



The BULLETIN

Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle • MARCH 2004 • For landlords and service providers

1 Read all about the proposed 2005 federal budget for the Section 8 Program.

2 Learn about some simple steps for making your Section 8 business more successful.

3 Our abatement procedures are changing! See page 3 of this issue for details.

How will the new budget proposal affect the Section 8 Program?



Dear housing provider,

President Bush's proposed fiscal year 2005 budget contains some real challenges for the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

First, it seeks to decrease funding by about \$1 billion. Experts estimate that would result in the loss of about 250,000 vouchers nationally (which could mean several thousand fewer vouchers in King County).

Second, it seeks to change the mechanism for funding, which may result in SHA being able to serve fewer families as the years go by.

Currently, the Housing Choice Voucher Program is "unit based." Housing authorities compete for allocations of new voucher units, which can support a specific number of low-income households.

In the current program, if rents in a community go up, the housing authority is able to raise its payment standards and secure enough funding from HUD to sustain the same

number of families in their private market housing. Under the administration's budget proposal, today's Housing Choice Voucher Program would be replaced with a Flexible Voucher Program. Instead of allocating a specific number of units (vouchers) to a housing authority, HUD would allocate a specific amount of money as a block grant.

There would be no necessary connection between increased housing costs in a community and increased program funding, as the current program provides.

A housing authority operating a Flexible Voucher Program would have more flexibility to choose participants and set rent policy than housing authorities have in the current program, but faced with rising rents and fixed funding, the choices could be challenging.

A housing authority could 1) select higher income families to receive vouchers, leaving very low-income households on the waiting list unassisted; 2) decrease the number of assisted families, which could increase the number of homeless families in the community; or 3) restrain increases in the payment standard below increases in market rents, which could result in concentrating voucher holders in poor quality housing in low income

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neighborhoods.

The Housing Choice Voucher Program has been very successful in assisting a large number of families fairly efficiently in private market housing. But there's no getting around the fact that housing costs across the nation have increased faster than family income, especially at the low end of the work force. There's no way to meet the same need with fewer dollars.

We will keep you informed on this issue as it works its way through the federal budget process, and we encourage you to watch for news about it.

KATHY ROSETH
PORCHLIGHT DIRECTOR

Inspectors corner

Being a good landlord is smart business!

As you know, Section 8 landlords must at least maintain and repair Section 8 subsidized units in compliance with all relevant codes, statutes, ordinances and regulations.

But many landlords have come to realize that their Section 8 business can be even more successful if they take a few simple steps to manage more effectively. For example, understanding the maintenance needs of your Section 8 properties and providing quick and effective responses to your tenants is not only good customer service, it is also an effective way to protect your assets.

Here are a few other recommendations for building successful business relationships with your tenants and the Seattle Housing Authority:

- Maintain a good relationship with your tenants. Tenants can act as your “eyes” at properties and in surrounding neighborhoods. They can help you protect your assets and notify you in case of trouble.
- Communicate notifications and agreements in writing with your tenants. Hard copies of records prevent misunderstandings and help both parties follow through with agreements.
- Respond quickly to tenant requests. Your immediate action may end up saving you money by solving a problem before it gets worse.
- Establish an annual maintenance plan. Having a maintenance plan will help you repair things in a timely manner and manage your budget.
- Keep common areas clean.
- Visit your properties regularly. Think about introducing a lease provision that allows you to walk through your units once or twice a year (with proper advance notice to tenants) to assess maintenance or tenant use issues.

Looking for more ways to improve your business? There's plenty of information available about how best to fulfill your responsibilities and protect your assets in the Section 8 Program. For example, the Seattle Office of Housing (206-684-0721) publishes the “Renter's Guide to Seattle,” which includes important information for both tenants and landlords. You can download the document on the Web at www.seattle.gov/housing.

The City of Seattle also provides extensive information on landlord-tenant issues at www.seattle.gov/dpd/Publications/Landlord_Tenant/LandlordTenant.asp.

