

# Commonwealth of Massachusetts



## **RAFT and ERMA Program Overview**

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# Welcome



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# Emergency Rental/Mortgage Assistance



## ■ RAFT

- Up to \$4,000 to prevent homelessness
- Up to \$10,000 to prevent eviction for households who have experienced a financial hardship related to COVID-19
- Serves households with income up to 50% Area Median Income (AMI), or up to 60% AMI for households at risk of homelessness because of domestic violence

## ■ ERMA

- Up to \$4,000 to prevent homelessness from a unit the applicant currently rents or owns
- Initially serves households with income between 50-80% AMI

## ■ Applying for assistance

- Applications are done through the Regional Administering Agencies ("RAAs"), 11 nonprofits throughout Massachusetts who contract with DHCD to administer RAFT and ERMA
- Many RAAs administer other local/private funds as well



# RAFT/ERMA Regional Administering Agencies ("RAAs")



- Massachusetts Housing Consumer Education Centers (HCECs) at [masshousinginfo.org](http://masshousinginfo.org)
  - Berkshire Housing Development Corporation
  - Community Teamwork, Inc.
  - Franklin County Regional Housing and Redevelopment Authority
  - Housing Assistance Corporation
  - Way Finders
  - Metro Housing | Boston
  - RCAP Solutions, Inc.
  - South Middlesex Opportunity Council
  - NeighborWorks Housing Solutions
- Lynn Housing Authority and Neighborhood Development
- Central Massachusetts Housing Alliance



# RAFT/ERMA Regional Administering Agencies ("RAAs")



- Many RAAs are operating remotely during the pandemic
- Each RAA's website is the best source of up-to-date information about how to submit a RAFT/ERMA application or get in touch with a housing counselor
- To find the RAA that serves a particular city/town, go to <https://hedfuel.azurewebsites.net/raa.aspx> (link available at [www.mass.gov/covidhousinghelp](http://www.mass.gov/covidhousinghelp)) or [www.mahousinghelp.com](http://www.mahousinghelp.com)
  - For RAFT, applicants should apply at the RAA that covers the city/town they are currently living in (if applying for arrears) or moving to (if applying for moving assistance)
  - For ERMA, applicants should apply at the RAA that covers the city/town they are currently living in



# Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT)



- Flexible assistance of up to \$4,000 in a 12-month period
- Benefit limit increases to \$10,000 for households at risk of eviction who have experienced a financial hardship related to COVID-19
  - This could be pre- or post-court eviction, and includes households who are not behind yet but are going to fall behind without assistance
- Designed to meet each household's unique needs
- Serves households of all sizes and configurations who are at risk of homelessness
- Having a dependent child under 21 is no longer a requirement for RAFT
- Eligible uses include rent arrears, rent stipends, moving costs, mortgage assistance, utility arrears, security deposits, first/last month's rent, furniture, and more



# Standard RAFT



- Traditional RAFT program
- Assists households who are experiencing an eligible housing crisis
  - Eviction
  - Doubled up and asked to leave
  - Health or safety risk
  - Foreclosure
  - Overcrowding
  - Domestic violence
  - Fire, flood, or natural disaster
  - Utility shutoff
  - Other crisis that will result in imminent housing loss
- Pays for expenses required to resolve the household's housing crisis



# COVID-19 RAFT Response



- Additional funding to RAFT for households who are experiencing a hardship caused or exacerbated by COVID-19
- In response to the pandemic, DHCD introduced new flexible policies to make RAFT easier and faster to access
  - Relaxed requirements for documentation (no longer need SS cards or birth certificates)
  - Allowance of e-signatures on application documents
  - Court summons NOT required for payment of rent arrears
  - Ability to access funds for rent or mortgage stipends without owing arrears if household can demonstrate loss of income due to COVID-19
  - New, shorter application (first version 7/1, second version 10/19)





# COVID-19 RAFT Response



- As of 10/19, tenants at risk of eviction will be able to access between \$4,001-\$10,000 as long as the following criteria are met:
  - Households has experienced a financial hardship related to COVID-19
  - Payment of RAFT benefit above \$4,000 will keep the household stably housed in their same unit for at least six months, or until June 2021 for households with school-aged children, whichever is later
  - Tenant pays at least 30% of gross income toward future rent (RAFT may cover a stipend payment if rent is not affordable on current income)
- For households referred by court or community mediators, mediator will negotiate the agreement between tenant and landlord
- For households not referred by court or community mediator, RAA will negotiate the agreement between tenant and landlord



# Emergency Rental & Mortgage Assistance (ERMA) Program



- Provides financial assistance to households facing a housing crisis related to the COVID-19 pandemic
- \$20M, most of which is federal CARES Act funding
- Eligibility:
  - Currently rent or own housing as a primary residence in Massachusetts;
  - Have gross household income that is between 50-80% Area Median Income (AMI)<sup>1</sup> ; and
  - Have a housing emergency due to a financial hardship related to or exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis

