

COVID-19 Health Crisis: Financial Relief Guide for Marylanders

This guide briefly describes certain COVID-19 related financial relief programs and consumer protections, with links to more information and resources.

This financial relief guide is updated regularly. To access the most recent version, visit www.labor.maryland.gov/finance.

State and federal emergency protections are in place to support Marylanders and provide immediate relief from the economic impact of the COVID-19 health crisis. Protections include new programs and policies implemented by the federal government and executive orders issued by Maryland Governor Larry Hogan. In addition, many banks, credit unions, lenders and other businesses are offering their own financial relief programs or providing assistance with bill payments.

This guide is intended for Maryland residents and their families. For small business guidance and resources, see [Maryland Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Information for Businesses](#).

Quick Tips for Consumers

- ✓ **Beware of “imposter scams”** – emails, phone calls, or other solicitations from fraudsters posing as government agencies, debt collectors, or loan assistance organizations attempting to scam you out of your unemployment benefits or stimulus payments. [More Scam Information](#).
- ✓ **Report illegal, fraudulent, or deceptive practices** by submitting a consumer complaint to the appropriate state or federal regulatory agency. [List of Regulatory Agencies](#).
- ✓ **Please plan ahead before contacting businesses and government agencies.** Many have a reduced staff, operating remotely due to state and federal public health directives, and are responding to an unprecedented amount of requests for assistance. To save time, before you call check the organization’s website for answers and have your documentation ready.

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Economic Impact Payments (Stimulus Payments)

- ❖ The American Rescue Plan (ARP) Act of 2021 authorized up to \$1,400 in one-time individual “economic impact payments” (also referred to as a “stimulus payment”). Previous federal legislation authorized individual payments of up to \$600 in December 2020 and \$1,200 in March 2020 (pursuant to the CARES Act). Many people have already received their economic impact payments as a direct deposit in their bank account from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). *If you have not received a federal economic impact payment or for more information about these payments, visit the [IRS Economic Impact Payment](#) website.*
- ❖ Beware of counterfeit federal stimulus checks! Protect yourself by learning about the stimulus check security features. See the "[Know Your U.S. Treasury Check Campaign](#)" for more information on check fraud.
- ❖ Garnishment of the economic impact payments authorized by the ARP Act of 2021 and the CARES Act of 2020 is prohibited pursuant to Governor Hogan’s [executive order 21-03-15-01](#) and [executive order 20-04-29-03](#), respectively (child support-related garnishments are exempt from these orders). Garnishment of the smaller December 2020 payment is prohibited pursuant to the federal law that authorized that stimulus.
- ❖ The Maryland RELIEF Act, effective February 15, 2021, included state-issued economic impact payments for low-income taxpayers. The RELIEF Act payments are not subject to garnishment by a financial institution or the state (except for actions or judgments awarding child support). To learn more about the RELIEF Act and find out if you are eligible for a direct payment, see the [RELIEF Act Information](#) page on the Maryland Comptroller’s website.

Mortgage Payments & Foreclosure

- ❖ The initiation of *new* foreclosures is prohibited until July 1, 2021, pursuant to regulatory guidance issued by the Maryland Commissioner of Financial Regulation under the authority of [Governor Hogan’s executive order 20-12-17-02](#) (which amended and restated previous orders issued on April 3, 2020 and October 16, 2020). This means that homeowners should not receive a document called a “Notice of Intent to Foreclose” from their mortgage lender or servicer during the time period between April 2020 and June 30, 2021.
- ❖ If your mortgage is backed by one of the federal agencies or government-sponsored enterprises listed below, the financial institution servicing your mortgage should provide you with a temporary suspension of loan payments (“forbearance”) for an initial period of up to 180 days, with potentially one or more extensions, if you need and request such assistance.
 - ✓ Federal Housing Administration (FHA)
 - ✓ U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA)
 - ✓ U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
 - ✓ Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae)
 - ✓ Federal Home Loan Corporation (Freddie Mac)

[Fannie Mae](#) and [Freddie Mac](#) are government-sponsored enterprises that hold nearly half of U.S. mortgages—use the lookup tools on their websites to find out if one of these entities backs your loan.

- ❖ There is a moratorium on foreclosures until June 30, 2021 for mortgages backed by Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the FHA, USDA, and VA.
- ❖ *Regardless of the type of loan you have, you must contact your mortgage lender or servicer (the company where you send your monthly payments) to learn about the mortgage assistance options available to you. Be aware that the FHA, USDA, and VA have a deadline of June 30, 2021 to request an initial forbearance. See your lender or servicer’s website or your monthly statement for the contact information.*
- ❖ For more information and resources, visit the Office of the Commissioner of Financial Regulation’s [COVID-19 mortgage relief and foreclosure prevention](#) website.

