

**CHAPA  
COVID-19 Affordable Housing Response Meeting  
Friday, May 29th, 2020 at 2:30 – 3:30 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 to our eleventh weekly call. Heller offered people space to acknowledge the recent murders of people of color. Heller called out the disparate impact of COVID-19 on black and brown people who have severely limited access to health care and housing opportunities and asked the audience to join her to use this moment to push harder for access to safe and healthy housing for all people of color. Let's be sure that COVID-19 plays a major role in redressing the inequities in housing, health and the economy.

**Secretary Michael Kennealy**

*Executive Office of Housing & Economic Development*

Kennealy updated the audience on Governor Baker's "Safer at Home" strategy in response to COVID-19 which lays out a roadmap to reopen the economy but "no hard timeline to returning to a new normal." Kennealy invited the audience to review the [Reopening Strategy](#) which includes materials for workplace safety (by sector) as well as information on accessing safety supplies. The site also includes public health metrics and a new "weekly dashboard" indicating where MA is in relation to the metrics and how we move from phase to phase. The site is currently available in English and Spanish with other languages to be added shortly.

Kennealy reported that discussions continue on enhancements to RAFT and other tools, such as CDBG funds, to assure housing stability for all. Kennealy recognized the work of partners at CEDAC and MassHousing in these discussions. Kennealy noted that \$20M of CDBG funds, representing the first half of Phase 1 of the CARES Act funding, will be used equally for housing stability (\$10B) and micro-enterprise assistance (\$9.65M). Kennealy noted that Gateway City businesses have been particularly hard hit and the administration is prepared to work to assist them regain their economic footing as efficiently as possible. Additionally, Kennealy noted that the Payroll Protection Program has delivered \$15B in funds to MA but there are still gaps and the administration is trying to understand where the gaps are and how to address them through additional federal funds or state resources. He thanked both Mass Growth Capital and MACDC for their "great partnerships" in delivering resources to small businesses.

Kennealy expects housing stability to remain a top concern of the administration. The Administration is keenly aware of the impact of the projected rental loss on landlords and developers. Noting that construction is allowed under Phase 1 of the Reopening

Plan, Kennealy gave a shout out to the team at DHCD who have been managing ongoing housing development sites.

Addressing the Governor's Economic Development bill, Kennealy noted that the bill which was filed before the pandemic, had intended to address, at least in part, the existing housing crisis in MA. Recognizing that COVID has served to amplify the crisis, he indicated that Housing Choice legislation is urgent and, if passed, will unlock housing production across many sectors. Addressing concerns raised by the audience, Kennealy indicated that the administration will be seeking long term solutions and future building must be about density, particularly increased density near transit sites.

Undersecretary Jennifer Maddox joined the discussion and offered some DHCD updates. In response to a question about DHCD's using a racial equity lens in the allocation of housing resources given the disproportionate impact of COVID on communities of color, Maddox confirmed that DHCD is aware of the disparities and currently engaged in internal discussions about how to allocate resources. Maddox also addressed the issue of best practices in protecting residents of public and subsidized housing indicating that over 3M masks have been delivered to state and federal housing sites and shelters. DHCD continues to work with DPH to encourage best social distancing practices as all sites.

With respect to rental assistance, DHCD is reviewing how to address the increased demand for accessible housing rental assistance and RAFT. Maddox gave a shout out to the Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) for their consistent and effective assistance to residents. She noted that Ben Stone, Associate Director of the Division of Public Housing at DHCD, is in close contact with the LHAs and hosts weekly calls to share and update information. Emily Cooper, Chief Housing Officer of the Executive Office of Elderly Affairs, shared the following resource, "[Guidance for State-Aided Public Housing.](#)"

Significant concerns remain about housing stability when the moratorium on eviction and foreclosure ends. Will vulnerable residents experience a "financial cliff?" Kennealy encouraged all parties to continue to engage in a thoughtful dialogue about the upcoming budget as well as leveraging federal funds to avoid that outcome. Kennealy thanked CHAPA and all the organizations on the call for their partnership in advocating for housing stability.

### **COVID-19 & Persons with Disabilities**

*Angelina Ramirez, CEO, Stavros*

Ramirez offered an overview of Stavros' response to the pandemic, including policy initiatives to help the community. Located in Amherst and serving the Pioneer Valley as well as all of MA, Stavros' mission is to assist persons with disabilities develop the tools and skills they need to take charge of their own lives, including locating accessible and affordable housing.

People with disabilities have been among the most impacted from COVID, particularly those in nursing homes and other long term care facilities. Stavros serves many

residents of long term care facilities who have expressed interest in finding alternative housing. While Stavros assists in housing searches through its housing counseling program, Ramirez reported that it is virtually impossible to find accessible and affordable housing at this time. During COVID, some landlords are unwilling to show units. Residents with accessible apartments worry that landlords will raise rents once the moratorium is lifted. Even with subsidy, people who need accessible and affordable housing will have few, if any choice.

