

**CHAPA
COVID-19 Affordable Housing Response Meeting
Thursday, July 16th, 2020 at 2:00-3:00 p.m.**

For the most updated information on affordable housing and the COVID-19 crisis, visit:
<https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/covid-19-affordable-housing-updates>

Notes

Welcome

Rachel Heller , CEO, CHAPA

Heller welcomed everyone back to our COVID-19 Affordable Housing Response Calls and summarized today's updates. CHAPA will continue to offer these calls on a bi-weekly basis.

Remarks from Secretary Michael Kennealy

Executive Office of Housing and Economic Development

Secretary Kennealy joined the call to discuss the **Baker-Polito**

Administration's economic development bill which focuses on its 2019 economic development plan, Partnerships for Growth, as well as the core themes of equity and recovery. The Governor's economic development bill contains \$275 million in capital authorizations as well as several key policy changes across three central areas: housing, community development, and business competitiveness. Kennealy focused his remarks on the items that impact housing including \$40 million for Neighborhood Stabilization, \$35 million for Transit Oriented Housing Development, \$10 million for Climate-Resilient Affordable Housing Production, expansion of the Housing Development Incentive Program from \$10 million to \$30 million, and passage of the Housing Choice legislation.

Kennealy indicated that the administration is looking at a broad range of options to insure people are able to remain in their homes during the pandemic, including the Right To Counsel Pilot Program and funding for increased production of housing for those with extremely low income (at or below 30% AMI) and permanent supportive housing. Kennealy pointed out, however, that state revenues have declined and assuming a level budget for FY2021, the State is starting with an approximate \$6 billion budget deficit.

Kennealy encouraged those on the call to contact their legislators and use social media to highlight the importance of this legislation particularly in light of recent studies connecting lack of affordable housing to racial and health equity. Housing Choice, if passed, will have a substantial impact in communities working to encourage housing development.

NLIHC's Out of Reach Report & Virtual Lobby Day

Tori Bourret, Housing Advocacy Organizer, National Low Income Housing Coalition (NLIHC)

Bourret joined the call from NLIHC to share their recently released **Out of Reach Report** (the Report) which documents the significant gap between renters' wages and the cost of rental housing in every state across the United States. The Report examines the "housing wage" defined as the income needed to rent a two bedroom apartment at fair market value assuming the renters pays no more than 30% of their income on housing. Bourret noted that in only 145 counties in the US can a minimum wage worker afford a one bedroom apartment at fair market value and there is no county in the US where a minimum wage earner can afford a two bedroom rental at fair market value. This dramatic gap is a national problem which can only be addressed with federal resources.

The Report finds that as incomes have declined due to COVID, more families have fallen into the housing cost burden category. The Report notes that before COVID, 7 million extremely low income households (ELI), making at or below \$12,000 per individual per year, were spending more than 30% of their income on housing. Since COVID 11 million ELI households are in that category.

Massachusetts has the third highest housing wage in the country. As detailed on the [Massachusetts infographic](#), \$35.52 per hour is the necessary wage to rent a two bedroom apartment at fair market value. Further, working at the minimum wage of \$12.75, the household would have to work 90 hours per week to afford a modest one bedroom apartment at fair market value.

Bourret noted that the House Appropriations Committee approved Fiscal Year 2021 Transportation- Housing and Urban Development [Funding Bill](#) that included funding for transportation and housing infrastructure in an amount of \$16 billion above the current levels.

NLIHC's virtual Lobby Day is on **July 21, 2020** and Bourret invited everyone to participate. More information on Lobby Day can be found at: <https://nlihc.org/virtual-lobby-day-2020>.

Bourret encouraged callers to advocate by reaching out to Senator Schumer and Speaker Pelosi to prioritize rental assistance in the next federal relief package. Everyday struggles of those who are housing insecure can be an impactful way of influencing policy makers and Bourret encouraged callers to share those stories of people in their communities with legislators.

Federal Updates

Ryan Dominguez, Senior Policy Analyst, CHAPA

Dominguez gave a shout out to Bourret and others at the NLIHC for the Report and their leadership in advocacy efforts.

CHAPA's advocacy continues as we look to put more Coronavirus Relief Funds toward both state and local shortfalls. With our full New England delegation, CHAPA will be advocating for \$100 billion in rental assistance in any forthcoming federal legislation.

Proposed regulatory actions from HUD were more concerning this week. The Trump Administration has once again signaled that it will rollback rules on the Fair Housing Law. However, calls from industry, [particularly Bank of America, Quicken Loans](#) and others have asked HUD to fight against the proposed changes indicating that it would make it more difficult to challenge racial discrimination.

HUD has also [proposed changes to the Equal Access Rule](#) to allow shelters to deny access to some trans individuals if their identity does not match with their biological sex with the result that they can be turned away. Comments can be made in opposition within the next 60 days and Dominguez encouraged callers to weigh in.

