

## Middlesex County Emergency Rental Assistance Program opens online application portal today, Monday, May 3

*Renters struggling financially due to COVID-19 may apply for financial assistance with rent and utilities*

**MIDDLESEX COUNTY, NJ** – Middlesex County’s Emergency Rental Assistance Program (MCERAP) will begin accepting applications for financial aid from renter households that are behind on rent and/or utility payments as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Renter households in need of assistance may submit their application and required documentation via the MCERAP online application portal beginning today, **Monday, May 3, 2021**. More information and a link to the application portal can be found here: [middlesexcountynj.gov/rentalassistance](http://middlesexcountynj.gov/rentalassistance).

The MCERAP is funded by a \$24.6 million grant from the federal government. Funding will be distributed on a priority basis, directly to landlords and utility companies. Assistance cannot be provided for rental and/or utility arrears prior to March 2020.

“Many families and individuals have been struggling financially due to the economic fallout from the COVID-19 pandemic, including those right here in Middlesex County,” said **County Commissioner Director Ronald G. Rios**. “The pandemic has highlighted how important it is to pull together as a community during times of crisis. Sometimes that means offering help and sometimes that means accepting help. I encourage renter households who are behind on rent or utilities due to the pandemic, and who meet the eligibility guidelines, to apply for this program today.”

“The COVID-19 pandemic and the ensuing economic crisis have been devastating for so many Middlesex County residents,” said **County Commissioner Claribel A. Azcona-Barber**. “The Middlesex County Emergency Rental Assistance Program will help ensure eligible renter households have a roof over their head and continued access to essential utilities during these challenging times. The County has worked hard to create this program to assist County residents, and we strongly urge all eligible residents to apply for financial assistance today.”

### ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES

Households eligible for financial assistance through the MCERAP are renter households in which at least one individual meets the following criteria:

- Qualifies for unemployment or has experienced a reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced a financial hardship due to COVID-19
- Demonstrates a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability, mainly documented by having an outstanding rental balance and/or eviction filing
- Has a household income at or below 80 percent of the area median income\* (Please note: Eligible households that include an individual who has been unemployed for the 90 days prior to application for assistance, and households with income at or below 50 percent of the area median, will be prioritized for assistance.)

\*Area median income guidelines can be found on the County website at [middlesexcountynj.gov/rentalassistance](http://middlesexcountynj.gov/rentalassistance).

## **APPLYING FOR ASSISTANCE**

Applications for financial assistance from the MCERAP may be submitted by an adult member of an eligible household or by a landlord on behalf of that eligible household. All required information and documentation must be submitted before an application will be considered for funding. Required documentation may include a copy of the rental agreement, tax returns, pay stubs, etc.

Rental assistance provided on behalf of an eligible household should not duplicate any other federally funded rental assistance provided to that household. For households in voucher subsidized units like Section 8, or in Public Housing, assistance may be available for the tenant's portion of the rent or to pay an outstanding utility balance.

Rental assistance may be provided on behalf of individuals who had a rental unit prior to the pandemic commencing in March 2020, lost the rental unit due to the pandemic, and executed a lease for a new rental unit but are having difficulty paying the first few months of the new lease.

If an eligible household is behind on rent payments, also known as being in arrears, assistance must be provided to reduce or pay off the back rent before that household may be eligible for assistance with future rent payments.

**Individuals seeking additional information regarding MCERAP, and those interested in applying for financial assistance, should visit [middlesexcountynj.gov/rentalassistance](https://middlesexcountynj.gov/rentalassistance).**