In congregate settings, Ramirez reports residents are concerned about exposure to COVID in their daily lives. Using an elevator is challenging. Limiting the number of people in the elevator creates long waits. It is hard to operate the elevator without touching surfaces. Some residents decide the hurdles are not worth the risk and remain in their homes. Isolation then becomes the main concern. Ramirez reported that they are receiving a record number of requests to move. Some clients are even willing to take an apartment that is not accessible because the experience of using an elevator is so traumatizing.

On the funding side, Ramirez reported that most of Stavros' clients benefit from AHVP and occasionally from Section 8 vouchers. Stavros has recently been working with local private foundations to gain increased support those who wish to leave congregate facilities. Stavros tries to make funds available to help a tenant with first and last month's rent as well as a security deposit. Even with increased private funding, the task is daunting because of the lack of available accessible homes. Stavros will continue to work with other housing organizations to highlight the need for more resources to support housing for people with disabilities.

### **Federal Update**

*Ryan Dominguez, Senior Policy Analyst, CHAPA*

Dominguez reported that actions on the national level were comparatively quiet this week. The House of Representatives passed the Payroll Protection Program Flexibility Act via a proxy vote of 417-1, extending the time period organizations have to use the funds from eight to twenty-four weeks and still qualify for loan forgiveness. Additionally, the requirement that 75% of funds had to be used to retain employees has been lowered to 60% with the remaining 40% available to cover operating costs. Finally, any organization that does qualify for the loan forgiveness, can also defer its payroll tax obligation. The bill has bipartisan support and is likely to move forward in the Senate in the next few weeks.

Additionally, the IRS issued guidance for relief for organizations that were not eligible for PPP and did not receive funds. In these cases, new employer tax credits, specifically the employee retention credit, equal to 50% of \$10K in paid wages per employee paid from March 13, 2020 through December 31, 2020 are now available.

CHAPA, together with the New England Housing Network, will continue advocating with both the Senate and Treasury in the coming weeks for additional flexibility for housing organizations using PPP and the Coronavirus Relief Fund.

Dominguez reported that Senator Ron Wyden of OR, ranking member of the Senate Finance Committee, in a press conference shared his priorities, many of which align with CHAPA's priorities as they relate to the correction to the LIHTC 4% standard, support for homelessness prevention and public housing. In terms of new funding allocations under the Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG), HUD Secretary Carson is receiving many requests to allocate additional funds to homelessness prevention and housing relief. On the other hand, advancement of the HEROES Act in the Senate is expected to be an uphill battle.

Rodriguez encouraged callers to join the National Low Income Housing Conference (NLIHC) weekly calls on Mondays at 2:30 to continue advocacy discussions around [Coronavirus and Homelessness/Housing](#).

### **State Updates**

*Eric Shupin, Director of Public Policy, CHAPA*

Shupin reported that the Joint Committee on Housing had voted out rent stabilization legislation that had been introduced in this session. The legislation eliminates the ban on state wide rent control and creates a local option for municipalities to enact rent control measures. The bill, [H3924](#), was introduced by Rep. Connolly and Rep. Elugardo. Shupin noted that while it is significant that the bill was reported out of committee, the fate of the bill remains unclear.

Additionally, the COVID data collection and reporting bill, [H4735](#) was passed by the legislature on Thursday and sent to Governor Baker. The goal of the legislation is to provide data on the disproportionate impact of COVID on people of color, nursing home populations, prisons, undocumented immigrants and others. The legislation is designed to look at barriers to testing and access to treatments.

However, CHAPA and many of our senior housing provider partners have expressed concern about the bill's compulsory reporting requirements including notification to every resident each time there is a new positive COVID case. Providers are also concerned about the anxiety and panic that could ensue among residents each time there was a case in the housing development, albeit with no specific information due to privacy issues. Finally, it is unclear which housing developers are covered by the legislation with some reading the language to apply to private as well as subsidized and public senior housing providers or all housing available for lease to persons with disabilities, which is essentially all affordable housing providers.

The disposition of the legislation is unclear and Governor Baker can sign, veto or send the bill back with amendments. CHAPA and some of our senior housing provider partners have written a letter to the Governor with suggested amendments. While all agree that the data is essential, the bill as written is likely to create unnecessary burdens for residents and housing providers.

Shupin reported some progress on Right to Counsel legislation which will be needed at the end of the eviction and foreclosure moratorium. Massachusetts Legal Reform

Institute (MLRI) is leading to advance a pilot program or short term variation of the bill will be put into place to help those who may lose their homes because of COVID.

**Discussion/Q&A**