

STATE OF NEW YORK

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2021-2022 Regular Sessions

IN ASSEMBLY

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Introduced by M. of A. ABINANTI, PAULIN, GALEF, MAGNARELLI, THIELE, FAHY, McDONALD, WOERNER, BUTTENSCHON, GRIFFIN, JACOBSON, McMAHON -- read once and referred to the Committee on Housing

AN ACT enacting the COVID-19 supplemental emergency rental assistance program of 2021; and providing for the repeal of such provisions upon expiration thereof

The People of the State of New York, represented in Senate and Assembly, do enact as follows:

1 Section 1. Short title. This act shall be known and may be cited as
2 the "Supplemental COVID-19 emergency rental assistance program of 2021".

3 § 2. Definitions. For the purposes of this act:

4 1. "Commissioner" means the commissioner of the state office of tempo-
5 rary and disability assistance.

6 2. "Supplemental COVID-19 emergency rental assistance program" or
7 "program" means the rental assistance program established by the commis-
8 sioner pursuant to section three of this act and funded by emergency
9 rental assistance funding issued pursuant to section 501 of the Consol-
10 idated Appropriations Act of 2021, Pub L. 116-260 § 501, and section
11 3201 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021, Pub.L. 117-2 § 3201, as
12 well as any other federal funds made available for the purposes defined
13 in this act.

14 3. "Occupant" shall have the same meaning as defined in section 235-f
15 of the real property law.

16 4. "Office" means the state office of temporary and disability assist-
17 ance.

18 5. "Rent" shall have the same meaning as defined in section 702 of the
19 real property actions and proceedings law.

20 6. "Rental arrears" shall mean unpaid rent owed to the landlord that
21 accrued on or after March 13, 2020.

22 7. "Small landlord" shall mean any person or entity that owns a build-
23 ing of twenty or fewer units.

EXPLANATION--Matter in italics (underscored) is new; matter in brackets
[-] is old law to be omitted.

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§ 3. Authority to implement emergency rental assistance. a. The commissioner is hereby authorized and directed to implement, as soon as practicable, but no later than 30 days from the effective date of this act, a program of rental assistance for persons eligible pursuant to section five of this act.

b. The program described in subdivision a of this section shall be funded with any state funds appropriated for such program, including those funds appropriated by that part, entitled "DEPARTMENT OF FAMILY ASSISTANCE OFFICE OF TEMPORARY AND DISABILITY ASSISTANCE", of section 1 of chapter 53 of the laws of 2021, enacting the "Aid to Localities Budget", designated for supplemental costs associated with an emergency rental assistance program which shall be spent as specified in this act.

c. The commissioner may delegate the administration of any portions of this program to any state agency, city, county, town, contractor or non-profit organization in accordance with the provisions of this act.

d. Where practicable, the commissioner shall use the same website, portal, application forms and documentation procedures as are utilized for the state COVID Rent Relief Program.

§ 4. Distribution. The commissioner shall work to ensure an equitable distribution of funds throughout the state, excluding administrative funds. For the first 30 days beginning with the first day that the office begins accepting applications, the commissioner shall ensure, to the extent practicable, that the allocation of funds from this program for households and landlords outside the city of New York is no less than 35% of supplemental emergency rental assistance funds available hereunder. After the initial 30-day priority period has ended, all applications shall be processed on a rolling basis.

§ 5. Eligibility. The commissioner shall establish standards for determining eligibility for such program, consistent with the following:

a. (1) A household shall be eligible for supplemental emergency rental assistance, if it is a tenant or occupant obligated to pay rent for their residence in the state of New York, including both tenants and occupants of dwelling units and manufactured home tenants, regardless of immigration status of the landlord or the tenants.

(2) A landlord shall be eligible for supplemental emergency rental assistance, if the landlord has a tenant or occupant obligated to pay rent to the landlord for the tenant's residence or occupancy of property owned by the landlord in the state of New York, including both tenants and occupants of dwelling units and manufactured home tenants, regardless of immigration status of the landlord or the tenants.

(3) A tenant and/or a landlord may seek payment for supplemental emergency rental assistance regardless of the tenant's income.

(4) A landlord may seek payment for supplemental emergency rental assistance for such rental arrears without regard for: (i) the reason that the tenant failed to pay rent; (ii) whether the tenant is still in occupancy of the rented premises or has vacated the premises while owing such rental arrears; or (iii) whether the landlord or tenant, or both, unsuccessfully made application for the COVID Rent Relief Program.

b. Nothing in this act shall preclude a recipient or the landlord of a recipient of public assistance from being eligible for supplemental emergency rental assistance under this program.

c. (1) The commissioner shall establish priority in processing applications and allocating funds under this program.

(2) For the first 30 days, the commissioner shall also grant priority for: (i) small landlords; and (ii) tenants residing in a building or development of twenty or fewer units owned by a small landlord.

