

SENATE
STATE OF MINNESOTA
NINETY-THIRD SESSION

S.F. No. 4704

| (SENATE AUTHORS: PORT, Boldon and Mitchell) | | |
|---|--------|---|
| DATE | D-PG | OFFICIAL STATUS |
| 03/07/2024 | 12049 | Introduction and first reading |
| | | Referred to Housing and Homelessness Prevention |
| 03/25/2024 | 12668a | Comm report: To pass as amended and re-refer to Health and Human Services |

1.1

A bill for an act

1.2

relating to housing; implementing recommendations of the Workgroup on

1.3

Expediting Rental Assistance for improving application approval times for the

1.4

family homelessness prevention and assistance program, the emergency assistance

1.5

program, and emergency general assistance; requiring reports; proposing coding

1.6

for new law in Minnesota Statutes, chapter 462A.

1.7

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF MINNESOTA:

1.8

ARTICLE 1

1.9

HOUSING FINANCE AGENCY

1.10

Section 1. [462A.2096] ANNUAL PROJECTION OF EMERGENCY RENTAL

1.11

ASSISTANCE NEEDS.

1.12

The agency must develop a projection of emergency rental assistance needs in

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consultation with the commissioner of human services and representatives from county and

1.14

Tribal housing administrators and housing nonprofit agencies. The projection must identify

1.15

the amount of funding required to meet all emergency rental assistance needs, including

1.16

the family homelessness prevention and assistance program, the emergency assistance

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program, and emergency general assistance. By January 15 each year, the commissioner

1.18

must submit a report on the projected need for emergency rental assistance to the chairs and

1.19

ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over housing

1.20

and human services finance and policy.

2.1 Sec. 2. **DATA COLLECTION TO MEASURE TIMELINESS OF RENTAL**
2.2 **ASSISTANCE.**

2.3 The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must work with the
2.4 commissioner of human services to develop criteria for measuring the timeliness of
2.5 processing applications for rental assistance. The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing
2.6 Finance Agency must collect data to monitor application speeds of the family homelessness
2.7 prevention and assistance program and use the collected data to inform improvements to
2.8 application processing systems. By January 15, 2027, the commissioner of the Minnesota
2.9 Housing Finance Agency must submit a report to the chairs and ranking minority members
2.10 of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over housing finance and policy. The report
2.11 must include analysis of the data collected and whether goals have been met to (1) process
2.12 an emergency rental assistance application within two weeks of the receipt of a complete
2.13 application, and (2) if approved, make payment to a landlord within 30 days of the receipt
2.14 of a complete application.

2.15 Sec. 3. **E-SIGNATURE OPTIONS FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

2.16 The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, working with the
2.17 commissioner of human services shall develop uniform e-signature options to be used in
2.18 applications for the family homelessness prevention and assistance program. No later than
2.19 June 30, 2026, the commissioner shall require administrators of the family homelessness
2.20 prevention and assistance program to incorporate and implement the developed e-signature
2.21 options. The commissioner must notify the chairs and ranking minority members of the
2.22 legislative committees with jurisdiction over housing of the date when the e-signature options
2.23 are implemented.

2.24 Sec. 4. **VERIFICATION PROCEDURES FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

2.25 (a) The commissioner of the Minnesota Housing Finance Agency, working with program
2.26 administrators, must develop recommendations to simplify the process of verifying
2.27 information in applications for the family homelessness prevention and assistance program.
2.28 In developing recommendations, the commissioner must consider:

2.29 (1) allowing self-attestation of emergencies, assets, and income;

2.30 (2) allowing verbal authorization by applicants to allow emergency rental assistance
2.31 administrators to communicate with landlords and utility providers regarding applications
2.32 for assistance; and

3.1 (3) allowing landlords to apply for emergency rental assistance on tenants' behalf.

3.2 (b) The commissioner must:

3.3 (1) prepare recommendations by January 1, 2025;

3.4 (2) adopt any recommendations by July 1, 2025; and

3.5 (3) provide technical assistance to counties, Tribes, and other emergency rental assistance
3.6 administrators to implement these recommendations.

3.7 (c) By January 13, 2025, the commissioner must report to the chairs and ranking minority
3.8 members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over housing detailing the proposed
3.9 recommendations required by this section. By July 7, 2025, the commissioner must report
3.10 to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction
3.11 over housing detailing the recommendations adopted as required by this section.

3.12 **ARTICLE 2**

3.13 **HUMAN SERVICES**

3.14 **Section 1. DATA COLLECTION TO MEASURE TIMELINESS OF RENTAL** 3.15 **ASSISTANCE.**

3.16 The commissioner of human services must work with the commissioner of the Minnesota
3.17 Housing Finance Agency to develop criteria for measuring the timeliness of processing
3.18 applications for rental assistance. The commissioner of human services must collect data
3.19 to monitor application speeds for emergency assistance and emergency general assistance,
3.20 and use the collected data to inform improvements to application processing systems. By
3.21 January 15, 2027, the commissioner of human services must submit a report to the chairs
3.22 and ranking minority members of the legislative committees having jurisdiction over human
3.23 services finance and policy. The report must include analysis of the data collected and
3.24 whether goals have been met to (1) process an emergency rental assistance application
3.25 within two weeks of the receipt of a complete application, and (2) if approved, make payment
3.26 to a landlord within 30 days of the receipt of a complete application.

