information for consumers on its [coronavirus resource webpage](#).

“Housing stability is absolutely critical for people to stay healthy and be able to productively return to work when that is safe to occur and the statewide stay-at-home order is rescinded,” said PHFA Executive Director and CEO Robin Wiessmann. “PHFA continues to work with public and private sector groups to make sure Pennsylvania homeowners and renters have access to the most resources possible from the federal CARES Act to aid their recovery from the economic slowdown.”

Additionally, utilities provided by the Pennsylvania Utility Commission will not be shut off due to failure to pay; private utilities companies are encouraged to adopt the same policy. The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) will see additional funding through the recently passed federal stimulus, and DHS is exploring a LIHEAP crisis recovery program based off availability of funding.

“DHS and the Sheltering Taskforce will continue to monitor developments and update the public on these important housing issues,” said Secretary Miller. “We know that the end of the emergency orders will not be the end of housing concerns. Many renters and homeowners who have lost their income could still face eviction, foreclosure, or utility shut-offs when the moratoriums are over. We will do everything in our power to ensure that the ramifications of COVID-19 mitigation efforts do not jeopardize housing.”

Visit pa.gov for a [“Responding to COVID-19” guide](#) or the Pennsylvania Department of Health’s dedicated [Coronavirus webpage](#) for the most up-to-date information regarding COVID-19. The PHFA is also providing information on its [Coronavirus Resource webpage](#).

Guidance to DHS providers related to COVID-19 is available [here](#).

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