Rental Evictions

- ❖ Rental evictions are temporarily prohibited if the tenant has a verifiable and substantial loss of income related to COVID-19, pursuant to [Governor Hogan’s executive order 20-12-17-02](#). Additionally, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention extended a [nationwide eviction moratorium](#) through June 30, 2021.
- ❖ If you live in multi-family rental housing financed by the Federal National Mortgage Association (Fannie Mae) or the Federal Home Loan Corporation (Freddie Mac), you may have access to their respective Disaster Response Networks. For more information, see [Fannie Mae’s COVID-19 renter’s resource finder](#) and [Freddie Mac’s COVID-19 rental relief website](#).
- ❖ Landlords of single-family residential properties may qualify for mortgage relief under the CARES Act if they are unable to collect rent from their tenants because of COVID-19. Landlords should contact their mortgage servicer to see if they qualify and to understand the associated tenant protections.
- ❖ Contact your landlord or property manager to discuss your payment options and check with your city or county government—some local jurisdictions have rental assistance programs or additional landlord/tenant laws. See also the [Maryland Department of Housing’s Eviction Prevention](#) webpage for more resources.

Student Loans

- ❖ The U.S. Department of Education has extended temporary suspension of payments (“forbearance”) and a 0% interest period for most federal student loans until September 30, 2021, among other provisions. To opt-out of the forbearance, you’ll need to contact the loan company directly. Information about forbearance and other assistance programs for federal student loans is available on the U.S. Department of Education’s [Federal Student Aid Coronavirus and Forbearance Information](#) website.

- ❖ Private student loans do not qualify for the federal programs. Private student loan borrowers should discuss their personal situation with their student loan servicer.
- ❖ Beware of fraudulent companies posing as “government agencies” contacting you by email, text, or phone promising to help with student loan relief or resolve issues on your behalf.
- ❖ Contact your student loan servicer (the company where you send your monthly payments) to learn more about loan relief options specific to your situation. See the servicer’s website or your monthly statement for the contact information.
- ❖ For more information and resources, visit the Office of the Commissioner of Financial Regulation’s [COVID-19 student loan relief](#) website.

Automobile, Mobile Home & Personal Loans

- ❖ Creditors are prohibited from repossessing personal property used as a residence, including mobile homes, trailers, and live-aboard boats until further notice or the state of emergency is lifted, pursuant to [Governor Hogan’s executive order 20-12-17-02](#). The prohibition against repossession of automobiles and trucks is no longer in effect.
- ❖ Some lenders may provide assistance by offering general loan deferral programs, modification options, certain late fee waivers, and temporarily refraining from reporting negative information to the credit bureaus related to payment deferrals. See the Maryland Department of Labor’s [press release on financial relief initiatives](#) dated April 3, 2020.
- ❖ Contact your creditor or lender to discuss payment options specific to your situation. See your monthly statement for the contact information.

Collections & Garnishment

- ❖ Garnishment of the federal economic impact (stimulus) payments authorized by the ARP Act of 2021 and the CARES Act of 2020 is prohibited pursuant to Governor Hogan’s [executive order 21-03-15-01](#) and [executive order 20-04-29-03](#), respectively (child support-related garnishments are exempt from these orders). The Governor’s executive orders also include a prohibition on “set-offs” (when a financial institution seizes deposits because of a defaulted loan or other debt). Garnishment of the smaller December 2020 payment is prohibited pursuant to the federal law that authorized that stimulus.
- ❖ Collection activities and garnishments for federal student loans are suspended until September 30, 2021. For more information, see the U.S. Department of Education’s [Federal Student Aid Coronavirus and Forbearance Information](#) website.

- ❖ The Maryland RELIEF Act stimulus payments, distributed by the [Maryland Comptroller](#), are not subject to garnishment by a financial institution or the state (except for actions or judgments awarding child support).
- ❖ Contact the collection agency or your loan servicer, bank, or creditor to discuss payment options specific to your situation. See your monthly statement for the contact information.

Credit Reporting

- ❖ The CARES Act of 2020 includes requirements for companies that report your payment information to the credit bureaus. If you are *current* at the time you enter into forbearance, deferment, or a partial repayment plan due to COVID-19, your payment status should remain as “current”; if you are *delinquent* at the time you enter into such a plan, your payment status will reflect the delinquency status until the loan is brought current. This applies to mortgages and student loans covered under the CARES Act.
- ❖ To assist consumers with monitoring their credit, the three main reporting bureaus – [Experian](#), [Equifax](#), and [TransUnion](#) – are offering free online credit reports weekly through April 2022. Contact the credit bureaus directly to obtain your report, or visit the federally-authorized website [AnnualCreditReport.com](#).

Income Taxes

- ❖ The deadline for filing Maryland taxes has been extended to July 15, 2021 for certain filers. The Maryland RELIEF Act, effective February 15, 2021, includes unemployment state tax relief. For more information about state taxes contact the [Maryland Comptroller](#) and to learn more about the RELIEF Act unemployment state tax relief, see the [RELIEF Act Information page](#) on the Maryland Comptroller's website.
- ❖ The deadline for filing federal taxes has been extended to May 17, 2021 for certain filers. The ARP Act of 2021 includes unemployment federal tax relief and other tax provisions. For more information about federal taxes, including questions about federal taxes on unemployment earnings, the Child Tax Credit, and the Recovery Rebate Credit (for outstanding 2020 stimulus payments), contact the [Internal Revenue Service](#).

