



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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New Resources Available for Renters and Landlords

Dear Colleague Letter

DATE: August 18, 2021

TO: Child Welfare Leaders and Prevention Partners

SUBJECT: Rental Assistance Call to Action

Dear Child Welfare Leaders and Prevention Partners:

The Children's Bureau recognizes the many challenges that child welfare agencies and community-based service providers have faced and continue to confront during the coronavirus pandemic. We appreciate all that you and your frontline staff are doing to ensure the safety and well-being of children, youth, and families during these very difficult times. I am writing to request your support to help prevent evictions and homelessness. While the need for housing assistance has grown during the pandemic, there also are unprecedented resources available to assist youth and families. We must join together to prevent the families and young adults we serve from being evicted and becoming homeless.

During the pandemic, millions of renters struggle to make their monthly payments due to loss of employment, income, or child care; illness and other circumstances that impact the lives of families and young adults. Housing insecurity and eviction are devastating events for families and young adults. Preventing family and youth homelessness is key to ensuring positive child welfare outcomes. By addressing housing needs, we can prevent the unnecessary separation of children from their families, help facilitate timely reunification for children in foster care, and support young adults transitioning from the foster care system.

We urge child welfare agencies to reach out to families involved with the child welfare agency, families receiving voluntary prevention services, kinship caregivers, and young people who are preparing to exit foster care or have transitioned out of the foster care system. There may also be other populations who are part of the child welfare system and at-risk of eviction, including

foster families and members of the child welfare workforce. Therefore, we urge child welfare agencies, kinship navigator programs, community-based service providers, and prevention partners to publish and promote information about resources widely.

To help you identify appropriate resources to assist children, youth, and families, we are sharing the following key resources available to support children, youth, and families in your states and communities.

Financial and Information Resources

- **Emergency Rental Assistance Program.** U.S. Department of Treasury. Due to the critical need to prevent evictions and potential homelessness for many Americans, the U.S. Department of Treasury has made billions of dollars available to state, local, and tribal government agencies to provide emergency rental assistance to qualifying households through the Emergency Rental Assistance Program. The Emergency Rental Assistance Program was created to help renters cover their housing-related costs and stay in stable housing during the pandemic. This aid is distributed through state and local governments. Programs that provide help with housing-related costs work in different ways, depending on how each state, local, or tribal government establishes its program. The U.S. Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) has a new website (consumerfinance.gov/renthelp) that allows renters and landlords to find information on rental assistance in their area. Additional information is included in the following fact sheets:
 - [Help for Renters Flyer](#)
 - [Help for Landlords Flyer](#)
 - [Help for Homeowners](#)
- **Emergency Housing Vouchers.** U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) program is available through the American Rescue Plan Act. Through EHV, HUD is providing 70,000 housing choice vouchers to local Public Housing Authorities (PHAs) to assist individuals and families who are: homeless; at risk of homelessness; fleeing, or attempting to flee, domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, stalking, or human trafficking; or were recently homeless or have a high risk of housing instability. Additional resources from HUD about the EHV program, including archived webinars, are available [here](#).

Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) Funds. The American Rescue Act Plan Act includes \$4.5 billion in additional LIHEAP funding to help families with low incomes afford home heating and cooling costs and meet unpaid electric and natural gas bills. The Administration for Children and Families (ACF) is also administering over \$1 billion in funding to assist low income households with drinking water and wastewater bills through the newly established Low Income Household Water

Assistance Program (LIHWAP). Visit <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ocs> for additional information.

- **Child Welfare and Child Abuse Prevention Funds.** Over the last 18 months, Congress appropriated additional funds for many of the child welfare formula grant programs administered by the Children’s Bureau. Many of these programs can be used to provide concrete assistance, including support to address housing needs. In certain cases, the use of child welfare funds may also assist families and young adults who are facing evictions when other resources or federal programs may be unable to assist. The following highlights available funding and provides links to guidance previously issued by the Children’s Bureau¹.
 - Supplemental funding under the Stephanie Tubbs Jones Child Welfare Services Program, Title IV-B, Subpart 1 of the Social Security Act (the Act) to prevent, prepare for, or respond to, Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), provided through the CARES Act. See: [ACYF-CB-PI-20-11](#).
 - Supporting Foster Youth and Families Through the Pandemic Act (Division X of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021). See: [ACYF-CB-PI-21-04](#).
 - Assistance under the John H. Chafee Foster Care Program for Successful Transition to Adulthood for young adults.
 - Assistance under the MaryLee Allen Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program for families.
 - Title IV-E Kinship Navigator Funding, available under Division X. These funds may be used to provide short-term support for benefits and services for unmet needs that do not extend beyond four months. See: [ACYF-CB-PI-21-05](#) and [ACYF-CB-PI-21-09](#).
 - Supplemental funding for the Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention Program (CBCAP) provided through the American Rescue Plan Act. See [ACYF-CB-PI-21-07](#).
- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund**

