

## Doggett celebrates federal funding to benefit Foundation Communities

BY NINA HERNANDEZ | AUSTIN MONITOR

(AUSTIN, TX) - At a Tuesday press conference, U.S. Rep. Lloyd Doggett and Foundation Communities celebrated \$3.5 million in federal funds that will go toward three of the local housing nonprofit's programs serving low- and middle-income families in Austin.

"Before affordability was a top concern for folks across our community, Foundation Communities was doing something about it," Doggett said. "There are thousands of families that have been helped by Foundation Communities – not only upon finding affordable housing, but with tax assistance and health care."

Foundation Communities Executive Director Walter Moreau thanked Doggett for his assistance in securing the funds, which will benefit the nonprofit's solar sustainability program and learning centers, as well as launch a new preschool in North Central Austin.

Foundation Communities provides affordable housing to more than 7,000 Austinites across 26 communities in the city. That includes 88 families residing at the Laurel Creek apartment community

on North Lamar Boulevard, where Tuesday's press conference took place. Laurel Creek will also be home to the Open Door preschool, which received \$820,000 as part of Doggett's efforts and will fill a sorely needed child care coverage gap in the area.

"Austin couldn't thrive, couldn't exist, if we didn't support families who are here working and who may not have a lot of money," Moreau said. "So thank you for helping us in this work for the last couple of decades."

The appropriations include \$1.5 million to equip five Foundation Communities properties with solar panels as part of the organization's efforts to reduce both its carbon footprint and energy costs for its residents. Doggett estimates the savings in energy costs will surpass \$100,000 per year.

"We are deeply committed to finding ways to expand renewable energy," Moreau said. "We have got to find a way to reduce our dependence on fossil fuels and convert to more renewable energy. We now have 1.5 megawatts of solar power. And these new panels are going to stay for decades into the future."

Another component of the funding is \$1.1 mil-

lion that will go to the nonprofit's 15 learning centers, which primarily serve students who qualify for free or reduced lunch. The funding will go to purchase furniture, playgrounds and other necessary supplies for 500 students.

"It recognizes that we need to focus as much of our attention as possible on our youngest neighbors here in this community," Doggett said. "And give them the opportunities that they need, assure their families can connect to Wi-Fi, and that we have the equipment they need and the furnishings they need to do the learning we want to occur."

The learning center funds will also help Foundation Communities expand high-speed internet access at its properties to 2,400 residents.

"Especially since Covid, it's hard to function if you don't have good internet," Moreau said. "So being able to offer that and provide that universally at our properties is critical."

This summer, the nonprofit hopes to break ground on phase two of its North Lamar property. Juniper Creek will add 110 more apartments for low-income families.

## Texas rent relief portal reopens until March 28

by Raquel Rogers | DEFENDER NEWS

(TEXAS) - If you're struggling to pay the rent or utility bills, the Texas Rent Relief Program is reopening its application portal now through March 28.

The Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs says first-time applicants may be eligible for up to 18 months of rent and/or utility assistance for past due bills, and up to three months of future payments, which will be made directly to landlords or utilities.

The state has about \$96 million remaining in its rent relief fund, which has provided over \$2 billion in emergency aid since 2020. It initially closed in November 2021.

"The average payout has been somewhere around \$6,500 or so in the past, but we've had some big ones for people that were way behind and hadn't yet gotten evicted," said Bobby Wilkinson, executive director, Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs.

Texas has made payments to more than 315,000 households to date, and prevented more than 21,000 evictions. Wilkinson said in order to be eligible, a household needs to be financially within 80% of their area's median income or below,

and they must be renters.

"Our preference is to pay the landlord directly, or the utility provider directly. That seems to make the most sense, and is the most efficient. But if we can get in touch with that landlord, or they don't want to participate, we're going send that check to the tenant," Wilkinson said.

First-time applicants may be eligible to receive up to 18 months of rent and utility relief this time around, either with past due payments, or a combination of past due and up to three months of current and future payments, made on their behalf.

Wilkinson said they have already received over 4,000 applications on its first day and they are first-come-first-served, but eviction applications will be prioritized.

Local housing advocates are praising the move to reopen, saying the need for assistance on month-to-month expenses is still great, as the impacts of the pandemic continue to drag on. Texas Housers says 270,000 evictions were filed in the state of Texas in 2022. Advocates say even more can be done to prevent further evictions.

Erin Hahn is a research analyst with Texas

Housers. She said although it's been three years since the COVID-19 pandemic started, it still makes sense for money to be distributed for assistance.

"Renters are definitely still struggling in the fallout of the pandemic," she said. "In 2022 we saw a huge spike of evictions in Texas. Over 270,000 were filed in the state of Texas in 2022, which is a huge rise from previous years."

After funds are exhausted, Hahn said they are hoping for more tenants' rights laws and additional funding from the State of Texas.

"The Texas Legislature is currently making decisions on how to spend a \$32 billion budget surplus. And they also have \$5 billion in remaining American Rescue Plan funds that they have to spend this session," Hahn said. "These funds could be used to replenish Texas rent relief."

