

# Asylum Seeker Emergency Rental Assistance Program

**Illinois Housing Development Authority**  
Special Needs Housing: Combating Homelessness

**HFA Staff Contact**

Andrew Field

[afield@ihda.org](mailto:afield@ihda.org)

*Illinois Housing Development Authority  
Asylum Seeker Emergency Rental Assistance Program  
Special Needs Housing – Combatting Homelessness*

*"Give me your tired, your poor,  
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.  
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me,  
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

Beginning in late August 2022, the Governor of Texas initiated a plan to bus asylum seekers who entered the United States from Central and South America to Illinois. The state of Colorado also decided, to a lesser degree, to bus asylum seekers who ended up in their state to Illinois as well. The buses would stop outside Union Station in the heart of Chicago and leave the men, women and children with only what they brought with them, no other means. In total, more than 8,000 asylum seekers were transported to Illinois — whether they wanted to or not — and the state of Illinois was given no advanced notification of the arrivals.

With no place to eat or sleep and a brisk Chicago winter on the horizon, state and local leaders immediately came together to develop and implement multiple plans and programs to assist these abandoned families in hopes they could establish new roots and lead a productive life in America, specifically in Illinois.

The Illinois Housing Development Authority (IHDA) offered to develop an emergency rental assistance program to provide stable housing for the asylum seekers while they found gainful employment and a permanent place to call home. IHDA has been leading the emergency housing program response to COVID-19 on behalf of Governor JB Pritzker and the state of Illinois. Since 2020, IHDA has administered three rounds of emergency rental assistance that has provided nearly \$1.02 billion in rental assistance to help 137,372 vulnerable households remain safely housed.

Using a portion of these emergency housing funds, IHDA quickly developed the Asylum Seeker Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ASERAP) to help this vulnerable population find stable housing while they determined their next steps. Leveraging our extensive experience, knowledge, partnerships and resources, our goal was to help these families find safe, stable housing while they establish a new life here in Illinois.

### **Multi-Governmental Response**

Many of the families and individuals seeking asylum have faced a long and difficult journey, fleeing desperate situations in hopes of a better life. A safe and secure home will allow these individuals and families to have access to employment, education and other benefits that can be difficult to access in transitional housing.

Therefore, on Sept. 14, 2022, Governor JB Pritzker issued a disaster proclamation to unlock state resources to aid those seeking asylum in the U.S. The proclamation enabled the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA) and other state agencies, in coordination with the city of Chicago, Cook County and other local governments, to ensure the individuals and families receive the assistance they need. This included transportation, emergency shelter and housing, food, health screenings, medical assessments, treatments and other necessary care and services.

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Governor Pritzker immediately organized all relevant state agencies and formed a Unified Area Command in Chicago to quickly deploy resources to support the operations. The Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) took the initial lead on housing, coordinating with hotels and other venues to find a place to temporarily house asylum seekers as they transitioned to a more permanent location.

To aid in their efforts, IHDA reached out to our contacts at more than 1,900 developments in our portfolio to determine if any could offer vacant units to house this influx of asylum seekers.

IDHS was constantly working to identify proper shelters but with limited resources, the use of shelters for this population would not be a long-term solution. IHDA was then asked if there was anything we could do to assist in providing temporary housing.

### **ASERAP**

*"Every family, every child, every human being deserves to feel safe and secure in the place they call home. I am committed to making sure that value defines what it means to live in Illinois."*

*-Governor JB Pritzker*

With winter approaching and already in the middle of the school year, it was critical to get the asylum seekers out of hotels and into a place they can safely stay without fear of immediate relocation.

As the primary administrator of the Emergency Rental Assistance 2 (ERA2) funds allocated to the state of Illinois under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (P.L. 107-02), IHDA conferred internally to determine whether assisting asylum seekers with rental dollars could be considered an eligible use per Treasury guidelines and federal statute. It was determined that we could provide ERA2 funds to prepay rent to help these people in desperate need of assistance.

Thus, in coordination with the Governor and sister state agencies, IHDA quickly worked to develop a program utilizing ERA2 funds to help secure at least a couple of months of stable housing for asylum seekers while they sought employment, education for their children and a permanent place to establish themselves in Illinois, or a path to continue their journey to their originally-intended destination.

In October 2022, the IHDA Board approved an allocation of \$23 million in ERA2 funds to establish the Asylum Seekers Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ASERAP) which launched the following November.

