



Voucher program update

HUD's new budget bolsters the Section 8 program

AS THIS ISSUE OF *The Bulletin* goes to press, Shaun Donovan, secretary of Housing and Urban Development, is presenting testimony on the department's Fiscal Year 2011 budget before the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies. Highlights of his written statement follow:

The...Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program is a cost-effective means for delivering decent, safe, and sanitary housing to low-income families in the private market, providing assistance so that participants are able to find and lease privately-owned housing. In fiscal year 2009, HUD assisted over two million families with this program; and, in fiscal year 2010, we plan to assist over 76,000 more families through new incremental vouchers

This Budget continues HUD's bedrock commitment to its largest program. The calendar year request for 2011 is \$19.6 billion, a \$1.4 billion increase over the 2010 Consolidated Appropriations Act and an amount estimated to assist 2.2 million households. This represents an increase of 34,466 families from fiscal year 2010 projections and 112,304 more than at the end of fiscal year 2009.

Of the \$19.6 billion request, \$17.3 billion will cover the renewal of expiring annual contribution contracts (ACC) in calendar year 2011....In addition, this Budget requests \$85 million for incremental vouchers to help homeless individuals, at-risk families with children, and families with special needs....

I am most encouraged that the Administration is working to strengthen the Housing Choice Voucher program. I'll report in a later issue on how Congress responds to HUD's proposed budget.

In this issue

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DEALING WITH CHALLENGING TENANTS

I want to call your attention to a workshop especially for landlords and building managers.

Coming in April, the two-day workshop is called **"Dealing with Mental Health Issues in Housing."**

Its sponsor, the nonprofit Dispute Resolution Center of King County, says that the training is designed specifically to increase landlords' and rental housing managers' effectiveness in dealing with challenging tenants and those with mental health issues.

The sponsor describes the workshop this way:

When residents of rental housing have mental health issues, the methods used to resolve conflicts with and between them need to be designed to meet their special needs. This training is designed to increase landlords' effectiveness in dealing with this population of tenants.

In this two-day workshop, trainers present, on Day One, a three-step conflict resolution model that can be used with the general population of tenants and residents. On Day Two, participants will learn to tailor that model to respectfully address the constraints of dealing with a tenant who has mental health issues.

The workshop will be conducted on two days—Monday, April 19 and Thursday, April 29—from 9 a.m. until 4 p.m. at the Good Shepherd Center, 4649 Sunnyside Avenue N, Room 202, Seattle. The cost is \$300 (\$350 if you enroll after April 8). To enroll or for more information, call Kasey Aesery at (206) 443-9603, ext. 107, or e-mail him at kaseya@kcdrc.org.

* * *

I TRUST YOU KNOW that I am always glad to hear from you about the Housing Choice Voucher program, and about our policies and procedures. I'm especially grateful for suggestions as to how we can improve our delivery of services to you and to our participants.

Regards,



Lisa Cipollone-Wolters

DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY
& RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS
206.239.1523

HAP checks to be deposited directly

Seattle Housing Authority is making good progress toward implementing direct deposits of landlords' Housing Assistance Payments. We recently concluded a successful pilot with a small group of landlords. We will now expand this test group to about 200 landlords. If everything goes smoothly with this larger group, we will move forward with the direct deposit program for all landlords in the next few months.

One of the benefits for landlords working with the Housing Choice Voucher program is timely payment of a portion of your subsidized tenants' rents. We pride ourselves on mailing the monthly Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) checks like clockwork. Now we're looking to add to this reliability the convenience and security of direct deposit.

With direct deposit, you will continue to receive an advice for all payments deposited into your account. This advice will list the tenants and the amount of rent being paid for each. Advices will be mailed out at the beginning of the month, and we are committed to making deposits between the third and fifth business day of the month—never later than the fifth business day.

We believe this compares favorably with the time needed to process checks. In addition to the convenience of not having to run to the bank or mail in your HAP check, there will never be a delay in payment owing to a bad address or an error on the U.S. Postal Service's part.

