Section 8 Policy Changes: 2014 Administrative Plan

In July 2014, the following changes were implemented and released in the 2014 Administrative Plan. The Administrative Plan, which was approved by the Board of Supervisors on March 25, 2014, outlines the policies that govern the administration of the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program.

1. **Passbook Savings Rate**

   When determining annual income for families who apply for or receive assistance under the HCV program, the Housing Authority considers annual income the greater of either: (1) actual income resulting from all net family assets; or (2) a percentage of the value of such assets based upon the current passbook savings rate as determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), currently set at 2%, when a family has net assets in excess of $5,000.

   HUD requires the Housing Authority to, on a yearly basis, establish and monitor its own passbook savings rate based on the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) national savings rate. Therefore, the passbook savings rate for the Housing Authority's Fiscal Year 2014-2015 is 0.81%.

2. **Homeless Families Referred for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program Rental Assistance**

   The Housing Authority adopted HUD guidance to cease administration of set-aside programs, and instead instituted a Section 8 HCV program waiting list preference for homeless families referred by eligible organizations. Redirecting efforts to house the homeless by instituting a limited waiting list preference preserves the Housing Authority's partnerships with the various community-based organizations that will continue to seek and refer the homeless for housing assistance. Homeless families may contact any of the organizations that are under agreement with the Housing Authority to determine if they are eligible for referral to the Section 8 waiting list.

   Instituting a limited waiting list preference for the homeless also requires the Housing Authority to determine eligibility for homeless applicants using the criteria presently used for HCV program applicants. The Housing Authority's standard criterion is to deny admission to applicants on parole or probation, and to review the past three years for all criminal background checks.

3. **Incoming Portability Families**

   The Housing Authority had never specified the timeframe for porting families (families arriving from another Housing Authority) wishing to find housing within its jurisdiction. Now, the Housing Authority has specified the timeframe. The Housing Authority now requires that a porting family have a minimum of 45 days remaining on their voucher before it expires. Should the family arrive with less than 45 days remaining before the voucher expiration date, the family will be referred back to its Housing Authority to request an extension.
Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013

Initially passed in 1994, the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA) created the first U.S. federal legislation acknowledging domestic violence and sexual assault as crimes, and provided federal resources to encourage community-coordinated responses to combating violence. On March 7, 2013, President Barack Obama signed the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act, which ensures the continuation and improvement of vital, lifesaving programs, and laws. As a result of the VAWA Reauthorization Act, the Housing Authority has implemented the following as of July 1, 2014:

1. The protections under VAWA have been extended to victims of sexual assault.
2. The Housing Authority is expanding protection for families by replacing the term “immediate family member” with “affiliated individual.” An affiliated individual is defined as “a spouse, parent, brother, sister, or child of that individual, or an individual to whom that individual stands in place of a parent, or any individual, tenant, or lawful occupant living in the household of that individual.”
3. The Housing Authority is expanding protection by changing the definition of “violent acts” from “criminal acts of physical violence against family members or others” to “criminal activity directly related to domestic violence, dating violence, sexual assault, or stalking against an affiliated individual or other individual.”
4. The Housing Authority is expanding its policy regarding the types of forms that victims may provide. Now, acceptable forms may include a record of an administrative agency or documentation from a mental health professional. Additionally, the victim is only required to provide the name of the perpetrator on HUD form-50066 if the victim knows the name of the perpetrator, and it is safe to provide it.
5. The Housing Authority is expanding the VAWA notification requirements to include applicants that are denied assistance, when a person is admitted, and when a tenant is notified of eviction/termination. (HUD has not released the notification document yet. Once released, the Housing Authority will make it available in accordance with VAWA.

Seeking Section 8 Volunteers!

2015 Annual Plan

Have you ever wondered why the Housing Authority operates the way it does? Why it has so many rules and policies? Do you wish you could share your concerns or ideas about them? Here is your opportunity to learn the answers to these questions and have your input heard.

The Housing Authority is recruiting Section 8 program volunteers for its Resident Advisory Board (RAB) Committee that will assist with the 2015 Annual Plan process. The RAB provides the opportunity for Section 8 participants to present input on matters that affect them, including new policies and plans. After all, who knows better about your housing needs, what you want, and what will assist you and your family the most?

