



## PRESS RELEASE

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For immediate release — April 10, 2020

### **United Way of King County, City of Seattle and King County Announce \$5 million Investment in Rental Assistance Program to Keep Families Affected by COVID-19 from Experiencing Homelessness**

**Seattle**—United Way of King County, in partnership with King County, the City of Seattle and the Seattle Foundation, today announced the launch of a \$5 million investment in United Way's expanded [Home Base](#) program to provide rental assistance to King County households that have lost all or part of their income due to the coronavirus pandemic. These funds will go into United Way's [Community Relief Fund](#). It is estimated these funds will help up to 2,000 families stay in their homes.

This new agreement will help King County residents who are late on their rent, have experienced a significant reduction in wages as a result of the public health crisis, and whose income is at or below 50% of Area Median Income (AMI). Providing rental assistance now, before tenants accumulate months of debt and back rent, will be more economical than waiting until tenants receive eviction notices.

Community members in need of rental assistance will be able to access the funds by calling 211 or completing an [application online](#). Translation services will be available through 211.

Partner agencies that will be key in implementing the modified Home Base program include [Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle](#), [Wellspring Family Services](#), [Solid Ground](#) and [Open Doors for Multicultural Families](#). Wellspring Family Services and the Urban League of Metropolitan Seattle are the service providers for United Way's Home Base program along with the King County Bar Association's [Housing Justice Project](#).

Gordon McHenry, Jr., president and CEO of United Way of King County, hailed the effort and emphasized that the size of the fund will determine the number of people that will be able to receive the assistance they need.

“This initial investment from our partners represents a good start, and it will allow us to provide immediate help to members of the community who have been hurt by the pandemic,” said McHenry. “However, this crisis will be with us for the foreseeable future, and it will require a continuing effort from all of us to chip in and help as much as we can.”

The expanded Home Base program will be funded by \$1.5 million from King County, a \$1 million commitment from the City of Seattle, and a \$1.5 million grant from money raised by the Seattle Foundation’s COVID-19 Response Fund. The rest of the funds will come from Microsoft, Starbucks, Amazon and WaFd Bank and AT&T, as well as individual donors who have contributed to United Way’s Community Relief Fund.

“The impacts of COVID-19 are reverberating throughout our region, with thousands of our neighbors and friends suddenly losing their paychecks. King County is contributing to United Way of King County’s Home Base program, to make sure individuals and families do not fall into homelessness because they cannot pay rent,” said King County Executive Dow Constantine. “This is an important step, but we must work with our state and federal governments, as well as private philanthropy, to do more to support our neighbors in need, and get through this emergency together.”

"Since before COVID-19 reached King County, the City has acted aggressively to prepare for this oncoming pandemic. From the first days of this crisis it was obvious that protecting renters at risk of eviction would be crucial in mitigating the spread of COVID-19. That’s why I signed the state’s first emergency order to halt residential evictions. In the weeks following, the City has worked to quickly enact additional measures to keep the power on, the water running and people in their homes,” said Mayor Jenny A. Durkan. “Today, we are grateful for this partnership to help provide some rent relief to residents that we know is urgently needed to get through this unprecedented public health emergency.”

United Way launched Home Base in 2019 with support from the Seattle Mariners and the King County Bar Association. Since April 2019, the program has kept more than 900 families from experiencing homelessness by providing one-time emergency funds to pay rent and associated legal and late fees, as well as pro bono legal representation for those already a party to an eviction proceeding. Tenants are also connected to public benefits with the assistance of a case manager.

This new expansion of Home Base will direct funds toward families experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 for reasons that include a significant reduction in wages; taking unpaid leave to comply with public health guidelines; or taking unpaid leave to care for their child due to a related child care or school closure. This \$5 million investment will prevent a greater public health emergency by reducing the number of families forced into homelessness.

"So many people are struggling right now. Thousands have been laid off, others are on the verge of losing their homes," said King County Councilmember Girmay Zahilay. "The best way we can support people in King County right now, especially low-income people, is providing direct cash assistance. Helping people pay rent is critical and I'm glad we've taken this first step."

“So many of our residents have lost jobs or pay due to the COVID-19 global pandemic and are wondering how they will afford to keep a roof overhead. Rental assistance helps families stay in their homes and focus on their health and safety, while alleviating the stress of mounting debt,” King County

Councilmember Claudia Balducci said. “King County is doing its part by redirecting existing funds to residents feeling the economic impacts of COVID-19.”

“Having a place to stay during this health crisis is one of the best ways to survive COVID,” said Councilmember [Andrew J. Lewis](#). “As a renter, I appreciate the threat of losing one’s home during times of economic certainty. I am grateful for the work United Way is doing with the Home Base program to ensure people can stay inside, and staying home is one of our most valuable tools we have in fighting this pandemic.”

“This partnership will provide immediate rent relief for 2,000 households—families and individuals who are being hit hardest by the economic impacts of COVID-19. Though there is a moratorium on evictions in place, this low-barrier funding will provide emergency support for those who need it most as we continue to secure policies and resources to keep people in their homes through this crisis,” Seattle Councilmember Teresa Mosqueda said. “Thank you to United Way and partners for supporting the community through Home Base, both before the crisis and now as we see existing inequities in our city exacerbated by this pandemic. The City will continue to work on measures to support all renters who have lost their income during the coronavirus crisis.”

King County is facing the highest rate of COVID-19 illness in Washington state, and low- and moderate-income households, as well as people of color, who disproportionately experience poverty due to systemic discrimination, remain at greatest risk for housing instability.

Seattle announced a 60-day [eviction moratorium](#) on March 16, and Governor Jay Inslee issued a statewide, [30-day moratorium](#) soon after.

United Way would like to encourage anyone who can support this effort to visit the [COVID-19 Updates](#) page to donate to the Community Relief Fund or to explore volunteering opportunities.

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