

RESOLUTION NO. 20 - 59
PINELLAS CARES FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE EXPANSION

WHEREAS, in response to the emergence of a novel coronavirus and the respiratory disease it causes (“COVID-19”), the World Health Organization (WHO) has officially characterized COVID-19 as a pandemic that constitutes a Public Health Emergency of International Concern; and

WHEREAS, on March 1, 2020, Governor Ron DeSantis issued Executive Order Number 20-51, declaring that appropriate measures to control the spread of COVID-19 in the State of Florida are necessary, and accordingly the State Surgeon General and State Health Officer declared that a Public Health Emergency exists in the State of Florida; and

WHEREAS, on March 9, 2020, Governor Ron DeSantis issued Executive Order Number 20-52 declaring a State of Emergency for the state of Florida in furtherance of efforts to respond to and mitigate the effects of COVID-19 throughout the state; and

WHEREAS, in addition to other subsequent Executive Orders issued by the Governor, the Governor found it necessary and appropriate to take action to slow the spread of COVID-19, and accordingly issued Executive Order 20-91 (EO 20-91) on April 1, 2020, restricting the movements and activities of people throughout the State of Florida as provided therein, shutting down and dramatically negatively effecting many businesses within Pinellas County which continues to date; and

WHEREAS, in order to fully and effectively respond to the developing threats posed by the novel coronavirus and its associated disease (COVID-19), and in coordination with ongoing emergency actions by the state and federal governments, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners (Board) passed Resolution 20-16 declaring a local state of emergency in Pinellas County (Resolution), and subsequently extensions and orders have been issued continuing the state local emergency based on ongoing threats and taking whatever prudent action is necessary to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of the community; and

WHEREAS, the Board adopted Resolution 20-20 (Safer at Home Order), and Resolution 20-23 implementing the Governor’s EO 20-91; and

WHEREAS, in April nationwide unemployment reached levels not seen in recent times, with the U.S. Department of Labor reporting, “The advance seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate was 11.0 percent for the week ending April 11.... This marks the highest level of the seasonally adjusted insured unemployment rate in the history of the seasonally adjusted series”; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Department of Labor Bureau of Labor Statistics reported as of Friday, June 19, 2020 that Florida’s unemployment rate is projected to have risen to a new historic high of 14.5% - higher than even the national average projected to be 13%; and

WHEREAS, as a result of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, many businesses have closed their doors temporarily or permanently, or have dramatically scaled back their hours of operation or employee work hours; and

WHEREAS, as a direct result of the COVID-19 Public Health Emergency, many individuals and families within Pinellas County now find themselves without funds, insurance or sufficient other federal assistance to pay for basic utilities, rent or mortgage payments, or other critical needs; and

WHEREAS, the unemployment system has been overwhelmed or is insufficient to the point where it is ineffective within the timeframes necessary to meet the needs of some of these individuals or families; and

WHEREAS, the threat to these vulnerable individuals and families constitutes a continuing significant threat to public safety and welfare; and

WHEREAS, the resulting threat to individuals and families impacted by the COVID-19 public health emergency of foreclosure, eviction, or health and safety from lack of money for utilities or other critical needs is a continuing community emergency in Pinellas County for which funds were not budgeted by the County prior to March 1, 2020; and

WHEREAS, Pursuant to §252.38(1), Florida Statutes, and Pinellas County Charter section 2.04 (k), the County has jurisdictional authority over the entire county for emergency management purposes; and

WHEREAS, on March 27, 2020, Congress passed, and the President signed the “Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act” (CARES Act); and

WHEREAS, on April 22, 2020, the U.S. Treasury Department (Treasury) issued Guidance for State, Territorial, Local, and Tribal Governments relating to payments made available under section 601(a) of the Social Security Act as added by section 5001 of the CARES Act (Coronavirus Relief Fund); and

WHEREAS, Treasury issued updated guidance through a series of Frequently Asked Questions on June 24, 2020 (Updated FAQs); and

WHEREAS, the Treasury guidance makes clear that COVID-19-related expenses reasonably necessary to the function of government that satisfy the Fund’s eligibility criteria are eligible expenditures of the Coronavirus Relief Fund allocation; and

WHEREAS, the Updated FAQs state in pertinent part that the Coronavirus Relief Fund, “is designed to provide ready funding to address unforeseen financial needs and risks created by the COVID-19 public health emergency;” and

WHEREAS, Pinellas County as a local government with a population in excess of 500,000 people is the only entity within Pinellas County that directly received the Coronavirus Relief Fund monies; and

WHEREAS, the Pinellas County Board of County Commissioners adopted the Pinellas CARES Financial Assistance Program by Pinellas County Resolution Number 20-36, on April 28, 2020 which adopted standards for the program as necessary to meet the impacts from COVID-19 (Pinellas CARES I); and