(3) After the initial 30-day priority period has ended, all applications shall be processed on a rolling basis.

d. To the extent feasible, no rental assistance provided pursuant to this act shall be duplicative of assistance for rent or rental arrears previously received or currently being received by the household or a landlord for a specific housing unit.

e. Any documentation or information provided to the office, its employees, agents, contractors and/or officers by an applicant as part of the application for benefits under the program shall be released only upon the consent of the applicant.

§ 6. Application. a. As soon as practicable, the commissioner shall make an application for the program available on the office of temporary and disability assistance's website. The application shall be available online in English, Spanish, Chinese, Russian, Korean, Yiddish, Haitian (French Creole), Bengali, and, to the extent practicable, other commonly used languages. The commissioner shall enable application assistance to be offered via telephone and make accommodations for those who are hearing or visually impaired, with referral to a community-based organization as deemed necessary.

b. Each municipal corporation shall designate not-for-profit organizations or local government staff that shall assist households and landlords in applying for assistance through the program. Such organizations and staff shall be permitted to file applications on behalf of such households and such landlords.

c. Any party, including the tenant or the landlord or owner, or their designee, that may be eligible to receive funds under this program may initiate an application for benefits available through the program. Regardless of whether a landlord, owner, tenant or occupant initiates an application, such landlord or owner shall be required to:

(1) use any payments received pursuant to this act solely to satisfy the tenant's full rental obligations to the landlord or owner for the time period covered by the payment;

(2) provide the office of temporary and disability assistance with necessary information and documentation to facilitate payments; and

(3) keep confidential any information or documentation from or information about the tenant or occupant acquired pursuant to this application process.

d. (1) Documentation of the immigration status of the tenant or occupant or the landlord shall not be requested as part of the COVID-19 supplemental emergency rental assistance program.

(2) Any documentation or information provided to the statewide application website, eligibility worker, hotline or obtained in the course of administering the emergency rental assistance program or any other assistance program shall be kept confidential and shall only be used for the purposes of determining eligibility, for program administration, avoiding duplication of assistance, and uses consistent with state and federal law.

(3) Any portion of any record retained by the commissioner in relation to an application pursuant to this section that contains the photo image or identifies the social security number, telephone number, place of birth, country of origin, place of employment, school or educational institution attended, source of income, status as a recipient of public benefits, the customer identification number associated with a public utilities account, medical information or disability information of the holder of, or applicant for, is not a public record and shall not be disclosed in response to any request for records except: (i) to the

1 person who is the subject of such records; or (ii) where necessary to
2 comply with state and federal law.

3 e. Upon receipt of an application and to the extent practicable, the
4 commissioner shall make available a means by which an application
5 submitted by a tenant, a landlord, or both jointly can be tracked by
6 both the tenant and the landlord, regardless of who submitted such
7 application.

8 f. Self-attestation shall be considered to be acceptable documentation
9 to the extent permissible by state law and relevant regulations;
10 provided that attestation of a person with knowledge of the household's
11 circumstances and/or the amount of rent due the landlord shall be
12 considered to be acceptable documentation to the extent permissible by
13 state law and relevant regulations.

14 § 7. Documentation. The commissioner shall establish procedures that
15 are appropriate and necessary to assure that information and documenta-
16 tion necessary to determine eligibility for benefits under the program
17 provided by households and/or landlords applying for or receiving
18 assistance under this act is complete and accurate. Additionally, the
19 commissioner shall establish procedures to ensure flexibility when
20 determining acceptable documentation.

21 § 8. Restrictions on eviction. Eviction proceedings for non-payment of
22 rent or supplemental rent that would be eligible for coverage under this
23 program shall be stayed against a household who has in good faith
24 applied for this program or who, subsequent to commencement of the
25 proceeding, applies for benefits under this program unless or until a
26 determination of ineligibility is made. Evidence of a payment received
27 pursuant to the program may be presented in such proceeding and create a
28 presumption that the tenant's or occupant's rent or supplemental rent
29 obligation for the time period covered by the payment has been fully
30 satisfied.

31 § 9. Payments. a. Payments from the program shall be made for rental
32 payments or rental and supplemental rent arrears accrued on or after
33 March 13, 2020. The amount of rental assistance paid under the program
34 shall not exceed the amount a tenant owes in rental arrears. 3 months of
35 prospective rental assistance may be paid on behalf of any eligible
36 household.

37 b. (1) The rental assistance shall be paid directly to the landlord of
38 the dwelling unit or manufactured home park occupied by the household
39 for the total amount of qualified rental arrears and prospective rental
40 assistance pursuant to subdivision a of this section.

