

November 17, 2020

UPDATE ON TENANT RESOURCES (HAMPDEN COUNTY)

FINANCIAL SUPPORT

- **Apply for RAFT and other funding**
 - **RAFT** (Residential Assistance for Families in Transition) includes up to \$4,000 in rental assistance for eligible families. Awards of \$10,000 will be available in certain situations. Tenants can apply for funding at:
 - **WayFinders**
 - Phone Number: 413-233-1600.
 - Apply at <https://www.wayfinders.org/apply-financial-assistance>.
 - **Fuel Assistance** – can help tenants afford their utilities.
 - **New England Farm Workers’s Council** (Springfield residents)
 - Phone Number: 413-272-2209.
 - **Valley Opportunity Council** (residents outside of Springfield)
 - Phone Number: 413-552-1548 (press 1 for English, 2 for Spanish and then 4 to speak with a live person).
 - **Catholic Charities** – can provide limited rental and utility assistance.
 - Phone Number: 413-452-0606 or 413-452-0813.
 - **Western Mass Community Mutual Aid** – can help with transportation, supplies, financial aid, healthcare, housing, translation, childcare, pet care, or emotional/spiritual support.
 - Apply for help at <https://www.wmacma.com/request-help/>, email wmamutualaid@gmail.com, or call the hotline at 413-351-2300.

FOOD RESOURCES

- **Project Bread’s FoodSource Hotline** – offers free help in 180 languages, with a dedicated line for those who are hearing impaired.
 - Call 1-800-645-8333 for information on available food assistance or to apply for SNAP benefits.
- **Mobile Food Bank Schedule** – lists sites throughout Berkshire, Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden County which host monthly or bi-monthly distributions. There are no eligibility requirements.
 - Find the list at <https://www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/mobile-food-bank>. Arrive 10-15 minutes early and bring boxes/bags to collect food.

- **Western Mass COVID-19 Food Pantry and Meal Locator** – provides a list of currently operating food pantries and meal programs, searchable by location, day of the week, and type of assistance (food pantry vs. meal site, etc.).
 - Search at <https://www.foodbankwma.org/get-help/covid-19-food-pantry-meal-program-schedule/>.

LEGAL SUPPORT

- **Apply for Community Legal Aid**
 - If a tenant has received a Notice to Quit or court papers, the tenant can apply for an attorney at 855-CLA-LEGAL (855-252-5342) or www.communitylegal.org.
- **Understand the new court process**
 - At least for now, most court events will be held over Zoom.
 - **Summons and Complaint:**
 - When a tenant is served with a Summons and Complaint for an eviction case, the first court date will likely say “TBD” or “to be determined.”
 - The Court will send a separate notice with the date of the first court event and the Zoom information. If a tenant is confused about the court date or whether the court event is in person or over Zoom, the tenant can contact the Court Clerk’s office (413-748-7838) or ask at the Zoom virtual counter (646-828-7666; Meeting ID 161-670-2984) M-F 1:00-4:15 p.m.
 - **Tenant should file an Answer and Discovery Request:**
 - An Answer is an important opportunity for a tenant to raise defenses and counterclaims. Discovery is the opportunity to ask the landlord for more information and to see the landlord’s evidence before court.
 - The *deadline* for tenants to give these documents to their landlords and the court is **three days before the first court event**.
 - If a tenant is unable to obtain an attorney, tenants can print out answer and discovery forms in Booklets 3 and 4 at: <https://www.masslegalhelp.org/housing/evictions-court-forms>.
 - The website <https://gbls.org/MADE> (click “Start Online Form”) will also walk tenants through the Answer and Discovery forms.
 - Tenants will need to print out the resulting documents, give copies to the court, and give copies to the landlord by the deadline.
 - **First Court Event:**
 - The first court event for a new case will be for mediation— an opportunity to try to reach a settlement agreement with the landlord.

- A tenant does not need to settle during the first court date if the landlord does not offer the tenant what the tenant wants or needs.
 - If the case does not settle during the first court date, the court will send a second notice to the tenant with a trial date.
- **Access other resources**
 - **2-1-1 or www.mass.gov/CovidHousingHelp/** – can provide information and resources for tenants and homeowners.
 - **Housing Court Clerk’s Office** – can answer questions about court dates, access to courts, interpreters, and more.
 - Call (413-748-7838) or ask at the Zoom virtual counter (646-828-7666; Meeting ID 161-670-2984) M-F 1:00 - 4:15 p.m.
 - **Tenancy Preservation Project (TPP)** – can help tenants with disabilities connect with resources and provide case management to preserve tenancies.
 - Call 413-233-5327 or email charris@mhainc.org.
 - **Court Services Center (CSC)** – can help answer tenants’ questions about the court process and help tenants fill out certain forms.
 - Zoom M-F 9 a.m. - noon: 646-828-7666; Meeting ID 161-526-1140.
 - **Emergency Assistance (EA) Shelter** – can provide shelter to eligible, low-income families experiencing homelessness or at imminent risk of homelessness.
 - Apply at (866) 584-0653. If families have difficulty applying or are denied shelter, they can apply for Community Legal Aid.
 - <https://www.masslegalhelp.org/housing> – can provide information to tenants about eviction rights and options.