



Legislation Text

File #: 20-303, **Version:** 1

Receive a verbal update from County staff and consider approving an Appropriation Transfer Request (ATR) to appropriate \$206,370 as a non-County contribution to Community Action Partnership (CAP) Solano Joint Powers Authority (JPA) for State approved Project Roomkey COVID-19 projects in Solano County (4/5 vote required)

Published Notice Required? Yes No
Public Hearing Required? Yes No

DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION:

The Department of Health and Social Services recommends that the Board receive a verbal update from County staff and approve an Appropriation Transfer Request (ATR) to appropriate \$206,370 as a non-County contribution to Community Action Partnership (CAP) Solano Joint Powers Authority (JPA) for State approved Project Roomkey COVID-19 projects in Solano County (4/5 vote required)

SUMMARY:

In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, Governor Gavin Newsom signed Senate Bill (SB) 89 on March 17, 2020, proclaiming a state of emergency for California and to support the urgent need for non-congregate sheltering. SB 89 provides \$100 million in emergency grant fund awards to California counties, Homeless Continuums of Care, and the State's 13 largest cities. Solano County was awarded \$206,370, and on April 7, 2020, the Board approved the grant award agreement with the California Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council and asked that the department return with additional details regarding the use of the funds.

The core purpose of this funding is to protect people experiencing homelessness and the surrounding communities through efforts to reduce the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak, and to minimize strain on the health care system related to bed capacity. Recently renamed "Project Roomkey" (Attachment A) by State officials, Governor Newsom has proposed a plan to secure up to 15,000 hotel or motel units statewide, targeting the highest COVID-19 capacity needs in communities as a core strategy to flatten the virus's curve. The State is recommending this strategy because individuals lacking stable housing are more likely to use hospital emergency rooms than those in stable housing, and in some places, individuals experiencing homelessness make up 20% to 30% of all adult hospital emergency room visits. Patients experiencing homelessness are admitted to inpatient units 5 times more often than those in stable housing, and they also have average lengths of stay that are longer. To help protect individuals experiencing homelessness from COVID-19 while reducing the likelihood of community spread, and while also relieving pressure on the hospital system from unnecessary admissions to local hospitals, the State has directed that Project Roomkey efforts should focus on the use of emergency grant funding to develop non-congregate shelter beds with a minimum service level of food, laundry, sanitation, security, and transportation services being available. Project Roomkey focuses on prioritizing beds for helping meet the top 3 needs:

- 1) Isolation/Quarantine beds for homeless individuals that test positive for COVID-19, who do not require hospitalization, but who are infectious and cannot otherwise properly self isolate;
- 2) Isolation/Quarantine beds for homeless individuals under investigation for COVID-19; having positive symptom screen and awaiting test results;
- 3) Isolation beds for homeless persons needing social distancing as a precautionary measure due to

being over age 60 and/or having a high risk of medical complications (preexisting lung disease, heart disease, cancer, diabetes, HIV, or other major medical conditions)

FINANCIAL IMPACT:

The costs associated with preparing the agenda item are nominal and absorbed by the department's FY2019/20 Adopted Budget. This grant had provided an allocation of funding to assist in financing resources to help prevent and reduce the spread of COVID-19. The revenue will be provided to CAP Solano JPA to coordinate COVID-19 prevention and containment efforts.

DISCUSSION:

On the evening of March 23, 2020, the California Homeless Coordinating and Financing Council (HCFC) released emergency grant award letters across California with the intent of rapidly bolstering local containment efforts related to COVID-19. Since that time, the primary strategy recommended by the Governor's Office and State Officials to help flatten the curve of COVID-19 was for local jurisdictions to establish lease agreements for non-congregate hotel or motel units, thereby allowing for isolation and quarantine spaces for homeless individuals. Without non-congregate housing, homeless individuals are challenged to shelter-in-place or self quarantine, whether sick or at extreme risk. "Project Roomkey" is intended to ensure access to a confined and safe space with a bed, as well as showers and restrooms, for individuals requiring isolation or quarantine. The projects must also include a basic set of required services: food, laundry, sanitation, security, and transportation to and from the location.

Housing First Solano, Solano County's Continuum of Care (CoC), received its award letter from HCFC on March 23rd, making available \$224,308.65. CAP Solano JPA (CAP Solano) is the administrative entity for the CoC and is responsible for administering the emergency grant. In response to the State's request for emergency, non-congregate beds, CAP Solano elected to hold a short application process for cities and/or non-profit partners to put together a first-phase of eligible projects. To ensure a speedy process and efficient deployment of resources focused on addressing immediate needs, CAP Solano formed a non-conflicted COVID-19 Funding Taskforce to swiftly review a first-phase of project applications and allocate funding according to the approved State prioritization for Project Roomkey efforts. Ensuring that only qualified and non-conflicted individuals would support the Funding Taskforce, CAP Solano developed the following seats and representation: A Public Health representative (Denise Kirnig, RD, MS, Senior Health Services Manager, Solano Public Health); A Low-Income Provider Representative (Jenalee Dawson, Social Service Coordinator, California Human Development); A Homeless Provider and Services Specialist (Tranine Chisom, Director of Supported Housing, Caminar); A non-conflicted, County Representative (Daniel Del Monte, Principal Management Analyst, County Administrator's Office); and a non-conflicted, City representative (Jose Jasso, Assistant City Manager, Rio Vista).

