

# EMERGENCY RENT & UTILITY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Memphis & Shelby County Partnership  
to Provide Emergency Relief During COVID19 Pandemic



Presented By:

**Memphis City Council and Shelby County Board of Commissioners**  
**Memphis Mayor Jim Strickland and Shelby County Mayor Lee Harris**



**SHELBY COUNTY DIVISION  
OF COMMUNITY SERVICES**

# PROGRAM OVERVIEW

- The City of Memphis and Shelby County Government have received a total of \$28.2 million (\$19.6M and \$8.6M respectively) from the U.S. Department of Treasury to administer the Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program.
- The ERA program will provide Shelby County residents direct financial assistance, including rent, rental arrears, utilities and home energy costs, utilities and home energy costs arrears, and other expenses related to housing.
- Funds expire on December 31, 2021.

# PARTNERING AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

City of Memphis and Shelby County will partner with:

- Shelby County Division of Community Services
- City of Memphis Division of Housing and Community Development
- Neighborhood Preservation, Inc. (NPI)
- The University of Memphis Law School's Legal Clinic
- Memphis Area Legal Services
- Metropolitan Interfaith Association (MIFA)
- United Housing, Inc. (UHI)
- United Way of the Mid-South
- Innovate Memphis
- United States Digital Response (USDR)

# ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

**Households are eligible for emergency rental or utility assistance (paid directly to landlord or utility company) if they meet the following criteria:**

- (1) One or more individuals qualified for unemployment benefits or experienced a reduction in household income, incurred significant costs, or experienced other financial hardship directly or indirectly due to the pandemic; OR
- (2) The household can demonstrate a risk of homelessness or housing instability; AND
- (3) Household income is below 80% of their area median income (AMI). Jurisdictions must give priority to applicants with household incomes below 50% of AMI or with household members who are unemployed at the time of application

**Landlords are eligible to apply on behalf of the tenant, but must have final sign off from the tenant, as well as tenant income documentation.**

(Note: Treasury Department Requirements are still being developed.)

# APPLICATION PROCESS FOR RESIDENTS

Applicants will access a central portal to fill out a single streamlined application. A randomized, weighted selection process will assure equitable distribution of resources.

More weight will be given to very low income tenants, the unemployed, seniors and people with disabilities. Eligible applicants facing eviction or utility cutoff will receive priority. Free legal assistance will be available to applicants facing eviction.

Partner agencies will assist those selected with submitting supporting documents to confirm their eligibility and secure payment details.

All residents assisted will be given the option of housing / financial counseling, as well as coordination of other social services to better support sustainable outcomes.

## WHY A RANDOMIZED SELECTION PROCESS?

- The use of a Random Selection Process promotes equality and access for everyone.
- A rolling process would allow tenants who have not a chance to apply and those who are not selected to reapply.
- The process could shorten the intake process and encourage more people to apply for assistance. After selection, tenants would then submit proof of rent and utilities due.
- Several counties have implemented successful randomized selection rental programs. Our team has conducted peer calls and research of lessons learned from lotteries in King County, WA; Harris County, TX; and Riverside, CA.

# PROGRAM INTAKE

Applicants complete an online application on a computer, cell phone or with the help of a call center operator.

Complete applications are entered into a randomized selection system and those selected are referred to county program staff or partner agencies for processing.

Approved applications are referred to County for issuance of direct payments to landlords or utility company.

# PROGRAM DEPLOYMENT

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Landlord Support - Direct support to landlords with priority given to landlords with tenants covered by the federal eviction moratorium (those who have received the “CDC Letter” from their tenants)

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Emergency Support for families with children - Immediate Rent and/or Utility Support that would stabilize family

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Emergency Support for Individuals, Couples and Seniors - Immediate Rent and/or Utility Support that would stabilize family

