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Coronavirus stimulus package adds rent relief, extends eviction moratorium

By Jay Cridlin *Tampa Bay Times*

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Americans facing housing insecurity will see some temporary relief as part of the federal government's new \$900 billion coronavirus stimulus package.

The package allocates \$25 billion in assistance for renters, to be distributed among states, territories and tribes. The money will go to households earning no more than 80 percent of their surrounding area's median income, and can be used for rent, utilities and related expenses.

Florida should receive an estimated \$1.43 billion, according to the National Low Income Housing Coalition. That's a significant step up from the \$250 million in coronavirus relief funds allocated for rent and mortgage aid by Gov. Ron DeSantis in June.

State and local authorities are now determining how best to disperse that money, said Jaimie Ross, president and CEO of the Florida Housing Coalition. If it's similar to the \$250 million tranche from June, and additional local funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Stimulus (CARES) Act, it'll be processed through local governments and state agencies.

"I'm sure everybody wants it as soon as possible," Ross said. "The timing, with people on holiday, is not ideal."

In response to questions about the state's rent relief dispersal process, a spokeswoman for DeSantis said late Wednesday afternoon that the governor's office needed more time for review.

In addition to the rent relief, the government has extended until Jan. 31 a federal eviction moratorium that was set to expire Thursday, giving millions of residents at least a one-month reprieve on losing their homes.

The federal moratorium, set in place in September, puts the burden on tenants to prove their economic hardship during the coronavirus pandemic, and to make the case they should not be evicted. But in Florida, after DeSantis let the state's own eviction moratorium expire in September, it's among the few protections residents had left.

The moratorium extension applies to all tenants meeting the Centers for Disease Control's criteria, not just those in federal housing or living in homes with federally backed mortgages.

The rent relief and eviction moratorium will help many people in the state, Ross said. But when those deadlines pass and that money is spent, the state may still face a housing crisis.

"When the moratorium is in place, people aren't paying their rent, and may not realize that the rent is still owed. There's no forgiveness of the rent," she said. "That's why we believe there will be an eviction tsunami. Because the rent will come due. If you haven't been paying your rent, and then you're going to

BRADENTON HERALD

get three months, but you owe 12 months, there's a problem. So we are going to need all of this rent assistance money, absolutely.”

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