



HOUSTON-HARRIS COUNTY

Rental Assistance and Tenant Protections during COVID-19

ELAINE MORALES

Director, Partnerships & Policy



connective



connective

We are local nonprofit transforming social services in the Texas Gulf Coast into a more **connected, empathic, and accessible** system.

We do this in partnership with communities by designing and delivering **human-centered programs**, developing **cutting-edge technology tools** for service providers, and leading **community-wide change**.

Today I will share best practices and strategies from the latest local Rent Assistance Program that achieve more equitable and effective distribution of funds. I will also share why; more interventions are still needed to address Housing Instability issues.



HOUSTON-HARRIS COUNTY **EMERGENCY RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM**

Administered by Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston and BakerRipley



Program Overview

- **JOINT program between Harris County and the City of Houston**
- **\$159M in government funds**, mostly from US Treasury. To date, over 87,000 households have requested 333M in funds with 190M pledged.
- Two primary administrators: **BakerRipley and Catholic Charities.**
- **The Alliance** joined as administrator of the Eviction Intervention component of the program.
- **16 Community Navigator agencies** supporting case management, legal services and eviction diversion supports.



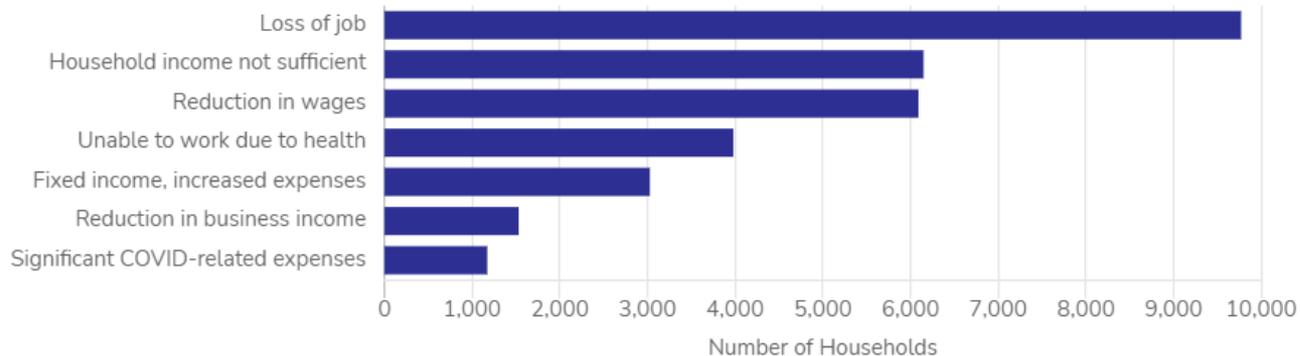
Program Overview

- Renters get **back rent from as back as April 2020 to present with an option for 2 months forward rent**. Utility assistance also available for past-due bills.
- Priority: Tenants with **<50% HAMFI or 90 days of unemployment**, additional consideration for monthly rent value and household size.
- Process: (1) **Connective provides common application and case management systems to BakerRipley, Catholic Charities, and the Alliance** (2) Eligibility specialists verify eligibility and approve payment.



Program Outcomes

- Over **49,700 households** have received assistance to date with over **\$190M pledged and provided**.
- COVID-19 related impacts among applicants:



Program Best Practices/Strategies

- **Joint City-County Coordinated Program** with common eligibility requirements, tenant application portal, landlord terms and conditions, and points of contact.
- **Centralized entry point of access** for both tenant application and landlord enrollment, with alternative modes of application in multiple languages.
- **Targeted SMS outreach to vulnerable families**, with text and email notifications as the application advances through the process.



Program Best Practices/Strategies

- **Reduced application and eligibility requirement burdens.** Including allowing proof of income eligibility by providing evidence of receipt of public benefits programs and self attestation of income.
- **Prioritization within a randomization process by Social Vulnerability Index since May 2020 through our common application system,** which is now a model around the country.
- **Responded to, and adjusted the program based on human centered design research** (tenants & landlords focus groups).

