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May 25, 2021

>> Randi: Okay. Welcome everyone to the
Accessibility and Disability Policy Webinar Series.

>> Richard: [Speaking Spanish]

>> Randi: One moment. All right. Thank you for your

patience and thank you, Richard for explaining how to connect to Spanish interpretation. This is our first attempt at this so it's very exciting to have all different kinds of languages.

So welcome today to the Accessibility and Disability Policy Webinar Series. My name's Randi Turner and I'm with the Governor's Committee on People with Disabilities. Today we have with us Laura Saintey and Monica McCarthy from the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs to talk about help that you can get from the Texas Rent Relief Program offered by TDHCA.

During this session, participants' microphones will be muted. You will see a Q&A icon on your tool bar. This is where you'll submit questions. If there is information for the panelist to share with the attendees, we will do so in the chat box. You will receive a follow-up e-mail with information about where the webinar will be posted on YouTube in case you want to review the session again or want to share the information with somebody else. In addition, the handouts of the materials you will see in addition to some other handouts provided by TDHCA in English and in Spanish will be posted at our website and that too will be in the follow-up e-mail you will receive about 24 hours after the session.

The Governor's Committee is made up of five staff and 12 members that are appointed by the governor. Those 12

individuals, which seven have to be people with disabilities, meet quarterly. We also have representatives from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services, the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, the Texas Department of Licensing and Regulation, the Texas Education Agency, and the Texas State Independent Living Council that all serve as non-voting advisory ex officio members.

So I'm going to go ahead and get the session started by turning it over to Laura. Go ahead, Laura and welcome to you both, Laura and Monica. Thank you for joining us today.

>> Laura: Thank you, Randi. I'm Laura Saintey and I'm going to be starting the presentation on getting help to stay housed through the Texas Rent Relief Program. The agenda for today is a program overview, eligibility, how to apply, how to check application status, and other resources.

So what is the Texas Rent Relief Program? It's the first COVID-19 statewide rent and utility assistance program. It's for low-income and moderate households to help who are financially impacted by COVID-19 or who are facing instability or at risk of homelessness. We have over \$2 billion in assistance available for this endeavor.

So there are two basic components that I'm going to cover, rental assistance and utility assistance. We can pay unpaid back rent or utility bills back -- as far back as March 13,

2020. You may request your current month and two future months of assistance as well. The program may cover late fees. For your rent, the contracted amount of your rent cannot exceed \$4600 a month. That's just the top threshold. For utility assistance, we will cover utility bills of electric, gas, propane, water, wastewater, trash removal, and Internet, only if it's included as a fee in your lease.

So there's also a Texas Eviction Diversion Program portion that Monica is going to take over.

>> Monica: Thank you, Laura. So about 10% of the funds that Laura was mentioning are set aside for tenants who are facing eviction in the court process. So as you see here it's over \$117 million that are set aside special support for those applicants who are facing eviction. When the tenant and landlord go to the eviction hearing, the judge will refer them to the Texas Eviction Diversion Program, so they will pause the eviction case while both tenant and landlord go to apply for the rental assistance. Meanwhile, the eviction case is paused and the record is sealed so that it's confidential.

The tenant and landlord apply to the program and we'll go into a little more detail about how you would make that application. But as they apply, they include their eviction case information, including the court docket number, the precinct number, and the county. Because of the urgent

situation in these cases, these applications are prioritized for review to try and speed the process along. And these applicants do not have to submit the documentation of their income but they do just have to attest that they meet the income requirements. And so the idea with this part of the program is to get landlords paid and back due rent, get eviction cases dismissed, and allow tenants to stay housed.

One of the handouts that you'll be receiving provides a little more detailed information about this program but the flowchart you see here does just shows you that anyone who is applying affirmatively for rent and utility assistance through the Texas Rent Relief Program, you know, they may hear about the program through an event like this or other outreach from their landlord or other resources. They would go ahead and apply to the program online or via phone. And anyone who is in eviction proceedings, they will get referred from their judge but they will actually go through the exact same application process so they would apply either online or by phone, certify that they meet the program requirements, which we'll talk about a little bit more. And from there they can receive up to 15 months total assistance, including 12 months of arrears.

