



# Renter Resources from the Texas Apartment Association

March 23, 2020

As we continue to deal with the impact of COVID-19 and its ripple effect on jobs and the economy, it's important that we work together as a community to help prevent people from being displaced from their homes. We have included answers to some frequently asked questions, as well as other resources to help navigate through these uncertain times.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What should I do if I am unable to pay my rent?

**First: Contact your Property Manager.** The most important thing that you can do is communicate your situation with your Property Manager.

Providing documentation from an employer or other documentation that shows how you have been impacted by this crisis will improve your chances for getting the help you need.

Ignoring notices and requests to contact your Property Manager is not advised. Frequent and timely communication is the best course of action.

The Texas Apartment Association has encouraged rental property owners to waive late fees and set up payment arrangements for residents impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

Please remember that they can't help you if you do not communicate your situation with them. When court proceedings resume you will still owe any amounts due and may be subject to eviction; therefore, trying to work with your property to make payment arrangements is your best course of action.

### Can I be evicted even though there is a public health crisis?

The Texas Supreme Court has halted most evictions, including for non-payment of rent, until April 19. Someone may still face eviction for posing an imminent threat of physical harm to others, or engaging in criminal activity.

However, you can still be issued a notice to vacate by your Property Manager for non-payment of rent. This notice is an indication that the rental property owner intends to pursue an eviction if rent is not paid and will usually occur if you fail to respond to notices/requests to contact your Property Manager.

## **I am a renter and need assistance paying my bills. Where can I go for help?**

If you need rental payment assistance, there are several groups and agencies that can help. Attached is a list of organizations that we are aware of which offer rental assistance. Many churches and other community non-profits also offer emergency financial assistance. There may also be assistance to help with other needs, such as utility or medical bills.

## **If you are unable to pay your utility bills during this time of crisis, what should you do?**

Several but not all Texas electricity providers have suspended disconnects and are waiving late fees during the COVID-19 crisis. Please check directly with your provider on what options they offer during this time. Remember that even if disconnection is suspended, your bills will continue to accrue.

## **Do I still need to pay rent even though evictions have been halted?**

Yes—the court’s temporary halt of evictions does not affect your obligation to pay rent, and continuing to pay your rent protects your rights as a renter under Texas law. If you’re concerned you will not be able to pay your rent, we recommend you communicate with your property manager with specific information about your situation to see what options they may be able to offer in this unusual circumstance.

This crisis has affected all of us and TAA members want to do their part in helping people remain in their homes. Like every other business, we have employees and supplier partners who depend on us for their livelihood, as well as other obligations we have to meet like insurance and utility bills.

Failing to pay your rent hurts our ability to meet those obligations, as well as our ability to operate and maintain the property where you live. Ultimately it may also hurt your credit or result in an eviction once that process is reinstated.

## **What if I live at a public housing authority property, affordable housing property or use Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8)?**

Both public housing and Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) residents who experience a loss or reduction of wages should contact their housing authority to see what can be done to provide assistance.

## **What should I do if I have to self-isolate in my apartment?**

- To avoid unnecessary contact, or maintenance staff entering your unit, consider notifying the management that you are undergoing self-isolation or quarantine.

- Avoid close contact with other people and pets.
- Maintain respiratory hygiene (use tissues, cover your mouth when sneezing or coughing).
- Keep your apartment clean and organized to maintain a healthy environment. Clean regularly and sanitize often using items like Lysol spray and Clorox wipes on “high touch” surfaces including countertops, tabletops, doorknobs, nightstands, bathroom fixtures, toilets, refrigerator handles, kitchen faucets, light switches, TV remotes, cell phones, computer keyboards and tablets.
- Do not leave your unit unless it’s an emergency. Do not use common areas.
- Postpone non-essential maintenance requests.

## What if I have to move/apartment hunt during the pandemic?

- Practice basic prevention—Take the usual precautionary measures, including not shaking hands, washing your hands after your visit is concluded, not touching your face and not touching surfaces, especially in common areas. Use hand sanitizer.
- Consider virtual tours
- Inquire about safety measures in place—Apartment communities are incorporating additional measures during this outbreak, such as deep-cleaning and disinfecting high-traffic surfaces. They may have closed or limited access to common rooms, gyms and laundry rooms. They may be stationing hand-sanitizer around the building. Finally, inquire how was the unit you plan to rent sanitized.
- Vet your moving/van rental company—Before scheduling your move, inquire what sanitation procedures your moving company has in place. Ask for movers to wear gloves to avoid contaminating your belongings. Alternately, consider moving your belongings yourself to minimize exposure, but make sure to enquire about sanitation procedures your moving van rental company has in place.

