

# GREENFIELD RECORDER

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FRANKLIN/HAMPSHIRE COUNTIES

## **Community Action, housing authority offering financial help during pandemic**

By DOMENIC POLI  
Staff Writer

Community Action Pioneer Valley and the Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority are offering assistance to people whose finances have been thrown into turmoil by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Those eligible in Franklin and Hampshire counties can qualify through Community Action for money for utility bills, rent, water/sewer bills, internet and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) applications. Community Action can be reached at 413-475-1570.

The housing and redevelopment authority in Turners Falls will help people apply for Residential Assistance for Families (RAFT) and Emergency Rental & Mortgage Assistance (ERMA), programs that can provide eligible households with up to \$4,000 to maintain their housing, obtain new housing or otherwise avoid homelessness. The money can be used for arrearages, short-term rental stipends, first and last month's rent, or security de-posits.

Gina Govoni, the authority's executive director, said RAFT is for people making less than 50 percent of the area's median income and ERMA is for those earning between 50 and 80 percent. There is one application process for RAFT and ERMA. Govoni said there has been a significant spike in applications amid the pandemic.

"It's hard to determine exactly, but I would estimate the past month our volume was double what it was this time last year," she said. In fact, Govoni said the authority is hiring additional temporary staff members "to deal with onslaught of new applicants."

Govoni said the authority has assisted a disproportionate number of homeowners, who she said will not have the same legal protections unless Gov. Charlie Baker extends the state's moratorium on evictions and foreclosures. The moratorium is slated to end Oct. 17.

Federal immigration status has no impact on eligibility for most of the funding.

The office is not open to the public right now, so all business is being conducted by phone. The Franklin County Regional Housing & Redevelopment Authority can be reached at 413-863-9781.

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