We look forward to working with you!

Sincerely,
Seattle Housing Authority Inspection Team

Did you know?

New online resources for landlords

Have you visited the Seattle Housing Authority's Web site lately? If not, check it out at www.seattlehousing.org. (Click on the “Section 8 landlords” link.)

We've recently updated the design, improved navigation and added new information and resources for landlords participating in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. For example, we've updated and expanded information about leasing, rents and program benefits. We've even added easy-to-understand articles addressing common questions, such as “How much can I charge for rent?”

In addition, we've created some new features to make it easier to work with us. One good example is the new online submission form for Section 8 listings. Tired of having to call our office with a listing, or mailing and faxing forms in to us? Now you can fill out a simple form right on your computer screen that automatically submits your listing and sends you a confirmation message.

All of these improvements are part of our ongoing efforts

to serve you better, and more efficiently, by using technology. We hope you'll visit the site soon. If you see anything that could use improvement, please contact us at porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org. We look forward to hearing from you!

Monthly landlord workshops

THIRD TUESDAY OF EVERY MONTH, 11 A.M. TO NOON, AT THE PORCHLIGHT HOUSING CENTER.

Join Seattle Housing Authority staff members for a free and informative workshop about how to participate in the Housing Choice Voucher Program. Topics covered will include: how to complete the Request for Tenancy Approval form; how utility allowances are calculated; how we decide if rents are reasonable; how we decide if rents are affordable; how long it takes to get an inspection; and general information about leases and contracts. The workshops will be held on the third Tuesday of each month. Call 206-239-1674 to reserve a place in March.



News you can use

Abatement policy is changing

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program was created to give low-income families and individuals access to decent, safe and sanitary housing in the private market. HUD regulations carefully spell out minimum standards for the physical condition of units subsidized by the program, called Housing Quality Standards (HQS). The regulations also require that units get HQS inspections when they first come on the program, and annually thereafter, for as long as assisted families live in them. If a unit is not in compliance with HQS standards then SHA is obligated to stop payments to the unit's owner. This is called "abatement."

In order to better serve all program participants, we are changing the way we manage the abatement process. Read on for more details, and let us know if you have questions.

WHAT IS THE NEW ABATEMENT POLICY?

Beginning no later than May 1, the abatement process will work like this: if a unit fails an annual inspection, the landlord will be asked to fix any problems so SHA can re-inspect the unit within 30 days. The owner will be sent a pre-abatement letter that describes the items that failed, the date subsidy will stop if the items are not fixed, and the date that SHA will return for a re-inspection.

If the unit passes the re-inspection, the owner will continue to receive subsidy payments without interruption. If it fails, SHA will terminate subsidy to the owner as of the date given in the pre-abatement letter. If the landlord has several units on the program, we will abate payments by reducing the total monthly amount paid to the landlord; if the landlord only has one unit, he or she will have to pay back any subsidy received since the unit failed the first inspection.

HOW IS THE POLICY CHANGING?

The new policy is different in several major ways. For instance, until now the Section 8 Program has been very flexible with re-inspections, sometimes waiting more than 30 days to re-inspect a unit. By May 1, we will begin re-inspecting all failed units within 30 days or less. In addition, we will halt subsidy immediately if a unit fails a re-inspection. (Previously, we would not halt subsidy until a unit had failed its second re-inspection.) As a result, landlords of units that fail inspections will be receiving pre-abatement letters and pre-termination letters sooner than they have in the past. For example, pre-abatement letters will be mailed after the first failed inspection, not the re-inspection.

These changes will bring the program into strict compliance with federal regulations, which we must do to ensure that it continues to be available for low income individuals and families in our community.

These changes will help ensure that the program continues to be available for low-income individuals and families in our community.

WHAT WILL HAPPEN IF A UNIT IS ABATED?

If a unit is abated, SHA will notify the owner and tenant that it is terminating the Housing Assistance Payment contract with the owner. This also terminates the lease, since the lease terminates automatically if the HAP contract terminates for any reason. (See the Tenancy Addendum attached to all voucher holders' leases for more information.) Termination will be timed so the tenant has 30 days notice to move, as required by law.