So with this slide we do just want to emphasize that anyone who is in eviction proceedings is very much

encouraged to have legal assistance through an attorney or otherwise. It can be a complicated process, a lot of questions, and an attorney would be the person to help you through that process. Stopteviction.org is a website available statewide in Texas. By putting in some brief information you can get a referral --

>> [Speaking Spanish]

>> Randi: One minute. I just switched something on the interpreter and it messed up, so I apologize.

>> It's okay. It was me. I'm going to click okay to go back into the Spanish. This is Sylvia.

>> Randi: I apologize. Thank you. A learning curve.

>> Monica: No problem. Are we good now?

>> Randi: Yes, ma'am.

>> Monica: Wonderful. So Stop Texas Eviction is a wonderful resource to try to find legal aid in your area. So low cost or free legal services for anyone in eviction proceedings. Texaslawhelp.org is another great resource. There's a lot of information there regarding any questions you may have and there's also information sometimes about legal clinics that are happening across the state. For anyone who might need that information by phone, we're including that hotline number there, which provides an automated information message that can refer you to these resources

also.

Okay. So now we're going to jump into some of the details around who is going to qualify for this rent and utility assistance. On the screen here you see the five main eligibility questions and we will walk through them now but I will let you know that on our website, TexasRentRelief.com, you can find this information and one of our handouts also includes a sort of eligibility screener that can help you see whether you might qualify. If you are a service provider, these are going to be the questions that you want to use as you're working with someone who is interested in applying.

So the first question is are you seeking assistance for rent or utilities for your primary residence, which must be located in Texas. You see a yes there. Is your household income less than or equal to 80% of the area median income for its size? And, again, we have more information for you about what that level looks like in your area.

For No. 3, can anyone in your family or your household demonstrate a risk of homelessness? So there's different ways to do this. You could show that you have a past due rent or utility notice. You could show that you have an eviction notice, or you could tell us that if you did not get the assistance you would have to move to an unsafe or unhealthy living condition or perhaps a crowded living condition.

For question 4: Has anyone in the household experienced financial hardships related to COVID-19? So there's many ways that you could have experienced a financial hardship, including a reduction in your income, increased expenses, other financial hardship, or having qualified for unemployment benefits.

The last question would be is this the only payment assistance you're requesting for the months that you need that assistance? So as it says here you must be able to answer yes to all of these questions to qualify for the rent and utility assistance that we're describing to you now.

Now, we've talked about which households would qualify and we want to talk a bit about what types of rental properties might qualify for this program. So most commonly we see that renters who are renting in multifamily or sort of duplex or single family will be applying. It does not matter whether it's sort of standard, market-rate property or whether it's an affordable housing property, which would be a property perhaps with the lower rent or a subsidized rent. We want to note for you here that anyone who's receiving housing voucher or who perhaps lives in public housing or has project-based rental assistance, they do qualify for the program. When they submit their application, they're able to request the assistance for their portion, whatever part of the

rent and utilities they are responsible for.

On the right side of the screen, we note some less common types of properties that do still qualify. So as far as manufactured homes or mobile homes, brief stays in hotels or motels, student housing -- not dormitories but a student housing situation where they would be on the lease, or any rent to own situations do qualify for this program and we're just noting for you here that those types of applications you will need to show documentation, that that is your primary residence and that there's a pattern of rent payments paid on the property.

>> Laura: So who can apply and how do you do that? So tenants can apply. A landlord can invite their tenants to apply. And a landlord can also assist a tenant and help apply on their behalf if they need help. So you can go either to the website, TexasRentRelief.com and complete an online application or you can call the call center at 833-989-7368 and ask for assistance with your application over the phone. That is available in other languages as well. And the call center is open Monday through Saturday from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. The website online application is open all day long 24/7. The online application is accessible. It's designed for use by screen readers and keyboard only users. It's got an ADA level two capacity. There is a good contrast ratio of 4.5 to 1,

which is ADA-level AA, and posted on the home page, if you require material in an alternate format you can call that call center or you can e-mail info@texasrentrelief.com to get assistance.

