



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 8, 2021

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<https://gscourt.nashville.gov/about-us/judges/division-viii-judge-rachel-l-bell/l-e-g-a-c-y-housing-resource-diversionary-court-and-program/>

**NEW HOUSING RESOURCE DIVERSIONARY COURT & PROGRAM
TO STREAMLINE RESOLUTION of 1,800 PENDING EVICTION CASES**

*\$20.8 in Emergency Rental Assistance funding to help pay
landlords and protect tenants as the national eviction
moratorium comes to end*

NASHVILLE, TENN. - Feb. 8, 2021 - The Davidson County General Session Court has transferred more than 1,800 pending eviction cases to the newly created Housing Resource Diversionary Court to maximize use of \$20.8 million from the U.S. Treasury's Emergency Rental Assistance (ERA) program for Davidson County.

The transfer is the result of a partnership between the Metropolitan Action Commission (MAC), Circuit Court Clerk Richard R. Rooker and Judge Rachel L. Bell, who created the new [L.E.G.A.C.Y. Housing Resource Diversionary Court](#) & Program specifically for this purpose. Judge Bell shared, "This diversionary court and program was developed to assist the tenant and landlord with a streamlined way to navigate the current pandemic, particularly those whose income was affected directly by COVID19 resulting in the inability to receive or pay rent. As a former, real estate attorney representing both tenants and landlords, I know all too well the sense of urgency for this court and the present need in this space."

"I am pleased that I could sign an Administrative Order to transfer all pending eviction cases to the Housing Resource Diversionary Court for processing in compliance with the Tennessee Supreme Court's Alternative Dispute Resolution Plan," said Presiding Judge Sam Coleman.

MAC, which received the \$20.8 million in ERA funding, will be responsible for administration and paying landlords once cases are settled. Rooker is in the process of notifying all parties about the transfer of their cases to the Housing Resource Diversionary Court. Judge Bell will be responsible for the review and adjudication of the cases as well as directing tenants to

community-based resources so they can avoid similar problems in the future. The Nashville Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC) will provide additional mediation assistance.

The group is working to streamline as many detainer warrants, the legal name for eviction notices, because the national moratorium on evictions will end on March 31.

"We are hoping landlords and tenants are able to resolve many of the pending eviction cases before the national moratorium expires," Judge Bell said. "We will be partnering with the NCRC who will assist the court with mediation in hopes the parties' matter will be fully remedied through rent assistance."

ERA allows payment for up to 12 months of past due rent. The funding also allows for paying ahead up to three months of future rent, based on a specified need. Some applicants will have additional fees connected to their arrearage, such as collection fees and court costs. ERA may cover many of those fees owed by the applicant.

"We are very grateful to have been included as a partner in the planning and implementation of the Housing Resource Diversionary Court with Judge Bell," said Dr. Cynthia Croom, Executive Director of the Metropolitan Action Commission. "We believe this will be a great demonstration of a coordinated and collaborative approach to housing security and set a foundation for improved economic well-being for the residents of our city."

In 2020, the TN Supreme Court, Administrative Office of Courts, implemented an Alternative Dispute Resolution Plan and the HRDC is using its model to order participants to seek resolve and try to settle their pending eviction matters by using mediation. NCRC demonstrated last fall how powerful mediation is in dealing with our current housing crisis, now exacerbated by the pandemic.

"We are thrilled to be in partnership now with Judge Bell's Housing Resource Diversionary Court to ensure that mediation will be a regular part of the solutions available to Davidson County tenants and landlords going forward," said NCRC Executive Director Sara Figal.

"I've always believed that justice is about meeting individuals where they are and finding the right solutions," said Judge Bell. "Our goal is to provide restoration to tenants who have had - and may continue to have - difficulty paying their rent because of

unforeseen circumstances and landlords who deserve to be compensated.”

Judge Bell said a successful mediation will allow her to dismiss cases thereby removing any reference to evictions based on late payments from the applicants’ credit records, which could limit their options for future housing.

“The Housing Resource Diversionary Court will assist in resolving non-payment of rent matters, and this is a win-win for both parties,” Rooker said, echoing Judge Bell’s sentiments.

In addition to processing cases more efficiently, Judge Bell said she will focus on referring tenants to the L.E.G.A.C.Y. Housing Resource Diversionary Court Program located at the C.E. McGruder Family Resource Center for individualized justice and case management curtailed to the tenant’s needs.

“The L.E.G.A.C.Y. Housing Resource Diversionary Court Program will empower tenants through several phases which include financial literacy, budgeting, access to job readiness training, workforce development and employment assistance,” said Alisha Haddock, Director of McGruder Center and Community Based Services Director for Catholic Charities. “The goal is to connect tenants to community-based agencies that help them maintain safe housing, progress to marketplace rent and ultimately move into homeownership.”

Matt Preston, Director of Family Empowerment for United Way, stated, “the relationship with the L.E.G.A.C.Y. HRDC/P is centered on seeking funding opportunities, and assessing the capacity of all partners that are in the network that can provide Financial Assistance to the tenants and landlords going through the Diversionary Court.

Other partners involved in the project include MDHA, New Covenant Christian Church, Jack & Jill - Nashville Chapter, Legal Aid Society of Middle TN, [Meharry Medical College’s Bridges to Success Program](#) and the new [Housing Law Clinic at Vanderbilt University](#). More information about these partnerships will be shared in weeks to come. Stay tuned.

Judge Bell founded the General Sessions Music City Community Court in 2012 and the L.E.G.A.C.Y. Housing Diversionary Resource Court is the second diversionary court started under her leadership. In the Fall of 2019, the Music City Community Court moved to the C.E. McGruder Family Resource Center in which Catholic Charities is the

lead agency. There the Music City Community Court has a permanent/dedicated space in Room 23, named the Bordeaux North Community Justice Center and it is also the location for the C.A.R.E. Diversionary Court for Ages 18-30 with low level misdemeanors and non-violent crimes.

It is the court's mission to create initiatives focused on preventative, restorative and diversionary justice centered around the concept that, "Justice does NOT stop at the courthouse steps!!" The vision is to do all it can to help break the playground to prison pipeline; to restore and rehabilitate lives by using its power and resources to move the needle for marginalized people.

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