

Workgroup on Expediting Rental Assistance meeting summary, February 8, 2024

- Participants listed at the end
- To review the meeting agenda, presentation slides, and any other relevant documents from the meeting, visit the [workgroup webpage](#) and select the “Meetings” tab

Main meeting topics

The February workgroup meeting began with workgroup updates, including external consultation activities and the final report process.

The draft legislative language was reviewed and discussed. Votes were conducted to determine whether draft language, with minor technical edits, would be included in the workgroup report. Workgroup members also discussed some questions and concerns for consideration during the legislative process.

The meeting closed with recognition that this would be the final workgroup meeting, and appreciation for the efforts and engagement of everybody who contributed to the workgroup.

Key agenda items

- Workgroup business and updates
- Legislative language overview and discussion
- Voting on legislative language
- Comments and questions for future attention
- Wrap-up

Workgroup business and updates

The February meeting began with workgroup updates, including the suggestion that workgroup members should reach back out to the external people and organizations with whom they consulted during the workgroup process, and share the final report following its submittal to the legislature. The final report process was also reviewed, and workgroup members were invited to share their thoughts from their pre-meeting review of the draft workgroup report.

Legislative language overview and discussion

The overview began with an update on the legislative language process. Nonpartisan staff who participated in the drafting process then presented the legislative language, and workgroup members had the opportunity to ask questions about the draft language.

The discussion was framed around four questions inviting workgroup members to share what stood out for them, their response or reaction, implications and considerations for the workgroup, and whether there were

any issues requiring resolution. One question that arose was related to timelines included in the draft legislative language, with members wondering whether shorter timelines might be possible. A workgroup member experienced with the legislative process advised that some of the work being laid out for agencies would require funding for them to complete information gathering necessary to scope and plan the work. Therefore, time would be needed for appropriation of funds, for the agency to complete their information gathering and planning, and then for appropriation of funds once the scope was known. Members expressed appreciation for this explanation and advised that this was helpful to understand.

Additional reactions and considerations were discussed. A workgroup member reflected on the lack of precision in some recommendations, noting that the legislative process would provide an opportunity to make the language more precise. Workgroup members also expressed appreciation that the draft legislation included both smaller- and larger-scope opportunities to expedite emergency rental assistance.

Voting on legislative language

This segment of the meeting began with introductory guidance that the workgroup would be voting on draft legislative language that had been updated with basic technical edits, but that broader implementation concerns would be addressed during the legislative process. The most frequent technical edit was changing “rental assistance” to “emergency rental assistance.” The technical edits were visible through the use of red font for any added words, and strikethrough of any words being removed (also in red font. (The presentation slides showing the technical edits can be viewed on the workgroup webpage referenced at the beginning of this meeting summary.)

The draft legislative language with technical edits was reviewed one section at a time. A few technical edits were added during the review and discussion. A few comments were brought up for future consideration (e.g., during the legislative process). These included:

- Section 7
 - Potential clarification as to which programs already had options in place and might not need to make a change
 - Consideration of whether the date could be earlier
- Section 8
 - Addition of a date for completion
- Section 10
 - Suggestion to break the timeline down into achievable components, adding benchmarks between now and the final date. Suggestion to consider this not only for Section 10, but also for other sections reflecting a larger amount of work with longer timelines.
- Section 11
 - Suggestion to revisit timeline, as current date is broadly considered not achievable

Members were asked to vote on whether sections, with noted technical edits, should be included in the legislative language submitted to the legislature in the WERA final report. Member votes were unanimous in approving the sections to be included in the report.

Comments and questions for future attention

Prior to the workgroup meeting, DHS and Minnesota Housing had reviewed the draft legislative language to identify both technical edits (as described above) and broader considerations. The comments on broader considerations were shared with the workgroup for awareness and may come up during the legislative process. Workgroup members were invited to ask questions or offer reactions to the comments shared by DHS and Minnesota Housing that were beyond basic technical edits and therefore not addressed by the workgroup.

