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CORONAVIRUS

**Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association
announces new rental assistance program**



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LITTLE ROCK, Ark.- The Arkansas Community Action Agencies Association, Inc. (ACAAA) and the state's Community Action Agencies will soon offer rental assistance to people who have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic through a new program known as "Arkansas Fresh Start".

According to a news release sent Monday by ACAA, the rental assistance is made possible by \$10 million in combined grants received through the Arkansas Economic Development Commission (AEDC) and the Arkansas CARES Act Steering Committee.

Officials say the program is expected to begin in early November.

According to the news release, the Arkansas Fresh Start program can provide up to two-and-a-half months rent to eligible Arkansans with a household income at or below 80% of their area's median income.

Officials say once the program has begun, people who are interested will be able to apply through their local Community Action Agency (CAA). Arkansas has 15 nonprofit CAAs, each provides assistance to certain portions of the state, according to the news release. Every county in Arkansas is served by Community Action Agency.

According to the release, the Fresh Start program was developed by the Arkansas CARES Act Steering Committee, working in conjunction with ACAA and AEDC.

"The Fresh Start Program is a great way to leverage funds that will help both tenants and landlords during these challenging times," said Mike Preston, Arkansas Secretary of Commerce. "We want to improve the lives of working Arkansans to every possible

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“Arkansas is facing a growing crisis in rent arrearages. The devastating economic and health effects of COVID-19 have resulted in a deeply concerning number of Arkansans falling dangerously behind in their rent payments,” said Terry Bearden, ACAA chief operations officer. “The U.S. Census Bureau Pulse Survey estimates that as many as 139,000 Arkansas households are facing the possibility of not being able to meet rent payment obligations due to the economic and public health impacts of the coronavirus pandemic.”

Bearden said although the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has issued a moratorium on evictions until the end of the year in the hopes of minimizing the further spread of the virus as a result of increased homelessness, the moratorium was not accompanied by any sort of financial assistance to address the problem of accumulating back rent.

To be eligible for the Fresh Start program, officials say an applicant must meet certain criteria, such as being a full-time Arkansas resident; not able to make rental payments due to a COVID-19-related issue; and having a landlord’s stated willingness to accept the payment.

Officials say once the program is underway, people who are wanting to apply can visit [ARFreshStart.com](https://www.arfreshstart.com) to find their area Community Action Agency and complete an application.

“We are thrilled to be part of this relief effort,” said Jennifer Welter, executive director of Conway’s Community Action Program for Central Arkansas (CAPCA) and president of the ACAA Board of Directors. “The Community Action movement has always been about helping people help themselves and giving them tools for developing self-sufficiency, so we feel honored to be able to play a role in providing