



The BULLETIN

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

1 PorchLight Director Kathy Roseth explains the recent changes in Section 8 procedures.

2 What you need to know about the new moving process for Section 8 participants.

3 Making changes to your lease agreements? Review these four steps for easy planning.

New procedures in the Section 8 program



Dear housing provider,

In the last few months the Seattle Housing Authority's Section 8 department has announced some changes in the way we administer the Housing Choice Voucher program, which have surprised some of our longtime participating landlords.

We continue to require that owners give us 60 days notice of proposed rent increases, however, we no longer send out an automatic notice inviting them to tell us about desired rent increases.

We instruct families to plan at least two months in advance if they wish to use their voucher to move to another unit. We require families to be up to date on rent to their current landlord and all utility bills before we will issue them a voucher to move. And we will no longer subsidize the same family in two units for the same interval of time, when tenants move mid-month.

Why all these changes? There are three related reasons. We need to 1) comply with regulations, 2) help foster the self-sufficiency of tenants by holding them accountable for their obligations and 3) conserve subsidy expenditures.

We ask families to plan two months before a move so that we have enough time to recertify their eligibility, including gathering new documentation of income, before we issue them a new voucher. That generally takes us a month, leaving a month for the family to identify a new unit and for us to schedule and conduct an inspection. The timeline should not affect landlords leasing units very much, provided you deal only with families who have their vouchers in hand.

Our decision to not provide subsidy for a family in two units for the same period of time is driven by the need to save money. As many owners know, the Housing Choice Voucher Program is under fire in the federal budget, and old assurances that vouchers would be fully funded are gone. We hope to avoid lowering rents, as other housing authorities have done, but we need to conserve funds as much as possible. We formerly subsidized

To learn more about the new Section 8 procedures, attend one of our monthly landlord workshops. See page 3 for details.

rent in the old and new units when a family moved mid-month, resulting in double subsidy payments. These payments have cost us about \$20,000 per month, enough to subsidize another 25 families. Now we ask families to plan their moves to coincide with the termination of our contracts with the former landlord, or pay the partial month's rent in the new unit themselves.

These and other changes are described in this issue of the Bulletin. If you have questions or feedback for us, please contact Ana Maria King, PorchLight Communications Specialist at 206-239-1668 or aking@seattlehousing.org.

KATHY ROSETH
PORCHLIGHT DIRECTOR

Moving in & out

What every landlord needs to know about new moving procedures

We recently sent a notice to landlords outlining the changes in the moving procedure for current Section 8 participants. We hope the new system will reduce misunderstandings, frustrations and unanticipated delays, making the process smoother for everyone involved. We know that as landlords you want to understand exactly how these changes affect you. Below we've outlined the most important things we think you'll want to know.

As a landlord, you may wonder...

Q: Why does the new process take so long?

Although it seems that a 60-day time frame would make the process more cumbersome, it is actually designed to make each step smoother for the tenants, the landlords, and the Section 8 staff. We hold a mandatory briefing and meet with participants individually, ensuring that they are eligible to move, that they understand their obligations, and that they have fulfilled all their tenant obligations *before* they start looking for a new place. We thoroughly evaluate all information on each application, including verifying sources of income and checking for outstanding debt. The longer time period also gives participants plenty of opportunity to ask questions, pay their outstanding bills, and plan their move effectively.

Q: Do I have to hold a unit for 60 days?

No. The complete moving process may take 60 days for *tenants*. They should not give a 20 day notice to vacate to their current landlords until *after* we have issued their vouchers. During the briefing, we instruct tenants to avoid making any verbal or written commitments to a new landlord until they have their voucher in hand.

Q: Why is this better for me?

There are several benefits for landlords who are accepting new Section 8 participants, as well as those with current Section 8 tenants who may choose to move.

When tenants move out:

- They are less likely to mistakenly give you notice when they are actually not eligible to move because they are reminded to wait until their voucher is approved and in-hand.
- You'll recover any past rent and utilities that tenants owe you. The expanded time frame allows us to verify that every participant pays past due utility bills or rent before we issue a new voucher.

In order to move, tenants must...

- ✓ Notify SHA 60 days before they want to move
- ✓ Attend a pre-issuance briefing when they submit their application to move
- ✓ Pay all outstanding utility bills and fulfill all their lease obligations
- ✓ Have their voucher in hand before entering an agreement with a new landlord

When Section 8 participants move in:

- You can avoid potential confusion and miscommunication about their Section 8 status, since their vouchers should already be in-hand before they meet with you. **You should always ask to see the voucher if you are considering a Section 8 participant as a new tenant.**
- The paperwork process should be smoother and easier, because tenants are fully briefed to understand the procedures and the paperwork involved.
- You can rest assured that they don't owe past rent and utilities to their previous landlord, which might affect their ability to pay the rent.