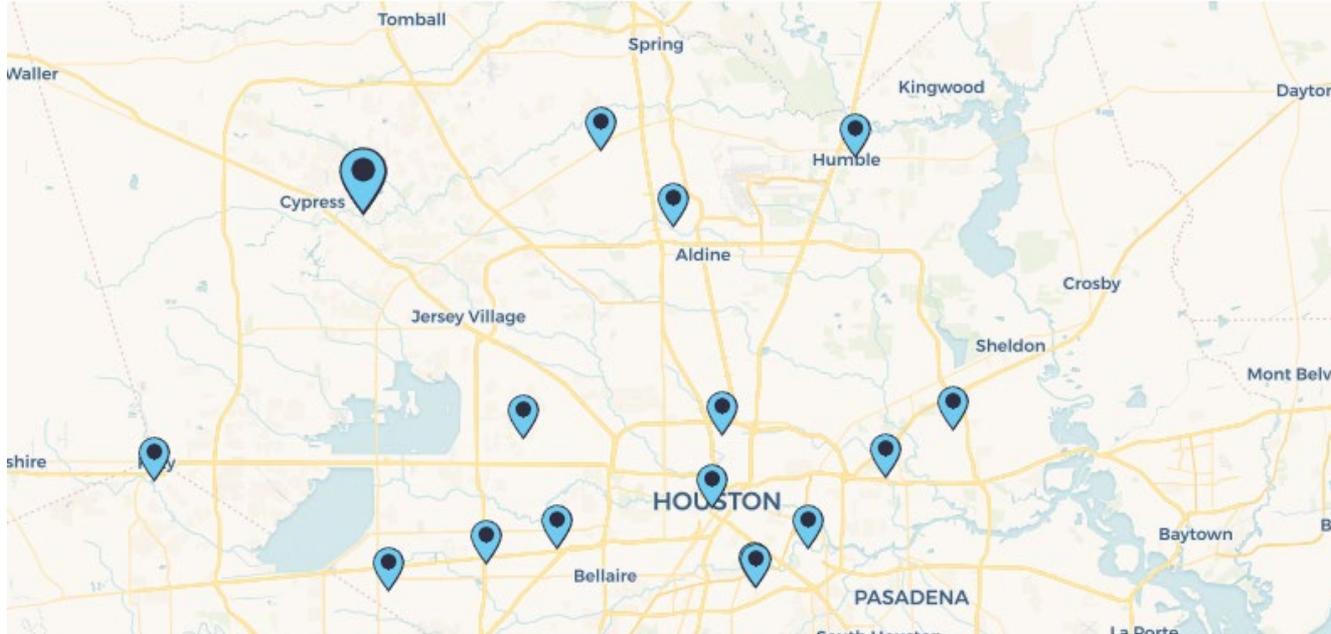


Program Best Practices/Strategies

- **Securing tenant protections** with the distribution of rent assistance dollars to ensure long-term housing stability outcomes.
- **Engaging multiple partners & leveraging their strengths:**
 - Catholic Charities joined as second administrator to expand the capacity of the region to process eligibility and payments.
 - Connective provides a centralized intake, technical assistance and data analysis for both administrators.
 - 16 CBO organizations acting as community navigators providing outreach, technical assistance on program navigation and application preparation, and referral to additional resources for tenants and landlords.



Network of Community Navigators



Program Best Practices/Strategies

- **Eviction Intervention Services** embedded within the City and County Rental Assistance Program and using the same centralized entry point.

The Alliance, a local nonprofit service provider, **works with renters who have active eviction cases and helps them submit applications** through the Rental Assistance Program. If determine eligible, the Alliance sends the rental payment directly to the landlords to avoid an eviction action.

The Alliance also provide **referrals to free legal assistance** to one of their legal aid partners.



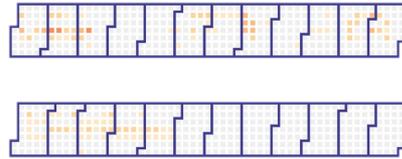
Community Best Practices/Strategies

Texas Housers Volunteer Court Watch Houston Eviction Solidarity Network



Observe a case.

[Sign up here.](#)



**Share your
observations.**



Community Best Practices/Strategies

Drive-through events, rent/financial application and legal aid assistance events
Keep Harris Housed Campaign, led by Texas Gulf Coast Area Labor Federation



**RENT ASSISTANCE
AND LEGAL AID**

SATURDAY, APRIL 17TH
NOON - 4PM

TEXAS GULF
COAST AREA
LABOR FEDERATION
AFL • CIO



Program Evaluation & Statewide Ranking

- Texas Housers regularly evaluates the 36 local jurisdictions in Texas that administer ERA programs to determine if these funds are being distributed in an equitable and timely manner. The Houston-Harris Emergency Rental Assistance Program was **ranked #1** on the three performance categories the evaluation looked at:
 - ✓ **Rate of Disbursal**
 - ✓ **Income targeting**
 - ✓ **Aid to Black and Hispanic or Latino households**



**Despite a local distribution of over 400M in Rent & Direct Assistance,
Houston is ranked third in evictions during COVID-19, with:**

45,251 Eviction Cases Filed

3.7% Defendants Assisted by Attorneys

3,718 Cases in the Docket today



Why?

