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NORTH CAROLINA OFFICE OF RECOVERY AND RESILIENCY

HOPE PROGRAM

HOUSING STABILITY AND EVICTION DIVERSION PROGRAMMING





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HOPE PROGRAM BASICS



THE HOPE PROGRAM

- The Housing Opportunities and Prevention of Eviction (HOPE) Program is part of a statewide effort in 88 counties to address renter needs such as rent and utility assistance due to impacts from coronavirus.
- The objective of the program is simple – to provide housing stability to vulnerable renters by paying landlords and utility providers directly.
- The program is designed to be as streamlined as possible to allow for fast application and quick payment of funds to landlords and utility providers.
- At this point, HOPE is able to pay rent and utilities within two to three weeks of receipt of a complete application.

HOPE ACCOMPLISHMENTS TO DATE

- Last year, the first version of the HOPE Program (HOPE 1.0) assisted 37,000 households with \$133 million in rent and utility payments.
- This year, the second version of the HOPE Program (HOPE 2.0) has received nearly 130,000 eligible applications and awarded more than \$370 million in rent and utility awards.

PROGRAM BASICS

- The HOPE Program is funded by the U.S. Treasury Department's Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Program.
- Approximately \$800 million is available for the HOPE Program for rent and utility assistance.
- The HOPE Program is operating in 88 counties.
- The remaining 12 counties (the largest counties in the state) are running their own eviction prevention programs.
- You can reach those individual programs from the HOPE website at <https://hope.nc.gov>.

AREAS NOT SERVED BY HOPE

County	County
Buncombe	Guilford
Cabarrus	Johnston
Cumberland	Mecklenburg
Durham	New Hanover
Forsyth	Union
Gaston	Wake

- Five tribal organizations also received their own allocation of funds:
 - Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians,
 - the Coharie Tribe,
 - the Haliwa-Saponi Indian Tribe,
 - the Lumbee Tribe of North Carolina, and
 - the Waccamaw-Siouan Tribe.

HOPE PROGRAM BASICS

- Covers rent and utility payments incurred by a renter since April 2020.
- Pays the landlord (for rent) and utility provider (for utility service) on behalf of the applicant.
- Provides up to 15 months of assistance.
 - Twelve (12) months of arrears and three (3) future months of assistance.
- Applicants can reapply when their assistance runs out for additional service, funds permitting.

HOPE PROGRAM ELIGIBILITY

Applicants (Tenants) must:

- Earn an income less than or equal to 80% area median income based on their county of residence (also known as LMI);
- Occupy a rental property as their primary residence and be a named party to the lease or rental agreement;
- Experience difficulty paying rent due to coronavirus pandemic related impacts.
 - Specific eligibility criteria is asked in the application.

WHAT DOES RENT ASSISTANCE COVER?

- Arrears on behalf of the applicant, up to 12 months total.
- Future recurring rent payments, up to 3 months at a time.
- Existing fees or surcharges that are part of the rent agreement, such as pet fees, insurance fees, utility fees, or other fees if they were pre-existing.

WHAT DOES RENT ASSISTANCE *NOT* COVER?

- Legal fees associated with eviction or other disputes.
- Late fees or penalties assessed by the landlord.
- Costs incurred by subletters or other individuals that are not part of a lease agreement or leases where the applicant is not the primary resident.
- Costs of alleged damage, including property damage, damage to credit, or other monetary or physical damage by either party.
- Lease drafting, administrative, or accounting fees.
- Equipment storage fees or leases and commercial, agricultural, or other non-residential leases.
- Payments owed to hotels and motels by permanent residents residing in those facilities.
- Arrears prior to April 1, 2020 or not related to coronavirus.

HOPE RENT AWARD CALCULATION

- The HOPE Program *pays the rent the applicant owes* up to a cap equal to 130% of the 2-bedroom unit fair market rent (FMR) cap for that county.
- If an applicant resides in subsidized housing, such as Public Housing, the HOPE Program pays for the amount of rent that the applicant pays to the PHA for back owed rent only.

HOPE DOCUMENTATION REQUIREMENTS

- A lease agreement is required to be uploaded when the applicant applies for assistance.
- The lease agreement must have the tenant names, rental address, and the amount owed a month at a minimum.
- In the absence of a lease, a written statement (lease summary) from the landlord is acceptable.
 - Includes the tenant name(s), the rent address, the amount owed per month, how many months late the tenant is, and when the lease ends.
 - NCORR has developed a template for this for landlords and applicants to use.
 - Proof of payment of previous month's rent to the landlord is also acceptable.

