



May 14, 2020

Honorable Members of the Interim Local Government Committee
Via Email

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the State's response to the impacts of COVID-19. As a lender, housing counseling agency, and provider of technical assistance to residents of trailer parks we are seeing first-hand the broad physical and economic impacts of this public health emergency on Montana residents and communities.

We appreciate the State's response to date, particularly the funds allocated to support Montana businesses and non-profits that are working to keep people safely employed, and the funds provided for direct housing assistance. Direct housing assistance is one of the needs we highlighted in our recommendations to the Montana Relief Fund Task Force:

Stable housing is now more than ever a critical health and welfare need. Over 20 years of supporting low- and moderate-income Montanans we know peoples' housing needs are best met through appropriate financial support combined with high quality services such as housing counseling. To respond to the extensive housing impacts of COVID, and keep people stably housed we need a three-pronged approach:

- 1. fund and support public and non-profit social service sectors such as homeless shelters, food banks, and childcare providers facing increased demand due to COVID;*
- 2. expand the housing assistance fund to support more renters and homeowners for an extended period; and*
- 3. provide housing counseling for renters at risk of eviction and homeowners at risk of foreclosure.*

These actions will put Montana's people and economy in the best position to return to a strong post-COVID future.

As we work to address the immediate needs of Montana residents, and encourage action on the recommendations above, we are also looking to the future. The lack of affordable housing supply was already a challenge for Montanans, and we anticipate the demand for housing in our State will continue to grow. As a Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI) we support housing development through flexible financing that allows developers to layer all the various public and private programs together to make projects viable. Most recently we have seen this approach work well with the Multifamily Coal Trust Homes Program. With the \$15 million committed from the State we were able to attract an additional \$650k from the US Treasury to support new housing preservation and development projects. The impacts in less than a year are impressive with 252 apartments in 7 towns.

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that gives every Montanan the opportunity to live in a home where they can thrive.



State support can be an incredible catalyst and is an essential part of the diverse housing landscape. We encourage you to continue to build long-standing resources like the Coal Trust Homes Program and a state Housing Tax Credit as we seek to ensure every Montanan has the opportunity to live in a home where they can thrive.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments, and for all your work on behalf of Montana people and communities.

Kaia Peterson
Executive Director

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