Insurance Coverage & Payments

- ❖ Automobile and other property or personal insurance companies are instituting premium rebates and/or rate reductions. Some insurance companies are also removing certain exclusions and providing flexibility with their deadlines and payment requirements to prevent loss of coverage during the state of emergency.
- ❖ Assistance programs and the amount of financial relief varies between different insurance companies. Contact your insurance provider to discuss options specific to your situation and insurance policy.
- ❖ For more information and resources about insurance, including Health Insurance FAQs, visit the [Maryland Insurance Administration's COVID-19 Resources](#) website.

Utility, Phone & Internet Service

- ❖ The prohibition on the termination of residential utility services (electric, gas, and certain non-municipal water systems) is no longer in effect. Refer to the Maryland Public Service Commission's [August 2020 press release](#) for information on payment plans, energy assistance programs, and links to consumer resources.
- ❖ Contact your utility, phone, or internet service provider to discuss payment options specific to your situation. See the company's website or your monthly statement for the contact information.
- ❖ The Office of the People's Counsel, a Maryland state agency that advocates for utility consumers, has a number of [COVID-19 Consumer Fact Sheets](#) on its website. The fact sheets include information on utility companies, how to negotiate during a state of emergency, and emergency assistance resources.

Additional Consumer Assistance & Resources

- ❖ The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as "food stamps"), helps those with a reduced income buy the food they need to support their health and their families. For information about SNAP, including program eligibility and how to apply, visit the Maryland Department of Human Resources' [Food Supplement Program](#) website.
- ❖ Maryland has a free, opt-in, telephonic service to check on the state's older residents. For more information and to register, see the Maryland Department of Aging's [Senior Call Check program](#) website.
- ❖ *There are many free or reduced-cost nonprofit legal service and consumer assistance agencies in Maryland.* These agencies can help residents manage the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic by providing direct support services, financial counseling, and legal advocacy.

Below are resources that provide direct services or referrals to local agencies and nonprofits:

- ✓ **Maryland HOPE hotline: 1-877-462-7555**
Referrals for free or reduced-fee assistance for housing-related issues, including legal advocacy, foreclosure prevention, rental and housing counseling. This hotline is administered by the [Maryland Department of Housing & Community Development](#).
- ✓ **2-1-1 Maryland (dial 211)**
Referrals for assistance with: food, utilities, shelter, health (including mental health and substance abuse), family support services for children, seniors, the disabled, and domestic violence, and more.
- ✓ **Fair Housing Action Center of Maryland**
Referrals and services for renters, including tenant advocacy and fair housing enforcement.
- ✓ **CASH Campaign of Maryland**
Referrals and services for free tax preparation, benefit screening, and financial counseling/coaching.

Regulatory & Consumer Protection Agencies

- ❖ State and federal government agencies regulate many of the industries in this guide. Reporting illegal, fraudulent, or deceptive business practices to regulatory agencies helps them monitor industry trends and enforce consumer protection laws.
- ❖ To report questionable business practices, **submit a consumer complaint** to the appropriate agency below (federal agencies are shown in the gray box):

Office of the Commissioner of Financial Regulation, Maryland Department of Labor

- ✓ Maryland-chartered banks
- ✓ Maryland-chartered credit unions
- ✓ Mortgage brokers, lenders, and servicers
- ✓ Auto lenders and personal lenders
- ✓ Student loan servicers
- ✓ Collection agencies
- ✓ Credit reporting agencies
- ✓ Debt management and credit services
- ✓ Check cashers and money transmitters
- ✓ Financial fraud and scams related to: mortgages, collections, student loan debt, credit services and credit repair

Office of the Maryland Attorney General

- ✓ General consumer complaints, including home and auto repair businesses, auto warranties, landlord/tenant issues, health care issues, scams, and more
- ✓ Price gouging, i.e. charging unreasonably high prices for goods during an emergency
- ✓ Investment fraud (see Securities Division)

Maryland Insurance Administration

- ✓ Insurance companies, including health, automobile, homeowners, and more

Maryland Public Service Commission

- ✓ Utility companies, including electric, gas, public water and landline phone providers

Office of the Comptroller of the Currency (OCC)

- ✓ National banks
- ✓ Federal savings associations

National Credit Union Administration (NCUA)

- ✓ Federal credit unions

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB)

- ✓ Financial institutions, businesses, services and products (see website)

Federal Trade Commission (FTC)

- ✓ Various consumer scams (see website)

Federal Communications Commission (FCC)

- ✓ Wireless phone, television and internet service providers



This document was prepared by the Office of the Commissioner of Financial Regulation, a division of the Maryland Department of Labor. The Office of the Commissioner of Financial Regulation is Maryland's consumer financial protection agency and financial services regulator.

For more information about the Office and the industries it supervises, go to www.labor.maryland.gov/finance.