ASERAP provides asylum seekers three months of rent plus move-in fees and/ or security deposit (if eligible), with the option of one three-month renewal should they apply for recertification. The rental payment assistance is in the form of a grant and paid directly to the housing provider on behalf of the tenant.

Maximum assistance will be capped at the lesser of six months of rental assistance or up to \$15,000 per applicant.

### **Ensuring Ability to Apply**

As many of the asylum seekers have limited-to-no knowledge of the English language, IHDA intentionally designed the program to ensure they did not incur any barriers to applying. Similar to our previous emergency housing assistance programs, IHDA issued a Request for Applications to partner with Housing Stability Service (HSS) agencies who would provide direct assistance and application counseling. After a thorough review, 19 organizations were approved to help IHDA be our “boots on the ground” as HSS providers.

Once approved, the HSS providers were sent on-site to hotels and shelters where the asylum seekers were being temporarily housed to provide counseling to individual families or as a group. In addition, we leaned on HSS providers to help in identify landlords with available units to safely house residents, as the asylum seekers were in completely foreign territory and in need of immediate and critical assistance.

Once the asylum seeker completed an application, the IHDA prioritized the processing and review of the ASERAP applications. All applications were reviewed within 24 to 48 hours, and payments were issued within 72 hours of approval. To ensure care can continue when the allotted ASERAP funding is exhausted, the state of Illinois has tasked community-based organizations and IDHS to assist with community integration.

### **Assisting Those in Need**

In less than two months, IHDA developed and implemented ASERAP to provide stability to the men, women and children whose lives were completely turned upside down.

More than 956 asylum seekers have initiated an application for assistance through the ASERAP program. To date, IHDA has reviewed 875 applications and approved 681 for grant assistance totaling \$3.7 million in aid for an average of \$6,369 per household. Also, 328 current ASERAP recipients have been approved for an additional \$1.4 million through the three months recertification with more on the way as they seek to establish new roots in Illinois.

In total, the program is expected to assist at least 2,000 asylum seekers who have taken refuge in Illinois. That said, the state is still unexpectedly welcoming asylum seekers on a near-daily basis, thus, the need continues and IHDA stands ready to help provide a safe, stable place for asylum seekers to call their own in Illinois.

Just as we had been asked during the Great Recession with the Hardest Hit Fund program and with the COVID-19 pandemic with the ERA and HAF programs, IHDA once again moved quickly to assist and address an immediate and acute housing issue in Illinois.

**EXHIBIT A**  
**IDHS ASERA Program Summary**

<b>IDHS ASERAP Overview</b>	IDHS ASERAP may provide up to three months of rental assistance (plus move-in fee, if eligible), with the option of one 3-month renewal, if eligible, to asylum seekers not to exceed six total months of rental assistance, as they transition from temporary hotel stays into affordable rental housing. Prospective tenants are required to complete a grant application to receive funding; full landlord participation and completion of the grant application is strongly encouraged. Rental payments will be disbursed in increments of three consecutive months and recertification by landlord and tenant will be required prior to each payout.
<b>Goal</b>	COVID-19 has exacerbated an affordable housing crisis that predated the pandemic and that has deep disparities. Asylum Seekers currently in intermediate housing are directly impacted by this housing crisis. The State has identified a goal to assist these households that are unable to pay rent as they seek work permits in Illinois.
<b>Source of Funds</b>	“ERA2” Federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program Funds (Section 3201 of the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021)
<b>ERA2 General Tenant Eligibility Criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be obligated to pay rent on a residential dwelling</li> <li>• One or more individuals within the household has qualified for unemployment benefits or experienced a loss of household income, incurred significant costs, experienced other financial hardship during or due, directly or indirectly, to the COVID-19 outbreak</li> <li>• One or more individuals within the household can demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability</li> <li>• The household is a low-income family (as such term is defined in section 3(b) of the United States Housing Act of 1937 (42 U.S.C. 1437a(b)). <i>See</i> 47 Ill. Adm. Code 378.103</li> </ul>
<b>Additional IDHS ASERAP Tenant Eligibility Criteria</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Must be, at the time of application, a person seeking asylum and residing in intermediate housing provided by the State of Illinois or the City of Chicago</li> <li>• The unit will serve as their primary residence</li> </ul>
<b>Housing Provider Requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Affirms that they are not receiving assistance from another rental assistance program for the same unit</li> <li>• Certifies that the housing they will provide is decent, safe and sanitary</li> <li>• Agrees and certifies that the rent is affordable/will not exceed “Fair Market Rent” (as defined by ARPA)</li> <li>• Agrees to comply with all applicable ARPA laws, rules and regulations.</li> </ul>
<b>Eligible Expenses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monthly rent for three months plus move-in fee (if eligible), with the option of one 3-month renewal with recertification, if eligible.</li> </ul>
<b>Structure of Assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The rental payment assistance will be in the form of a grant.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The initial assistance will be disbursed in one payment equal to up to three months of rental assistance (plus security deposit or move-in fee, if eligible), with the option of a second disbursement of up to three additional months of rental assistance, if eligible, not to exceed six total months of rental assistance, and will be paid directly to the housing provider on behalf of the tenant.</li> <li>• Recertification of housing provider/property manager and tenant will be required prior to each payout.</li> <li>• Repayment of rental assistance provided to eligible recipient will not be required (except in the case of fraud or other wrongdoing or due to a return of excess funds).</li> <li>• Payments will be made to the housing provider/property manager on behalf of the tenant; grants will be made payable directly to the tenant in instances where the housing provider is unwilling to accept payment directly.</li> </ul>
<b>Per Household Assistance</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Maximum of six months of consecutive rental payments plus move-in fee, if eligible.</li> <li>• Maximum assistance will be capped at the lessor of 6 months of rental assistance or \$15,000 per applicant.</li> </ul>
<b>Duration of Assistance; Transition Services</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assistance will cover three months of forward-looking, consecutive rent payments, with the option of one 3-month renewal with recertification, if eligible.</li> <li>• Grantees unable to afford the rent after the expiration of the grant funding will be referred, to the extent possible, to other IDHS programs.</li> </ul>
<b>Estimated Number of Participating Households</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2,000 households are anticipated to receive assistance on a first-come, first-serve basis.</li> <li>• Eligibility is not a guarantee of funding.</li> </ul>

