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State of Minnesota

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

NINETY-THIRD SESSION

H. F. No. 4556

03/04/2024 Authored by Howard
The bill was read for the first time and referred to the Committee on Housing Finance and Policy

1.1 A bill for an act
1.2 relating to housing; implementing recommendations of the Workgroup on
1.3 Expediting Rental Assistance for improving application approval times for the
1.4 family homelessness prevention and assistance program, the emergency assistance
1.5 program, and emergency general assistance; requiring reports; proposing coding
1.6 for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 462A.

1.7 BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.8 Section 1. [462A.2096] ANNUAL PROJECTION OF EMERGENCY RENTAL
1.9 ASSISTANCE NEEDS.

1.10 The agency must develop a projection of emergency rental assistance needs in
1.11 consultation with the commissioner of human services and representatives from county and
1.12 Tribal housing administrators and housing nonprofit agencies. The projection must identify
1.13 the amount of funding required to meet all emergency rental assistance needs, including
1.14 the family homelessness prevention and assistance program, the emergency assistance
1.15 program, and emergency general assistance. By January 15 each year, the commissioner
1.16 must submit a report on the projected need for emergency rental assistance to the chairs and
1.17 ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over housing
1.18 and human services finance and policy.

1.19 Sec. 2. [462A.2098] PROVIDING INFORMATION ON RENTAL HOUSING.

1.20 The agency shall regularly provide information to emergency rental assistance program
1.21 providers and to rental property owners that connect renters to state and federal programs
1.22 that help renters stay stably housed. The agency shall leverage existing programs and
1.23 resources in providing information under this section.

2.1        **Sec. 3. DATA COLLECTION TO MEASURE TIMELINESS OF RENTAL**  
2.2        **ASSISTANCE.**

2.3        The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, working with the  
2.4        commissioner of human services and county housing administrators, must develop criteria  
2.5        for measuring the timeliness of processing emergency rental assistance applications, and  
2.6        collect data to monitor application processing speeds. Programs to be monitored include  
2.7        family homelessness prevention and assistance, emergency assistance, and emergency  
2.8        general assistance. The commissioners of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and  
2.9        human services must use the data collected to inform improvements to emergency rental  
2.10       assistance application processing systems. By January 15, 2027, the commissioner of the  
2.11       Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority  
2.12       members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over housing and human services  
2.13       finance and policy. The report must include analysis of the data collected and whether goals  
2.14       have been met to (1) process an emergency rental assistance application within two weeks  
2.15       of receipt of a complete application, and (2) if approved, make payment to a landlord within  
2.16       30 days of receipt of a complete rental assistance application.

2.17       **Sec. 4. DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN SERVICES; MAXIS**  
2.18       **MODIFICATIONS.**

2.19       The commissioner of human services must make modifications to the MAXIS system  
2.20       to ensure it has greater flexibility in issuing assistance payments while maintaining controls  
2.21       to monitor and prevent inaccurate, unnecessary, or fraudulent payments. The commissioner  
2.22       must identify gaps and plan modifications as needed to fulfill the stated goals in this bill.

2.23       **Sec. 5. DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONERS OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE**  
2.24       **MINNESOTA HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY; EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE**  
2.25       **PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS.**

2.26       The commissioners of human services and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must  
2.27       develop program recommendations for emergency rental assistance that have the flexibility  
2.28       to provide relief for crises within a time frame that corresponds to the emergency and that  
2.29       are simple enough for applicants to understand across all emergency rental assistance  
2.30       programs. In the development of these recommendations, the commissioners must:

2.31       (1) recognize differences between administrative and legislative authority and propose  
2.32       legislative changes to the definition of emergency general assistance;

3.1 (2) adopt policies and practices that prioritize easy-to-understand eligibility criteria and  
 3.2 definitions that prioritize accessible, humanizing approaches when assisting persons through  
 3.3 a crisis; and

3.4 (3) develop guidance to emergency rental assistance program administrators that  
 3.5 encourage the program administrators to be flexible with the required forms of documentation  
 3.6 for the program and to avoid establishing documentation requirements that are likely to be  
 3.7 barriers to participation in emergency rental assistance for eligible households.

3.8 **Sec. 6. DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONERS OF HUMAN SERVICES AND THE**  
 3.9 **MINNESOTA HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY; EXPAND OUTREACH AND**  
 3.10 **CONSOLIDATE PROGRAM INFORMATION.**

3.11 (a) The commissioners of human services and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency,  
 3.12 in consultation with counties and nonprofit community partners, must develop and implement  
 3.13 strategies that expand outreach to community members to increase awareness of emergency  
 3.14 rental assistance availability and how persons can apply for assistance.

3.15 (b) The commissioners of human services and the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency  
 3.16 must create a resource that consolidates program requirements for emergency assistance,  
 3.17 emergency general assistance, and family homeless prevention assistance in one location  
 3.18 that potential applicants can utilize to ensure they are able to apply for assistance as early  
 3.19 as possible. The commissioners must develop a process to ensure updates are made to the  
 3.20 resource created under this section as program changes are implemented.

3.21 **Sec. 7. E-SIGNATURE OPTIONS FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

3.22 The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of  
 3.23 human services shall develop uniform e-signature options to be used in applications for  
 3.24 emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and  
 3.25 assistance program assistance. No later than June 30, 2026, the commissioners shall require  
 3.26 administrators of the emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family  
 3.27 homeless prevention and assistance program to incorporate and implement the developed  
 3.28 e-signature options.