With regard to the Community Reinvestment Act (CRA), the House of Representatives has introduced a [resolution](#) to reverse the recent [Rule](#) finalized by the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, after both the Federal Reserve Bank and the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation both pulled back their support. CHAPA submitted testimony during the notice and comment period see: <https://www.chapa.org/housing-news/chapa-submits-comments-to-occ-on-its-proposed-rule-change-to-cra>.

Dominguez referred callers to the "[Public and Indian Housing COVID-19 Resources](#)" which includes an Eviction Prevention and Stability Toolkit that has resources for public housing authorities and other landlords.

ERMA Update

Kristin Hass, DHCD; Stefanie Coxe, Regional Housing Network of Massachusetts; & Chris Norris, Metro Housing|Boston

On June 30th, the Baker-Polito administration announced the launch of Emergency Rental and Mortgage Assistance ([ERMA](#)), a new \$20 million statewide fund to assist low-income households facing difficulty with rent or mortgage payments. Our next three presenters provided updates on ERMA's implementation from the state, regional and local perspectives.

Hass indicated that the Regional Administering Agencies (RAAs) are receiving a high volume of inquiries about ERMA and RAFT. Despite some confusion about the two programs and how they differ, Hass indicated that applicants need only to apply for assistance without regard to the specific program and RAA staff will determine which program is applicable in each case.

Coxe expressed her gratitude to the Administration for expanding access to rental assistance programs. She indicated that in some areas, RHAs may be administering local Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) programs as well as RAFT and ERMA. Coxe indicated that in some communities households with income up to 100% of Area Median Income, may be eligible for assistance.

Norris emphasized the importance of access to all of the rental assistance programs. Metro Housing Boston has sent out 1,100 flyers and 5,500 emails (42% open rate) and will be advertising on Facebook and other social media in an effort to reach more applicants. With the expanded outreach in just 14 days, Metro Boston has received 1,000 applications. Norris shared Metro Housing's one-pager on the application process at [Metro Housing|Boston's Rent Relief, Utility Arrears, and Eviction Prevention Page](#).

Heller acknowledged the significant roles of Hass, Coxe, Norris and their colleagues as well as that of the Administration in responding to the COVID-19 housing stabilization crisis by funding and implementing this valuable program.

State Updates

Eric Shupin, Director of Policy, CHAPA

Shupin reported that the final FY2020 COVID-19 Supplemental Budget bill ([H.4808](#)) is now on the Governor's desk for signature. The \$1.1 billion budget includes \$20 million for additional RAFT homelessness prevention resources for families and individuals impacted by COVID-19, \$1 million more for housing and services for unaccompanied youth experiencing homelessness, \$1.5 million more for HCECs, at least \$9.25 million specifically for shelters serving unaccompanied adults, \$13.5 million for local housing authorities, and other relevant investments. [For a full summary of the housing-related items in the budget, click here.](#)

Shupin noted that July 1st was the first day of the FY 2021 state budget. However, the State is now operating under short term (month to month) budgets at least through July. Tax filing deadline was this week and the Legislature will wait to see how the revenue picture looks as filings come in. It is expected that the budget will pass in August or later although the process is unclear since the current legislative session ends on July 31, 2020. Shupin noted that it will be very difficult to move legislation in the remaining ten days of this session. While the full Legislature needs to pass the budget, this could be part of a special session which would be an unusual step. There is no expectation that the session will be extended beyond July 31, 2020.

As for the status of particular legislation of concern to many in the housing community, Shupin indicated that the Economic Development bill ([H4529](#)) is now before the House Bonding Committee and CHAPA will be providing testimony. [The Right to Counsel Pilot](#) (RTC Pilot) bill is now before the Senate Ways and Means Committee. Shupin urged callers to reach out to both Senator Spilka and Senator DiDomenico to urge them to move this legislation forward.

Funding is needed to implement the pilot and a coalition of over 100 organizations are advocating for \$6 million from the Coronavirus Relief Fund to be used to implement the RTC Pilot. Shupin was pleased to announce that entire Massachusetts U.S. Representative delegation has urged the Governor to support this request. A copy of their letter to Governor Baker can be found at [Mass U.S. Rep Delegation Letter supporting funding for a right to counsel pilot](#).

Eviction Moratorium Challenge Update

Carol Marine, Senior Program Manager, CHAPA

Marine updated callers on the status of *Matorin v. Commonwealth*, a case filed with the Supreme Judicial Court challenging the constitutionality of H4647, entitled, An Act Providing for a Moratorium on Evictions and Foreclosures During the COVID-19 Emergency (the Moratorium). The Moratorium halts most “non-essential residential and small business evictions as long as the state of emergency remains in effect.

While the state proceeding is ongoing with a hearing scheduled for July 30th, two small landlords have filed a new lawsuit in United States District Court in Boston, *Baptiste v. Commonwealth of Massachusetts*, seeking a preliminary injunction. The case has been assigned to Judge Mark Wolf and will likely be heard in early August.

For a [summary of the law, please click here](#).

Next Meeting: TBD