At the same time, to save paper and the costs of printing and postage, we are exploring systems that

We're testing direct deposit of HAP checks, and soon we'll send payment advices (and the *Bulletin*) electronically

will let us notify you of your HAP payments instantly via e-mail.

We hope eventually to go paperless to the greatest extent possible, with all landlords receiving HAPs by direct deposit and with payment advices (and *Bulletins*—this publication) sent electronically. Landlords who are invited to receive HAPs via direct deposit in the expanded test group will be required to provide us an e-mail address.

For now, we will continue mailing your checks as usual. We expect that our larger test project, which we're launching this month, will provide us useful information about how realistic our expectations are and where the program may benefit from refinements.

Regardless of whether your HAPs will be directly deposited or paid by paper check, it remains critically important that you keep us current on your mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address. We need this information to notify you of inspections at your rental properties, to tell you about changes in the HAPs for your tenants, to send year's-end tax documents, and to contact you should questions or concerns arise about one of your subsidized tenancies.

Changes to your contact information need to be submitted to Mike Jung, owner liaison. You may write Mike at the Porchlight Building, 907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, Seattle WA 98107. This information may also be faxed to Mike at (206) 239-1770 or e-mailed to him at mjung@seattlehousing.org.

If you haven't already done so, please be sure to provide Mike your e-mail address.

Upcoming Landlord Workshops

Workshops are held in the Porchlight Community Room, 907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.

TUESDAY, MARCH 16

Attracting good tenants; lease enforcement

Trouble finding tenants? How reaching out to Housing Choice Voucher tenants can help ¶ What does the rental market mean for your bottom line? ¶ What to do if you have problems with a tenant ¶ Discuss your strategies for attracting tenants and lease enforcement with other landlords ¶ Your questions answered

TUESDAY, APRIL 20

The Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspection

An overview of the Housing Quality Standards ¶ The timeline for inspections ¶ Lead-based paint: Why this is so important, what to look for, how to fix it ¶ Landlord and tenant responsibility for repairing HQS deficiencies ¶ Your questions about the HCV program and HQS inspections answered

Keeping clear of Fair Housing laws

Q :: I am the owner of an apartment community with “cluster boxes” assigned in sequential order by the U.S. Postal Service. One of my tenants is a person with a disability who has requested that I relocate her mailbox from an upper to a lower, accessible level. What do I do?

Just as housing providers must consider reasonable accommodation requests from residents, the Postal Service will consider a customer’s request to assign an accessible mailbox. Under the postal service “Hardship Clause” regulations, a postal customer may submit a written request to relocate a mailbox to a lower, accessible level.

If you receive a request from a tenant to re-assign a cluster box, it’s a good idea to respond to the request in writing and to inform the tenant of the Postal Service’s policy. While the U.S. Postal Service regulations do not require a housing provider to be involved with the tenant’s request, you can offer to write a letter on her behalf or to join in her request.

The tenant’s written request should indicate that he or she has a disability, explain that the currently assigned mailbox is inaccessible, and request the assignment of a more accessible mailbox as a reasonable accommodation.*

Here is a summary of the U.S. Postal Service’s policy:

Any request to relocate the mail box must be submitted in writing directly to the postal delivery person. After the request is submitted to the delivery person, the delivery person submits the request to a manager to evaluate the accommodation request and take appropriate action. If the local postmaster denies a request, the request is sent to the district manager for review and a final decision.

§ 631.42 of the U.S. Postal Service Postal Operations Manual

Postal regulations provide that a request not be denied solely because of increased operational costs or because a family member or other party may be available to receive mail on the customer’s behalf.

Finally, if the postal service is unable to relocate the mailbox, it may provide an alternate accommodation such as door delivery.

Q :: I recently approved the tenancy of a Housing Choice Voucher program participant who has a service dog—a Rottweiler. The woman provided her doctor’s written statement confirming that she has a disability and that the dog is a service animal. However, my insurance company says it will not insure properties with certain dog breeds, including Rottweilers. What should I do?

In this situation, as housing provider you should ask the insurance company to waive its dog-breed policy as a reasonable accommodation under the Fair Housing laws. You can request the insurance company to instead make an individual assessment of this service animal’s behavior. If there is no evidence that this particular animal is dangerous, the insurance company may have a hard time defending its denial of a waiver.