So if you need help with your application, tenants and landlords with limited access to the Internet or those who can't apply online due to accessibility or language barriers can complete their application either by phone or by mail. You can call the call center at any time to start an application and submit a reasonable accommodation. The languages that the application is available in is Spanish, Vietnamese, Korean, and Chinese and of course English.

There are access to interpreters in over 200 languages. If you need to mail documents to the program after you do a phone application and they ask you to send certain documents, you need to send them to this address with attention to Texas Rent Relief Program and that's a Houston address that's on the screen. And of course you can always either go online and check your status or you can call the call center and get a status update.

So if you're a trusted third party person helping the tenant to complete their application, there's sort of a process you need to go through. First we would recommend that you print the application and checklist that's on the website under

"forms and resources." This way the tenant can fill out the entire application on paper so you have every data field that you will need to enter into the online application. You will also need to get documents from them. So the document checklist will tell them what sort of documents they may need such as an ID, a copy of their lease, a late due bill, copy of their unemployment benefit award letter. Any of those things, it will help the tenant get those for you and provide those to you.

Once you have all that information, then you can go online and register. You will see when you go online to register and do an application, it will say Neighborly software. That means you are in the system. So you register in Neighborly. You will complete all the sections. Each section has a letter associated with it from a program overview, then A through L and then a "submit" button. Each time you complete each section, you need to hit a complete and continue button at the bottom and you will see a check mark show up on the left-hand menu showing that you've finished that section. You need to make sure that every section is completed and the submit button is done before you have a complete application. Otherwise, it will not be reviewed until it's complete.

Once you're in, make yourself a user on the tenant's

account. So you'll apply for a tenant using the tenant application. At the top of the left-hand-side of the screen it will say users and you can make yourself a user on the tenant account so it shows you're helping. Then you can start the application for their tenant rent and utility assistance. On the submit page there will be an option at the bottom that you need to select if you're helping a tenant. And it will say are you the primary applicant? And you'll put "no" and when you put "no" a box will open up for you to upload a signed dated copy of the tenant's certification. Because the tenant must certify that they agree to the program requirements and the conditions of it.

And then you will sign off and date it after you upload that. As the authorized party. So it's really quite easy. It takes -- if you have all the information ready, you can do an application in probably 15 minutes.

So there's four ways to document household income. First is eligibility through other programs. Programs such as if you are already qualified in receiving services for LIHEAP, weatherization, or CEAP utility assistance. If you're a household of three or less and you have WIC assistance. If you have a child in Head Start. If you receive SNAP benefits or TANF or SSI for the head or co-head of the household. All of those are sort of prequalifying programs. They already

indicate to us that you're income eligible.

The second way is if you were sued for eviction, which Monica mentioned earlier. If you are sued for an eviction you don't need to upload income documents, you just need to attest to your annual income amount and upload that court docket information.

The third way is to provide your annual income documentation for 2020. That's your tax return for 2020. And the fourth way is if you can't do any of the top three, that you would upload income documentation for all household members that are 18 years of age or older. And this would show -- we would analyze that 30-day income.

So those income through other programs -- I kind of mentioned when I went through the first option -- those are the different prequalifying programs with the WIC. Also, I did not mention during that, if you're living in a rent-restricted property or public housing or you're receiving tenant-based or Section 8 rental assistance, a recent tenant income certification, no older than one year from the date of your application needs to be uploaded. And that way we can pay your tenant portion.

>> Monica: All right. So I was checking some of the questions that are coming in. Thank you, everyone. I saw some questions around what if I'm renting an apartment? What if I'm renting a single-family home? What we're saying

here is that you do need to be renting to qualify for the program. So as far as what type of rent assistance you can get, you can request past-due rent and late fees all the way back to March 13 of last year, 2020. So if you are late on rent, you can request help with that.

Now, you do not need to be late on represent. Say you're coming up on June and you're going to be needing that help now, you can request up to three months of current and future rent assistance. So we hope that you can get that assistance to avoid becoming behind on rent. And as you go through the application, the items that are listed here underneath would also be included as rent assistance if they are showing up on your lease. So if your utilities or your Internet or certain recurring fees are included on your lease like garbage fees or delivery fees, you can also include those in your request for rent assistance.