AGREEMENTS

- The Landlord and Tenant HOPE Program Agreement (LTA) is required to be signed by the applicant and landlord to receive rent assistance.
- The LTA is sent automatically to the email addresses on file when the award is verified.
- A W-9 is also included with the LTA for the landlord to complete.

LANDLORD AND TENANT PROGRAM AGREEMENT

- Confirms the rent owed and rent due.
- Formalizes oral leases to allow for greater housing stability.
- Provides some protections for the applicant in exchange for the landlord receiving the rent payment.
- “Locks in” the award amount and forms the basis for payment to the landlord.

WHAT THE LANDLORD AGREES TO

- Landlord agrees that they shall not evict for non-payment within 60 days of the last month of assistance covered by the Program.
- Landlord agrees to dismiss summary ejection proceedings (eviction).
- Landlord agrees to work with tenant to form a payment plan, if necessary, for any rent not covered by HOPE Program rent assistance.
- Confirms the landlord has not received payment for the rent amount due from any other source.

WHAT THE LANDLORD AGREES TO

- Landlord must maintain a safe and habitable dwelling.
- Landlord must not increase rent or fees for the duration of the lease.
- Landlord must pay any utilities owed if that is a part of the lease.
- The landlord and tenant jointly agree to the terms of the agreement and it is returned to the Program by both parties.

HOPE UTILITY ASSISTANCE

- The HOPE Program also provides utility assistance.
- Assistance is paid directly to the utility provider on behalf of the applicant.
- Assistance pays for back-owed utilities only.
- Covers “critical” utilities.
 - Electricity, Gas/Propane, Water, and Wastewater/Sewer.

WHAT DOES UTILITY ASSISTANCE *NOT* COVER?

- Utilities not essential to life and property.
 - Landline phones, internet, cell phones, entertainment services.
- Recreational utilities or non-residential uses.
 - For example, propane tanks for grills.
- Utilities associated with property tax collection or are otherwise annualized.
 - Such as some municipally delivered trash services and stormwater fees.
- Pre-paid utility accounts unless the account is negative.
- Yard and lawn waste, trash collection, recycling fees.
 - Unless such fees are combined with other utilities and not able to be separated.

UTILITY ASSISTANCE AWARD LIMIT

- The applicant reports the amount they owe to the utility provider in the application and supports that with a bill or invoice.
- The award is for the lesser of that reported amount or the cap shown below.
- The program may eventually pay up to 15 total months of assistance in this way
 - Previous HOPE awards made for the utility count towards the 15 month limit.

Utility	NTE Award Amount
Electricity	\$1,020
Gas	\$270
Water	\$210
Wastewater	\$240

PROGRAM APPLICATION – KEY QUESTIONS

- Are you a renter in the State of North Carolina?
- Are you the head of household or co-head of household?
- Are you listed on the written lease or in agreement with your landlord in the case of an oral lease?
- Is your primary or permanent residence a hotel or motel?
- What is your county of residence?
- Are you affiliated with a tribe?

KEY QUESTIONS FOR HOPE CONTINUED

- Due to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, my household has experienced a reduction in household income.
- Do you or another household member currently suffer unemployed due to the COVID-19 pandemic? If so, when did unemployment begin?
- Due to the economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic my household is recovering from or currently experiencing significant costs and/or is continuing to experience financial hardship.

KEY QUESTIONS FOR HOPE CONTINUED

- Have the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic you marked above continued to cause your household significant challenges meeting your rent payments, and:
 - Caused your household to be late on rent or utilities at some point since April 1, 2020, and/or;
 - Resulted in you or your household being threatened with or put at risk of eviction or homelessness?

APPLICATION CONTENT

- Rent award calculation questions:
 - Are you currently late on your rent?
 - How many months are you past due on your rent, if any?
 - How much do you pay a month for rent?
 - Do you receive public housing assistance or a housing voucher?
 - Who is your landlord?

APPLICATION COMPLETION

- Once the applicant completes the application questions, they are determined to be preliminarily eligible or ineligible.
- Preliminarily ineligible applicants that complete an application on their own are notified of their status and may contact the call center for more information or to determine if there has been an error.

HOLD/INELIGIBLE REASONS

- “Bad” email.
 - Places a hold, but does not result in an ineligible status.
- Duplicate application.
- Address verification failed.
- Key questions not answered with eligible responses.
- Over income threshold.

