



February 8, 2021

Dear Members of the Contra Costa Board of Supervisors,

As community, labor, and faith organizations that work directly with the residents most impacted by housing insecurity in Contra Costa County, the members of the Raise the Roof Coalition are encouraged that local residents are poised to receive nearly \$71 million in financial assistance. While we have concerns about some aspects of the new Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) created by SB 91, we are encouraged that the ERAP will prioritize households making less than 50% of area median income and communities most impacted by the racial and economic inequities of COVID-19. This considerable allocation of rental assistance represents an unparalleled opportunity to stabilize our county's most vulnerable tenants, small landlords, and mission-driven affordable housing providers.

However, as with all governmental programs, the ERAP will only prove successful if it is implemented in a strategic and equitable manner. It is incumbent upon all of us to rise to meet the moment by working together to help those in need. **Therefore, we urge you to build upon the success of recent collaborations between public and community agencies in Contra Costa County by establishing a well-resourced Coordinating Council to assist renters and property owners in navigating the ERAP. Without such action, the most vulnerable tenants and property owners--the ones whom the ERAP is truly meant to protect--will fall through the cracks, increasing the risks of eviction, foreclosure, homelessness, and the long-term harms of insurmountable debt.**

Recommended Actions

You have the power to build out the bottom-up infrastructure needed to complement the State's top-down approach. Therefore, we ask you to consider the following four actions:

- 1. Provide Mini-Grants to Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) for Outreach and Education.** The staff report for Item D.7 notes that, under the proposed plan, the County will retain over \$514,000 for "local community engagement and program outreach." This money should be distributed as soon as possible to CBOs with a proven track-record of

working across all of Contra Costa's communities to assist residents with navigating the ERAP. Special attention should be given to providing mini-grants to CBOs with a trusted reputation among low-income communities, immigrant communities, and communities of color as well as people at risk of homelessness. As noted in the staff report, the success of the State's ERAP will depend on the engagement of local partners with deep roots in the communities most impacted by COVID-19. Indeed, local CBOs are best positioned to ensure that these communities receive the culturally and linguistically specific support they need to navigate the ERAP application process. Contra Costa's swift, efficient, well-coordinated, and highly effective public/community outreach campaign for the 2020 Census can serve as a model in this regard.

- 2. Select a CBO to Manage the Coordinating Committee.** The coordinating tables for the 2020 Census and the long-running CalFresh Partnership each serve as excellent examples of how a standing group of stakeholders can collaborate to engage residents from across Contra Costa's diverse communities and solve issues that emerge in the implementation process. The ERAP represents an unprecedented opportunity to provide immediate assistance to local residents in need. But given the scale of the program, and the scope of the challenges it is meant to address, implementation will require efficient and real-time coordination among local grantees. The Coordinating Council should thus be established immediately under the direction of a designated CBO--which, like other local outreach partners, should receive a grant to support this role.
- 3. Create a Community Hotline to Provide Multilingual Navigation for Low-Income Renters and Landlords Seeking Advice and Support.** This would serve as a single point-of-entry to connect residents with CBOs from their neighborhood who can help guide them through the ERAP process. Further, the hotline should be used to connect residents to ancillary services. Since the start of the pandemic, Contra Costa County has invested in several programs to support renters and landlords, including CDBG-funded rental assistance, eviction protections, and tenant legal services. This hotline would thus improve outcomes in terms of navigating not only the ERAP, but also the County's other responses to pandemic-induced housing insecurity.
- 4. Work with the State to Collect and Analyze Data.** The ERAP is a brand new program. In order to evaluate and improve outreach during the implementation process, it will be critical to collect and analyze data on program recipients, experiences, and outcomes. The State or LISC--the contractor selected to manage the ERAP--should be collecting such data, but that data may not be shared readily with the local CBOs that are leading the outreach campaign. Therefore, the County should use its leverage with the State to collect data and present regular reports on ERAP outcomes to the Coordinating Council. The Coordinating Council can then use this information to troubleshoot, address gaps in services, and/or make recommendations for program alternatives should future rental assistance monies become available.

Thank you for your consideration of these four recommendations. We believe these actions will help to make the program effective at getting the most vulnerable tenants and landlords the relief that they need and to prevent displacement and homelessness in Contra Costa County.

Sincerely,

Alex Werth, East Bay Housing Organizations
Mariana Moore, Ensuring Opportunity Campaign to End Poverty in Contra Costa
Kristi Laughlin, East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy

On behalf of the Raise the Roof Coalition

The Alliance of Californians for Community Empowerment (ACCE)

California Nurses Association (CNA)

Contra Costa Central Labor Council

Central County Regional Group (CCRG) of First 5 Contra Costa

East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy (EBASE)

East Bay Housing Organization (EBHO)

Ensuring Opportunity, the Campaign to End Poverty in Contra Costa County

The Faith Alliance for a Moral Economy (FAME)

Jewish Family & Community Services East Bay

Monument Impact

Tenants Together