If the company refuses to grant an insurance waiver, both you and the prospective resident may have grounds to file Fair Housing complaints against the insurance company. If the insurance company were found to be in violation of the Fair Housing laws, it could be responsible for any damages that your tenant and you (as landlord) incur in waiting for the accommodation.

Q :: Can apartment management require tenants’ caregivers to be screened?

A housing provider may require live-in caregivers to undergo some screening. If a housing provider screens live-in caregivers, the screening should be limited to appropriate areas. For example, it may be appropriate to screen a caregiver for a criminal record if the landlord’s policy is to conduct criminal background checks for all adult applicants. But because a caregiver is not the lessee, it is not necessary to screen the caregiver’s credit.

Housing providers may deny residency to a live-in caregiver who refuses to consent to limited screening.

If a resident has an immediate need for a live-in caregiver and the housing provider’s policy is to screen all live-in caregivers, it is a good practice to allow the tenant to hire the caregiver, and then screen the caregiver following the hiring. While this practice entails some risk, many live-in caregivers are paid by, and will have been screened by, the state.

* For a useful discussion about reasonable accommodation principles, see “Joint Statement of the Department of Housing and Urban Development and the Department of Justice: Reasonable Accommodations Under the Fair Housing Act,” www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/library/huddojstatement.pdf



Housing Choice Voucher Program

Porchlight Building
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200
Seattle WA 98107-4637

Phone 206.239.1500
Fax 206.239.1770
E-mail porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org

www.seattlehousing.org

GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Housing Choice Voucher program issue, call 239.1728 and press '0'

TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call 239.1663 or go to www.seattlehousing.org and click on 'Rental Listings' under the 'Landlords' menu

OWNER INFORMATION

Note: Changes must be submitted in writing
Fax 239.1770, attention Mike Jung
Questions? Call Mike at 239.1672

HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM MANAGER

Barbara Strayer 239.1620

OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung 239.1672

OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

'Aa' through 'Malerba' 239.1619
'Malf' through 'Zz' 239.1636
Mod Rehab & Project-based 239.1649

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals—contracts and leases
'Aa' through 'Lara' 239.1676
'Larb' through 'Zz' 239.1635
New move-in team supervisor 239.1621
New move-ins fax number 239.1760

INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections 239.1645
New move-in inspections—
'Aa' through 'Lara' 239.1676
'Larb' through 'Zz' 239.1635
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor 239.1621

HOUSING QUALITY STANDARDS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis 721.1457, ext 10
Paul Gimmi 239.1632
Sue Nigg 239.1639
Jonathan Shibuya 239.1616
Jason Shirley 239.1646
Nancy Shutes 770.6880
Lora Wait-Hoy 721.1457, ext 11

Inspectors' corner

Tips for a successful initial inspection

These are some of the most common fail items we and our colleagues encounter in performing initial inspections of units.

Landlords and managers who have worked with us previously probably know this list by heart; landlords new to the Housing Choice Voucher program may find this list useful as they prepare for our initial inspection of a rental unit.

—BILL FRANCIS & LORA WAIT-HOY

1. Be sure all utilities (electricity, gas, oil, water) are turned on by the time of our inspection.
2. Have the gas or oil furnace serviced prior to the inspection, and provide proof (with a service sticker or invoice) that the furnace has been serviced within the last two years.
3. Make sure all interior and exterior painted surfaces are free of deteriorated paint *if* the unit was built prior to 1978 *and* children under the age of six or a pregnant female will be residing in the household.
4. Install a handrail on any interior/exterior stairway that has more than three steps including the landing.
5. All smoke detectors must be installed and working. There must be at least one detector on every level of the unit, and these should be installed near bedrooms or sleeping areas.
6. All appliances must be in good working order.
7. Keyed locks are not allowed on doors to bedrooms or sleeping areas.
8. Double-keyed deadbolt locks must have been replaced with single-keyed interior thumb-turn type locks.
9. Cover plates must be on every electrical outlet and light switch.
10. The unit must be clean and in move-in condition, and all repairs must have been completed.