## Illinois Asylum Seekers Emergency Rental Assistance Program

### Frequently Asked Questions

Last Revised: 11/28/2022

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12. Why is COVID-19 a condition in the application if the program is not an emergency response program for COVID-19?
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14. Will applicants be eligible for this assistance if they independently seek available housing and do not use the housing locator onsite?
15. Can applicants be serviced virtually through Zoom or Teams?
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20. Is there a maximum monthly rent that landlords cannot exceed while participating in the program?
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23. Will landlords have to repay any funds?
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33. What services are HSS agencies expected to provide for applicants?
34. Are agencies required to have staff at the hotel sites where the asylum seekers are residing for a minimum number of hours/days per week?
35. How are HSS agencies expected to report the work done for this program?
36. Will HSS agency counselors have access to print out the applications at the hotel sites?

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39. I submitted the wrong document. How can I fix it?
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42. Can I start my application and finish later?

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

*Disclaimer: Information included in this document will be updated on a regular basis when applicable.*

### **General**

- 1. What is the Illinois Asylum Seekers Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP)?**
  - The Asylum Seekers ERAP provides rental assistance grants to asylum seekers that arrived starting Wednesday, Aug. 31, 2022, from Texas to the State of Illinois.
- 2. When is the ASERAP application period?**
  - The portal will open on Monday, Dec. 5, 2022, and there is currently no end date for applying.
- 3. What is the maximum award amount?**
  - The award amount is capped at \$15,000 or up to 6 months of rental assistance, whichever comes first.



**4. How will asylum seekers apply for the ASERAP?**

- Spanish speaking Housing Stability Servicer (HSS) staff will be onsite at the hotels where asylum seekers are currently staying, and will work with applicants to gather the information and documentation necessary to complete their ASERAP application.

**5. Who is the contact for any Asylum Seekers ERAP issues?**

- The IHDA call center has a designated prompt for ASERAP issues. Call 866-454-3571 and select prompt #5. HSS agencies may also report any issues to the Asylum Seekers ERAP email proxy at [aserap@ihda.org](mailto:aserap@ihda.org).

**6. Can asylum seekers choose where in Illinois they want to be housed?**

- The availability of housing stock will determine our ability to place each family in their desired city or community.

**7. Can an asylum seeker qualify for assistance if the landlord is non-participating?**

- If a landlord declines to participate in the program but is still willing to rent the unit, rental assistance may be paid directly to the tenant. Please note that payments will take longer than 72 hours for landlords that decline to participate.

## Applicant

**8. What can asylum seekers do to prepare for the application?**

- Asylum seekers should work with a Catholic Charities Case Manager or an onsite Department of Human Services (DHS) Community-Based Organization to obtain and provide documents needed for the application.

