

Joint Audit Committee: Audit recommends improved monitoring for housing and energy assistance programs

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MADISON - On Friday, the nonpartisan Legislative Audit Bureau (LAB) released a limited-scope review of the Emergency Rental Assistance and Emergency Solutions Grant programs (report 22-3). The Department of Administration (DOA) administers the Emergency Rental Assistance program and the Emergency Solutions Grant program to provide housing assistance and emergency shelter assistance to individuals in need.

Through June 2021, DOA received \$434.7 million in supplemental federal funds for the Emergency Rental Assistance program. From March 2021 through September 2021, the program provided \$64.0 million in benefits for 15,968 households.

In July 2020, DOA was awarded \$32.5 million in supplemental federal funds for the Emergency Solutions Grant program. From July 2020 through December 2021, program funds were used to serve 19,013 individuals from 12,001 households.

“In initiating the audit to evaluate supplemental federal funds allocated to the state related to the COVID pandemic, I knew that there was a strong potential for waste and mismanagement of these funds. In the case of this audit report, The Emergency Rental Assistance and Emergency Solutions Grant programs lacked compliant program guidance, proper application oversight, and eligibility monitoring. Due to the diligent work of the Legislative Audit Bureau and the Joint Legislative Audit Committee, we now have a roadmap to improve the administration of these

programs given that well over \$150 million remains unspent by DOA,” said Senator Robert Cowles (R-Green Bay).

LAB made recommendations for DOA to improve how it administers the Emergency Rental Assistance program, including by improving the program’s application process, modifying the process for prioritizing applications for program benefits, and improving how it monitors the program.

LAB made recommendations for DOA to improve how it monitors the Emergency Solutions Grant program.

In February 2022, and at the request of the co-chairpersons, the Joint Legislative Audit Committee directed LAB to evaluate the state’s administration of supplemental federal funds received in response to the public health emergency. LAB will release other evaluations as they are completed throughout 2022.

Copies of LAB’s report (report 22-3) may be obtained from its website at www.legis.wisconsin.gov/lab or by calling (608) 266-2818. Report concerns related to state government activities to LAB by calling the toll-free hotline at 1-877-FRAUD-17.