Next we will be talking about utility assistance. So similarly we can pay past-due utilities, your current month of utilities, and any late fees. So when you're requesting for any back-owed utilities, these are going to be based off the utility bill that you submit with your application and we can pay also disconnect or reconnect fees if you are still in the same rental units where you had previously lost your service. We can also pay up to two months of future utilities. So similar to rent

assistance. The current month and two months of future. And this is just noting that if you pay your utilities to your landlord these should be requested under that certain section under the application.

Here we're listing costs that the program cannot pay. So any legal fees or court fees will not be covered by this assistance. Though, if your landlord has agreed to do eviction diversion with you, they would have to agree to waive these fees. We cannot pay costs for homeowners such as their monthly mortgage. Again, this is a program to help renters. We cannot pay penalties and we cannot cover telecommunication services like phone bills, cable, or Internet unless in those certain situations where Internet might be included as part of the lease.

Now, when the tenant applies, the landlord will also be invited to submit their own landlord portion of the application and this is because the program is -- if the landlord agrees to participate, the program will make the payment directly to the landlord. So if they are participating, they'll have to submit basic information around who they are and how to contact them. They may need to submit an ID and they'll have to submit a completed IRS form W-9. If they have -- they'll have to submit one of the numbers listed here, a DUNS number, EIN, tax identification number or Social Security number,

depending on what type of business they are. The landlord will also have to submit the lease or if there's no written lease in place for that tenant, they'll have to certify the term of the lease and how much the rent is. They'll have to also certify if there is any back rent owed by the tenant. And then the landlord will have to agree to the terms of the program and submit a certification. So we'll talk a little bit more about what that says, but so long as that landlord is participating, they will be invited to share their direct deposit information via bill.com, which is a third-party vendor we're using to help make payments through the program. If they submit the direct deposit information, the payment will come via direct deposit. Or, if not, some payments are made via check sent by mail. And so when the tenant applies, the program will reach out to the landlord at least three times inviting them to participate. If a certain amount of time passes and the landlord declines to participate or does not respond to the program, we are able to make the payment directly to the tenant after that outreach to the landlord has been completed.

So as landlord and tenant are applying to the program, they both -- as you see in the middle here -- both are required to certify that all the information that they're submitting is true and that it's accurate. They're also going to certify that they've not received other rent assistance or utility assistance

for the same time period and for the same amount. So we know that there's been some -- there's other rent assistance programs out there. There's philanthropic efforts to help pay rent assistance so of course we encourage you to apply for those other programs, but as you go through the Texas Rent Relief application you will have to certify that you have not already received assistance for those same amounts that you are requesting. If in any situation, maybe someone had applied to separate programs and then they were to receive payments from both the programs, duplicate payments, they would need to just return that second payment back to our program. So that's something that would be certifying as you apply to the program.

And now the tenant, additionally, must certify that that rental unit they're applying for the assistance for, that that is their primary residence, meaning, you know, that is where they live right now. If they do receive those funds directly, they're certifying that they will take those rental assistance funds and use them to pay their landlord. And on the landlord side, when the landlord is participating, they are certifying and agreeing that they will not evict the tenant for the time period when they're receiving that rental assistance. They are certifying that if the lease was set to end during the period of assistance that they will go ahead and extend the lease

through that time period. And, additionally, if there's any fees or penalty that are not eligible to be covered by the program, the landlord agrees that they will go ahead and waive those fees.

Okay. So you've gone online or you've called in, you've submitted your application. So now we'll talk about what to expect after that happened. Most applicants monitor their status through our online application system and so this chart here is showing the general progression of statuses. As you are in process of completing your application, it will show as in progress. Once you hit "submit" your application status will show as application submitted and that means that you are waiting for review. It then enters the review process, will be checked for eligibility and any missing information for documents, if needed. After eligibility is confirmed, it moves to payment in progress. And that is good news. When you see that, that means that the payment is coming and once you see disbursed, you know that either the landlord or the tenant, depending on whether the landlord is participating and also the utility vendor that they have been paid. In some of the follow-up materials we'll have more information -- more specific information about the statuses if any of you are needing to check on a status.