HOW RENTERS APPLY

- Potential recipients of HOPE services apply using an online application at <https://hope.nc.gov>.
- Applicants may also contact the dedicated contact center at 1(888)9-ASK-HOPE.
- Applications were opened in mid-May 2021 and remain open today.
- Applicants that previously received HOPE assistance may reapply using a specific portal that is delivered to them by email.

GETTING LANDLORDS INVOLVED

- Landlords can notify the Program that they are interested in their tenant applying by contacting the contact center at 1(888)9-ASK-HOPE.
- Landlords can also complete a form online to log their interest in the Program at <https://rebuild.nc.gov>.
- Both methods will result in a HOPE Program representative following up with the tenant to begin an application for assistance.



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HOPE PROGRAM

EVICTION DIVERSION PROGRAMMING



OBJECTIVE

The goal of the Eviction Diversion (ED) program is to prevent, delay, or stop an eviction and facilitate the signature of an LTA to secure housing stability for an applicant to the HOPE program.

EVICTIION MORATORIUM AND HOPE

- Federal and state eviction moratoriums had been put in place to stop evictions due to non-payment during the pandemic.
 - Eligible applicants to the HOPE Program were specifically protected from eviction in the state moratorium.
- With the expiration of federal and state eviction moratoriums, a critical need to prevent, delay, or stop eviction proceedings is a new focus of HOPE service.

EVICTIION MORATORIUM EXPIRATION

- HOPE is intended to prevent an eviction by covering back owed rent.
- It is prudent for a landlord to explore the HOPE program and encourage their tenant to apply before filing for eviction.
 - The Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) has been trained on the HOPE Program and has access to program materials to facilitate a connection between a landlord and the Program.

STATE EVICTION MORATORIUM

- State Executive Order (EO) 171, extended by EO 206:

“The protections from eviction of this Executive Order shall extend to those residential tenants who have applied for the HOPE program and have been notified that they have met the eligibility criteria for participation in the HOPE program, even if those residential tenants would not qualify for protection from eviction under the CDC Order. Once the landlord has executed the HOPE Landlord-Tenant Agreement, the tenant shall be protected from eviction under the terms of that Agreement, and not under this Executive Order.”

POLICY BASICS

- 10% of funds may be set aside for housing stability services, such as eviction diversion.
- Eviction diversion assistance must comply with the “maximum months of assistance” requirement from Treasury.
- To track expenditures, outcomes, and engagement with this program an ED applicant must also be or become a HOPE 2.0 applicant.

GENERAL PARTNER SCOPES

- Coordinate with HOPE staff to assist an identified population of vulnerable renters.
- Provide basic education, coordination, and resource delivery to landlords and tenants.
 - Lowest level of engagement. Not legal counsel or mediation.
 - Issues requiring a “light touch” could be resolved this way.
- Represent tenants in negotiations.
 - Issues requiring significant intervention could be resolved this way.
- Coordination, advocacy, and payment of rent bonds and “other expenses” to prevent or delay an eviction.

PROCESS

- Current or new HOPE applicants are identified for ED.
 - These applicants will be identified in our system now through landlord refusals, expired LTA reports, landlord information, and feedback from ED partners.
 - Individuals facing eviction or contacting ED partners for assistance will be directed to apply for HOPE and will then be flagged as an ED applicant.
- Applicants are triaged by need for assistance to one of the ED partners.
- Information is shared with that partner to help stop the eviction or to facilitate signature of the LTA.

PROCESS CONTINUED

- Work performed to stop an eviction is stored with the applicant's HOPE record.
 - Time and effort (if applicable), case notes, activities, and outcomes are recorded applicant by applicant.
- The ED partner coordinates with the HOPE Specialist to generate an appropriate award amount and eventually an LTA.
 - The ED partner may request that a rent bond is paid or that an LTA have slightly different award periods to accommodate signature from a landlord.

TRIAGE CATEGORIES

- Yellow
 - Yellow ED files require a light touch.
 - These may be landlords with questions or hesitations about the LTA, and include expired documents or landlord refusals.
- Red
 - Red ED files are those that have been identified as imminent or pending eviction.
 - These applicants require legal assistance to stop an eviction.

PARTNER MANAGEMENT

- Generally ED partners will operate in accordance with their own best practices or specialty.
- ED Partners should not:
 - Perform direct HOPE Program intake.
 - Perform HOPE case management.
 - Alter or amend LTAs without permission from HOPE staff.
 - Make commitments or obligations on behalf of HOPE without HOPE intervention.



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THANK YOU