Q: When will the unit be inspected?

Your prospective tenant will give you a "Request for Tenancy" packet, which you need to complete and return to PorchLight. When we receive it, we will contact you to discuss the lease terms and rent amount. If all of the paperwork is complete and we both agree to the lease terms, you will receive a call in three to five business days to schedule an inspection.

Q: What happens if tenants stay beyond the date on the notice they have given me?

Once you have received the termination of contract and your last HAP payment from the housing authority, you should proceed as you would with non-Section 8 tenants. After the HAP contract's end date, tenants are personally responsible for any rent charges they may incur.

News you can use

Making changes to your lease

What happened to the annual rent negotiation letter? You may have noticed that SHA no longer sends you a notice before your contract anniversary date, reminding you to inform us of any changes to the lease terms. Now, if you want to increase rent or make other changes in the lease terms, simply submit to SHA a copy of the legal notice that informs your tenant of the changes. In a nutshell, here's how the new process works:

- 1. Landlord gives the tenant a legal notice of a change in lease terms.** Seattle and state law require that landlords inform tenants in advance of rent increases or other changes to the lease terms, such as who is responsible for paying utilities.
- 2. Landlord sends copy of notification to SHA at least 60 days before the effective date of the change,** in accordance with the HAP contract (section 15, paragraph d.)
- 3. Tenant and landlord either agree to renew the lease or not to renew the lease.** In many cases, any increase in rent amount will fall solely onto the tenant. The tenant and landlord may choose to negotiate, but the landlord must send us the updated lease terms. If the tenant decides not to renew, the tenant must initiate the process to get a new voucher to move.



- 4. SHA receives the copy of the new lease terms and processes the changes.** SHA will issue a contract amendment to the landlord and tenant at least 30 days before the effective date, stating the new rent portions. As before, if SHA has questions about the reasonableness of the increase or the validity of the notice, we will review it and contact the landlord and the tenant. This may delay the effective date.

Please be assured that this policy does not mean that SHA restricts landlords from asking tenants for rent increases. It just means that landlords must initiate the change in lease terms by *informing the tenant directly themselves*, following the same laws that apply to non-subsidized lease agreements.

Join us!

Mid-month moves

No more overlapping subsidies

EFFECTIVE SEPTEMBER 1, 2004:

If SHA has paid a full month's subsidy on behalf of a Section 8 participant who has given notice to vacate, we cannot also pay a subsidy to the new landlord for any days within that same month, even if the new unit has passed inspection. In other words, two landlords cannot receive a subsidy for the same tenant for the same interval of time.

What can you do? Clearly communicate with the tenant about move-in dates and make sure that all parties involved understand who pays the rent in a mid-month move situation. If the tenant is unsure, ask to see their Termination of Contract letter, which will show the date the last subsidy was paid.

Landlord workshops

Every third Tuesday at 11 a.m.


Still have questions about the changes in Section 8 procedures? Join us at our monthly landlord workshops.

Upcoming sessions:

OCTOBER 19
NOVEMBER 16
11 a.m. to noon

Workshops are held at PorchLight Housing Center
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200 in Seattle
Please R.S.V.P to 206-239-1672

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 **PorchLight**
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").

Did you know...

...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint abatement 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.

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

GENERAL QUESTIONS	206-239-1620	Barbara Strayer	OCCUPANCY MANAGER	206-239-1620	Sven Koehler	OWNER LIAISON	206-239-1672	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	
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.	206-239-1636	To list a unit with Section 8:	206-239-1663	Initial/annual inspections:	206-239-1645	Re-inspections:	206-239-1576	206-239-1689	Bruce Brines	206-239-1631	Bill Francis	206-239-1632	Paul Gimmi	206-239-1616	Nancy Jones
Status of tenancy approvals:	Report ownership changes:	Fax:	INSURANCE TEAM	206-239-1623	206-239-1760	INSPECTORS	206-239-1689	206-239-1631	206-239-1632	206-239-1616	206-239-1639	206-239-1646	206-239-1669	206-239-1650	206-239-1654	206-239-1654	206-239-1654	206-239-1654
NEW MOVE-IN TEAM	206-239-1674	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR	206-239-1621	Deborah McCaslin	206-239-1621	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR	206-239-1621	Deborah McCaslin	206-239-1621	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR	206-239-1621	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR	206-239-1621	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR	206-239-1621	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR	206-239-1621	INSPECTION SUPERVISOR

PorchLight has reorganized and many of our telephone numbers have changed. Please refer to the list below to contact Section 8 staff members.