>> Laura: So I'm going to take you on a tour of the

website and show you where you can find a lot of this information. So when you're at TexasRentRelief.com at the top there's a dashboard that you can click on and this will show you how many people have been assisted. How much money has been disbursed, how much is approved to be paid, how many households have been assisted, how many more are in line, the average amount of assistance. It will show you back rent, current rent, back utilities, future utilities. You can get demographic information. You can even drill it down to a ZIP code.

On the beginning page on the main home page there's information, there's the contact information. There's the landlord application to apply. There's the tenant application. Button to submit to apply now. There's do I qualify questions that you can answer. Are you seeking rental utilities for your primary residence in Texas? Yes. Take you to the next one. You can go through those.

Under forms and resources. Under the program documents there's a landlord checklist and a tenant checklist. There's a landlord certification, a tenant certification. This is the tenant application and certification form combined, that if you're helping someone to apply this would be a really good document to print out, have them complete. Definitely make sure they sign and date that certification form. This tenant

checklist also gives them all the documents and information they need to provide. That's another good one if you're helping someone to apply. These are for utility providers and landlords and an appeal form if you are denied and you do not feel that you were -- that you feel that you were eligible you can write an appeal.

These are some resources that are available. The Texas Eviction Diversion Program fliers in English and in Spanish. These are those eligibility questions and sort of a decision tree that you can look at. This is an overview from applying to getting paid, sort of how the process works and what's happening in each of those application statuses. And this is a guide on your status of your application. It will tell what the application status is and if there's anything that you may need to do and what's going on with it, this payment guide is for landlords to help them with how to get paid.

If you are trying to get this information about Texas Rent Relief out in your communities or to other people, there are fliers in English and Spanish, there's social graphics that you can use. There's also online application instructions. There's videos on landlord tips, how to register, how to apply as a tenant, how to apply as a landlord, and how to view or edit on existing application. So regarding viewing and editing an existing application, you can view it. If you need to upload

or change anything, you do need to contact the call center for them to reopen that section so that you can make the changes. Once you do makes the changes, make sure you hit that "complete and continue" button at the bottom so that it gets saved. Under FAQs, frequently asked questions, there are lots of questions here. Just those that are asked over and over again, general program questions, questions that landlords have asked, that tenants have asked, that utility vendors have asked. Eviction diversion-specific questions, questions about outreach, reporting, and questions about the system, the Neighborly system.

So once you click on a question and you open it up -- let's go to which counties are covered. Texas Rent Relief covered all 254 counties of Texas. So as you open them up, it will give you answers. Again, it's available in multiple languages. You just need to select the language that you wish to view in. If I was to pick Spanish here then the questions all change to Spanish. Same with the other languages.

So this web page has lots of information. Let me close that.

>> Monica: Great. Thank you, Laura. And before we move on to questions from the group, we did just want to share, you know, that there is a lot of other programs that are

out there helping with rent assistance and other assistance. In general and also some that are particular for people with disabilities. So we've noted some of those programs here, some might offer more short-term assistance. While we have our Texas Rent Relief Program that covers the entire State of Texas, many localities, cities, and counties also received some assistance as well under similar funding or different rent and utility assistance programs. Some of them listed here. So especially if you live in a larger city or county, we encourage you to see if your locality might have more assistance that can help you. And many times using some of these programs in the short term might be able to help if you need longer-term assistance, perhaps reaching out to your local public housing authority to see whether they have vouchers available and other assistance. You can ask your public housing authority whether they have programs specific to people with disabilities or, if not, would they consider that in the future.

You can seek out the low-income housing tax credit properties that are around the state and through TDHCA. We have other programs including Project Access and Section 811 Project Rental Assistance to help with rental assistance or the Amy Young Barrier Removal Program. So some of these longer term programs, they might have a wait list and it can be

difficult to get that assistance but sometimes using some of the short-term programs can help you get there.

As we wrap up here, we do just want to encourage you to sign up for our e-mail Listserv. You can sign up for this under the TDHCA website. There is a left-hand panel where you can register for our pandemic-related Listserv and through this Listserv we'll often share larger updates related to the Texas Rent Relief Program and some of our other pandemic assistance programs. So please stay in touch. And, with that, I think we're interested in hearing from you, hearing your questions about the program and thank you so much for taking this time with us. Randi, I don't know if you've noticed any trends?

