

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

December 2, 2022

Commissioner Christopher Nunn  
Georgia Department of Community Affairs  
60 Executive Park South, NE  
Atlanta, GA 30329

Dear Commissioner Nunn:

We write to express deep concern regarding the decision by Georgia Department of Community Affairs (DCA) to abruptly end an essential lifeline for Georgians with no notice and no transparency. Specifically, we request information on what factors led to this decision to close the Georgia Rental Assistance (GRA) program to new applications, why the decision took days for DCA to announce publicly, and what DCA plans to do with the remaining federal funds supporting the program.

This termination potentially leaves thousands of Georgian families without shelter, jeopardizing Georgia's economic recovery. These Georgians work and operate small businesses, have young children at home, or are trying to put their life back on track following a global crisis, and they deserve answers about why DCA suddenly ceased accepting new applications for the federally-funded Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP), also known as GRA.

From April 2020 to October 2022, there have been 235,217 eviction filings in the metro Atlanta area despite eviction moratoriums established under federal law. These filings were predominantly directed at low-income and minority communities, who have also borne the brunt of the health and economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

In light of this, ERAP has been a lifeline for thousands of hardworking families throughout Georgia. Congress initially created this program under the bipartisan Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, signed into law in December 2020. In the first iteration of funding, the state of Georgia directly received more than \$552 million, with more than \$157 million also going to eligible local governments throughout Georgia. Facing further calamity, Congress provided a second round of federal funding to states to help hardworking families in the American Rescue Plan. In this second tranche, the state of Georgia directly received more than \$437 million, with a further \$125 million allocated to eligible local governments in Georgia.

This funding came at a critical moment in our state's history. Thanks to this federal assistance, tens of thousands of Georgia families were able to stay in their homes, sparing them and their children the tumultuous effects of eviction, and many Georgia property owners were able to receive consistent funding to cover their costs. Many Georgians were planning to rely on this assistance for their rent in November, and some were planning to apply for assistance for the first time. In fact, there were some Georgians who were working on their applications on October 27, 2022, trying to make them as comprehensive and accurate as possible so they could submit them in time for November rent.

Then, on October 28, 2022, these Georgians tried to log on to the DCA website—the same website they had checked all week—only to find a one-sentence announcement. DCA was no longer accepting new applications.

Indeed, according to reporting by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution, even Georgians who DCA had previously approved for assistance suddenly had this approval revoked, immediately throwing their ability to pay rent into limbo.

According to multiple housing advocates that reached out to some of our offices in the aftermath of this decision, their clients did not receive any advance notice, nor opportunities to remedy or appeal. Not even the many housing advocates and groups who had previously partnered with DCA to assist tenants were notified of the change. In fact, as recently as October 26, 2022—two days before DCA's sudden shutdown—Georgia counties had even directed tenants to apply to the DCA program.

This is unacceptable. Georgia has received nearly \$1 billion in federal funding to support eviction relief. This abrupt and premature decision to close the GRA program may unnecessarily force Georgians from their home. While we appreciate that DCA eventually sent a letter regarding the closure to our offices on the day of the shutdown, the application had closed before the letter was sent, leading to hours of ambiguity and confusion about the state of the program. The notice posted by DCA on November 2, 2022—one day after rent is typically due—is wholly inadequate.

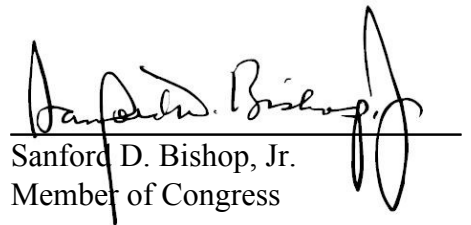
Given the challenges this decision presents to many Georgians, especially those facing housing uncertainty and insecurity, I request that you provide a written response addressing the closure and the future of the program and a full briefing to our staffs no later than December 9, 2022.

While we are proud of Georgia's economic recovery, we still must fight for hardworking Georgia families across the state who need a little help to stay on their feet amidst rising costs. That means taking full advantage of federal resources to support hardworking Georgia families staying in their homes, rather than abruptly ending a critical resource without any notice just days before the rent is due.

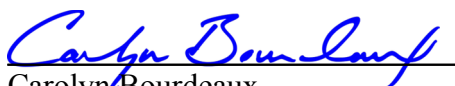
Sincerely,



Henry C. "Hank" Johnson, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Sanford D. Bishop, Jr.  
Member of Congress



Carolyn Bourdeaux  
Member of Congress



Lucy McBath  
Member of Congress



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Nikema Williams  
Member of Congress



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David Scott  
Member of Congress