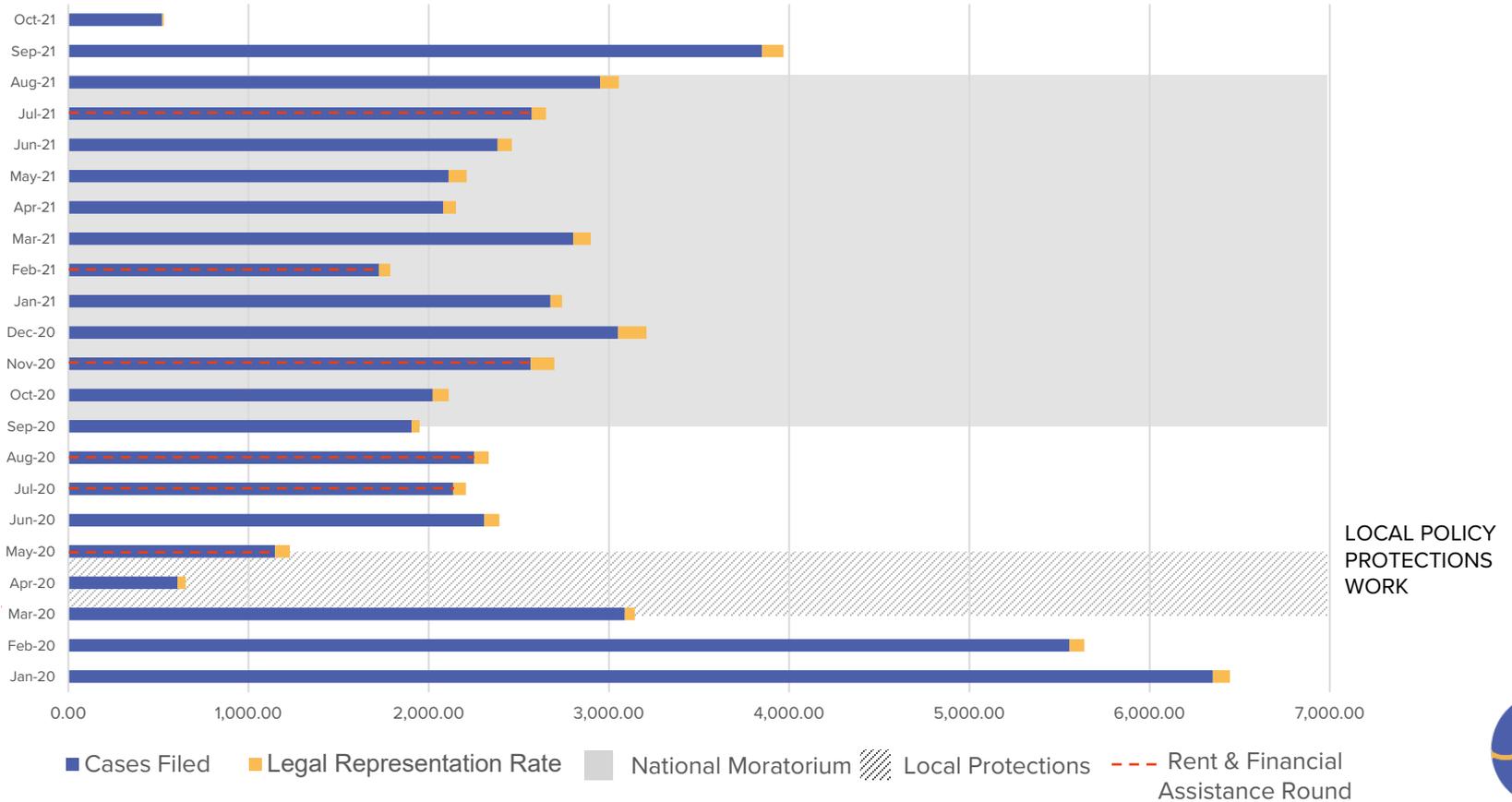
Houston already had an Eviction Problem

- In 2016, Houston ranked **third in evictions** in the US, with 11,082 evictions.
- In 2019, the eviction filing rate in Harris County was 8.8% with 64,255 eviction cases processed. **More than 1 in every 25 households got evicted**, this does not include informal evictions.
- **47% of all renters were cost-burdened** (pre-pandemic)



Eviction Filings During COVID-19

Thank you to January Advisors for the open access eviction tracker!

