

# Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) Data Dashboard

## Introduction, Methodology, and Discussion

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Updated 3/2/2022

### Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the financial crisis that it gave rise to have taken a devastating toll on Americans. COVID-19 has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and caused millions more to lose their incomes, livelihoods, and homes. Low-income people of color have been disproportionately affected, with higher rates of [infection](#) as well as [financial hardship](#).

The federal government responded to the unprecedented crisis by devoting groundbreaking sums of money to assistance programs that are designed to keep Americans stabilized. Through the [Emergency Rental Assistance \(ERA\) program](#), \$46 billion has been distributed to states and localities for assisting low-income households that are behind on their rent and at risk of eviction.

Of Texas' \$2.7 billion allocation, \$1.7 billion was allotted to the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs for the administration of a statewide rental assistance program. The remaining \$1 billion has been distributed amongst 37 cities and counties that operate local programs. In order to prevent evictions (a tremendous detriment to a person's health at any time but [particularly during a pandemic](#)), it is imperative that the states and localities receiving ERA funding take proper action to distribute it effectively.

Texas Housers' ERA data dashboard tracks the performance of Texas ERA programs, considering the efficiency and equitability of their distribution beginning as early as February of 2020. When paired with information about where the need for rental assistance persists (stay tuned for the upcoming release of our eviction data dashboard), the ERA data dashboard becomes a powerful tool for identifying the jurisdictions that should be targeted in the allocation of [additional funding](#) for rental assistance.

### Methodology

To ensure that ERA is being distributed effectively, Texas Housers requests quarterly data on program expenditures and recipient pools from each of the 38 jurisdictions (1 state and 37

localities) that administer ERA in Texas. All data are obtained through the public information request process.

Data requested from jurisdictions administering ERA
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The total dollar amount of ERA (1 and 2) distributed</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The total number of households that received assistance of any kind</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of households that received assistance by Area Median Income (AMI)</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of households that received assistance by race</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The number of households that received assistance by ethnicity</li> </ul>

The current dashboard displays data that are current as of December 31, 2021, the end date of Treasury's Quarter 4 (Q4) reporting period and the last time ERA grantees were required to compile the income and demographic data that are featured in the dashboard. Since ERA programs have continued to distribute assistance in the months since, their total expenditures are now higher than what they stood at in December. However, the data presented in the dashboard are the most current public data that contain income and demographic characteristics.

Because the dashboard attempts to incorporate data from 38 different sources, there are some nuances that users should be aware of:

Two out of the 38 jurisdictions that administer ERA in Texas — Bexar County and Cameron County — failed to respond to Texas Housers' request for data. The data of these two counties are thus missing from the dashboard's interface. As a result, the total dollar amount of ERA distributed and the total number of households assisted in the state of Texas by December 31 as presented by the dashboard are marginally lower than they would be with the inclusion of these two programs' data. Likewise, the charts displaying income and demographic information about Texas' ERA recipients do not include these two programs' data. The requested data are critical to assessing the effectiveness of these local ERA programs. By not responding to public information requests, which they are required to do by law, these jurisdictions impede the important task of assessing the effectiveness of Texas ERA programs.

Lubbock County reported the *dollar amount* that was distributed to households in each income, racial, and ethnic category, as opposed to the *number of households* it assisted in each category as was requested. Texas Housers used the portion of the total dollar expenditure that went to Lubbock County households in each income, racial, and ethnic category to

estimate the portion of the recipient pool that each category represented, since the number of households in the recipient pool was provided.

The City of Houston and Harris County as well as the City of El Paso and El Paso County are represented on the dashboard as single programs because these cities and counties opted to distribute their respective ERA allocations collectively. (The dollar amount of ERA1 that the dashboard reports was recaptured from the City of El Paso and El Paso County's joint program was lost from El Paso County.)

Finally, given that the U.S. Treasury is in the process of [reallocating ERA funds from low to high performing jurisdictions](#), jurisdictions' total ERA1 allocations as reported by the dashboard are subject to change.

## Discussion

Below are Texas Housers' findings and recommendations after collecting and assessing data regarding Texas ERA program progress through the end of December, 2021:

Although Texas is often regarded as an ERA "[success story](#)" largely in response to the nationally acclaimed performance of the statewide Texas Rent Relief program, ERA distribution on the local level is defined by stark geographical disparities.

Several Texas jurisdictions have struggled to get any money out the door, failed to meet spending deadlines, and returned millions of ERA1 funds to the Treasury for reallocation elsewhere in the state and nation (see the Counties of [Montgomery](#), Brazoria, Hays, El Paso, Jefferson, and Nueces and the City of Laredo). As long as evictions in these jurisdictions continue (see Texas Housers' [eviction dashboard](#) for more information), the loss of any amount of rental assistance is inexcusable.

Other jurisdictions spent their ERA1 awards quickly and received reallocated funding from the Treasury in January to meet the need for assistance that remained (see Houston/Harris County and San Antonio). However, rising eviction rates in these jurisdictions throughout early 2022 (again see Texas Housers' [eviction dashboard](#)) indicate that need remains still.

There is a chance that Texas could soon lose millions in vital rental assistance for good, as the Treasury plans to recapture all unobligated ERA1 funds at the end of March. Jurisdictions not on track to meet the March deadline must voluntarily reallocate to the statewide Texas Rent Relief program so that this vital assistance can reach low-income Texans before it is too late.