These additional agency comments are listed below:

- General comment overall—please note that recommendations in this legislation will require funding from the legislature. A fiscal note will be needed for any legislation introduced.
- Section 1:
 - Please note that the Emergency Assistance program is part of the MFIP consolidated fund and will move to the new Department of Children, Youth, and Families on 7.1.2024. Emergency General Assistance will stay at the Department of Human Services. The Revisor's Office likely has the authority to make this update afterwards but just raising it here for awareness since this applies to all other sections of this bill as well (i.e., references to the commissioner of human services will need to be updated to also include the commissioner of children, youth, and families once the new agency is operational).
 - Please note that Emergency Assistance is more than just rental assistance and is part of the MFIP consolidated fund. Emergency Assistance is one of many “allowable expenditures” under the MFIP consolidated fund. Counties are not required to offer EA and have discretion over what to cover with EA (if offered). There are state statutes and federal regulations that dictate how EA must be used.
- Section 3:
 - We have explained to the workgroup previously that this data is not available at this time and MAXIS has limitations for producing this data.
 - Will EA/EGA remain at DHS? Should Children, Youth, Families be named here as well? Since DHS will have a greater portion of the data in-house, should they be the lead for this report?
- Section 4:
 - The legislative language in this section is very broad. This language could be more specific in terms of what updates the commissioner is being requested to make in the MAXIS eligibility system. We would have difficulty fiscal noting this section given how broad the direction is.
- Section 5:
 - This section title refers to only the “Emergency Assistance Program,” implying that this section applies only to the emergency assistance program. However, other language refers to “all emergency assistance programs,” clause (1) refers to Emergency *General* Assistance, clause (2) does not refer to any specific program, and clause (3) refers to Emergency Assistance. Is this intentional? Does this language also apply to the Family Homeless Assistance and Prevention Program? This language needs to be clarified in terms of which specific programs it applies to.
 - Is there an expectation that DHS report the recommendations to the Legislature? If not, what gets done with the recommendations?
 - Should say report recommendations for legislative changes, rather than compel the executive branch to propose changes.

- Section 6:
 - Will there be funding available for additional outreach? Is there recognition that outreach without additional program funds will further burden the system? Is there a plan to sequence program funding and outreach?
- Section 7:
 - Please note that both Emergency Assistance and Emergency General Assistance already allow electronic signatures so legislation directing us to implement e-signature options is not needed. We recommend deleting the DHS commissioner and DHS programs from the language.
- Section 8:
 - Reference to “program materials” - does this apply to applicant-facing materials only?
- Section 10:
 - Please note that both Emergency Assistance and Emergency General Assistance currently use established common entry points for public assistance programs (i.e., the Combined Application Form and the online MNbenefits application). We would want to make sure that any future centralization work takes this existing program alignment in public assistance programs into account.
 - Was it determined that DHS would operate the system?
- Section 11:
 - Note that policies for Emergency Assistance are set at the county level and not determined by DHS. This flexibility is allowed under 256J.626
 - DHS has concerns with allowing landlords to apply on someone else's behalf. Agree that they could make a referral, but we would have concerns about a landlord starting the application on the renter's behalf. In addition, there could be barriers to allowing this under MA federal laws and regulations. For example, in provider-controlled settings where the landlord is the provider and there are protections in state law and our federal waiver plans to ensure individual self-autonomy.
 - This timeline is not achievable. If this legislation is approved it would go into effect on 7/1/24. Having a report prepared by 1/1/25 on this topic is not feasible. Recommend a later due date for the recommendations.
 - If this recommendation were to be adopted, it should require authorization from the tenant. An application seeking past-due rent from a renter who has moved out would disqualify them from applying for assistance for their new home for 12 months.

There were no questions or reactions shared by workgroup members at the meeting.

Wrap-up

Workgroup members were reminded that they were encouraged to share the report, when ready, with external individuals and groups with whom they consulted. Workgroup members were given the opportunity to express appreciation as the final workgroup meeting ended. Members were also asked to provide feedback on the workgroup process, so that future workgroups could operate more effectively.

February 8 meeting participants

- Cassandra Barden, Minnesota Multi Housing Association
- Cindy Fahland, Hennepin County
- Ellen Sahli, Family Housing Fund
- Jen Frisbie, Community Mediation Minnesota

- Jeremy Galley, DHS
- Josh Ney, MinnCAP, proxy for Lori Schultz
- Julie Ogunleye, United Way
- Kristyn Stephens, Washington County
- Rebekah Grimm, Salvation Army
- Rep. Michael Howard, MN House of Representatives
- Rinal Ray, Minnesota Housing
- Sen. Lindsey Port, MN Senate
- Theresa Dahlheimer, St. Louis County

Others

- Amanda Welliver, MN Housing
- Dan Kitzberger, MN Housing
- Dan Mueller, Senate Counsel Research and Fiscal Affairs
- Erik Anderson, MMB
- Justin Cope, House Research Department
- Karen Gaides, MAD
- Katie Hatt, MAD
- Kristy Graume, DHS
- Nicolas Demm, DHS
- Stephanie Klein, MAD
- Trevor Frey, MAD

Not present

- Andrea Palumbo, HOME line
- Mary Kaczorek, mid-Minnesota Legal Aid
- Nicole Worlds, county administrator, Greater MN