3.29 **Sec. 8. LANGUAGE ACCESS IN APPLICATIONS FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

3.30 The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of  
 3.31 human services shall research state and federal laws and regulations to determine language  
 3.32 access standards applying to the organizations' emergency general assistance, emergency

4.1 assistance, and family homelessness prevention and assistance programs and shall ensure  
 4.2 compliance with all applicable language access requirements. The commissioners shall  
 4.3 identify specific languages into which program materials could be translated to improve  
 4.4 access to emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless  
 4.5 prevention and assistance program assistance and shall translate the materials into the  
 4.6 identified languages. The commissioners shall develop and implement a plan to translate  
 4.7 any website applications for emergency general assistance, emergency assistance, and family  
 4.8 homeless prevention and assistance program assistance into multilingual website applications.  
 4.9 The commissioners shall identify funding needs to improve their organizations' language  
 4.10 access and any available funding sources. The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing  
 4.11 Finance Agency shall provide technical assistance and support to family homeless prevention  
 4.12 and assistance program grantees to ensure grantees meet language access standards.

4.13 Sec. 9. **PROMOTING ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR PROCESSING EMERGENCY**  
 4.14 **ASSISTANCE APPLICATIONS; DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONER.**

4.15 (a) The commissioner of human services, in consultation with county and Tribal human  
 4.16 services agencies, the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators,  
 4.17 the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative, and other stakeholders shall identify and evaluate  
 4.18 strategies to promote adequate funding for processing emergency rental assistance  
 4.19 applications. The commissioner shall:

4.20 (1) evaluate state and federal reimbursement for administrative support staff;

4.21 (2) determine adequate compensation for processors based on objective data such as  
 4.22 market studies or livable wage markers;

4.23 (3) determine if state funding increases are necessary to process emergency rental  
 4.24 assistance applications in a timely manner; and

4.25 (4) establish a process to determine an equitable funding formula that is adjustable as  
 4.26 needed.

4.27 (b) The commissioner shall report the results of the evaluation of funding for processing  
 4.28 emergency assistance applications and any related recommendations to the chairs and  
 4.29 ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over emergency  
 4.30 assistance by January 1, 2026. The report must also include any draft legislation necessary  
 4.31 to implement the recommendations.

5.1 Sec. 10. **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR A CENTRALIZED RENTAL ASSISTANCE**  
5.2 **APPLICATION SYSTEM.**

5.3 **Subdivision 1. Development of new emergency rental assistance application**  
5.4 **system.** The commissioner of human services, in collaboration with the commissioner of  
5.5 the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner of information technology  
5.6 services, must develop a recommendation for a new centralized emergency rental assistance  
5.7 application system that will be administered by the state and be available statewide to all  
5.8 emergency rental assistance providers to process emergency rental assistance applications.  
5.9 The commissioner shall consult with various emergency rental assistance providers  
5.10 throughout the state in making recommendations under this section.

5.11 **Subd. 2. New system requirements.** The emergency rental assistance application system  
5.12 must:

5.13 (1) be a centralized system operated by the Department of Human Services;

5.14 (2) be able to integrate with existing emergency rental assistance application systems;

5.15 (3) serve as a single application portal into multiple state emergency rental assistance  
5.16 programs;

5.17 (4) be flexible, scalable, and customizable;

5.18 (5) serve as a single source for agencies to view applications and supporting  
5.19 documentation; and

5.20 (6) allow applicants to view their documentation and the status of their applications.

5.21 **Subd. 3. Cost estimate.** The commissioner of human services shall consult with other  
5.22 individuals that have expertise in statewide data systems and shall put together a cost estimate  
5.23 for the emergency rental assistance application system.

5.24 **Subd. 4. Report to legislature.** The commissioner of human services shall submit a  
5.25 report by January 15, 2027, to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative  
5.26 committees with jurisdiction over housing and human services finance and policy. The  
5.27 report shall include proposed timelines, a sample request for a proposal with technical  
5.28 specifications, and cost estimates for a new emergency rental assistance application system  
5.29 under this section. The report must also include any draft legislation necessary to implement  
5.30 the application system.

6.1 **Sec. 11. VERIFICATION PROCEDURES FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

6.2 (a) The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency and the commissioner  
6.3 of human services shall consult with local officials to develop recommendations aimed at  
6.4 simplifying the process of verifying the information in applications for emergency general  
6.5 assistance, emergency assistance, and family homeless prevention and assistance program  
6.6 assistance. In developing recommendations, the commissioners must consider:

6.7 (1) allowing self-attestation of emergencies, assets, and income;

6.8 (2) allowing verbal authorization by applicants to allow emergency rental assistance  
6.9 administrators to communicate with landlords and utility providers regarding applications  
6.10 for assistance; and

6.11 (3) allowing landlords to apply for emergency rental assistance on tenants' behalf.

6.12 (b) The commissioners must:

6.13 (1) prepare recommendations by January 1, 2025;

6.14 (2) adopt any recommendations by July 1, 2025; and

6.15 (3) provide technical assistance to counties, Tribes, and other emergency rental assistance  
6.16 administrators to implement these recommendations.