



July 23, 2021

Alderman Michael Murphy
Chairman, Finance and Personnel Committee
Common Council, City of Milwaukee

Re: Council File No. 210547, Mayor Barrett's Stronger Summer Plan

Dear Committee Chairman Murphy,

Members of the Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center (MKE RHRC) thank Mayor Tom Barrett for including funding for our collaborative initiative under the Mayor's Stronger Summer Plan, part of the first allocation of American Rescue Plan funding. These resources will help Milwaukee continue a strong recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in stabilizing housing, the foundation of community wellness.

In early 2021, nine co-partner organizations launched the MKE RHRC after working together in collaboration with a broader group of stakeholders over two years identifying strategies to address Milwaukee's eviction crisis. These included a tenant landlord resource center; expanded access to mediation and legal services; and more temporary rent assistance funds. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated efforts as partners worked together to meet the unprecedented needs of impacted renter households and our prior relationships made the effort more seamless.

The MKE RHRC developed a website, www.renthelpmke.org, central telephone helpline (414) 895-RENT (7368) and email (info@renthelpmke.org) to serve as a virtual clearinghouse for tenants and landlords to connect with resources, including legal and mediation services and financial assistance. MKE RHRC triage specialists now field over 500 inquiries each week from those with an urgent need for assistance with rent payment and housing problems. Co-partners are also focused on developing an eviction diversion framework that gets these resources to tenants and landlords sooner.

We are pleased to see that Mayor Barrett proposed \$1.2 million to support the Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center. This investment will provide critical operating support to the MKE RHRC in these early stages, providing a strong foundation that will ensure sustainability as co-partners meet increased demand for services. The MKE RHRC leverages expertise from many facets of the rental housing system, bringing them together under one roof to align resources and capacity while avoiding duplication of effort and resources.

Over the past few months, members of the MKE RHRC have been active in local and national groups focused on eviction diversion and prevention. For example, the City of Milwaukee is participating in the National League of Cities Eviction Learning Lab cohort, and on July 21, Deb Heffner, Housing Strategy Director and MKE RHRC Coordinator, presented information on our effort to a national audience of 2,000 participants at a White House-sponsored eviction prevention webinar. The City of Milwaukee got some great, favorable attention and our unprecedented collaboration serves as an example that organizations that appear to have disparate interests can find common ground to serve the community.

MKE RHRC co-partners every day see the economic disparities present in the housing system – disparities which have resulted from a legacy of past discrimination and racist practices such as redlining and unequal access to jobs and educational opportunities. The plan includes an intentional focus on racial equity and inclusion that is an important first step to address the unequal impact of COVID-19 on Milwaukee residents. We strongly support using ARPA funds for initiatives that increase housing stability, and expand and enhance safe, affordable housing – leading toward a more resilient and healthier city.

Sincerely,
Milwaukee Rental Housing Resource Center Co-Partners

Apartment Association of Southeastern Wisconsin
Community Advocates
Hope House
IMPACT Inc.
Legal Aid Society of Milwaukee
Mediate Wisconsin
City of Milwaukee Department of Neighborhood Services
Milwaukee County Division of Housing

The Urban Economic Development Association of Wisconsin, Inc. (UEDA) serves as the MKE RHRC convener.

cc: Members of the Finance and Personnel Committee, City of Milwaukee Common Council
Alderswoman Milele Coggs, District 6
Alderman Nik Kovac, District 3
Alderman Scott Spiker, District 13
Alderswoman JoCasta Zamarripa, District 8

Mayor Tom Barrett, City of Milwaukee
President Cavalier Johnson, City of Milwaukee Common Council