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EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (ERAP)

Overview

The DC Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) helps low-income District residents facing housing emergencies. The program helps prevent homelessness by providing funding for overdue rent and related legal costs for households facing eviction. The program also supports security deposits and first month's rent for residents moving into new homes. The District currently contracts with four non-profit organizations throughout the city to manage the intake, eligibility screening and payments of the ERAP program.

This policy brief provides information on the District's ERAP program. It also identifies two key issues currently facing ERAP.

- There is insufficient funding and resources for the program. For the past few years funding has run out before the end of the fiscal year, and there is limited staff to manage cases.
- ERAP would be strengthened by adding resources for case management services to help ERAP recipients address problems that led to their housing crisis.

Population Served by ERAP

ERAP serves low-income households in the District that include one of the following: a child under the age of 19, an adult over the age of 59, or a person with a disability. Eligible households must have a combined monthly income of no more than 125% of the Federal Poverty Line, or \$1,900 for a family of three. (see Table 1.)

Household Size	Monthly Income Cannot Exceed
1	\$1,134
2	\$1,532
3	\$1,930
4	\$2,328
5	\$2,726
6	\$3,124

Source: Department of Human Services Income Maintenance Administration

The amount paid on behalf of these eligible families depends on a household's income and available resources and is subject to certain limitations. For example, ERAP generally pays no more than \$4,250, or for no more than five months of back rent. Households are eligible for one payment per twelve month period.

In 2010, nearly 2,700 DC households received ERAP assistance. The average payment per household was \$2,023. Figure 1 shows a breakdown of 2010 DC ERAP participants by eligibility

type. The majority of households that received assistance were families with children but no household members that were elderly or with a disability. However, a significant share of households had a member with a disability (20 percent), or both children and household members with a disability (14 percent).

ERAP Services

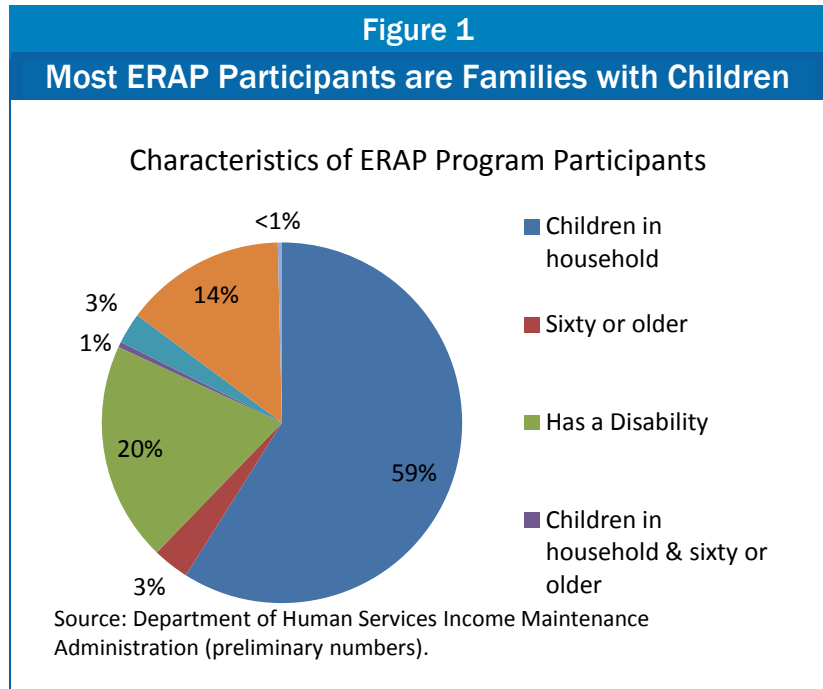
ERAP provides funding for both rent that is past due (in arrears) and to help other families move into a new residence (security deposit and first month's rent). ERAP generally pays for no more than five months of overdue rent, and usually no more than \$4,250. However, this can be increased to \$6,000 and more than five months of rent in certain cases. For security deposits and first month's rent, ERAP will pay up to \$900.

Most ERAP payments – 92 percent in 2010 – are used for rent in arrears. Three percent were used for security deposits, and the remaining five percent was used for a combination of first month's rent and the security deposit.

DC's Department of Human Services (DHS) manages the ERAP program, currently contracting with four non-profits in DC to manage the operations. (See the list of ERAP providers below.). Through these organizations, applicants fill out applications, interview, and provide documentation necessary to apply to the program. These organizations also provide case management services to help prevent another housing emergency. Lastly, these organizations pay ERAP funds directly to the landlord, court, or court marshal once an application for ERAP funds has been approved.

Households must apply for ERAP services through one of four organizations that DHS contracts with. The four organizations and their phone numbers are:

- Catholic Community Services, 202-574-3442
- Housing Counseling Services, 202-667-7006
- Salvation Army, 202-561-2000
- The Community Partnership for Prevention of Homelessness, 202-863-1370



ERAP Funding

For fiscal year 2012, ERAP's total budget was just under \$7 million, virtually unchanged from the FY 2010 and 2011 funding levels, but represents a decrease of \$1 million from the FY 2009 funding level, after adjusting for inflation. Funding for ERAP fell just as the recession took hold of the economy and at the same time that poverty and unemployment rose in the District.

Current Issues Facing ERAP

There are two major issues currently affecting ERAP:

- Lack of sufficient funding and staff resources
- Need for increased case management services

Funding and Resources: For the past few years, the organizations that give out ERAP funding have run out of ERAP funds several months before the end of the fiscal year because the demand for ERAP is so high. In Fiscal Year 2012, the organizations that distributed ERAP funds saw an increase in the number of applicants and in the size of their rent problems, which likely are indicators of the worsening lack of affordable housing in the District. As a result, the funds this year may not be able to help as many households..

Case Management Services: Because households can receive ERAP help just once per year, the program provides case management services to help prevent further housing emergencies. However, many families have the need for ERAP more than once over a twelve month time period, and need more long-term case management. With limited funding and staffing for the ERAP program though, organizations do not have the resources to do provide increased case management services. Additional funding to provide case management beyond the period of a family's immediate housing crisis could help families avoid future problems.

