

NEBRASKA TAXPAYERS FOR FREEDOM ISSUE PAPER: DOUGLAS CO. COMMISSIONERS TURN COVID-19 RELIEF INTO WELFARE.

BACKGROUND. On March 27, 2020, Congress passed the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, which established a \$150 billion Coronavirus Relief Fund (CRF) for state, county, and municipal governments with populations of over 500,000 people to address unanticipated, necessary expenditures incurred because of the COVID-19 public health emergency. The federal government released billions of dollars to states and localities with accompanying parameters for spending the funds. The feds intend these billions to help first responders, health and medical professionals, and true victims of the coronavirus. Unfortunately, some states and localities, including Douglas County, are spending this windfall on welfare services not directly pertaining to handling the pandemic. Such expenditures deprive affected professionals and citizens of funding they deserve.

RENT SUBSIDIES. Douglas Co. Commissioners set aside \$10 million of their \$166 million federal allotment to provide rent subsidies and late fee expenses for unpaid rent after April 1, 2020. Supposedly, this program intends to stabilize housing for residents suffering from unemployment or job furloughs. However, one could make a solid case that unemployed home mortgage holders likewise deserve such subsidies. Aid up to 4 months and/or a maximum payment of \$4,000. Renters must reside in Douglas County and have household income at or below 100% of the area median income, not below poverty level. Applicant must be the same as person on the rental agreement and must produce a copy of lease.



Renters must have only 1 primary residence, notwithstanding no way to verify such. Renter must be a citizen or qualified resident alien. This clause would allow hundreds of DACA illegal aliens to become recipients, because they enjoy semi-permanent residency here. Applicants must submit their lease agreement and letter from landlord verifying owed rent or an eviction notice. Renters must show W-9s from landlords. Funds paid directly to landlords. Each adult in the household must show a proof of income document. Documents include pay stubs, SS or pension cards, unemployment benefits, letter from employer showing job loss or furlough, or retirement or

disability documentation. Those who cannot provide income documentation may submit a letter of explanation, an allowance that will invite fraud stemming from self-certification. Required ID includes birth certificate or SS cards, both easily forged. Applicants cannot utilize rental assistance from more than 1 organization, yet there is no verification process. Landlords must willingly agree to participate and certify that rent owed. They must certify that they will not evict a renter for nonpayment for the months of assistance received through this program, even if landlord has other reasons to evict. See table below:

Persons in Family	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Moderate (100%) Income Limits (\$)	\$60,900	\$69,600	\$78,300	\$87,000	\$93,950	\$100,900	\$107,900	\$114,850

UTILITY SUBSIDIES. Up to \$750 per household applied directly to an M.U.D. bill and up to \$750 per household applied directly to the OPPD bill. Illegal aliens temporarily amnestied under the DACA and other programs are eligible. Some renters pay for utilities as part of their monthly rent, so CARES \$\$ dispensers must avoid handing out duplicate payments.

GROUPS DOLE IT OUT. Local leftist nonprofits obtained the privilege of dispensing these grants, so expect them to demonstrate much generosity. Included are Latino Center of the Midlands, Siena Francis House, and Together Inc. The county also will work with the Omaha Community Foundation under contract to funnel monies, but there is no accountability here. The Foundation will offer the county a list of possible recipients.

OTHER QUESTIONABLES. The County Corrections Dept. wants \$4,000 for a new wireless phone center for inmate self-study, a \$382 Canon camcorder for recording online lectures, a \$2,400 inmate banking kiosk, a \$1,199 LEDLCD monitor for security, a \$20,000 re-entry to society library, \$114,000 in dental equipment, and \$32,786 of food preparation equipment. The Election Commissioner office seeks \$1,000 for recycling, \$38,000 to print more ballots for election day,

part of \$37,284 for replacement drop-boxes for ballots, and \$4,500 for laptops for additional employees, though such employees only temporary.¹ The county has designated 1 category of nonprofits for funding, like the Omaha Zoo, Orpheum, and Joslyn Museum, despite their activities not remotely connected to the pandemic. The 2nd category comprises small nonprofits who dispense welfare services. Yet, the county board appears concerned about protecting itself from federal auditing that may discover misappropriations of CARES funds. The County Health Center wants money for IPADS, so that patients can communicate better with their families. Ring-system doorbell systems for judge offices. \$125,000 for new sound systems for 5 courtrooms. A \$300,000 renovation for a jury assembly room. \$1.8 million for a mobile command center RV used at major crime scenes. \$1.8 million for a huge vehicle to travel around the county to offer coronavirus testing, even though this massive truck cannot maneuver in side streets. The Sheriff's Office, not the Health Dept., in charge of this vehicle, leading us to suspect that it will become used more for law enforcement than medical purposes. Nonprofit organizations, many of them leftist like Together, Inc., will receive a total of \$20 million to dispense, with no restriction against aiding illegal aliens. Commissioner Mike Boyle would like more millions for nonprofits.

THE VOTES. Voting to ladle out \$10 million to nonprofit organizations for them to then dispense welfare services as they wish: Borgeson, Boyle, Cavanaugh, Duda, Morgan, Rodgers. Voting to shovel out \$10 million to fund arts and entertainment venues²: Borgeson, Boyle, Cavanaugh, Duda, Morgan, Rodgers.

MANAGEMENT. Deloitte Touche, under contract to ascertain that the funding remains within legal federal bounds,



will help the county establish criteria for the spending. Commissioners voted to pay \$1 million to this firm to administer the funds and install strict auditing guidelines. The NE Association of County Officials also will advise. The county is progressing with apportioning funds to local governments like cities and villages but still not sure how to structure the aid. Understand that counties cannot use CARES monies to fill in gaps for lost revenue or replace monies local governments already allocated.

CITY OF OMAHA FUNDING. The county dispensing CARES funds to Omaha is complicated. The city first must request pandemic funding from FEMA before requesting pandemic \$\$ from the county. Depending upon how much money the city believes it needs following FEMA dispensation, the city will only then make a formal, detailed funding request to county commissioners. The county has reserved \$25 million for Omaha, though the city government keeps changing its figures pertaining to funds needed. Deloitte Touche will act quickly to evaluate the eventual city request.

TAKE ACTION NOW. Of the original \$166 million given the county, only \$32 million remains unspent. These expenditures do nothing to protect public health and safety or lower the risk of transmission and infection, yet commissioners believe these welfare and wish list items will protect citizens and county employees, allowing county functions to continue securely. Several county commissioners want to add additional millions to such expenditures. Such unwarranted largesse proves why taxpayer watchdogs must restrict government spending. Contact your Douglas Co. Commissioner today to NOT spend coronavirus monies on these welfare and wish list endeavors, using the text above. Email netaxpayers@gmail.com for commissioner contact information and to join our NTF *County Watch Program*.

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¹ Douglas County CARES Update, 7-28-20.

² E.g., Lauritzen Gardens, Opera Omaha, Film Streams, Omaha Symphony, Omaha Children's Museum.