Please note that the tenant may stay in the unit for up to 60 days after the owner stops receiving subsidy on the tenant's behalf – 30 days from the time of the failed annual inspection to the failed re-inspection, and then another 30 days after the failed re-inspection (since the tenant is allowed 30 days after contract termination to move). The tenant is not responsible for SHA's portion of the rent being abated during this time.

WHAT IF THE TENANT DOESN'T WANT TO MOVE?

If the tenant wants to stay in the unit even though it doesn't meet HQS, he or she can work with the landlord to get the fail items corrected and request that SHA conduct a final re-inspection of the unit within the abatement period (the period between the date the subsidy ceases and the date the tenant moves out). If the unit passes this final inspection, subsidy to the owner will begin again, pro-rated to the date the unit finally passed inspection. No back payments are made for the period during which the unit did not meet HQS. If the unit fails this final inspection, or the tenant wants to move and doesn't request an inspection, SHA will issue the tenant a voucher to move.

WHAT IF I CAN'T MAKE REPAIRS ON TIME?

If making a repair in a certain time period would cause you undue hardship, please call us at 206-239-1728 to discuss the problem. SHA may allow for extensions due to shipping delays, difficulty finding a qualified contractor, and other such problems. In some cases, however, we will require documentation showing why more time is needed.

GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Section 8-related issue or concern:
 1) Call 206-239-1500.
 2) Select option 1 from the main menu.
 3) Select option 0 from the Section 8 menu.

OCCUPANCY MANAGER

Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Special/agency-based: 206-239-1636
 Mod. rehab./project-based: 206-239-1649
 All other programs: 206-239-1619

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals: 206-239-1674
 206-239-1635
 Report ownership changes: 206-239-1655
 Fax: 206-239-1760

ISSUANCE TEAM

206-239-1592

OWNER LIAISON

Sven Koehler 206-239-1672

To list a unit with Section 8: 206-239-1663

Initial/annual inspections: 206-239-1645
 Re-inspections: 206-239-1576

INSPECTION SUPERVISOR

Deborah McCaslin 206-239-1621

INSPECTORS

Bruce Brines 206-239-1689
 Bill Francis 206-239-1631
 Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632
 Nancy Jones 206-239-1616
 Sue Nigg 206-239-1639
 Nancy Shutes 206-239-1646
 Jeff Small 206-239-1669
 Lora Wait-Hoy 206-239-1650
 Mike Yost 206-239-1654

PorchLight telephone: 206-239-1500 | PorchLight fax: 206-239-1770 | PorchLight e-mail: porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org

Did you know...
 ...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service for your deteriorated paint problems. We have a high level of expertise from years of experience and respond quickly to service requests. We can provide both EPA certified lead-based paint risk assessors and EPA certified lead-safe workers, including painters and carpenters. Call us today at 206-932-4685 or 206-932-4243. ...that you can find support for owners on our Web site? Visit us at www.seattlehousing.org today and click on "Section 8 landlords" for helpful resources and information. ...that the City of Seattle provides free information about property owner rights and city ordinances? Call 206-684-7979 for more information.



Community services of the Seattle Housing Authority
 907 N.W. Ballard Way, Suite 200
 Seattle, WA 98107-4637

What is PorchLight?
 The PorchLight Housing Center is a division of the Seattle Housing Authority, the city's largest provider of low-income and affordable housing. PorchLight manages the Section 8 Program and applications for public housing.

A focus on service
 Located in Seattle's Ballard neighborhood, PorchLight is a place where people seeking housing assistance can learn about and apply for opportunities at a convenient one-stop location. We provide the highest quality customer service to clients, participating owners and all of our partners in Seattle's affordable housing continuum.

Want to learn more?
 Call 206-239-1500 or visit us at www.seattlehousing.org. (click on "Housing," then "PorchLight").

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