TDHCA says applications will be processed in the order received, prioritizing those facing evictions. Those applicants should submit their court docket number.

You can apply through the Texas Rent Relief website at [www.texasrentrelief.com](http://www.texasrentrelief.com) or call (833) 9TX-RENT (833-989-7368).

## CDC Recommends All Adults Get Tested for Hepatitis B

By Stacy M. Brown | NNPA Newswire Senior National Correspondent | @StacyBrownMedia

(NNPA) - The U.S. Centers for Control and Prevention have issued a new recommendation urging all adults to receive screening for hepatitis B at least once in their lifetime.

The agency describes hepatitis B (HBV) as a liver infection caused by the HBV virus. It can progress to liver cancer and other serious illnesses. CDC officials said as many as 2.4 million people live with HBV, and most might not know they have it. A severe infection could lead to chronic HBV, which could increase a person's risk of getting cancer or cirrhosis. Further, the CDC said those diagnosed with chronic or long-term HBV are up to 85% more likely to succumb to an early death. "Chronic HBV infection can lead to substantial morbidity and mortality but is detectable before the development of severe liver disease using reliable and inexpensive screening tests," CDC officials stated.

Even though the number of people with HBV has decreased significantly in the last 30 years, the Office of Minority Health at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says it is still a problem for African Americans. That office reported that, in 2020, non-Hispanic blacks would be 1.4 times more likely to die from viral hepatitis than non-Hispanic whites. Also, non-Hispanic blacks were almost twice

as likely to die from hepatitis C as white individuals. Further, while having comparable case rates for HBV in 2020, non-Hispanic blacks were 2.5 times more likely to die from HBV than non-Hispanic whites. Medical officials noted that HBV spreads through contact with infected blood or bodily fluids, which can occur through sex, injecting drugs, or during pregnancy or delivery.

The CDC previously issued a recommendation in 2008, when it urged testing for high-risk individuals. In its most recent recommendation, the agency said that adults over 18 must be tested at least once.

The agency declared that pregnant individuals should also undergo screening during each pregnancy, regardless of whether they've received a vaccine or have been previously tested.

Additionally, incarcerated individuals, those with multiple sex partners, or people with a history of hepatitis C should test periodically, the CDC said. The agency warned that symptoms of acute HBV could include fever, fatigue, abdominal pain, dark urine, and jaundice. Symptoms could take several months or longer to present and last for months.

The CDC's latest report further notes the following:

- It's estimated more than half of people who

have the hepatitis B virus (HBV) don't know they're infected. Without treatment and monitoring, HBV infection can lead to deadly health outcomes, including liver damage and liver cancer.

- The report updates and expands previous guidelines for HBV screening and testing by recommending screening for all U.S. adults and expanding continual periodic risk-based testing to include more groups, activities, exposures, and conditions.

- Providers should implement the new CDC hepatitis B screening and testing recommendations to ensure all adults are screened for HBV infection with the triple-panel at least once in their lifetimes and that people who are not vaccinated for hepatitis B – but are at increased risk of HBV infection – receive periodic testing.

"Although a curative treatment is not yet available, early diagnosis and treatment of chronic HBV infections reduce the risk for cirrhosis, liver cancer, and death," CDC officials noted in the report.

"Along with vaccination strategies, universal screening of adults and appropriate testing of persons at increased risk for HBV infection will improve health outcomes, reduce the prevalence of HBV infection in the United States, and advance viral hepatitis elimination goals."

"That's a history that has no price."

ESPN also reported some of the championship rings started at \$60,000. Game-worn jerseys and trophies were also up for sell to the highest bidder.

"Since my life is still happening and ever-evolving, I am less personally attached to those items than I am to my desire to create new history for myself — and futures for others," Jabbar said. "Much of the proceeds from my auction will go to support my charity, the Skyhook Foundation, whose mission is to 'give kids a shot that can't be blocked. We do this by sending children from economically challenged schools to spend five days in the Angeles National Forest to experience the wonders of nature and learn the basics about science, technology, and engineering."

Jabbar won six NBA championships—five with the Lakers and one with the Milwaukee Bucks. He held the NBA scoring title for 39 years until LeBron James broke the record back in February.

## KAREEM ABDUL-JABBAR SOLD HIS NBA CHAMPIONSHIP RINGS AND OTHER MEMORABILIA FOR \$2.8M IN AUCTION

by Darryl Robertson | BLACK ENTERPRISE

(BE) - Kareem Abdul-Jabbar put four of his NBA championship rings up for auction back in 2019.

According to ESPN, Jabbar's four championship rings, and other memorabilia were for auction with the proceeds going to Jabbar's Skyhook Foundation in an effort to help kids interested in science, math, engineering, and technology.

Included in the auction was an autographed basketball used during his final game in 1989.

"When it comes to choosing between storing a championship ring or trophy in a room or providing kids with an opportunity to change their lives, the choice is pretty simple. Sell it all," Jabbar said.

He added: "Looking back on what I have done with my life, instead of gazing at the sparkle of jewels or gold plating celebrating something I did a long time ago, I'd rather look into the delighted face of a child holding their first caterpillar and think about what I might be doing for their future."