



For Immediate Release

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Couleecap Launches the Wisconsin Emergency Rental Assistance Program in the Coulee Region

(Westby, WI) Couleecap has launched a new program to help low-to-moderate income residents experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19 and struggling with housing insecurity. The Wisconsin Emergency Rental Assistance Program, or WERA, was announced by Governor Tony Evers last week and is funded by from dollars allocated by the U.S. Department of Treasury for COVID relief. Couleecap is delivering the program along with other Community Action Agencies and Energy Services, Inc. in partnership with the Department of Administration.

WERA offers eligible households direct financial assistance for rent, utility, home energy costs, and wraparound services. Past due rent or utility charges are covered in the program, dating back to the start of the pandemic. Applicants must be a Wisconsin resident who has experienced a significant income loss or costs due directly or indirectly to COVID-19, is at risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability, and has a household income at or below 80% of the county median income.

Couleecap operated a similar program, the Wisconsin Rental Assistance Program or W.R.A.P., from June – November 2020, which provided more than \$1.7 million in rental assistance to 865 households. Executive Director Hetti Brown says the WERA program will do even more. “The new program offers help for a longer period of time than the previous program. There are other updates as well, including assistance for utility bills, housing stability, and help for people regardless of citizenship status,” says Brown. “We appreciate the Wisconsin Department of Administration for working with us to apply best practices from the last program to make this one even better.”

Residents can access the WERA program online with resources in English, Spanish, and Hmong. Other translation services are available on demand. An online pre-screening form, program details, and income eligibility guidelines can be found at www.couleecap.org. Residents without internet access may also call 1-844-267-0033 to complete an application over the phone or request information about the program. Couleecap serves Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon Counties but the WERA program is a statewide program, as offered through the Wisconsin Community Action Network. To apply for assistance in another county, residents may call 1-833-900-WERA (9372).

The program comes as tenants and landlords attempt to manage a year-long pandemic that continues to create economic hardship for many. While a federal eviction moratorium offers some protection, tenants are still responsible for rent during the moratorium, putting their housing at risk without rental



assistance. It also places landlords in a difficult financial position as many rely on rental income to pay mortgages, maintenance costs, and other expenses to maintain the properties.

The WERA program will continue through the end of 2021 or until funds are fully utilized. Couleecap will prioritize households making 60% of CMI or less, but households making up to 80% CMI can apply to receive assistance. For a single person, 80% CMI ranges from \$38,300 - \$44,050 and for a household of four ranges from \$54,700 - \$62,900 depending on the county of residence.

In addition to rental assistance, all applicants will be automatically evaluated to receive state energy assistance, and Couleecap case managers will provide help with household budgeting, program referrals with application assistance, and other social service support.

People must complete a pre-screening form at www.couleecap.org to receive assistance. Persons without internet access may apply by calling 1-844-267-0033. Due to a high call volume, applications submitted online may receive a faster response.

The WERA program is just one effort in a suite of services Couleecap has launched to address community need during the pandemic. Couleecap continues to fundraise to provide these services and hopes to add new services as new needs are identified during COVID-19 recovery. Those wishing to support these efforts can donate at www.couleecap.org or by mailing contributions to 201 Melby Street, Westby, WI 54667.

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About Couleecap

Couleecap, Inc. is a private non-profit 501c3 charitable organization. Couleecap helps people in need with housing food, transportation, and more. Created in 1966, we are a community action program that fights poverty and promotes self-sufficiency in Crawford, La Crosse, Monroe, and Vernon counties. Couleecap is a member of the Community Action Network, originally created in 1964. Learn more at couleecap.org.

