



The Colorado Coalition for the Homeless is in strong support of HB20-1410. The economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic threatens to significantly exacerbate housing instability and homelessness. Colorado's General Assembly must take bold action to help people already struggling to make ends meet by putting CARES Act dollars toward flexible emergency rental assistance and the Eviction Legal Defense Fund.

Colorado was already in a [housing crisis](#) with an estimated 280,000 Colorado households paying at least 50% of their income towards housing. We have a shortage of more than 130,000 affordable housing units for households with the lowest incomes – with needs beyond this number for other low-wage workers and households. They are at extreme risk of joining the more than [10,000 people](#) who on any given night in Colorado have no home at all. Modeling by Columbia University estimates that [homelessness may grow](#) by 40-45% nationwide this year as a result of the fallout from the virus. The nearly \$20 million requested for emergency rental assistance in this bill will go a long way to prevent this increase.

High [unemployment](#) – now 30 times higher than at the Great Recession's peak – and continued physical distancing requirements that prevent people from getting back to work creates the potential for nearly [500,000 evictions](#) in Colorado, and a wave of foreclosures perhaps even larger than we had during the Great Recession. During and following the COVID-19 crisis, access to legal assistance through Colorado's Eviction Legal Defense Fund will be especially important as tenants who have lost income as a result from the virus' economic fallout try to navigate provisions of the CARES Act, state executive orders on evictions and late fees, and local moratoria.

The connection between health and housing has never been more clear. A [recent report](#) demonstrates that people experiencing homelessness who are infected with coronavirus would be twice as likely to be hospitalized, two to four times as likely to require critical care, and two to three times as likely to die from the illness as the general population. Because of these likely disparate health outcomes, we believe it is key that this bill prioritizes people experiencing homelessness who have school-age children, those who are Veterans, and those who are medically vulnerable.

We have worked with the City and County of Denver and other direct service partners to bring several hotels online to house people experiencing homelessness in activated respite (COVID-19 positive) and protective action (COVID-19 negative and medically vulnerable) settings. Service providers have taken similar action across the state, including in La Plata County. These CARES Act dollars could help ensure that this group of people, and others in our community who are living on the edge of homelessness, does not end up back on the streets.

During this pandemic, Colorado's lawmakers must ensure everyone is stably housed. This is not just an economic necessity, but a moral and health imperative. Lives are at risk. We must protect those who are most vulnerable during this pandemic. We urge you to vote "yes" on HB20-1410.