

Dallas County will launch housing, business assistance programs with \$10 million in federal money

Residents must live outside the Dallas city limits and cannot have received additional federal support



Horseback security guard Staci Smith patrols The Village apartments Wednesday, April 1, 2020 in Dallas.

(Ryan Michalesko / Staff Photographer)

By Nic Garcia

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Dallas County will spend at least \$10 million to help residents pay for housing and businesses keep the lights on after stay-at-home orders put in place to slow the **coronavirus** pandemic brought the local and national economies to a near standstill.

The two programs were approved Tuesday by county commissioners, although neither will be immediately launched and more details on how individuals and businesses can apply will be announced later.

Commissioners also approved \$300,000 to help child care programs through the coming weeks.

The money to fund all three programs comes from nearly \$250 million of federal stimulus money the county received. To help manage the large sum, which cannot be used to pay for existing programs, commissioners approved hiring five new employees who will be responsible for oversight.

Community activists and landlords celebrated the county's effort to help residents but warned the aid wasn't nearly enough.

"It's a good start," said Josephine Lopez Paul, lead organizer for Dallas Area Interfaith, a nonprofit that advised the county on its housing assistance program. "It's a down payment on what is a very large problem in our county."

Ian Mattingly, president-elect of the Apartment Association of Greater Dallas, said industry analysts suggest that about 15% of renters won't be able to pay rent this month. That means about 15,000 families that live in the county but outside Dallas city limits and make below 80% of the county's median income are in jeopardy.

He said it will be important for the county and the nonprofits it is working with to administer the funds to target individuals who are not receiving additional support such as unemployment.

“There is a significant number of people who cannot get access to unemployment insurance,” he said. “Those are the families that tend to be the most vulnerable to homelessness and other issues. As we come out of our seclusion, making sure that resources like renter assistance and health care resources are available is critical to us as a county.”

In order to qualify Dallas County residents must have lived within the county since March 1, make less than 80% of the Dallas-area median income and not have received additional housing assistance from the federal stimulus program known as CARES. The resident must also live outside the Dallas city limits.

Residents will be awarded up to \$1,500 a month for three months.

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BY WIRE SERVICES AND TOM STEELE

Unlike the city of Dallas, **which launched its own application program**, the county is initially working with three nonprofits to screen applicants: Catholic Charities, Friendship-West Baptist Church and Jewish Family Service of Greater Dallas. The organizations were selected in part because they have existing housing assistance programs.

The county is expected to launch its own application process later.

Dave Woodyard, president and CEO of Catholic Charities, acknowledged the work ahead would be daunting but said he has a team of 25 employees and more than two dozen volunteers working with residents in search of aid.

“I think we’re in pretty decent shape and our response time has been pretty good so far,” he said.

“We’ll do our best to keep up.”

While some details still need to be finalized, Woodyard said he hopes to start the county’s work in earnest as soon as next week. However, he encouraged residents in need to reach out to his organization now.

“There is no reason to wait,” he said.

Dallas County has not yet selected a vendor to help run the business program. Officials said they hope to coordinate with City Hall to work with the same organization to eliminate confusion.

Qualifying businesses will be awarded up to \$15,000 as long as they stay in business for up to four months and continue to pay their employees. Eligible businesses must have been operating since Feb. 1, have fewer than 100 employees and made an annual gross income of less than \$1.5 million in 2019. The businesses must all operate inside the county but outside Dallas city limits.

Both housing and business programs will be awarded on a lottery system.

County Judge Clay Jenkins said at an evening news conference that he expects the county to increase the aid to both programs.

Josephine Lopez Paul
Lead Organizer

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