

**FORT BEND COUNTY – CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)
EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE (ERA) PROGRAM
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs) rev 2.16.2021**

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)
Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Rental Assistance Program**

Q1. Where can I get the latest information on COVID-19?

A1. You may find the latest COVID-19 information by going to the Centers for Disease Control website at www.cdc.gov; You can also get information at our website at www.fortbendcountytexas.gov or other local and state government official websites.

Q2. What is the new Emergency Rental Assistance Program?

A2. The Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program established by section 501 of Division N of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260 (Dec. 27, 2020) (the "Act"). The funds must be used for direct financial assistance, including rent, rental arrears, utilities and home energy costs, utilities and home energy costs arrears, and other expenses related to housing.

Q3. How do I apply to the County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program?

A3. You may apply for the program online by going to the Fort Bend County website at <https://fortbend-era.powerappsportals.us/>. The program will open on February 15th at 8:00am for landlords, and February 17th for tenant applications. The program will remain open until September 30, 2021, or until funds have been fully committed.

Q4. If I cannot access the web can I still apply?

A4: Yes, however the online portal is the best way to ensure your application is fully processed. However, if you do not have access to the web or internet, you may phone the call center at 281-238- CARE or 281-238-2273. Case Managers will be available from 8:00am until 5:00pm Monday through Friday.

Q5. What are the eligibility criteria for receiving assistance?

- A5.
1. Must be a resident of Fort Bend County
 2. A member of the household must have a valid government issued photo ID.
 3. Must have a financial hardship that was directly tied to the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. job loss due to closure of business due to COVID-19; layoff due to COVID-19, etc.); The County's Program will make the final determination if your impact was due to COVID-19
 4. Eligible tenants are those with household income at or below 80% of the local Area Median Income level. The following table provides the income guidelines at 80% Average Median Income based on your current household members.

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| 80% Average Median Income | Persons in Family | | | | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
| Annual Limit | \$ 44,150 | \$ 50,450 | \$ 56,750 | \$ 63,050 | \$ 68,100 | \$ 73,150 | \$ 78,200 | \$ 83,250 |
| Monthly Limit | \$ 3,679 | \$ 4,204 | \$ 4,729 | \$ 5,254 | \$ 5,675 | \$ 6,096 | \$ 6,517 | \$ 6,938 |

5. Eligible tenants with household incomes less than 50% of the local Area Median Income level as defined by HUD, will receive a higher priority.
6. Must not have received assistance from another agency, non-profit, government or private provider for the month of assistance provided or to be provided.
 - a. Assistance received from another government agency, non-profit or private provider shall not be for rental or utility assistance or duplicate the benefit to be received from Fort Bend County for the same month of assistance.
7. Must have documentation supporting need for rental and/or utility assistance is due to the impact or hardship created by COVID-19.
 - a. Job/Employment loss after March 1, 2020 (i.e. provide most recent TWC statement or statement from employer on letterhead), or
 - b. Other income loss with documentation (i.e. verified loss of stipend, child support, etc.), or
 - c. For determining annual income, applicants should provide documents evidencing annual income (e.g., wage statement, interest statement, unemployment compensation statement), or a copy of Form 1040 as filed with the IRS for the household.
 - d. For determining monthly income, applicants must provide income source documentation, as listed above, for at least the two months prior to the submission of the application for assistance. If an applicant qualifies based on monthly income, the County must redetermine the household income eligibility every three months for the duration of assistance.

For Utility Assistance:

1. Items #1 through #7 above must be met.
2. Utility bill must match the name of the tenant and the address on the lease.
3. Utility bill must be past due or not paid as of the prior month.
4. Utility bill payment will be made for current month and current amount due.

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Q6. What is the maximum amount of assistance available?

A6. Assistance will be based on current household income and total monthly rent amount. Each household is eligible for rental assistance of up to \$1,500 per month for a maximum of twelve (12) months. For utility assistance, each household is eligible for utility assistance of up to \$500 per month for a maximum of twelve (12) months. Monthly payments will be made based upon continued eligibility, until funds are exhausted or fully committed.

Q7. Will the payment be made directly to the resident?

A7. No, for rental assistance, all payments will be made directly to the landlord. For utility assistance, all payments will be made directly to the utility provider. There are provisions for payments to be made to the tenant, however by exception, the County will make payments via check to the tenant and landlord as co-endorsers and signees. The County also reserves the right to make payments to tenant and landlord as co-endorsers to ensure proper payments.

Q8. Will individuals who received Coronavirus (COVID-19) Emergency Rental Assistance be required to pay the money back?

A8. No. This assistance is not a loan; it is considered as a grant and will not have to be paid back. However, if we discover that a recipient has falsified documents or has somehow defrauded the program, the money will have to be repaid and the tenant and/or landlord could be subject to fines, penalties and potential imprisonment for committing fraud.

Q9. I applied to the last Fort Bend County Program, why do I have to reapply?