>> Randi: Yes, that's what I was kind of looking at. One of the things that keeps coming up is I've made phone calls. I've been on hold for 30 minutes. I'm going to get a call back or I e-mail and I don't get a response. So there seems to be some frustration there getting through to communicate with somebody. What do you suggest?

>> Laura: So if you can't get through, you can contact me or someone at TDHCA in our division and we can at least try to figure out what's going on. I know that the call center had some glitches a couple of weeks ago and it was impossible for them to get in. We are increasing staff and we

are working on increasing that response time. You can also go online and see if you can find your status there and look at that status chart. That will give you a good indication of what's going on.

>> Randi: That's come up too where people -- well, in general, how long should the process take? Because some people, you know, they have been waiting a month. Some people applied back in March and they haven't heard anything but they see other people get their payments processed. So in general how long does the whole process take or should it take?

>> Laura: So it depends. It depends on if your application has everything that's needed, if there was questions or things that needed to be clarified. If something more needed to be uploaded. I know originally when we had the initial system it did not function correctly and people applied multiple times, which put many duplicates in our system, which is making it difficult to figure out what's the right application and what's not and making sure that we're not sending the same person to five different people to review when they really only need one.

We asked people initially not to do any more applications but then when the new system came out everyone received an e-mail from Texas Rent Relief asking

them to go in, complete their application, and if they didn't complete it in 21 days, it would be put in an inactive status. So if you do get that e-mail, do make sure you go into your application and check it. Remember, those check boxes that I was saying on the left-hand side, if they're not marked complete they're not checked off and something's missing. Typically if your application is in review and the reviewer asks you for missing documents, the quicker you can get that back and make sure you send a response back to them as a request that you did follow through. If you just do it and don't let them know, they may be working on 400 other files and won't know to get back to that immediately and it might sit there a little bit of time. So make sure you respond as instructed and any e-mail responses.

So, how long should it take? Well, initially we had such a huge backlog and then we had too many people that were in eviction status so we prioritized evictions and everybody got put on hold while we got the evictions caught up and now we're back to working those. If you haven't received help and you applied back in February, please let me know. If you have applied in March, I'm seeing March applications now being in review and being processed. I do need to let you know that over the last month we have gone from not processing very many applications to doing almost \$10 million

days. So in one day we'll get \$10 million of assistance out to Texans. So it is starting to roll out. It is starting to happen faster.

Someone noted that they were asked to upload a W-9. If you're a landlord, then you do need to do that. If you're a tenant, I'm wondering if you applied in the right application. You might want to check that.

>> Randi: Okay. I'm going to kind of go a different direction. Is the program only for those in eviction or if I'm disabled and my income has been affected and by TWC unemployment is stopping, can I still get assistance?

>> Monica: That's a great question. So, no, you do not have to be in eviction proceedings to qualify. We encourage you to apply to the program just as soon as you know you have a need. So maybe you're already behind on rent. Maybe, like we said, you're going to be behind for next month. We only request that if you are in eviction proceedings, you include that information on your application because, as we mentioned, that will prioritize the application for review and that way you won't need to upload the income documentation. But definitely you do not need to be in eviction when you apply.

If while you're waiting, if you are sued for eviction, you can call the call center and have them update your application

to add that information.

>> Randi: I think right now part of the problem with the call center is people can't get through.

>> Laura: Yes.

>> Randi: That's the frustrating end of that right now. If it's been a while since like February or maybe early March, Laura, you said to contact you or do you want me to have them -- do you want me to collect it all and I can send them over to Thomas, who was handling some of those other calls we got? Or how do you want to do that?

>> Monica: You know, I might suggest even first step check your spam inbox on your e-mail. We have heard that some of the e-mails are sometimes going to spam, so we would hate if you missed the communication because of that.

Second, we would absolutely encourage you to check online and see where your status is at. I think we can confidently say that once you enter the payment and process status, you are within two weeks of having your assistance, either directly to you or to your landlord or utility provider. And, of course, we're working to improve all of those timelines.

>> Laura: Yes. Someone said if they're disabled and their income has been affected can they apply even if they're not in an eviction status and, yes, of course. You just need those five qualifying questions to determine if you're eligible.

