

## State launches \$1 billion relief program to help Texans pay rent, utilities during pandemic

**Cayla Harris, Austin Bureau**

The state is launching a new relief program to aid Texans who have struggled to pay their rent and utility bills during the coronavirus pandemic, Gov. Greg Abbott announced Tuesday.

The program, created through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs, will offer more than \$1 billion to eligible residents. The state will begin accepting applications on Feb. 15.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has placed a significant financial strain on many Texans, and the Texas Rent Relief Program will provide an incredible lifeline to households in need of assistance on their rent and utility payments,” Abbott said in a release.

To qualify, households must fall at or below 80 percent of the area median income in their community, and either qualify for unemployment benefits or explain in writing the financial hardships they have experienced over the past year. They also must provide an eviction notice or past-due bill notice, or demonstrate that they live in an unsafe or unhealthy home.

The full list of qualifications is available at [texasrentrelief.com](https://texasrentrelief.com), the state-run site for the program. When applications open on Monday, residents can submit their documents through the website or by calling 1-833-9TX-RENT.

“This program is a key component of our state’s pandemic recovery effort and will be essential to the rebound of our economy, workforce, and education system,” said Texas House Speaker Dade Phelan. “I am thrilled that qualifying Texas families have an avenue for temporary relief on essential items like rent and utility payments when it truly counts the most.”

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