



City of Houston's priorities for use of federal COVID-19 funds should be focused on Houstonians who need help, not to supplement city's day-to-day operations

Yesterday, Mayor Turner announced that \$4.1 million of CARES Act funds would be allocated to pay overtime to pay 110 police officers each day to patrol crime "hot spots" around the city. On the same day, the City of Houston announced a plan to use \$328,000 of CARES Act funds to buy new replacement residential garbage bins.

These are strange priorities for the use of the only major source of funds our city has to combat a pandemic that has already killed 17,477 of our fellow Texans.

The US Treasury Department issued guidance to cities on how to use the Coronavirus Relief Funds allocated through the CARES Act. Cities were given broad authority to use the funds for "necessary expenditures incurred due to the public health emergency." Houston, which received over \$404 million in CARES funds, has inexplicably chosen to prioritize a temporary expansion of the police budget and the purchase of replacement garbage bins.

There are millions of Houston residents hurting and at real risk of contracting the virus right now because of the pandemic. Their needs should be the City's priority. Instead of setting up an effective program to get rent relief and mortgage assistance directly to Houstonians who will lose their homes without financial assistance, officials are using these precious funds to cover the city's cost of doing business.

Meanwhile, the clock is ticking. A second pandemic surge is coming and if CARES funds are not expended by the end of 2020, the City will have to return the money to the US Treasury.

Seven months into this pandemic, we know that an mounting increase in COVID-19 infections which the Mayor acknowledges means an increase in jobs lost, hours cut, and bills unpaid — all things that will hurt low-income Houstonians the most. At this moment, there is an emergency need for more COVID testing, more personal protective equipment, improved contact tracing, massive increases in utility and income-targeted rental assistance, and rapid rehousing programs. As the CDC's order on evictions noted, a loss of shelter directly contributes to the spread of the pandemic. No matter the City's regular and ongoing financial needs and Washington's inaction to provide additional aid, police overtime and new garbage bins are not appropriate actions Houston needs to take to protect our public health.

Contact:
Zoe Middleton,
Southeast Texas co-director, Texas Housers
zoe@texashousing.org
231.250.3104