3.27 **Sec. 2. DIRECTION TO COMMISSIONER OF HUMAN SERVICES; MAXIS** 3.28 **MODIFICATIONS.**

3.29 The commissioner of human services must make modifications to the MAXIS system
3.30 to ensure it has greater flexibility in issuing assistance payments while maintaining controls
3.31 to monitor and prevent inaccurate, unnecessary, or fraudulent payments. The commissioner
3.32 must identify gaps and plan modifications as needed to fulfill the stated goals in this act.

4.1 Sec. 3. **EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM MODIFICATIONS.**

4.2 The commissioner of human services, in consultation with the commissioner of the
4.3 Minnesota Housing Finance Agency must develop program recommendations for emergency
4.4 rental assistance that have the flexibility to provide relief for crises within a time frame that
4.5 corresponds to the emergency and that are simple enough for applicants to understand across
4.6 all emergency rental assistance programs. In the development of these recommendations,
4.7 the commissioners must:

4.8 (1) recognize differences between administrative and legislative authority and propose
4.9 legislative changes to the definition of emergency general assistance;

4.10 (2) adopt policies and practices that prioritize comprehensible eligibility criteria and
4.11 definitions that prioritize accessible, humanizing approaches when assisting persons through
4.12 a crisis; and

4.13 (3) develop guidance for emergency rental assistance program administrators that
4.14 encourage the program administrators to be flexible with the required forms of documentation
4.15 for the program and to avoid establishing documentation requirements that are likely to be
4.16 barriers to participation in emergency rental assistance by eligible households.

4.17 Sec. 4. **E-SIGNATURE OPTIONS FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

4.18 The commissioner of human services, working with the commissioner of the Minnesota
4.19 Housing Finance Agency shall develop uniform e-signature options to be used in applications
4.20 for emergency general assistance and emergency assistance. No later than June 30, 2026,
4.21 the commissioner shall require administrators of emergency general assistance and emergency
4.22 assistance to incorporate and implement the developed e-signature options. The commissioner
4.23 must notify the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with
4.24 jurisdiction over human services of the date when the e-signature options are implemented.

4.25 Sec. 5. **PROMOTING ADEQUATE FUNDING FOR PROCESSING EMERGENCY**
4.26 **ASSISTANCE APPLICATIONS.**

4.27 (a) The commissioner of human services, in consultation with county and Tribal human
4.28 services agencies, the Minnesota Association of County Social Services Administrators,
4.29 the Minnesota Tribal Collaborative, and other stakeholders shall identify and evaluate
4.30 strategies to promote adequate funding for processing emergency rental assistance
4.31 applications. The commissioner shall:

4.32 (1) evaluate state and federal reimbursement for administrative support staff;

5.1 (2) determine adequate compensation for processors based on objective data such as
5.2 market studies or livable wage markers;

5.3 (3) determine if state funding increases are necessary to process emergency rental
5.4 assistance applications in a timely manner; and

5.5 (4) establish a process to determine an equitable funding formula that is adjustable as
5.6 needed.

5.7 (b) The commissioner shall report the results of the evaluation of funding for processing
5.8 emergency assistance applications and any related recommendations to the chairs and
5.9 ranking minority members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over emergency
5.10 assistance by January 1, 2026. The report must also include any draft legislation necessary
5.11 to implement the recommendations.

5.12 Sec. 6. **VERIFICATION PROCEDURES FOR RENTAL ASSISTANCE.**

5.13 (a) The commissioner of human services shall consult with local officials to develop
5.14 recommendations aimed at simplifying the process of verifying the information in
5.15 applications for emergency general assistance and emergency assistance. In developing
5.16 recommendations, the commissioner must consider:

5.17 (1) allowing self-attestation of emergencies, assets, and income;

5.18 (2) allowing verbal authorization by applicants to allow emergency rental assistance
5.19 administrators to communicate with landlords and utility providers regarding applications
5.20 for assistance; and

5.21 (3) allowing landlords to apply for emergency rental assistance on tenants' behalf.

5.22 (b) The commissioner must:

5.23 (1) prepare recommendations by January 1, 2025;

5.24 (2) adopt any recommendations by July 1, 2025; and

5.25 (3) provide technical assistance to counties, Tribes, and other emergency rental assistance
5.26 administrators to implement these recommendations.

5.27 (c) By January 13, 2025, the commissioner must report to the chairs and ranking minority
5.28 members of the legislative committees with jurisdiction over human services detailing the
5.29 proposed recommendations required by this section. By July 7, 2025, the commissioner
5.30 must report to the chairs and ranking minority members of the legislative committees with

6.1

jurisdiction over human services detailing the recommendations adopted as required by this

6.2

section.