All you have to do as a RAB Committee member is attend a minimum of one meeting each year that takes place in October/November. Should you wish to volunteer in this year’s Committee, you may e-mail AssistedHousingCompliance@hacola.org, or call (626) 586-1542, and express your interest. Be sure to provide your name and contact phone number and any questions you may have. A Housing Authority representative will contact you with details of your role as a RAB member.
Top 5 Required Documents at the Annual Reexamination

Each year, the Housing Authority requires that Section 8 assisted families provide information about their income and family composition via a reexamination packet. If the documents needed to verify reported information are insufficient, or not submitted, the family is scheduled to attend a mandatory appointment with Housing Authority staff. Failure to provide vital documents will delay the processing of the family's annual reexamination, and in some cases, may lead to termination of the family's assistance. Below is a list of the most commonly missed documents and/or information, and how to avoid a mandatory appointment:

1. **Current Computer Generated Documents** - To be acceptable, ALL computer-generated documents submitted MUST show the created or issued date. The document must not be more than 60 days prior to the date the Housing Authority receives the reexamination packet. If documents are older than 60 days, the family will be required to resubmit documents and/or attend a mandatory appointment.

2. **Current and Consecutive Paystubs/statements** – All reported income must be accompanied by an annual statement and/or at least two consecutive paystubs that meet the criterion specified in #1 above. Quite frequently, pay stubs reflecting different pay periods or a single pay stub is submitted. Before submitting pay stubs to the Housing Authority, ensure that the pay periods are dated within 60 days and are successive. Other acceptable employment verifications include payment histories and wage letters printed on the company's letterhead. For non-wage income such as pensions and Social Security/SSI, provide a current benefit award letter or current, consecutive payment statements.

3. **Bank Statements** – Families that report having a checking and/or savings account must supply ALL PAGES of the current bank statement for each account. Be sure to note the page numbers, typically listed at the bottom of the statements, and ensure that all pages are included. Even though the last page (example, page 5 of 5) may seem informational, it is still required since it completes the statement.

4. **Failure to Provide Signatures** – The reexamination packet requires that certain members of the family read and sign sections that pertain to the release of information, family obligations, and disclosures of criminal activity. Reading the packet carefully and making note of sections where a name must be printed, and a name must be signed, will ensure that these vital sections will not be missed.

5. **Los Angeles County Department of Public and Social Services (DPSS) Notice of Action** – Quite frequently, families report DPSS public assistance income but fail to submit a current Notice of Action. Recently, the Housing Authority implemented a system that allows the Housing Authority to obtain DPSS assistance income information directly from DPSS, but only when the family grants permission. Even if permission is granted, supplying the Housing Authority with a Notice of Action will ensure a more accurate assessment of the family's income.

**Accessibility Online, Anytime, Anywhere – the Housing Authority's Online Tenant Portal**

The Housing Authority now only considers voucher extension requests and information changes (such as family composition and/or income changes) submitted via the online tenant portal. Families wishing to apply for the Family Self-Sufficiency Program are also required to submit their pre-application via the portal.

The Housing Authority is your partner in helping you remain up-to-date on your rental assistance matters. The Housing Authority's online portal, accessible via the www.hacola.org website, allows you to perform tasks such as submitting income and family composition changes, as well as contacting your case manager with the click of a few buttons. You have 24/7 access to important forms, as well as inspection reports.

Registering only takes a moment and it's free! If you have yet to register, you may do so by going to www.hacola.org and selecting the Section 8 Tenant Portal menu option. You will need your tenant identification number (t-number), and the last four digits of your social security number. Be sure to use your preferred e-mail account to receive notifications.
Soon the Housing Authority will launch the One Call Now System. The One Call Now System will allow the Housing Authority to send urgent text, e-mail, and/or recorded messages, such as when your Annual Reexamination is being mailed and is due, inspection dates, and program advisories. By using this system, the Housing Authority will be able to improve its communication with program participants while reducing the delays associated with the need to print and distribute notices.

Keep in mind that you reserve the option of opting-out of this system; however, doing so may cause you to miss urgent notices about your rental assistance matters. Rest assured that none of your personal information will be shared with anyone. The One Call Now System takes the security and privacy of your personal information (i.e. phone numbers, e-mail addresses) very seriously. Information is never sold or shared – you will not receive any unsolicited calls as a result of using the service.

If you are interested in helping to make decisions about how the Housing Authority operates, you can apply to become a Tenant Commissioner on the Los Angeles County Housing Commission (Housing Commission).

The Housing Commission helps guide Housing Authority policy. It is an integral part of the decision-making process because it helps determine how the program operates, how money is spent, and how policies are developed. It is an excellent way to stay involved and give back to your community. Please note that this is not an announcement for employment. Your application to serve as a Tenant Commissioner will not affect your housing assistance.

To request an application, you may contact Roberta Lear, Executive Assistant at (626) 586-1501, or e-mail her at Roberta.Lear@lacdc.org.

TENANT TALK is a publication of the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles, which is dedicated to building better lives and better neighborhoods. For questions regarding this newsletter, please contact TENANT TALK editor, Dayana Zavala, at the Housing Authority of the County of Los Angeles, Assisted Housing Division P.O. Box 1510, Alhambra, CA 91802 or at Dayana.Zavala@hacola.org.