

October 16, 2020

UPDATE ON TENANT RESOURCES

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:
 - **Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance:**
 - Email hc@cmhaonline.org or call 508-791-7265, ext 172.
 - More information and a fillable application at www.CMHAonline.org
 - **RCAP Solutions:**
 - Information at www.rcapsolutions.org/hcec-application/
 - Call 800-488-1969
 - **Fuel Assistance** – can help tenants afford their utilities. Email LIHEAP@wcac.net or call 508-754-1176 and leave a message.
 - **Catholic Charities** – can provide limited rental and utility assistance. Call 508-798-0191.

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 at (508) 831-2050 or the virtual counter on M-F 1pm to 4:15pm Zoom (646)828-7666 (Meeting ID 161-670-2984).

- **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 (508) 831-2050 or M-F 1pm to 4:15pm Zoom (646)828-7666 (Meeting ID 161-670-2984).
 - **Tenancy Preservation Project (TPP)** – can help tenants with disabilities connect with resources and provide case management to preserve tenancies. 508-438-5656, agarner@communityhealthlink.org
 - **Worcester Court Services Center (CSC)** – can help answer tenants' questions about the court process and help tenants fill out certain forms. Zoom (646) 828-7666 (Meeting ID 1615261140) M-F 9am-noon
 - **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.