41 (2) Prior to making a determination of eligibility for benefits under
42 the program, the commissioner or the commissioner's designee shall
43 undertake reasonable efforts to obtain the cooperation of tenants and
44 landlords to apply for and accept payments from the program. Such
45 outreach may be considered complete if: (i) a request for participation
46 has been sent in writing, by mail, to the tenant and/or landlord and the
47 addressee has not responded to the request within 14 calendar days after
48 mailing; or (ii) at least 3 attempts by phone, text, or e-mail have been
49 made over a 10 calendar day period to request the tenant's and/or land-
50 lord's participation; or (iii) a tenant and/or landlord confirms in
51 writing that the tenant and/or landlord does not wish to participate in
52 the program. The outreach attempts or notices to the tenant and/or land-
53 lord shall be documented and shall be made available to the tenant
54 and/or landlord. When possible, both landlord or owner and tenant shall
55 be notified of the provisional determination of eligibility and the
56 tenant and landlord or owner shall have a final opportunity to partic-

1 ipate. If the tenant does not participate, the commissioner may approve
2 a landlord's application. If the landlord does not participate, the
3 tenant may use such provisional determination as an affirmative defense
4 in any proceeding seeking a monetary judgment or eviction brought by a
5 landlord for the non-payment of rent accrued during the same time period
6 covered by the provisional payment. If the landlord has accepted such
7 payment, the landlord shall be deemed to have waived the amount of rent
8 covered by such provisional payment, and shall be prevented from initi-
9 ating a monetary action or proceeding, or collecting a judgment premised
10 on the non-payment of the amount of rent covered by the payment.

11 (3) Acceptance of a payment for rent or rental arrears from this
12 program shall constitute agreement by the recipient landlord or property
13 owner: (i) that the arrears covered by this payment are satisfied and
14 will not be used as the basis for a non-payment eviction of the tenant;
15 (ii) to waive any late fees due on any rental arrears paid pursuant to
16 this program; (iii) to not increase the monthly rent due for the dwell-
17 ing unit such that it shall not be greater than the amount that was due
18 at the time of application to the program for any and all months for
19 which rental assistance is received and for one year after the first
20 rental assistance payment is received for that tenant; (iv) to not evict
21 for reason of expired lease holdover tenancy any household on behalf of
22 whom rental assistance is received for 12 months after the first rental
23 assistance payment is received, unless the dwelling unit that is the
24 subject of the lease or rental agreement is located in a building that
25 contains 4 or fewer units, in which case the landlord may decline to
26 extend the lease or tenancy if the landlord intends to immediately occu-
27 py the unit for the landlord's personal use as a primary residence or
28 the use of an immediate family member as a primary residence; and (v) to
29 notify the tenant of the protections established under this subdivision.

30 § 10. Repayment and assistance not considered income. Eligible house-
31 holds shall not be expected or required to repay any assistance granted
32 through the program, except in instances of fraud perpetrated by such
33 household. Landlords shall not be expected or required to repay any
34 funds paid through the program except in instances of duplicate payments
35 or fraud perpetrated by the landlord. Assistance granted through the
36 program shall not be considered income for purposes of eligibility for
37 public benefits or other public assistance to the extent allowed by law
38 but shall be considered a "source of income" for purposes of the
39 protections against housing discrimination provided under section 296 of
40 the human rights law. There shall be no requirement for applicants to
41 seek assistance from other sources, including charitable contributions,
42 in order to be eligible for assistance under the program.

43 § 11. Notice to tenants in eviction proceedings. In any eviction
44 proceeding pending as of the effective date of this act and any eviction
45 proceeding filed while applications are being accepted for assistance
46 pursuant to this act, the court shall promptly make available to the
47 respondent information regarding how the respondent may apply for such
48 assistance in English, and, to the extent practicable, in the respond-
49 ent's primary language, if other than English.

50 § 12. Outreach. The commissioner shall ensure that extensive outreach
51 is conducted to increase awareness of the program among tenants and
52 landlords or owners. The commissioner shall require each municipal
53 corporation to target for outreach communities for the purpose of
54 increasing such awareness. The commissioner shall, to the extent practi-
55 cable, partner with municipal corporations in an effort to provide
56 outreach materials in the languages commonly spoken by residents of New

1 York state as per the American Community Survey from the United States
2 Census Bureau. Municipal recipients shall contract with community-based
3 organizations to supplement the state's outreach program, providing
4 additional application assistance and outreach activities specific to
5 their geographic location. Such community-based organizations shall
6 deliver their services in multiple languages and in a culturally compe-
7 tent manner to vulnerable and/or low-income populations, including popu-
8 lations prioritized by the program pursuant to section five of this act.

9 § 13. Fair housing obligations. Nothing in this act shall lessen or
10 abridge any fair housing obligations promulgated by the federal govern-
11 ment, state, municipalities, localities, or any other applicable juris-
12 diction.

13 § 14. Reports by the commissioner. The office shall be required to
14 report and post information on their website and update such information
15 at least monthly beginning 30 days from when the commissioner makes an
16 application for the program available. Such information shall include
17 but not be limited to:

18 a. the number of municipal recipients that choose to participate in
19 the statewide program;

20 b. the number of eligible households that received assistance under
21 this act, including the particular category of assistance which was
22 provided;

23 c. the average amount of funding provided per eligible household
24 receiving assistance; and

25 d. the number of households that applied for assistance.

26 § 15. This act shall take effect immediately and shall expire and be
27 deemed repealed September 30, 2025.