

The Virgin Islands Consortium

VI Housing Authority Promoting 'Helping Hands' Program Aimed at Providing Relief to Tenants

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The Virgin Islands Housing Authority on Friday said it would start promoting a program that helps residents who are part of its housing program and have fallen behind on their rent. The announcement takes into consideration the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's [eviction moratorium](#), which ends on Dec. 31, setting up a wave of evictions and court battles in the months ahead if action is not taken to remedy the matter.

VIHA said it launched the "Helping Hands" program in March to give residents options for dealing with unpaid rent and mounting debt.

“We can work with you to set up a repayment plan within your means,” said Director of Asset Management Jimmy Farmer, whose staff created Helping Hands. “Even if you owe \$1,000 or more, a reasonable amount repaid each month in addition to your regular month’s rent can keep you in good standing.”

According to VIHA, the repayment agreement is a written, signed contract between tenant and landlord – in this case, VIHA — spelling out the amount of rent you owe, how much you will pay per month, and for how many months. For VIHA residents, the total amount of rent plus repayment can never exceed 40 percent of adjusted income.

“If you had a decrease in income or a change in circumstances that made it difficult to pay your rent on time, we can recertify your income and adjust your rent to reflect the change,” Farmer added.

The federal CARES Act enacted the first eviction moratorium last March for 120 days. As unemployment figures rose and the virus showed no sign of slowing, protections against eviction continued at the state, local and national level to keep millions of renters housed.

The authority said it will run radio spots on WAXJ 103.5 FM and WDHP 1620 AM, along with WTJX. “VIHA hopes to reach as many residents as possible to make sure they have a chance to act while they can,” stated the release.

The Helping Hands program gives residents until January 31st, 2021 to start a repayment plan and avoid eviction, Farmer said.

Some VIHA residents have been holding back their rent because of needed repairs to their units, Farmer acknowledged. Covid-19, he said, affected the housing agency, too, limiting maintenance workers to emergency repairs for the residents’ as well as their safety.

“VIHA wants to do the right thing,” he said. “A non-working sink or shower has a monetary value that we can apply as a percentage deduction to your rent based on our repair valuation guide. Talk to your property manager to see if your situation warrants an abatement.”

The economic losses from Covid-19 have forced many people to double up with friends or family, which can trigger an eviction if they are not on the lease, according to VIHA. The Helping Hands program may be able to get them on the lease without increasing the household’s income. Farmer encouraged them, as well as elderly residents with live-in caretakers, to talk to their property manager about their situation.

“VIHA wants to keep your family whole,” he said.