**9. Will the rental assistance need to be paid back?**

- The rental payment assistance will be in the form of a grant and repayment is not required (except in the case of fraud or other wrongdoing).

**10. How can applicants check the status of their applications?**

- Applicants can request an update from their Catholic Charities Housing Case Manager, who will be receiving communications from IHDA during the review process and can find their application status in their account. Any questions regarding the status of applications can also be sent to the proxy email [aserap@ihda.org](mailto:aserap@ihda.org).

**11. Is the ASERAP considered a public charge benefit?**

- No, recipients of this rental assistance will not be considered a public charge.

**12. Why is COVID-19 a condition in the application if the program is not an emergency response program for COVID-19?**

- Asylum seekers are directly impacted by an affordable housing crisis further worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic.

**13. What will the recertification process look like?**

- Recertification for the landlord and tenant can be done in a three month increment if they still meet all qualifications of the program. Catholic Charities Housing Case Managers will help families prepare for recertification two months after the initial approval of their application, and will ensure families come to their HSS with all documentation prepared.

**14. Will applicants be eligible for this assistance if they independently seek available housing and do not use the housing locator onsite?**

- Yes, IHDA encourages applicants to take the initiative to identify housing that meets their needs. However, the Catholic Charities Housing Locator will perform a walk-through of the unit with the applicant and will also vet the landlord.

**15. Can applicants be serviced virtually through Zoom or Teams?**

- Due to the nature of the program, applications will only be completed on site by a Housing Stability Servicer.

**16. What is the turnaround time for applications to be approved and funded?**

- Completed applications are reviewed within 48 hours. If approved, the payment will be mailed within 72 hours. Payments are made directly to the landlord in the form of a check.

## Landlord

**17. How do landlords apply for the program?**

- You will receive an email from Unqork (IHDA's online application platform) regarding an application started with your information. The email will have instructions on what steps landlords need to take to complete the application.

**18. What type of lease do I need to enter with the prospective tenant?**

- Although a lease is not required, IHDA strongly suggests the tenant and landlord execute one. If a lease is not completed, a lease attestation must be signed by both tenant and landlord to verify the rental of the unit.

**19. I received a notification that a tenant started an application for the program. What does that mean?**

- An ASERAP applicant is seeking rental assistance to pay for rent in one of your properties. If you are participating in the program, you must complete your side of the application with supporting documentation.

**20. Is there a maximum monthly rent that landlords cannot exceed while participating in the program?**

- Rent must be affordable and should not exceed Fair Market Rent (FMR) as defined by ARPA rules and regulations. The FMR can be found by clicking [here](#) or by visiting [www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2023\\_code/2023summary\\_erap.odn](http://www.huduser.gov/portal/datasets/fmr/fmrs/FY2023_code/2023summary_erap.odn)

**21. How much assistance can my tenant receive?**

- The program will cover the applicant's move-in fees plus up to six months of rent, with a maximum award of \$15,000.

**22. How will funding be distributed to my tenant?**

- If approved, funds will go to the property owner or manager directly. If the landlord is unwilling to participate in the program, funds will go to the tenant directly.

**23. Will landlords have to repay any funds?**

- No, this grant does not have to be repaid except in the case of fraud or other wrongdoing.

**24. Will landlords pay taxes on funds?**

- Please contact a tax expert regarding reporting this grant. IHDA will not require a W-9 for this program.

**25. Will the ASERAP pay for utilities?**

- Funds for this program are to pay for rent only. If utilities are included in the rent, funds can cover the amount included with rent.

**26. How will I be notified if the application has been approved?**

- You will receive an email and the application on the portal will also show an approval status. Your HSS, Community Based Organization, or Catholic Charities agency will also be notified of the approval.

**27. How will I be notified if funding has been sent?**

- Please contact our customer service line for further information on your approved application. Call 866-454-3571 and select prompt #5.

**28. Who do I contact with questions regarding the program?**

- You may contact our customer service line. Call 866-454-3571 and select prompt #5.

**29. Is there a priority population for this program?**

- All applicants in this program are considered a priority population with a first-come, first-served process.

**30. Will I have a say in who my tenants will be?**

- Everyone is eligible to apply, and tenants must be approved or denied only for reasons allowed by the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

## HSS Agencies

### **31. What is the role of the Housing Stability Service (HSS) agencies?**

- Participating HSS agencies will support the goals of the ASERAP by having Spanish speaking staff onsite completing applications for asylum seekers. HSS agencies who provide housing services will also make landlord and unit referrals to Catholic Charities Housing Locators.

