



HOUSING

In hard times, a helping hand

New Warwick office will help distribute \$36.6M in new foreclosure-prevention aid

July 26, 2016

By Christine Dunn Journal Staff Writer

WARWICK - Rhode Island Housing opened its new suburban Help Center in Warwick Monday morning as part of its effort to distribute \$36.6 million in new federal Hardest Hit foreclosure-prevention funding awarded to the state this year.

The new office is at 43 Jefferson Blvd. The agency's executive director, Barbara Fields, welcomed numerous public officials at the event, including Governor Raimondo, Senators Jack Reed and Sheldon Whitehouse, Rep. James Langevin, and Warwick Mayor Scott Avedisian.

Fields said that since the Hardest Hit fund launched in 2010, the money has been used to help more than 3,000 Rhode Islanders stay in their homes. Counting this year's award, the state has received nearly \$116 million from the program, which is operated by the U.S. Treasury Department.

Whitehouse said this year's allocation comes from a pool of Hardest Hit funds that had been distributed to other states but were never used. Rhode Island won more money, in part, because of its past success in operating the program, he said.

Reed noted that when the program was first devised, the formula left Rhode Island out of the small group of states awarded funds, but the state's Congressional delegation succeeded in proving that Rhode Island was among the states most severely affected by the foreclosure crisis.

"You can't go to work every day if you're housing insecure," the governor said. Losing a home is also destabilizing for children and their performance in school, she added.

"A stable home is the foundation of a child's education," Whitehouse said. "It really is the answer of being able to thrive." He noted that "a lot of people" in Rhode Island still have "underwater"

mortgages, meaning the amount they owe is more than the home is worth today. This can make refinancing or selling a home difficult.

Homeowners still struggling to make their housing payments because of a loss of income or other financial distress can get information at the Help Center in Warwick or at Rhode Island Housing's main offices at 44 Washington St., Providence; by calling (401) 277-1500; or by going online to HHFRI.org or emailing info@HHFRI.org.

"Rhode Island's housing market is now clearly on the upswing," Langevin said, "but clearly more work needs to be done, and that's what this new funding is all about."



Rhode Island Housing on Monday opened its new Help Center, at 43 Jefferson Blvd. in Warwick. THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL/STEVE SZYDLOWSKI



Kevin Montalvan, Brendan Lech and Mariel Mejia are among the new employees at the Warwick Help Center for Rhode Island Housing, which opened Monday.