A9. The ERA program is a new program and has different requirements and rules. It also does not include mortgage payments or assistance. There is also an income requirement for households at or below 8% of the local Area Median Income. Therefore if you meet this income requirement and have had an eligible financial impact due to COVID-19, you are encouraged to apply.

Q10. May the County provide assistance to a renter household with respect to utility or energy costs without also covering rent?

A10. Yes. The county does not need to provide assistance with respect to rent in order to provide assistance with respect to utility or energy costs.

Q11. What type of documentation is needed?

A11. Below is a partial list of documentation that will be needed.

1. Verification of job loss due to the COVID-19 (ONE of the following is required):
 - A. Layoff, furlough, or termination letter from former employer
 - B. Unemployment Verification from TWC
 - C. Letter from employer (or other documentation) indicating reduced work hours/income
 - D. Self-Certification of job loss

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2. Income verification (ALL the following, if applicable, are required for each adult member (18 years of age and older) of the household):
 - A. Check/pay stubs for the past 30 days (1) month. The paycheck stub must have the year-to-date gross income listed. If you are paid in cash or by personal check, you must provide a letter from your employer stating your year to date pay (that is, you must show how much money you have earned since January 1, 2020). Your employer's letter must be on company letterhead with the employer's phone, email, and fax number for verification.
 - B. Letter from current and/or past employer documenting income.
 - C. Self-Employment record books for the last six (6) months.
 - D. Award letters from pensions, military allotments, education loans, grants, and scholarships.
 - E. All Income for the household (wages, unemployment benefits, SSI, child support, alimony, investment income, and retirement income (including pensions) etc.
 - F. Bank Statements for the past (30) days (checking and savings accounts) for all household members.
 - G. Proof of applying for unemployment benefits (or a statement indicating why you are not eligible).
 - H. A copy of the most recent tax return for each adult member (if check stubs are not available).
3. Copy of a Driver's License or other Government Photo ID for the tenant or owner
4. Verification of Residency
 - A. Eviction Papers or a copy of documentation received from your landlord stating that you are at least one month behind in paying your rent.
 - B. Current executed lease, depicting payment amount, address, landlord information and signatures.
 - C. Copy of utility bill in your name showing delinquency and not older than 30 days.

Q12. When will I know if my application for assistance has been approved?

A12: Once you submit your application online, you will receive a confirmation number indicating that your application has been submitted. Applications will be reviewed for accuracy and any missing information or documents will be requested. You will get confirmation of receipt within 7-10 business days from one of our case managers.

Q13: When will I know if my rent or utility assistance has been approved for payment?

A13: Our goal is to provide a confirmation that your assistance is confirmed will be paid to the landlord or utility within 7-10 business days. Payment may be made directly to the landlord, or the utility company. You and the payee will be notified of the payment.

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Q14: If I am not able to be assisted, what other options are available?

A14: We unfortunately expect that we are not going to be able to address all needs for all families through this program. Our goal is to serve as many as possible until all funds are committed. If you are not selected for payment assistance, then you should contact Fort Bend County Social Services for other alternatives.

Q15. If I am denied assistance, can I appeal the decision?

A15. Your application can be reconsidered only if there is a significant identified error made during the enrollment process. However additional proof will be required to make any changes to the original application. Once the requested proof is received and considered, the ability to receive assistance will depend on whether any COVID-19 Rental Assistance Program funds are still available.

Q16: Do I need to reapply for assistance?

A16: Yes, you will be required to recertify monthly or no less than every three (3) months for continued assistance. Your continued eligibility will be determined based upon the initial qualifying eligibility criteria.

Q17 Do I need to contact my landlord?

A17: You should inform your landlord that you have applied to the County's Emergency Rental Assistance Program and if accepted, the County will be making a payment directly to them. However, the landlord will need to enter their information via the Landlord portal on the County website.

Q18: How can I check the status of my rental assistance?

A18: Because of the high volume of calls we receive; we are asking that you refrain from calling to check the status of your rental assistance. Your case manager will be constant contact with you regarding your application.

Q19: If my Tenant application is approved, when will my landlord get paid?

A19: The landlord will be contacted and notified of payment and payment status. Landlord payments will be sent out as quickly as possible, however could take up to 21 days.

Q20: How long will it take for my utility provider to receive my payment?

A20: Due to the high demand, and required documentation for program compliance, it may take up to 45-60 days from the time your completed application is submitted to receive payment. We ask all vendors and applicants to be patient due to the high volume and verification process.

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Q21: My bills are on autopay. Do I need to update my payment?

A21: If your bills are on autopay, we assume you have funds to pay your bill directly. If you are not able to make your payments, then the bill should not be on autopay, as any assistance we provide would be a duplicate and you would have to repay these funds to Fort Bend County.

Q22: I am elderly and on a fixed income, can I still apply for the program?

A22: If you are elderly and on a fixed income, i.e. Social Security, etc, then your income has not been affected by COVID, and therefore would not be eligible.