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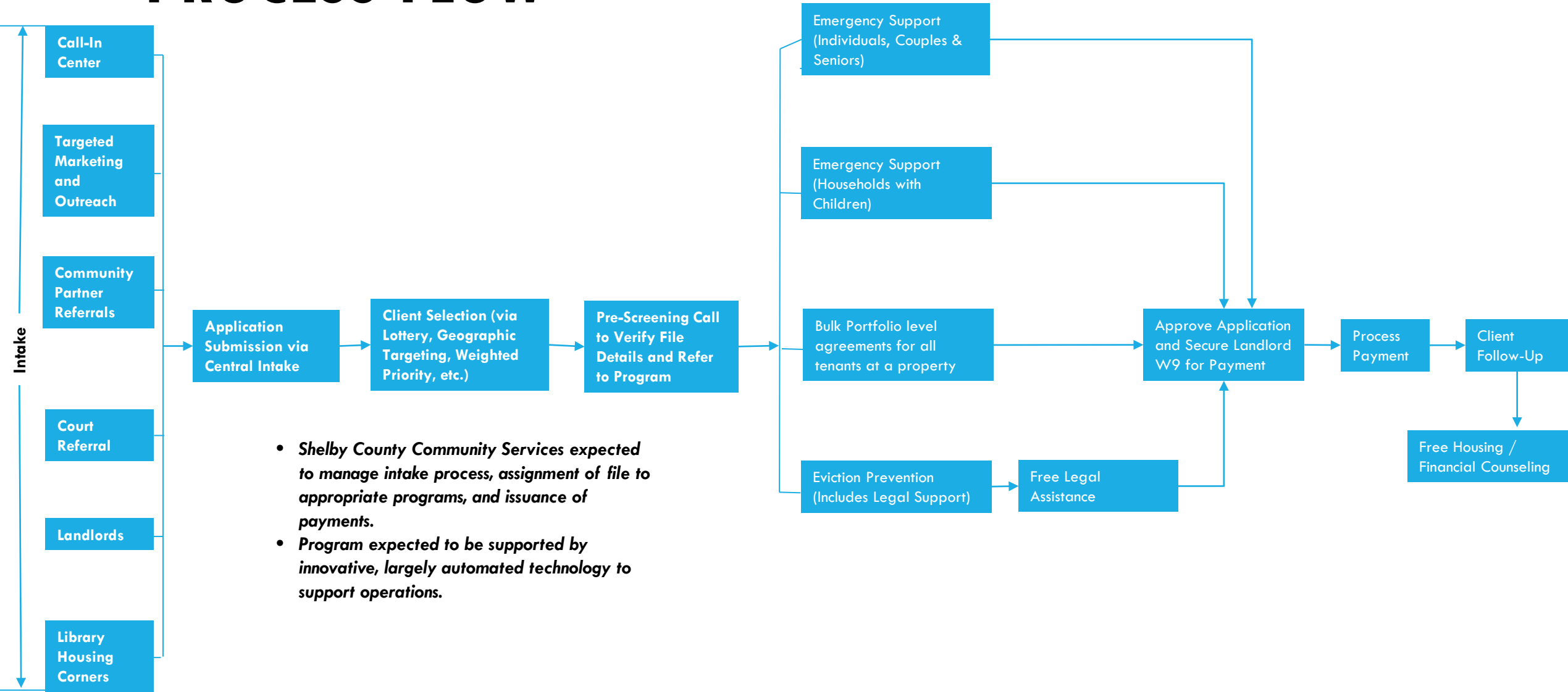
Eviction Risk - Clients in court facing eviction will receive free legal assistance and the program lawyers will coordinate with the courts and the clerk’s office

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Housing and Financial Counseling – All who receive financial assistance will have access to free housing and financial counselors to work towards long term stability



# PROCESS FLOW



# BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

- Many tenants are at risk of eviction when the bar on in person court hearings in Tennessee expires on March 31, the same day the current protections from the CDC Halt Order are set to expire.
- Many landlords, large and small, are suffering economic hardship as many of their tenants have not been able to pay for many months. Stable affordable housing is at risk if property owners cannot pay their bills.
- Many tenants are at risk of utility cutoff due to their inability to catch up on past due utility bills.
- Courts are not equipped to manage the large number of evictions that most expect to be filed if there is no intervention.
- Free legal assistance and housing / financial counseling will further increase stability of program beneficiaries.
- Close evaluation and research of program will provide roadmap for future interventions. There are many opportunities to learn from this.

# TIMELINE AND NEXT STEPS

- Landlord Survey made available to gauge community need
- Communication and planning with all parties, including:
  - Residential rental property owners and managers
  - Memphis Light, Gas & Water
  - Shelby County General Sessions Court Judges and Court Clerk
  - Tenant advocacy groups and potential program partners
- Develop a phased approach to rolling out the program, starting with portfolio level agreements with property owners to settle in bulk for multiple tenants.
- Potential applicants can sign up to receive live updates at <http://home901.org/covid-resources> OR by texting home901 or casa901 to 21000.
- Application portal for residents opens March 1, 2021 (fully bilingual in English and Spanish).