WHEREAS, while Pinellas CARES I was intended as a temporary assistance program to “bridge the gap” for impacted individuals, the impacts from the COVID-19 public health emergency continue, and infection rates are rising within Pinellas County; and

WHEREAS, according to UCLA’s Turner Center for Housing and Innovation analysis of 2018 American Community Survey, Public Use

Microdata Sample data (Turner Center Data), median gross rent of renter households in the Tampa Bay Metropolitan Statistical Area with at least one worker in an industry likely to be immediately impacted COVID-19-related income or job losses is \$1,170.00; and

WHEREAS, ongoing unemployment means that the need for assistance by those impacted will continue over the coming months; and

WHEREAS, according to Turner Center Data analysis, the median income of newly vulnerable renter households in the Tampa-St. Petersburg-Clearwater Metropolitan Statistical Area is \$72,300; and

WHEREAS, these are households that were not rent burdened prior to COVID-19 but have at least one worker in an immediately impacted industry; and

WHEREAS, according to the COVID-19 Tampa Bay Partnership statistically valid Community Survey:

- Of residents whose employment status has been affected by COVID-19 nearly one-quarter have sought deferral of a rent or mortgage payment, received food from a food bank, or postponed filling a prescription to reduced expenses; and
- Overall, about half of residents remain “very concerned” about the impact of COVID-19 on themselves or their household; and

WHEREAS, according to the Federal Reserve’s Survey of Consumer Finances, which is conducted every three years, most recently in 2016, all but the top 20% of earners, the median transaction accounts (include checking, savings, money market, call accounts, and prepaid debit card) balance is less than \$10,000 dollars, with the Median savings account balance by percentile of income:

- Bottom 20% of earners: \$600
- 20th to 39.9th percentile: \$1,700
- 40th to 59.9th percentile: \$3,800

- 60th to 79.9th percentile: \$8,200
- 80th to 89.9th percentile: \$18,700
- Top 10% of earners: \$62,000

WHEREAS, as impacts continue from the COVID-19 public health emergency it is necessary for the County to continue and expand the Pinellas CARES I program to allow more individuals and families impacted by the pandemic to obtain aid, and to allow a larger amount of aid to some that have exhausted the Pinellas CARES I aid amounts.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED AND DECLARED by the Board of County Commissioners of Pinellas County, Florida, this 7th day of July 2020:

1) The Board of County Commissioners finds, in addition to the Whereas clauses above:

- a. that it is necessary and appropriate as an intermediate continuing emergency step to assist vulnerable individuals and families by continuing the Pinellas CARES Financial Assistance Program beyond June 30, 2020 while available allocated Coronavirus Relief Fund resources continue to exist;
- b. that the Pinellas CARES Financial Assistance Program is necessary to respond to the continuing COVID-19 public health emergency and should be:
 - i. expanded to increase the total amount available to any one applicant to \$5,000.00; and
 - ii. broadened to allow funding to persons with more available assets (up to \$10,000.00) and removing the reference to the Federal Poverty Limit and clarifying the income limitation.

2) The County Administrator is directed to implement the Pinellas CARES Financial Assistance Program. The County Administrator is further authorized to make such adjustments to the program as may be necessary or prudent within the guidelines established by Treasury as they may be amended or supplemented from time to time. The authorization for this program should be construed broadly to authorize the County Administrator to effectuate the purposes enunciated in this Resolution.

Severability.

Any provision(s) within this Order that conflict(s) with any State or Federal law or constitutional provision, or conflict(s) with or are superseded by a current or subsequently-issued Executive Order of the Governor or the President of the United States, shall be deemed inapplicable and deemed to be severed from this Order, with the remainder of the Order remaining intact and in full force and effect. To the extent application of some or all of the provisions of this Order is prohibited on the sovereign land of a federally or state recognized sovereign Indian tribe, such application is expressly excluded from this Order.

Effective Date; Duration.

This Order is effective immediately upon filing with the Clerk of the Circuit Court which will happen at the close of this meeting.

This Order is in addition to the Executive Orders issued by Governor DeSantis.

This Order applies to incorporated and unincorporated areas within Pinellas County, but has no application outside of Pinellas County.

This order and prior resolutions and emergency orders remain in force and effect unless modified or superseded.

Commissioner Welch offered the foregoing Resolution and moved its adoption, which was seconded by Commissioner Long, and upon roll call the vote was:

AYES: Gerard, Eggers, Justice, Long, Peters, Seel, and Welch.

NAYS: None.

ABSENT AND NOT VOTING: None.

Approved as to Form. Donald S. Crowell, Chief Asst. County Atty