

Washington state to get estimated \$454M for housing relief, but it could take months to arrive

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A year into the pandemic, an estimated 136,300 households in Washington, or 9.5% of renters, are behind on rent, according to a late February survey... (Ken Lambert / The Seattle Times) More ▾

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The \$1.9 trillion federal stimulus bill that President Joe Biden signed last week includes billions of dollars to help renters and homeowners nationwide who are behind on their monthly payments.

State officials estimate Washington will get about \$404 million in rental assistance and \$50 million for homeowners behind on their mortgages.

But it could take several months for Washingtonians to see that money. Federal agencies still have to dole out the money to states, and state and local lawmakers have to make decisions about how to get the funding to the public.

Still, renters may get some aid sooner. Local governments are preparing to distribute federal rental assistance from the stimulus Congress passed in December.

Across Washington, the need for help is significant. A year into the pandemic, an estimated 136,300 households in Washington, or 9.6% of renters, are behind on rent, according to a late February survey by the U.S. Census Bureau.

Belltown tenant Mike Fulop said he was “in sheer panic” after he fell behind on rent at the start of the pandemic, when a worsening health condition prevented him from working. By November, he and his mom owed \$25,000 in back rent for their two-bedroom apartment.

With rental assistance, he paid the debt to the landlord. “I got lucky,” he said.

But now, Fulop is unsure what comes next. He was glad to hear that Seattle Mayor Jenny Durkan on Monday extended Seattle’s eviction moratorium through June 30. “I basically have no other option than to hope it gets extended,” he said.



Mike Fulop, a tenant in Seattle’s Belltown neighborhood, shown here with his dog Dude, fell behind on rent during the pandemic. (Courtesy of Mike Fulop)

Homeowners have fallen behind, too: An estimated 155,800 households in the state, or about 6.5% of those paying mortgages, are not caught up, according to the survey.

Washington’s eviction moratorium is set to expire at the end of this month. A federal moratorium on [single-family foreclosures](#) is set to last until June 30.

A spokesperson for Gov. Jay Inslee said Monday the governor’s office is still discussing “the future of the eviction moratorium.”

State Speaker of the House Laurie Jinkins, D-Tacoma, said the combination of federal stimulus funding and expected aid in the state budget “is going to really address the eviction moratorium in terms of rent relief for renters and for our landlords.”

While Jinkins said she had not spoken directly to Inslee about extending the state moratorium, “to move into mass evictions at the end of the month just doesn’t seem like a good strategy,” she told reporters Monday.

Along with help for renters, Washington state expects to get at least \$50 million for mortgage assistance from the latest stimulus bill, said Margret Graham, a spokesperson for the Washington State Housing Finance Commission. It is likely to take at least three months for that assistance to be available to homeowners, Graham said.

The state is still awaiting details about how the money will be distributed and how it can be used, Graham said. Along with direct help on payments, the commission hopes to also fund counseling for homeowners.

Homeowners who are behind on their mortgage payments can find counseling and other help at [homeownership-wa.org](#) or by calling 877-894-4663.

In Seattle and King County, renters are set to get access to more assistance this spring.

The Seattle City Council this week will consider how to spend about \$21.2 million for rental assistance and eviction prevention from the last federal stimulus in December, plus an additional \$1.5 million for utility assistance.

Durkan’s office [proposed](#) directing \$8 million to United Way of King County for its rental assistance program, about \$7 million to the Office of Housing for assistance for tenants in subsidized housing, and \$6.2 million to organizations with “an established track record” of serving people who have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

If the city directs \$8 million to United Way, the agency expects to start a rental assistance program in May, said Lauren McGowan, senior director of ending homelessness and poverty at United Way of King County.

Since the last round of assistance closed in December, more than 5,500 households have expressed a need for assistance, McGowan said.

King County is in the process of directing about \$45 million toward rental assistance. County staff and county council members last week said they plan to direct about a third of that money to community organizations serving people of color who have been hard hit by the pandemic.

According to county data, about 25,100 households have expressed a need for help paying rent, though not all necessarily qualified for aid. About 9,100 households have received assistance totaling about \$37.6 million since the program started last year, according to a county spokesperson. More than two-thirds of those who received help were people of color, according to King County Budget Director Dwight Dively.

King County expects to launch its latest round of rent assistance by April.

Renters with questions can email DCHSRentalAssistance@kingcounty.gov or call 206-263-3481. Tenants in need of aid can find more information at [uwkc.org/renthelp](#).

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