So those are the important things that you need to answer.

>> Randi: We have somebody else who says I've applied and was told I was approved but can't get through online to see when I'll be funded. I'm under eviction currently and I'm worried that I'm going to be put out. What might you suggest?

>> Laura: It's been approved?

>> Randi: That's what they said. It's been approved. Online to see when it will be funded. Does it say when the payment will be made?

>> Laura: Typically, from the time you get the approval e-mail you have 7 to 14 days for it to get through payment processing and then another about 7 days for possibly a check to be issued. So if it's past a couple of weeks then we definitely need to have that checked.

>> Randi: Okay. If we have a resident that's previously received assistance from a different organization and then applies for Texas Rent Relief, how do managers report this?

>> Laura: Okay. So say it depends on what months they got assistance. So say they got assistance for October through December of 2020 and they are asking Texas Rent Relief for January through May of 2021. It's not a duplicate assistance. Different months, different amounts. That's fine. If they applied and they asked for, say, January through March

with Texas Rent Relief and they also got that assistance through some local agency, then you would need to refund the duplicate months back to Texas Rent Relief for the months that they received assistance from the other entity.

Say, for example, that -- say somebody's rent is \$1,000 a month and they got \$500 from one organization for the month of March. Texas Rent Relief could cover the other \$500, they just can't do the whole \$1,000 because that's duplicating \$500 of it.

>> Monica: As you walk through the online application, it's going to ask these things. It's going to say, you know, have you received other assistance? It will allow you to list it there. So we hope that that should be clear as you're going through the screens on the application.

>> Laura: So the videos that are online are being updated because we made some changes. Those should post by the end of this week. There will be a tenant application, a landlord application, and a landlord assisting a tenant in their application video. These videos will literally walk you through each screen that you have to use when you apply. It shows you exactly how you fill it out and what you need to put in.

>> Randi: There's lots of other questions but if you are a Spanish speaker, go ahead and type your question into the

Q&A box and we will have somebody interpret that momentarily. What happens if the landlord doesn't want to apply for benefits to assist the tenant?

>> Laura: Okay. So you can apply as a tenant on your own and you can get the check cut directly to you to pay your landlord, as long as you're under a current lease that's covering the months that you're asking and you reside in the unit when the payment is received. So you have to be -- the purpose of the funds is to keep you housed during the pandemic so that you are not at risk of getting ill. And so -- or spreading the disease. And so if you are residing in the unit, you have a current lease for that unit, you can apply for it and we can help make those payments to you that you can then pay your landlord with.

>> Monica: And we should say even if you do not have a rent lease, if you can show a pattern of rental payments, that would also be sufficient. So we as a program we must reach out to your landlord -- and we will try to engage them and make the payment to them directly but, again, if they do not respond or if they decline participating, that's when we'll be able to pay you the tenant directly.

>> Randi: What if someone lost -- and this may not be something you can answer. What about someone who lost public housing because they lost their job with COVID. Now

they cannot get back into public housing due to owing money and are at risk of homelessness. So they could apply for your funds, right?

>> Laura: Are they in a rental unit now?

>> Randi: Public housing is usually rental -- oh, they were in public housing.

>> Laura: Right. If they're not -- yeah, if they're not in a rental agreement or can show a pattern of payment for rent somewhere then they should probably try to apply through the emergency solutions grant funds or the homeless funds that TDHCA offers.

>> Randi: Okay.

>> Laura: If they're, say, living in a hotel/motel, as long as they have some sort of written agreement with that hotel/motel or they can show a pattern of payment, we can help cover those as well.

>> Randi: Okay.

>> Laura: Oh, another thing. Say they're paying -- they're sharing a house with somebody they know and they have an agreement with that person to pay a portion of the monthly bills or monthly rent, as long as they have an agreement that they can show and they have -- or a pattern of payments we can help cover that as well.

>> Randi: Okay. And you can scan and upload

documents. They don't have to be mailed, correct?

>> Laura: You can -- on the online system you can and also on your phone. You can actually just take a picture and it will automatically upload. The phone is kind of small to work on but if you can do that, you can just take photos on your phone. It will upload right in. It takes most forms, PDFs, JPEGs, photos. It takes all forms of documentation that you can upload. You cannot e-mail documents to info@texasrentrelief because of security reasons. They're going to ask you to physically mail those instead.