### **32. Do HSS agencies need to be HUD-certified or HUD-approved to participate?**

- HUD certification and HUD approval are not a requirement for HSS agencies to participate in the Asylum Seekers ERAP.

### **33. What services are HSS agencies expected to provide for applicants?**

- Housing stability servicers are expected to provide assistance to applicants by completing and submitting applications and reviewing pre-negotiated leases with participating individuals and families. Catholic Charities Housing Case Managers will ensure that each family comes to their HSS agency with all necessary documents completed. Other HSS partners will also be assisting with housing or landlord location, making these referrals to Catholic Charities Housing Locators who will vet landlords and units, and managing landlord relationships.

### **34. Are agencies required to have staff at the hotel sites where the asylum seekers are residing for a minimum number of hours/days per week?**

- HSS agencies will be coordinated according to their capabilities and their staff size and will be “need based” per hotel occupancy.

### **35. How are HSS agencies expected to report the work done for this program?**

- HSS agencies will follow the same guidelines provided by the grant management team for their Illinois Rental Payment Program contracts since funding is coming from “ERA 2” Federal Emergency Rental Assistance Program Funds. IDHS may require reporting on additional data elements, which IHDA will communicate, as needed.

### **36. Will HSS agency counselors have access to print out the applications at the hotel sites?**

- Counselors are encouraged to print applications and prepare materials prior to being onsite.

## Troubleshooting

### **37. How can I check the status of my submitted application?**

- Please use the login information used to start an application to check the current status. You will also receive emails from our review team if we require further information from you.

**38. How do I upload additional documents to my application?**

- You will log into your portal and use the “add documents” button. Please make sure the document has been fully submitted before closing out of your browser window.

**39. I submitted the wrong document. How can I fix it?**

- Please contact our ASERAP email proxy at [aserap@ihda.org](mailto:aserap@ihda.org). You can also call us at 866-454-3571 and select prompt #5.

**40. What do I do if I forgot my username or password?**

- You will be able to reset your password using the link in the portal log-in page. Your username is the email address you used when you initially applied.

**41. I have not received any update emails. Who should I contact?**

- Please contact our ASERAP email proxy at [aserap@ihda.org](mailto:aserap@ihda.org). You can also call IHDA at 866-454-3571 and select prompt #5.

**42. Can I start my application and finish later?**

- Yes, you may save your progress and come back when you are ready to finish your application. Please make sure you do not hit the “Submit” button until you have fully completed the application.



## MANAGEMENT BULLETIN #549

**DATE:** 10/12/2022  
**TO:** Owners and Agents of IHDA Assisted Properties  
**CC:** IHDA Asset Management Staff  
**FROM:** IHDA Asset Management Department  
**RE:** **URGENT CALL TO ACTION** - Asylum Seekers Housing Needs

### SUMMARY:

Governor J.B. Pritzker issued an [emergency disaster proclamation](#) on September 14, 2022, to assist asylum seekers arriving to Chicago from the state of Texas. A copy of the press release is available [here](#).

In coordination with the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois and the Illinois Department of Human Services (IDHS) seek assistance in its humanitarian effort to support these numerous individuals, including families and children. While the number of people in need of housing and specific information regarding space/services needs are unknown, we are contacting you as a valued partner and provider of affordable rental housing to connect you and ask you to consider sharing information regarding the number of available units you may have to serve this population with IDHS.

Please note, assisting this population is an approved use of your tenant selection plan (TSP) in making housing available for emergency purposes as needed and permitted by state mandated waitlist preferences where eligible applicants may have been displaced as a result of governmental action in accordance with applicable regulations in [20 ILCS 3805](#). While there are currently no monetary resources available, IDHS is actively exploring sources for rental subsidy to support this effort. More information may be forthcoming.

You can support this critical initiative and asylum seekers in two ways:

- Contacting Nikita Robinson, Administrative Assistant with the Illinois Office to Prevent & End Homelessness at IDHS to provide direct, real-time information regarding available housing units and any available services/support including basic furnishings. She can be reached at (312) 793-3922 or via email at [Nikita.Robinson@Illinois.gov](mailto:Nikita.Robinson@Illinois.gov)
- Updating your property listings available for rent in the [IL Housing Search](#) tool

Thank you in advance for your partnership.

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### ATTENTION:

*Please be advised that visitors to IHDA's office space will be required to adhere to IHDA's COVID-19 disclosure and safety protocols. Please visit [www.ihda.org](http://www.ihda.org) for more information.*

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