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County of Berks / COVID-19 Leadership Team Press Release

Berks County announces new grant program for local small businesses affected by COVID-19

Reading, PA— 8/31/2020 — The Berks County Board of Commissioners will be launching a new grant program next week to assist local small business owners who have been struggling financially due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Berks County Small Business New Start Grant program is the latest component of the Rebuild Berks initiative from the Berks County Commissioners and Greater Reading Chamber Alliance. The program will be administered by Community First Fund, a non-profit, federally qualified community development financial institution (CDFI).

The Board of Commissioners allocated \$6 million from the county's CARES Act funds to support this program on August 11. The program will award grants ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000 to Berks County small business owners based on revenue level. To be eligible, businesses must primarily operate in Berks, have 50 or less full-time employees and have pre-COVID annual gross revenues of \$3 million or less. Eligible business must have been in operation as of February 15, 2020 and certify their business is operating or has a clear plan to fully reopen. The grants can only be used for costs incurred due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We understand the crucial role small businesses have in our community and have seen first-hand how much they have been struggling during this pandemic,” Commissioner Michael S. Rivera. “We want to help these local business owners get the financial assistance they need to give their restaurants and stores the boost they need for a fresh start from this setback.”

The program will give priority to low-and-moderate income business owners and to businesses operating in disadvantaged areas, including communities experiencing higher than average poverty rates and unemployment rates. The program will focus on businesses in the hospitality, tourism, retail, restaurant and personal care industry sectors and with preference given to businesses owned by people of color, veterans, women and disabled individuals.

Finally, the program will prioritize businesses that have incurred the highest revenue loss due to COVID-19 and businesses that have received limited to no prior local or state relief funding.

“We’ve seen our business communities taking the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis,” said Daniel Betancourt, President & CEO of Community First Fund. “These small business grants are vital in keeping these businesses afloat and we applaud the efforts of the Berks County Commissioners in their efforts to get these resources into the hands of those most impacted by the crisis.”

The online application portal is expected to open on Thursday, September 10 and close on Wednesday, September 23. A list of eligibility requirements, a checklist to help business owners prepare for the application and a list of frequently asked questions are currently available at www.rebuildberks.com/funding. The online application portal can be accessed through the website after the portal opens.

All resources and documents are available in English and Spanish. Community First Fund representatives will also be available throughout the process to offer technical assistance to applicants. Recipients will not be determined on a first-come, first-serve basis, so applicants are asked to take their time to properly prepare and have complete and correct information at hand when submitting their applications. The necessary information to apply includes the most recent tax return, a form of acceptable government-issued photo ID for the primary business owner and the dollar amounts of total gross revenues from March 1, 2019 to May 31, 2019 and total gross revenues from March 1, 2020 to May 31, 2020.

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