<sup>1</sup> Depending on demand and funding availability, eligibility may be later expanded to 0-80% AMI



# Emergency Rental & Mortgage Assistance (ERMA) Program



- ERMA funds can be used for:
  - Rent or mortgage **arrears** (due no earlier than April 1, 2020)
  - Rent or mortgage **stipends** (for payments due after the date of application)
- Eligible households can receive up to **\$4,000** in a 12-month period
- Applying for ERMA:
  - Same 11 regional administering agencies as RAFT
  - RAFT and ERMA use the same joint application



# RAFT and ERMA Documentation



- Applicants must provide documentation of the following:
  - ID for head of household
  - Proof of income (Self-certification available if proof unavailable for benefits up to \$4,000. Income verification policy moving toward automatic government verification, at which point self-certification will no longer be an option.)
  - Proof of housing (e.g., lease, mortgage statement)
  - Proof of amount of rent/mortgage due



# RAFT and ERMA Documentation



- In cases of **rental assistance**, the property owner must provide:
  - A completed W-9 tax form
  - Proof of property ownership (e.g., copy of deed)
  - Signed agreement stating that the owner will not evict for any payments covered by RAFT or ERMA funds
- In cases of **mortgage assistance**, the property owner must provide:
  - Proof of property ownership
  - A copy of a current mortgage statement that verifies the lender and where to send a payment



# Combining Assistance



- No household may receive more than \$10,000 of RAFT or ERMA combined assistance within a 12-month period (and benefits above \$4,000 only available for tenants at risk of eviction because of COVID-19)
- No household may receive more than \$10,000 of RAFT or HomeBASE combined assistance within a 12-month period.
- HomeBASE benefits will not be considered in eligibility or assistance level for ERMA benefits and vice versa.
- RAFT and ERMA funding cannot be used for expenses already being paid for by another state or federal source (e.g., Local CDBG, HOME, ESG, CPA, Local Affordable Housing Trusts).
- However, RAFT/ERMA funds can be combined with these other types of funding if the household's need exceeds the maximum RAFT/ERMA benefit.



# RAFT/ERMA Comparison



	<b>RAFT</b>	<b>ERMA</b>
<b>Income Limits</b>	Below 50% AMI (increases to 60% AMI for people who are at risk of homelessness because of domestic violence)	50%-80% AMI <sup>1</sup>
<b>Eligible Housing Crisis</b>	All sorts of emergency housing situations, including (but not limited to) risk of eviction, utility shutoff, doubled-up/asked to leave, couch-surfing, and sleeping in a car	Behind on rent or mortgage or will be unable to pay rent or mortgage in upcoming month(s)
<b>Eligible Uses of Funds</b>	A variety of things to help people obtain or maintain stable housing (security deposit, rent/mortgage arrears, utility arrears, furniture, and more)	Rent/mortgage arrears and rent/mortgage stipends

<sup>1</sup> Depending on demand and funding availability, eligibility may be later expanded to 0-80% AMI



# RAFT/ERMA Comparison



	<b>RAFT</b>	<b>ERMA</b>
Other Eligibility Criteria	The household must be a Massachusetts resident, but there is no residency length requirement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The unit must be the applicant's primary residence and must be located in Massachusetts</li><li>• The household must be experiencing a financial hardship related to or exacerbated by COVID-19 that is causing their housing crisis</li></ul>
Benefit Limit	Maximum of \$4,000 in a 12-month period, or \$10,000 for tenants facing eviction because of COVID-19	Maximum of \$4,000 in a 12-month period
How to Apply	Contact one of the 11 regional RAFT Administering Agencies	Contact one of the 11 regional RAFT Administering Agencies
Application	Joint RAFT-ERMA Application	Joint RAFT-ERMA Application





# RAFT/ERMA Application Process: TIPS



- Clients should communicate with their landlords about their intentions of applying for financial assistance.
  - Provide to participating landlords information on the agency that will be contacting them and the estimated timeline of application process.
- Clients must maintain communication with the agency processing their application:
  - Inform the agency if anything has changed and facilitate communication between agency and landlord to expedite the process.
- Property owners and property managers can help make the process move faster by supplying thorough, complete property owner documentation to the Regional Administering Agency.
- RAAs ask for paperwork from the property owner to ensure that funds are going to the correct entity and so that they can issue 1099 tax forms at the end of the year.



# RAFT/ERMA Application Process



## ■ Contact your local Regional Administering Agency:

- Each RAA will have its own application process and timelines may vary.
- Visit their website for more information on how to begin the process: whether clients should call in, email, or submit an application online.
- RAFT/ERMA application process timeline may vary from 2-6 weeks, start to finish, depending on completion of file (documentation), the number of cases being processed, clients' compliance throughout the process, and the landlord's responsiveness.



# QUESTIONS?