

# Financial Relief During COVID-19

For additional information on COVID-19, including town news and other resources to support residents, visit [www.westfordma.gov](http://www.westfordma.gov)

Also please be aware that this is a quickly evolving situation and you are encouraged to visit companies' and agencies' websites or contact them directly with specific questions.

Due to high call volumes and demand, it is recommended that you visit websites for information prior to emailing or calling.

## **Utilities** (gas, electric, phone, cable, internet, etc.):

- Currently the Department of Public Utilities has prohibited electric and gas companies from making shut off determinations until the state of emergency is lifted or until further notice from DPU. This seems to apply even to customers who were not previously identified as low income. Please call or visit your providers' websites to stay informed. If questions arise call Alison Christopher at 978-399-2325 and she will reach out to the Utility Advocacy Group.
- Fuel Assistance is accepting applications for low-income households through at least April 1st. Please call Alison or Annette if you need to apply and we will inform of when applications are being taken at Community Teamwork or in our offices.

## **Food:**

- Maintain social distancing by exploring grocery and prescription delivery options. Note that many local businesses are reducing or eliminating fees during this time. The Senior Center is offering to take shopping lists and forward lists to Merrimack Valley Reserve Corps volunteers to shop for seniors or people with health conditions that make shopping more risky.
- Homebound seniors (60+) can temporarily request Meals on Wheels. If you are interested in this, please call 800-892-0890 to inquire with Elder Services of Merrimack Valley or call Alison or Annette. These meals are billed monthly and are very inexpensive/free to those who can't pay.
- Westford Food Pantry is doing their best to remain open and support the public by passing out pre-made bags outside the building. Please visit their website at [westfordfoodpantry.org](http://westfordfoodpantry.org) for updates.
- Seoul Kitchen has offered to deliver food free of charge to seniors or residents in need.

- For those in need, including those who may have changes in eligibility due to lost wages, consider applying for:
  - Food Stamps/SNAP-application and eligibility guidelines can be found on the Massachusetts DTA website. If you have questions call Alison or Annette at 978-399-2325 or 978-399-2326.
  - Women, Infants and Children (WIC)-Call Community Teamwork at 978-459-0551.

**Time Out of Work:** This is a constantly evolving situation. Keep informed of state and federal guidelines and legislative changes.

- If you need to be out of work due to illness, risk of illness to yourself or family, etc., consider the following:
  - Talk to your employer about using paid time off
  - Talk to your employer about other creative approaches, such as working remotely or adapting approach to job responsibility if applicable
  - Understand your short-term disability policy
  - Ask your employer about other supports available
  - If your job offers it, consult the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) for free confidential supports, including but not limited to counseling, legal advice and other resources.
  - For seniors or low-income individuals with questions about legal rights, Northeast Legal Aid is providing service by pre-arranged appointment only. To apply for assistance please call Monday through Friday 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. at 978-458-1465.
  - Visit the Department of Labor website for information on your rights and on the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)
  - For information on Federal changes to employment insurance coverage during COVID-19, visit the Department of Labor website and also the Massachusetts Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development for the impact of federal changes on state law.

### **Assistance Paying Bills:**

- St. Vincent de Paul is a Catholic organization that supports people in need of emergency financial support, regardless of their religious beliefs. They are currently only meeting with emergency cases to protect their volunteers, but they can speak with you by phone to determine your level of need and create a plan on when they can meet with you/interim assistance they can provide. Call and leave your name and number at 978-692-6353x134.

- Community Teamwork in Lowell has limited funding to help prevent housing loss during times of financial crisis, including RAFT and RAFT Upstream funding. Their Housing Consumer Education Center can also answer questions about housing concerns. You can reach them at 978-459-0551.
- Seniors may call Alison or Annette and inquire about applying for assistance through the Friends Emergency Fund.

**IF YOU JUST NEED TO BRAINSTORM OR NEED OTHER ASSISTANCE OR SUPPORT, PLEASE CALL ALISON CHRISTOPHER, LICSW AT 978-399-2325 OR ANNETTE CERULLO, LSW AT 978-399-2326.**