

June 22, 2021

Wilson Community Improvement Association, Inc.

Public Comments

North Carolina Homeowner Assistance Fund

The application does not make specific mention of the role housing counselors will serve in the NC's Homeowner Assistance Fund. The network of counseling agencies played a vital role in the success of HHF (Home Protection Program), MPP (Mortgage Protection Program) and SHFPP (State Home Foreclosure Prevention Program).

For homeowners who have suffered a loss of income due to unemployment or underemployed this program will offer them the ability to become current. Housing counseling helps clients experiencing delinquency prevent foreclosure and receive information to improve their housing situation going forward.

With this being said, Housing Counseling Agencies should have been mentioned and included in the program design of the NC's Homeowner Assistance Fund Program. These agencies are local and have visibility in the communities they serve. They have a proven track record for homeowners' retention by providing a holistic approach to housing counseling and serving clients. These agencies provide the tools and guidance for enhancing credit scores, reducing debt, possible refinance, etc. and helps to create a stable foundation for the future.

Many of the targeted and priority clients who will seek assistance through NC's Homeowner Assistance Fund will have prior knowledge and experience with their local housing counseling agency. Homebuyers' education and counseling is a requirement for most clients utilizing USDA mortgages, down payment assistance programs, CRA programs, and Habitat for Humanity mortgage loans.

Housing Counseling Agencies have demonstrated their ability to mobilize and positively impact client outcomes during emergency and crisis situations and have a

successful track record in working with federally funded and emergency management programs.

The NC's Homeowner Assistance Fund is an opportunity to help strengthen the HUD approved counseling agencies network and provide assistance to homeowners who have been impacted. The aforementioned housing programs were successful as a result of the HUD approved housing counseling agencies participation. Housing counseling agencies collaborate with federal, state and local stakeholders in the housing industry. By utilizing an innovative triage approach which fully leverages funding and maximizes staff efficiency, these agencies are positioned to better serve those facing a financial crisis. Housing Counseling agencies help prevent foreclosures, stabilize neighborhoods, and effectuate systemic changes within the housing industry.

These agencies are a valuable resource and offer long term sustainability for distressed families in North Carolina. Therefore, they should be specifically mentioned and have a major role in the overall design of the program and service delivery.