

# COUNTY OF MORRIS

## Office of Communications & Digital Media



**PRESS RELEASE: Morris County**

**July 15, 2021**

For Immediate Release

### **Morris County Renters & Landlords: Rental Aid is Still Available**

*Legal Services in New Jersey Also Warns Renters: Do Not Ignore Court Notices on Evictions*

Morris County announced today that federal rental assistance **remains available** to qualified families and can assist landlords, as Legal Services of New Jersey additionally warned renters not to ignore court notices related to settlement of eviction actions.

The announcements come as New Jersey's COVID-19 moratorium on residential evictions prepares to end in January.

The Morris County Department of Human Services has received more than \$14.6 million in rental assistance to disperse among qualified families. The aid can assist landlords as well as qualified families.

At the same time, Legal Services in New Jersey is warning renters **not to ignore notices of mandatory settlement conferences** if their landlords already have filed eviction notices. (read more below)

#### **RENTAL ASSISTANCE**

“Rental assistance funds are still available in Morris County and the State of New Jersey to people from low- and moderate-income households who had a substantial reduction in income, have qualified for unemployment benefits, incurred significant costs or experienced a financial hardship due to the COVID-19 pandemic,” said Kasey Errico, Director of Morris County Human Services.

As of last week, 1,541 applications were submitted, with 513 applications being approved to date and those households receiving more than \$4 million in aid.

Morris County is urging renters to determine if they qualify and to apply.

Renters may inquire about the program by simply checking the criteria provided at the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) COVID-19 Information [website](#). Some of the qualifications also are listed further below.

To apply, simply go to: <https://njdca.onlinepha.com/>

The federal Emergency Rental Assistance funding is designed to help avert a housing crisis for tenants in critical need of such support. **The funding also will bring needed relief to landlords**, who have been challenged by the financial impacts of the pandemic as well, according to Errico.

Morris County partnered with the DCA, as have other counties, to utilize the state's program vendor and eliminate confusion for those in need by using one on-line portal to access the assistance application.

## **KNOW OF EVICTION ACTIONS & YOUR RIGHTS**

While Governor Phil Murphy's pandemic moratorium on evictions does not expire until January 2022, it does not prevent landlords from initiating eviction court proceedings before then – and **New Jersey courts may summon renters for “mandatory settlement conferences”** well before the eviction moratorium deadline.

The conferences are **only designed to determine whether an eviction case may be settled** without going to trial and does not obligate any renter or landlord to enter into an agreement.

### **But appearances are mandatory.**

“If you do not appear, a default judgement will enter against you, meaning you will lose the case,” Legal Services warned in a new flyer.

The agency also advised renters that they do not have to agree to settle the case, just appear for the conference.

“You do not have to agree to pay any money. You do not have to agree to move out. Landlords and tenants who do not make an agreement will have a trial scheduled when the court starts holding trials,” said Legal Services.

## **MORE ON RENTAL ASSISTANCE**

The umbrella name for the federal rental assistance program is the COVID-19 Emergency Rental Assistance Program Phase II or CVERAP PHASE II. The first phase was launched in July 2020, using \$91.75 million in federal funds, which assisted about

15,000 New Jersey residents. New Jersey has been provided \$353 million for the second phase.

The program covers two areas:

**Emergency Rental Assistance for Arrears:** Applicants may be eligible for up to a maximum of twelve months of emergency rental assistance to help pay for rent arrears and future rent to the extent that funds are available. Families that have already received funding through Phase I of the program, that need additional rent support, and have not yet received the maximum twelve months of emergency rental assistance can apply for additional funding.

**Emergency Rental Assistance for Current and Future Rents:** Financial assistance is limited to three months based on application submitted, except that the household may receive additional assistance for additional months subject to the availability of remaining funds and eligibility, not to exceed 12 months (plus an additional three months if necessary to ensure housing stability).

Persons applying must meet all applicable income and eligibility requirements. You must be eighteen (18) years of age or older to apply or be an emancipated minor. Only one (1) application per household will be accepted. Applications will be accepted until enough applications have been received to ensure distribution of all available funds. A computerized selection (lottery) process will be used to select residents who have been impacted by COVID-19 for eligibility determination.

**Eligibility Criteria:** Selected households must meet the following eligibility criteria to qualify for assistance:

Qualify for unemployment or have experienced a reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced a financial hardship due, directly or indirectly, to the COVID-19 pandemic;

Demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability;

Have a household income at or below 80 percent of the area median income (please see income limits below);

Have a lack of assets and savings to pay rent arrears or current and future rent;

Be a New Jersey resident; and

Obligated to pay rent on a residential dwelling.

The program will only pay for rent arrears incurred after March 13, 2020.

**Property managers or owners of a residential dwelling may apply for assistance on behalf of a tenant.**

The landlord must:

Obtain the signature of the tenant on the application, which may be documented electronically; and

Must provide documentation of the application to the tenant to notify the tenant that the application has been submitted.