

To: Members of the Commission to Increase Housing Opportunities

From: Kate Snyder, Mayor and Member of Portland's Legislative/Nominating Committee and Kristen Dow, Director, Portland's Health and Human Services Department

Re: End of Emergency Rental Assistance Program

Date: November 1, 2022



We would like to take this opportunity to express the Portland City Council's Legislative/Nominating Committee's concern regarding the abrupt ending of the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program and the impact it will have on recipients as well as municipalities.

Of the estimated 8,500+ households across the State currently relying on this funding, more than 870 are located in Portland. It is likely that, with the sudden end of this resource, households will turn to General Assistance for similar support. While the City of Portland operates a General Assistance (GA) office seven days a week and is successful in making determinations within 24 hours of receiving GA applications, we are not equipped to handle the anticipated spike in GA applications resulting from the end of ERA funding.

The 120 municipalities across the State likely to be impacted as a result of this program's end are likely to be similarly impacted. We urge the State to develop an effective solution to bridge the gap in rental assistance funding and to relieve municipalities from the responsibility of absorbing 8,500+ former ERA recipients.

Effective solutions could include, but are not limited to: 1) the State taking responsibility for processing GA applications, specifically those submitted by former ERA recipients; 2) formally allowing and/or recommending that all municipalities in the State of Maine provide GA assistance above the overall maximums to avoid a spike in the number of individuals struggling with houselessness; and 3) reimbursing municipalities for 100% of those costs.

Administratively, we urge the State (and the legislature during the upcoming legislative session) to do everything in its power to assist ERA recipients in this difficult transition. Municipalities cannot possibly take on this sudden administrative and fiscal responsibility in a manner that is sustainable or fair to their taxpayers or households in need.

The solutions to these challenges are complex and imperfect. However, we hope to be included as a collaborator in developing and identifying them, and remain committed as a City to continue to support our communities. We ask for assistance at this time to ensure that municipalities are not solely relied upon as the de facto solution to a Statewide challenge.

Sincerely,
Kate Snyder, Mayor
City Council Legislative/Nominating
Committee Member

Kristen Dow, Director
Portland Health & Human Services
Department