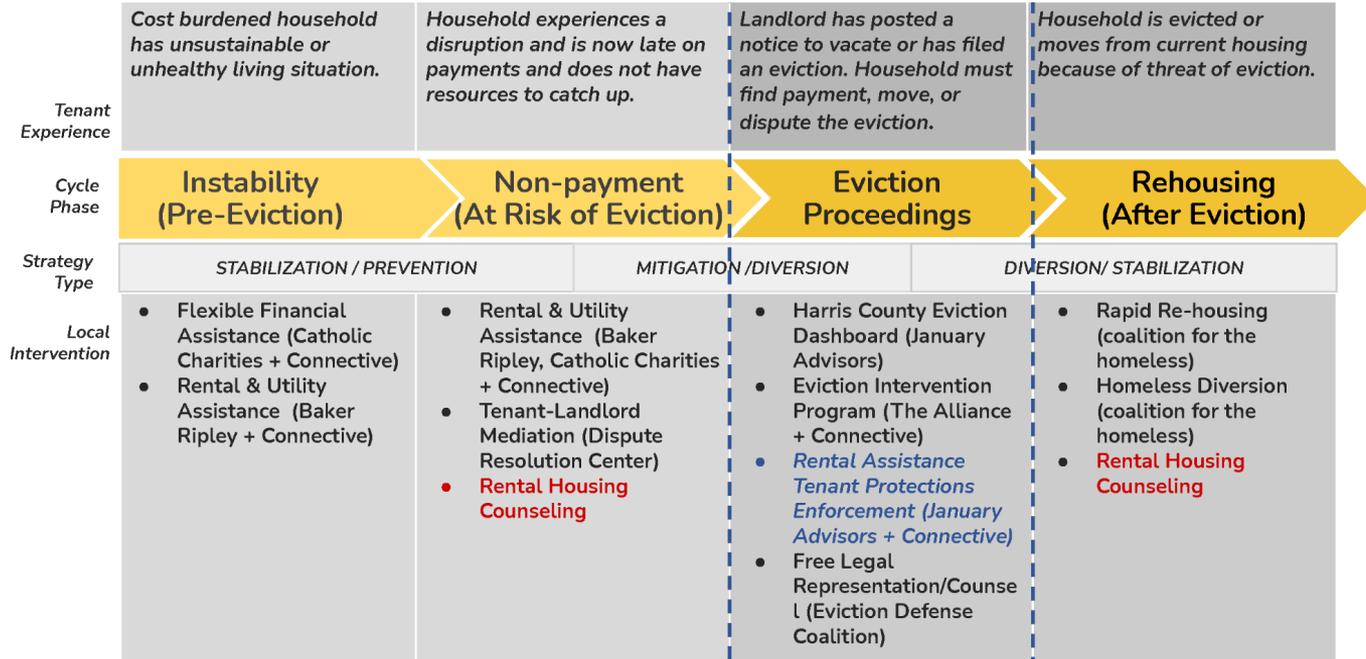


Addressing Housing Instability requires a holistic approach

- The lift of the Federal Eviction Moratorium and the lack of tenant protections in the State of Texas leave this responsibility to local communities. Texas has yet to provide Right to Counsel and Sealing of Eviction Records protections to mitigate the collateral and long-term damage evictions have in a tenant's life.
- Some interventions to explore during periods of crisis locally include extending the timeline for which a notice to vacate could be issued by allowing more than a 3-day window to pay rent. Also investing in the increased capacity of placed-based eviction diversion interventions at the courts would go a long way for residents that already are in the docket.
- COVID-19 Rent and Financial Assistance efforts have brought improvements to infrastructure and multi-sector collaborations that should not go ignored. Local communities must continue to invest in sustaining these efforts, expanding access to legal aid services at the courts, and upstream interventions that avoid eviction filings.



Eviction Prevention pilots can explore the provision of coordinated interventions to address housing instability issues:



Thank you.