Advocates call on Austin to provide $40M for renters

By: Kevin Clark - May 13, 2020

AUSTIN (KXAN) — The Travis County Commissioner’s Court approved $10 million in rent relief on Tuesday.

Now, the calls on Austin to provide more coronavirus relief money for renters are growing louder.

Central Texas interfaith held a press conference Wednesday, calling for the city to provide $40 million in direct rental assistance.

The organization, made up of 50 churches, schools, unions and nonprofits, pointed to other Texas cities that have spent more on their renters than Austin.

The city of Dallas approved $14 million for rent and mortgage relief.

Houston has provided $15 million for renters, and San Antonio made available $25 million for rent, utilities and other basic needs.

To this point, Austin has allocated $1.2 million in direct assistance for renters.

The city held a lottery last weekend and says it will be able to help more than 1,000 families with the money.

But staff told the City Council’s Housing and Planning Committee Tuesday there were 10,378 total applicants, demonstrating a much greater need.

Council members asked staff to find more opportunities for funding.

People still need to pay their rent and the assistance we’ve provided so far is just a drop in the bucket,” said District 1 Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison in a statement to KXAN.

The city told KXAN it hasn’t determined how much will be required or when it will available.
“It is difficult to calculate the full amount that will go towards housing assistance at this time as those proposals included case management and other basic needs support,” a spokesperson told us Wednesday.

Members of Central Texas Interfaith said the number of applicants for the city’s lottery isn’t indicative of the city’s need, either.

Advocates estimate that 68,000 local renters will miss payments.

They say even the $40 million-dollar figure is conservative, which would provide $600 to those renters for just one month.

Through a translator we spoke with Maria Lopez, who lives at a mobile home park in Northeast Austin.

She explained many of her neighbors, who cleaned houses or had jobs in construction or in the restaurant industry, are now struggling to pay their rent.

In addition, she said many people fear asking for help if they have to provide a Social Security number.

“If her park there are 286 trailers with families, full families,” said Carlota Garcia, who translated. “She says this is an issue for the vast majority of them.”

KXAN has reached out to Austin officials to ask if renters were required to provide a social security number to participate in the city’s lottery.