

# The Columbus Dispatch

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## Columbus to thwart evictions with federal assistance funds

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Columbus announces a \$3 million portion of CARES Act funding from the U.S. Department of Treasury, to help people avoid evictions.

Keeping people in their homes has a direct impact on containment of COVID-19.

And for those facing eviction, the worry about being left homeless is far more dire than just stepping out to a grocery store and sharing a cough or sneeze.

Columbus officials recognize this and on Thursday announced that a \$3 million portion of \$157 million distributed in federal CARES Act funding last month would directly help renters.

“Housing instability can be a leading indicator of the public health crisis,” said Mayor Andrew J. Ginther, noting that a typical family of five might subject themselves or others to the virus spread if forced out of their homes.



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“We’re talking about thousands and thousands of our neighbors that would be homeless,” he said.

Currently, there about about 1,200 eviction cases pending in Franklin County Municipal Court, which is scheduled to reopen June 1.

To ward off the onslaught of cases, the city is spending \$250,000 of the funds to hire five additional attorneys for the League Aid Society of Columbus and \$100,000 for Community Mediation Services.

But the bulk of the funding, \$2.65 million, will go directly to tenant-based community assistance, cash payments to those facing imminent eviction.

The assistance is short-term, to help those facing homelessness in June and July, “as many evictions as we can prevent,” Ginther said. Plans for additional assistance will be announced later this year with assistance from a newly formed Recovery and Resiliency Advisory Group.

The initial rental assistance is expected to help about 2,500 renters, said Bo Chilton, CEO of IMPACT Community Action, an attempt “to flatten the wave of evictions that are coming.”

Councilwoman Shayla Favor, who chairs the housing committee, said the funds will provide “urgent relief” and help ease the burden on homeless shelters.



“The economic and financial impact of COVID-19 on Columbus families has been devastating, leaving many unemployed and without the ability to pay rent,” she said.

Impact Community Action will distribute the rental assistance dollars to residents and to other rental assistance programs, including Columbus Urban League, COMPASS, COAAA and Physicians Care Connection.

Overall, CARES Act funding to Columbus includes:

- \$80 million for expenses directly related to COVID-19, including testing, EMS response and personal protective equipment.
- \$51 million for human services including shelter, housing and rental assistance
- \$26 million small business assistance, and technology for teleworking and economic recovery

The funds must be spent by year-end and be directly related to COVID-19 response measures. The Columbus City Council will vote Monday to accept and appropriate the funds.

The city already has spent about \$7 million in virus-related costs, including overtime for public safety and health workers. “At the same time, our revenues to provide core city services are down because of high unemployment,” said Ginther. “We will be using these new funds prudently.”

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