

ABC 30

Some Visalia residents eligible for \$5,000 in COVID-19 relief

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FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- The City of Visalia is dedicating \$1.2 million in federal funds to help more than 200 families pay their bills.

The COVID-19 Residential Rental-Mortgage and Utility Assistance Program is available to low to moderate income households who are struggling financially as a result of the pandemic.

"These are CDBG funds, which are not unusual for cities to use," City Manager Randy Groom said. "But in this case they are very specifically applied as part of CARES, to provide that COVID relief. So people who apply have to demonstrate that they have been negatively affected by COVID-19."

Each family is eligible for up to \$5,000 for current or past due rent, mortgage, or utility payments.

But the money won't end up in a recipient's bank account. It will be paid directly to the service provider-such as a rental management company.

"I think any program that's helping people in need in this environment is good," said Jim Armstrong, owner of Armstrong Property Management. "I'm glad the city's having the forethought to do this."

Armstrong says his rental management company doesn't have too many tenants delinquent in rent right now.

But those that are, are falling far behind. That means some of the property owners he represents are losing money.

"(The property owners are) not wealthy," Armstrong said. "They've been able to gather up enough money to buy one or two rental properties-they live off of that money and they're sort of painted with the same brush as the rich landlords on big multi-family properties."

In this respect, Visalia's new COVID-19 assistance program will be a win-win.

Renters can keep up with their monthly payments, and landlords will continue to get paid. It's being administered by two organizations, including Self-Help Enterprises, which tells Action News that the response so far has been significant.

Many people are still in need, and there's no guarantee a second stimulus check will arrive.

"This really hits home in the home," Groom said. "It hits families and individuals where they may be hurting right now, and so it's very satisfying to be able to provide this to individuals in that family household."