

News Release | October 19, 2020

HOME of VA Receives \$300,000 Grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation to Keep Richmond Renters in Homes

Grant will help renters impacted by COVID-19 with counseling and legal assistance to avoid eviction, part of the company's efforts to keep people housed

Richmond, VA – Up to 40 million U.S. renters may face eviction by the end of the year due to the economic downturn caused by the pandemic. People of color, including Black and Hispanic tenants, represent 80% of people potentially facing eviction once federal rental protections end, according to research from the Aspen Institute and the COVID-19 Eviction Defense Project.

While the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) issued a temporary moratorium halting the eviction of tenants who cannot pay rent through the end of the year, the moratorium requires that tenants must still [file a federal declaration form](#) to be eligible for the eviction protection. Additionally, tenants are obligated to navigate varying state laws and local legal proceedings.

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia (HOME) today announced a \$300,000 grant from the Wells Fargo Foundation which will enable HOME and its partners, Central Virginia Legal Aid Society and the Great Richmond Bar Foundation, to enhance their free counseling and low-cost legal assistance for people in Richmond, VA that are disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and at-risk of eviction.

“Lack of legal representation and for low-income people is a glaring equity gap,” said Rulon Washington, community outreach manager with the Wells Fargo Foundation. “We believe supporting efforts to provide low-income renters at risk and legal assistance is an important step in helping the most vulnerable people stay housed.”

Harvard researchers found an estimated 90% of landlords have legal representation, while only 10% of tenants do, putting them at a significant disadvantage. However, two-thirds of tenants with legal representation are more likely to avoid an eviction judgment and remain in their home.

Monica Jefferson, HOME's vice president & chief operating officer noted, “HOME of VA is proud to partner with the Wells Fargo Foundation to support the City of Richmond's Eviction Diversion Program to ensure access for vulnerable, underserved, and at-risk populations in the most integrated settings within the community. Housing assistance and no-cost legal help can make a significant difference in the economic well-being of low-income families and those facing complex housing barriers.”

Over the last several months, it has been challenging for HOME to provide direct services and to operate at a normal level due to the COVID-19 health pandemic and the federal and state moratoriums on evictions. However, since the inception of the Eviction Diversion Program in October 2019, 147 households have been awarded financial assistance. \$176,569 has been committed and disbursed to Richmond tenants to pay rent arrearage through the end of June. The average financial assistance amount per household is \$1,201. The work of the program continues to evolve, and HOME will utilize the financial resources provided as they anticipate a tsunami of eviction cases for the remainder of 2020 and beyond.

From August 3, through September 18, 2020, there were 1,088 unlawful detainers on the Richmond General District Court docket, the highest in Virginia.

As part of its [\\$175 million response to COVID-19](#), the Wells Fargo Foundation has made more than 1,200 grants in support of national and local nonprofits to help keep people housed.

HOME was also helped by Wells Fargo Bank in 2017 as they entered into a four-year partnership agreement to increase homeownership opportunities and expand mortgage lending to African Americans and African-American neighborhoods in the Richmond metropolitan region.

The Wells Fargo Foundation efforts to address the housing affordability crisis in response to COVID-19 includes expanding the capacity of housing counselors to respond to renters and homeowners, supporting nonprofits that provide affordable rental homes and services, and funding for legal assistance organizations to provide legal counsel and representation for renters at-risk of eviction. These efforts are part of the Wells Fargo Foundation's \$1 billion philanthropic commitment to address housing affordability solutions by 2025 by investing in strategies to advance housing stability, increasing supply of affordable homes; expanding homeownership opportunities for people of color; and driving transformation and innovation in local communities.

About Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME)

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. (HOME), founded in 1971, is a statewide fair housing and HUD-approved housing counseling 501(c)(3) non-profit. HOME's mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME's mission is to ensure equal access to housing for all people. HOME fulfills its mission to ensure equal access to housing for all people by addressing the still glaring individual instances of housing discrimination. Additionally, HOME works to tackle systemically divisive housing practices on a larger scale through fair housing enforcement and research, advocacy, and statewide policy work. HOME also takes direct action to aid first-time homebuyers and families with homes under the threat of foreclosure. At a time when unequal access to housing and credit contributes most to the United States' growing wealth gap, HOME's multi-faceted approach is a powerful catalyst toward furthering fair housing. You can learn more about HOME and all of its services at www.HOMEofVA.org.

About Wells Fargo

Wells Fargo & Company (NYSE: WFC) is a diversified, community-based financial services company with \$1.97 trillion in assets. Wells Fargo's vision is to satisfy our customers' financial needs and help them succeed financially. Founded in 1852 and headquartered in San Francisco, Wells Fargo provides banking, investment and mortgage products and services, as well as consumer and commercial finance, through 7,300 locations, more than 13,000 ATMs, the internet (wellsfargo.com) and mobile banking, and has offices in 31 countries and territories to support customers who conduct business in the global economy. With approximately 266,000 team members, Wells Fargo serves one in three households in the United States. Wells Fargo & Company was ranked No. 30 on Fortune's 2020 rankings of America's largest corporations. News, insights and perspectives from Wells Fargo are also available at Wells Fargo Stories.

Additional information may be found at www.wellsfargo.com | Twitter: [@WellsFargo](https://twitter.com/WellsFargo).

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