## Resident Service and Access to Amenities

During this crisis, rental communities are following CDC recommendations to practice social distancing and take measures to limit spread of the virus. As a result, rental properties may:

- Close select or all amenities
- Ask you to pay rent online
- Close office to non-employees
- Limit repairs to emergency situations only

We realize that these actions may be inconvenient but are intended to help protect you, your neighbors and people who work at the property.

## Communal behaviors to limit the contamination spread

- Wash your hands often, avoid touching your face and practice respiratory hygiene
- Avoid close contact with people who are sick
- Clean and disinfect your apartment to maintain a healthy environment
- Limit contamination of common amenities, such as the communal gym, movie room, or a playground, by using disinfecting wipes before and after you use the equipment. Avoid using common areas and amenities if you are sick.
- Limit visitors—Practice social distancing by limiting visitors to your unit or inviting friends/family to share common areas with you.

## Where do I go for more information?

**Renter Information:** [www.taa.org](http://www.taa.org)

**General information on COVID-19:** [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](https://www.cdc.gov/)

## Emergency Financial Assistance

The following organizations **MAY** be able to assist with some housing needs and household expenses.

### Call 211

211 is a universal number (similar to 911 and 311) for community information and referral services. It is intended to connect individuals and families in need and the appropriate community-based organizations and government agencies. Active 211 systems are in all or part of every state.

### Austin/Travis County

[Travis County Family Support Services website](#) or call 211 or 512/854-9020

[Catholic Charities of Central Texas](#)—512/651-6100

[St. Matthew's Episcopal Church](#)—512/345-8314

[St. Vincent de Paul, St. Austin's Catholic Church](#)—512/477-9471

[Travis County Family Support Services Division](#)—512/267-3245

[Austin Texas Health and Human Services Department \(HHSD\)](#)—512/972-5011

## **Dallas/Dallas County**

[United Way of Metropolitan Dallas](#)—214/978-0000—[info@unitedwaydallas.org](mailto:info@unitedwaydallas.org)

[American Red Cross | North Texas](#)—512/928-4271

[Catholic Charities](#)—866/223-7500

[Metro Dallas Homeless Alliance](#)—972/638-5600

[Dallas County Health and Human Services](#)—214/819-2000

[Interfaith Dallas](#)—214/827-7220

[Dallas Housing Crisis Center](#)—214/828-4244

## **Houston/Harris County**

[Alliance of Community Assistance Ministries \(Includes Service Area Map of Houston Region\)](#)

[The Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston](#)—719/659-5461

[Catholic Charities](#)—713/874-6776

[Chinese Community Center](#)—713/271-6100

[Coalition for the Homeless](#)—713/739-7514

[Disaster Housing Assistance Program](#)—866/497-6036

[East Fort Bend Human Needs Ministry](#)—281/261-1006

[Epiphany Community Health Outreach Services](#)—713/270-0369

[Emergency Aid Coalition](#)—713/522-5903

[Humble Area Assistance Ministries](#)—281/446-3663

[Interfaith Caring Ministries](#)—281/332-3881

[Jewish Federation of Greater Houston](#)—713/667-9336

[Katy Christian Ministries](#)—281/391-5261

[Memorial Area Assistance Ministries](#)—713/468-4516

[My Brother's Keeper](#)—281/498-9933

[Red Cross](#)—713/526-8300

[St. Vincent's House](#)—409/763-8521

[Wesley Community Center](#)—713/223-8131

[United Way](#)—713/957-4357

[US Department of Housing and Urban Development \(HUD\)](#)—713/718-3199

[West Houston Assistance Ministries](#)—713/977-9942

## **San Antonio/Bexar County**

[San Antonio Risk Mitigation Fund](#)—210/207-7830

[Bexar County Community Resources](#)—210/335-3666

[Alamo Area Resource Center](#)—210/358-9995

[Catholic Charities - Crisis Intervention Program](#) (utilities only)—210/226-6171

[Christian Assistance Ministry \(CAM\)](#) —210/223-4099

[Ella Austin Community Center](#)—210/224-2351

[Salvation Army - Social Services](#)—210/352-2020

[San Antonio AIDS Foundation](#)—210/225-4715

[Alamo Area Resource Center](#)—210/358-9995

[SAMMinistries](#)—210/340-0302

[St. PJ's Children's Home](#) (must have disability)—210/531-8555

[St. Vincent de Paul](#)—210/225-7837