The County of Solano similarly received its award letter of funding from HCFC on March 23rd, making available \$206,370. Based upon CAP Solano's efforts to swiftly implement a local process for developing Project Roomkey projects across the county, County Staff first made a recommendation on April 7, 2020 for the Board of Supervisors to consider accepting the grant award and authorizing a non-county contribution of the grant funding to CAP Solano to support regional coordination for Project Roomkey. After discussion and consideration, the Board asked staff to bring back an item on April 28, 2020 with a full breakdown of what the County contribution would specifically pay for should the funds be contributed to support Project Roomkey through CAP Solano. Additionally, the Board requested more information on the use of funds to pay specifically for mobile shower services, seeking a breakdown of what that type of a program would cost. The direction provided was that these pieces of information could be compared side-by-side for the Board to consider what they would like to recommend be funded during the April 28th Board item. On Thursday April 9, 2020, the Solano Emergency Operations Center received correspondence from CAL OES indicating that mobile showers are not an approved or acceptable use for Project Roomkey funding.

Since the April 7, 2020 Board Item, following CAP Solano's COVID-19 Funding Taskforce reviewing phase-1 applications, a joint project submitted by the Cities of Benicia and Vallejo was awarded the full CoC grant amount of \$224,308.65. With these funds, no later than April 23rd, the project will have launched 180 hotel/motel beds with all required services, to be available for 60 days while serving the top three Project Roomkey priority groups. The fully loaded cost for the 180 beds and required minimum services for 60 days is approximately \$1.2 million. The CAP Solano grant allocation is being utilized by the Cities of Vallejo and Benicia to specifically support the cost of the hotel room leases, affording approximately 33.4% of the total cost to lease the hotel rooms. These beds are available for homeless residents countywide that meet the State's identified top-three priority areas, thereby supporting the protection of valuable inpatient hospital space and reducing the likelihood of COVID-19 community spread. Following the Phase-1 award, the CAP Solano JPA held a meeting to launch Phase-2 of Project Roomkey development across other areas of the county. Per the State's recommendation to consider available grants to reallocate, CAP Solano approved up to \$1 million from the Homeless Housing Assistance Program (HHAP) to be made immediately available for a second phase of Project Roomkey applications (Attachment B). The Funding Task Force met on Friday, April 17th to review the second-phase of projects, thereby ensuring additional isolation and quarantine units will be awarded on Tuesday, April 21st to then scale up in the coming days. Further details regarding Phase-2 awards, including what projects were funded and other detailed program information, will be provided for this April 28th Board item and update.

The Department of Health and Social Services is recommending that the County combine its allocation of funds together with the CoC allocation, as well as with the reallocated \$1 million HHAP grant, to reduce duplication of efforts and to support swift deployment of funds to be specifically used to pay for hotel room leases and/or the State required services tied to Project Roomkey units. Through the submission of projects to CAP Solano JPA's COVID-19 Funding Taskforce, Solano's jurisdictions and other local non-profits have been actively developing hotel projects, determining how to meet their local needs related to managing the impacts of COVID-19. Providing these funds to CAP Solano for the purposes of paying for hotel room leases and/or State required services tied to Project Roomkey units will help to ensure that the County is supporting disbursement of available funding with the intent of as much coordination as possible with our city partners, while mitigating impacts of COVID-19 through supporting the State's recommended strategy. An additional \$50 million dollars from the California Department of Social Services (CDSS) will be made available to access to support further Project Roomkey efforts, however the State has made clear that the CDSS funding will only be readily available to county-regions which utilize the COVID-19 Emergency Grant funds to specifically pay for Project Roomkey hotel room leases and/or the State required services.

ALTERNATIVES:

The Board may choose not to combine the County allocation with the CAP Solano JPA. This is not recommended because local jurisdictions have been developing Project Roomkey programs through CAP Solano JPA's funding process. CAP Solano JPA expedited the process for allocating funds for non-congregate isolation and quarantine beds, the State's recommended strategy. Keeping the County allocation separate could lead to duplication of efforts, as well as less coordination throughout the County. It could also lead to the purchasing of services or equipment that are not eligible expenses for Project Roomkey, or it could lead to the purchase of eligible services that do not most effectively meet the needs of our partnering jurisdictions in their development of non-congregate isolation and quarantine projects. Should funding be spent on efforts unrelated to Project Roomkey State priorities, Solano County may likely lose access to \$50 million in CDSS funding that will be available to County-regions which utilize the Emergency Grants on Project Roomkey efforts.

OTHER AGENCY INVOLVEMENT:

The Department of Health and Social Services will work in partnership with CAP Solano JPA to enhance

efforts related to coordination of homeless emergency funding to support COVID-19 response.

CAO RECOMMENDATION:

APPROVE DEPARTMENTAL RECOMMENDATION