As noted in [guidance](#) issued by the ACF Office of Family Assistance (OFA), states may use Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funds to address the housing-related needs of low-income families who are homeless or precariously housed. Along with providing ongoing cash assistance, most states provide an array of short-term benefits and services to needy families to help them deal with a crisis situation, such as support to prevent eviction and utility cut-offs and apartment rental down payments. Additionally, the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 established a new \$1 billion Pandemic Emergency Assistance Fund (PEAF) to allow states, the District of Columbia, tribes operating a tribal TANF program, and all five U.S. territories to fund certain non-

¹ All Children’s Bureau Program Instructions are available at: <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/cb/laws-policies>

recurrent, short-term benefits, including help with rental arrears, to needy families impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. More information on PEAFF can be found on the [OFA website](#). Child welfare agencies and community-based organizations should consult with their state or local TANF agencies to learn about what their states offer through their TANF and PEAFF programs.

- The U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness has developed the “[Toolkit to Help Families and Youth to Prevent Eviction](#).”

Additional Suggestions and Resources

The Children’s Bureau affirms that working with families and young adults to secure housing and prevent eviction and homelessness is paramount to prevention. We urge child welfare agencies, kinship navigator programs, community-based service providers, and prevention partners, with the consent of families and young adults, to:

- Be proactive in connecting families to federal, state, and local resources to pay off rental arrears, making sure to provide resources that are in the languages that families can speak and read. This includes recognizing that individuals with disabilities may need additional support. Identify and establish relationships with local housing providers and experts who can assist in resolving complicated housing situations.
- Assist in providing documentation and determining eligibility. Many programs are establishing requirements on how to determine need and level of assistance. We encourage child welfare agencies to be a part of these conversations to determine if there are ways to streamline the process and make it easier for vulnerable families and young adults to participate. In addition, caseworkers and other child welfare professionals should be prepared to help verify need based on their knowledge of the family or young adult. For instance, the agency might be able to verify or certify the loss of income, impact of COVID-19, and information on rental agreements.
- Assist with utilities payments. Families and young adults may need assistance to access programs that help with utilities. The disconnection of electricity, water, or other utilities not only creates an unstable environment for children and families but can be a reason for eviction.
- Help mediate with landlords. The Children’s Bureau recognizes that the loss of rental income has caused hardships for landlords. By using foundational principles of social work practice, caseworkers and others may be able to assist families and youth where non-payment of rent is not the only issue placing a family or young adult at-risk of homelessness.
- Practice [Intentional Landlord Engagement](#). Proactively contact landlords and other housing providers who provide housing for families and young adults involved in the

child welfare system. Let these landlords know about the assistance that is available to them. Families may be fearful of disclosure about a pending eviction due to potential involvement with the child welfare system.

- Assist with and attend eviction-related court hearings. Caseworkers should encourage families and young adults to attend eviction proceedings and offer to accompany them to these proceedings. In instances where the hearings are held remotely, caseworkers should ensure that families and young adults have access to technology so they can actively participate (laptop with camera and audio and high-speed internet). Caseworkers should be empowered to advocate in court with and on behalf of families and young adults, including providing information on any financial assistance a family or young adult has attempted to access.
- Help families understand their rights. This may include helping them to read and understand the conditions of their lease or access information from states or counties on tenant rights.
- Help connect families to legal services. Having access to an attorney or multidisciplinary legal team that provides legal advocacy can empower and support parents, caregivers, youth, and individuals to help them maintain well-being, preserve family integrity, and promote economic mobility. For more information on the importance of civil legal advocacy in advancing the well-being of children and families and information on funding to support civil legal advocacy, see: [ACYF-CB-IM-21-02](#).

Thank you again for the work your agencies are carrying out to support children, youth, and families through the pandemic. If you have questions or identify areas where the Children's Bureau could assist you in this work, please contact your [Children's Bureau Regional Office](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Aysha E. Schomburg', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Aysha E. Schomburg, Esq.
Associate Commissioner
Children's Bureau

