

COVID-19 RAFT Response
Program Guidance
March 25, 2020

Note: During this rapidly evolving situation, program guidance for the COVID-19 RAFT Response will also evolve. The below guidance is initial guidance from DHCD that may be modified or updated as the situation unfolds.

DHCD has received an additional \$5,000,000 in funding for the Residential Assistance for Families in Transition (RAFT) program. This additional \$5M will allow DHCD to expand the existing RAFT Program to create a special “carve-out” program for households facing instability as a result of COVID-19-related loss of wages or increase in expenses (e.g. medical expenses).

The carve-out program will be referred to as “COVID-19 RAFT Response” (CRR) and will be administered in accordance with the RAFT Program Guidance. However, there will be some key changes that apply to households under the COVID-19 RAFT Response:

- **Automatic waiver for RAFT screen score for COVID-19-related applications.** CRR applicants do not need to complete part 3 of the RAFT screening tool (homelessness risk factors). They simply need to complete part 1 (eligible housing crisis) and part 2 (income-eligible).
- **“Self statement” of COVID-19-related loss of income or increase in expenses.** In the interest of processing applications quickly, CRR applicants do not need to provide documentation to verify their loss of income or increase in expenses and can simply provide a short self-statement (written or verbal) connecting their housing emergency with the COVID-19 crisis.
- **Use of “upstream RAFT” housing crisis and “standard RAFT” housing crisis options.** Households will be able to qualify for CRR under any of the existing housing crisis options, including being behind on rent or mortgage but not yet facing eviction or foreclosure. Households who qualify for CRR will be able to access any of the normal RAFT payment options, including market rent stipends, moving costs, etc. This differs from the Upstream RAFT pilot program because households using Upstream RAFT can only access arrears.
- **Waiver of the requirement of a shutoff notice for gas/electric assistance.** Because utility companies will not be issuing shutoff notices during the COVID-19 crisis, CRR applicants may qualify for utility assistance without a shutoff notice and simply with a notice of arrears.
- **Flexible documentation policy.** If documents are unavailable due to the COVID-19 crisis, applications may be processed without documentation that is normally required. RAAs should make their best effort to collect documentation, particularly documentation that verifies income, but will not be penalized for not collecting typical RAFT documentation if it cannot be gathered in a timely manner. DHCD understands that property owner documentation is required in order to appropriately issue end-of-year tax forms to owners and vendors, and understand this may not be able to be waived.

Funds will be tracked in HAPPY using a new increment under the RAFT program, **increment 12**. COVID-19 RAFT Response participants should be enrolled in increment 12 in the Occupancy module **and** their payments should be assigned to increment 12 so that DHCD and the RAAs can track both participants and payments.