>> Monica: We should say online is definitely the preferred method. As you're walking through the application, it's going to prompt you for what's needed and that is the fastest and preferred way to get us the supporting documents.

>> Randi: What if someone is in a long-term RV park?

>> Laura: Okay.

>> Randi: Does that work too?

>> Laura: If they're in a long-term RV park and they have lot fees that they have to pay on some sort of agreement, we can cover those.

>> Randi: If we have full Medicare or partial Medicaid, the Medicare savings program, will they meet income eligibility to get help with rent and utilities? What if they are enrolled in LIF -- I don't know what that is. Extra help too.

>> Laura: You have to be in those specific programs we mentioned on the slides for sort of automatic eligibility or you would just have to document what your income is. Maybe a copy of your benefit award letter that shows what your monthly income is that we can use to analyze the last 30 days or if you get an award letter that covers a year, that it's for the current year. We can use that.

>> Randi: Two individuals are on a lease and only one is affected and unable to pay their share. The second individual is paying all the rent. Can there be any assistance there?

>> Laura: That's a good question.

>> Monica: Yeah, in general, you know, there needs to be -- they need to be able to show that rent is due for this person. So it sounds in that particular situation that might not be the case. But if they could show, you know, that there was -- that they were missing their rent payments, that would sort of be another situation. Yeah.

>> Laura: I think we had some information on lease and sublease that could handle that, but I would think if they're both on the same lease, I don't know whether that can be covered. We'd have to check further on that.

>> Randi: And if you're renting a home on private land, that's still covered, right?

>> Laura: Any rental unit that is your primary residence, yes.

>> Randi: Okay. Let's see, but you said -- what about rent to own?

>> Laura: Yes, as long as you are not -- yeah. Rent to own as long as you're not somehow listed on that document as the owner already then, yes.

>> Randi: Is an unemployment benefit letter sufficient documentation for income verification?

>> Laura: If that's all you're getting, yes.

>> Randi: Okay. Let's see, for clarification, my agency helps with rent and utility assistance for individuals 60 years of age and older. Only one time a year. So if we helped them already can they not get help from the Texas Rent Relief Program? Will that depend on what kind of help they've received, probably?

>> Laura: Yes, and we can't cover the same months for the same amount for the same bill. So if you helped them for January rent, we can't cover January rent. If you helped them for February electric, we can't cover February electric but we can cover other things for that month, just not the ones you did, if that makes sense.

>> Randi: If the status says "resubmitted," what does that mean?

>> Laura: Okay. So the statuses have been streamlined and changed. You'll notice on the status chart resubmitted was one of the more detailed ones. Resubmitted I believe means that it was in queue, came out of queue for some reason and got put back in.

>> Randi: Okay. All right.

>> Laura: While we're at that discussion point, some people have already gotten their first round of assistance and their months that are covered are about to be up. And they want to reapply. Do not go in and start a new application to reapply. The system will automatically prompt you with an e-mail when you're eligible to reapply and it will say that you're eligible to reapply for more assistance and to use this link. That is typically 60 days after the date that your payment was made. So you may get behind again a little bit by a month or so before you get that e-mail but you can request that back three months at a time. So just be cognizant that we don't want you reapplying because that creates duplications in the system which really bogs things down and keeps it difficult for us to catch up and for people that are already waiting to get assisted.

>> Randi: Okay. I don't see any questions in Spanish but we are also out of time. So there are a number of other questions so what I'm going to do is go through and pull these

Q&As because they link back to the person that asked. And I'll compile those and get those to you, Laura and Monica and see if we can answer those people directly. If it is something we think would benefit everybody, we'll send a mass e-mail out later. It may take us a week or so to get all of those done.

>> Laura: Great.

>> Randi: Probably not going to happen today or tomorrow. I want to thank you both. I want to thank our interpreters, our sign language interpreters, and our Spanish interpreters as well as our realtime captioning provider. Thank you very much for joining us today and I hope that you enjoyed the session. Have a great rest of the day.

[End of webinar]

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