

Oregon grants to cover missed rent for over 2,600 businesses

By **JAMIE COLDBERG**
The Oregonian/OregonLive

SALEM — Oregon plans to pay the outstanding rent of more than 2,600 businesses and then offer another round of aid to businesses in need.

Business Oregon, the state's economic development agency, will distribute nearly \$50 million on April 12 to cover the missed rent of a combined 2,609 commercial tenants across the state, according to spokesperson Nathan Buehler. That's pending the receipt and approval of final documentation from those tenants and landlords.

The grants will be paid directly to landlords to bring their tenants current on rent by covering outstanding rent those tenants accumulated from March 1, 2020, to Feb. 28, 2021. The state offered grants of up to \$100,000 per tenant, but the average grant request was \$19,159.

Eighty-four landlords who applied for grants, 54 of whom are in the Portland area, indicated they had individual tenants who owed more than \$100,000 in missed rent, according to Buehler.

The grants are part of the state's \$100 million commercial rent relief program, which lawmakers approved in January. Business Oregon, which is administering the fund, will reopen applications for another \$42 million round in mid-April.

Nearly 88% of the applicants that applied for

funding through the program earlier this month were approved, pending final confirmation of their documentation.

Applicants in most parts of the state were approved for funding as long as they met the necessary requirements, but Business Oregon only funded 80% of applicants from the Portland area. That's because the state is working to distribute grants equitably across the state.

Business Oregon held a lottery to determine which eligible applicants to approve. Those that weren't approved initially will automatically be considered along with new applicants during the second round of funding in April.

While the vast majority of applicants were approved, it is still unclear how many business owners across the state are behind on rent due to the pandemic.

While both landlords and tenants must participate in Oregon's application process, landlords must submit the initial application. Landlords who accept the funding must also sign an agreement forgiving any outstanding penalties or interest and promising not to evict their tenants.

Despite the commercial rent relief program, business groups and owners also remain concerned about a looming eviction crisis.

Oregon lawmakers allowed the state's moratorium on commercial evictions to expire last Sep-

tember, but gave business owners until the end of March to repay their outstanding rent. That may have prevented an onslaught of commercial evictions over the last six months.

Lawmakers are considering a proposal to give business owners until the end of September to repay rent bills they accumulated during the worst days of the coronavirus recession last year.

However, lawmakers are unlikely to vote on that bill before the current grace period expires at the end of March, potentially opening up businesses owners to evictions if their landlords have not applied or been approved for funding through the commercial rent relief program.



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-2011 Study by Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine and the National Institute on Aging

Oregon officials warn of fourth COVID-19 surge

By **SARA CLINE**
Associated Press/Report for America

PORTLAND — As vaccine administration continues to ramp up in Oregon, health officials said Friday, April 2, they are concerned about the increasing number of COVID-19 cases in the state and variants of the virus.

During the past two weeks, Oregon's COVID-19 case count rates have been rising. The week of March 22 coronavirus cases increased by 28% from the previous week, based on the Oregon Health Authority's COVID-19 report that was released Wednesday.

"It is clear that in Oregon and across the country the fourth surge of the virus is at our doorstep," Gov. Kate Brown said Friday.

Health officials say that if more contagious variants take hold in Oregon, the COVID-19 transmission rate in the state could increase by 20% during April.

"As this latest model shows, we still have work to do. We must remain vigilant," said Dean Sidelinger, the health officer for the Oregon Health Authority.

A rise in cases is not just a concern in Oregon. Earlier this week, the head of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention pleaded with Americans not to let their guard down in the fight against COVID-19, warning of a potential fourth wave of the virus and saying she has a recurring feeling "of impending doom."

Speaking during a virtual White House briefing on Monday, Dr. Rochelle Walensky grew emotional as she reflected on her experience treating COVID-19 patients who are alone at the end of their lives.

Brown said that while Oregon's increase is not as large as spikes in other states, the issue has put officials and Oregonians "back on alert."

Officials say that if cases continue to rise,

some counties may move back a risk level, in which stricter restrictions are implemented.

In addition, officials warned this week that as Oregonians celebrate upcoming holidays, to continue to follow restrictions and safety measures, including gathering outdoors instead of inside and wearing a mask.

"We have come so far," Brown said. "Don't let the vaccines and sunny spring weather give us a false sense that we are in the clear, because we are not. This virus has proven that it can mutate."

Multiple variants have been reported across the state and circulating since late 2020.

"This is a race between the vaccines and the variants, it is a critical moment for all to double down so we can outrun this next wave," Brown said.

So far, 17% of Oregonians have been fully vaccinated.

Beginning Monday, statewide, frontline workers, people living in multi-generational households and adults 16 and older with underlying health conditions are eligible for the vaccine.

As of Wednesday, twenty counties received approval from the Oregon Health Authority to accelerate their vaccination timelines and have already begun vaccinating this group.

In addition Gov. Brown announced Friday that household family members of frontline workers will also become eligible for vaccine doses on Monday.

Officials say that all residents 16 and older will be eligible for the vaccine by May 1.

"Just because we're vaccinated doesn't mean we can return to pre-pandemic life just yet," said Sidelinger. "Until we see enough Oregonians vaccinated to stop the spread, we must continue with those preventive measures. We cannot cede our momentum to the virus."

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