



The BULLETIN

Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle • MARCH 2005 • For landlords and service providers

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Voucher program cuts require shared pain



Dear housing provider,

A few weeks ago HUD notified the Seattle Housing Authority that our Housing Choice Voucher program would receive approximately \$3 million less than it received in 2004, which is almost \$6.8 million shy of the funding necessary to support all 7,861 of our vouchers at current cost levels. Like most housing authorities across the country, SHA is scrambling to reduce costs as much as possible and still keep commitments to current voucher holders and landlords. But in order to ensure that no participant loses a voucher because of funding cuts, many participants will have to pay more of their income for rent and utilities or move to smaller units, and many landlords may have to accept less rent.

SHA has already taken steps to control program costs. Our Housing Choice Voucher waiting list has been closed since July 2003, and we have not issued new vouchers to applicants on the waiting list for over

a year. Last year we eliminated staff positions in the Section 8 department to reduce administrative expenses and implemented a minimum tenant contribution of \$50 for rent and utilities. Earlier this year the SHA board voted to prevent voucher holders from moving with their SHA vouchers to very high cost areas like San Francisco or Boston. But we still have a long way to go.

Here are some of the changes and proposals which would affect owners:

- *Moratorium on all requests for rent increases.* At this time, we are not able to approve any requests for rent increases with an effective date of March 1 or later.

- *"Rent reasonableness" review of all units on the program.* We must be sure that SHA is not subsidizing units at a higher level than they could command on the open market. Owners may be asked to provide us with rent rolls showing the rent they are getting in their unsubsidized units and recent newspaper ads for comparable rentals in the same neighborhood.

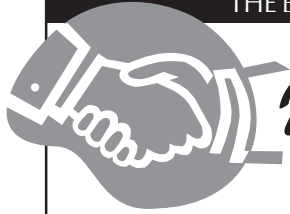
- *Reductions in payment standards.* SHA is reconsidering its subsidy maximums (payment standards) for all its units, but particularly for the large supply of one and two-bedroom units in the

rental market. If we reduce the payment standards, some tenants may have no choice but to move to less expensive units, even if the rent for their current unit is justified based on the local market.

- *Reduction in occupancy standards.* SHA may implement minimum occupancy standards (for example, we may decide that only households of six or more people may qualify for a four bedroom unit), which may require some families to move to smaller units.

Over the next few months, SHA will be analyzing these and other proposals to reduce costs. We know that we have to balance our budget and position ourselves for continued expected cuts in the voucher program. We want to do this work thoughtfully because we know how important the program is to families who depend on it, and how valuable our partnership is with participating owners. We will make every effort to communicate clearly and give adequate notice of changes to the families and landlords affected by them. Your comments and questions, as we go through this painful process, are very welcome.

KATHY ROSETH
DIRECTOR OF RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS



Working together

Paper trails: Putting everything in writing eases non-compliance woes

While it may seem cumbersome, documenting interactions with tenants in writing and sending copies to SHA may make your life easier in the long run. If you encounter future conflicts with your tenant, or one issue in particular turns into a chronic problem, the paper trail will help both you and SHA deal with concerns more quickly and effectively.

Putting your concerns in writing is often the best way to clear up a misunderstanding before it becomes serious. For example, if tenants miss a rent payment or cause damages that are not a result of normal wear and tear, notifying them in writing may get a better response than just a verbal notice. Tenants may not realize that some of these issues are actually lease violations, so a written notice can make it clear exactly what they need to do to comply with their lease.

If you are trying to settle a dispute, it is simple to refer to a written notification, while verbal conversations cannot always be recalled. In fact, written notices are often *required* if you need to pursue legal action.

Many property management companies have pre-prepared forms for standard notices to tenants about lease violations. However, for informal notices, hand-written letters are fine, too. Just make a copy before you send it to the tenant and indicate in the letter that one copy is going to SHA.

Often, merely knowing that SHA is receiving copies will encourage tenants to comply with your lease. One of their main "participant obligations" for participating in the voucher program is to comply with their leases, and they know that they could lose their voucher if SHA determines that they are guilty of material breaches of their lease agreements.

Three myths about handling lease infractions in the Voucher Program.

MYTH 1: "I thought that SHA notifies tenants when they don't comply with their lease."

No. Renting to someone with a voucher does not change the rights and responsibilities you have as a landlord, including resolving lease compliance issues. Voucher holders must comply with the terms of your lease, just as any other tenants. If they have trouble

complying with the lease, please take the same action you would with non-voucher tenants, beginning with written notification of the issue. If voucher holders still don't not comply with the lease after you have property notified them, SHA can then get involved.

MYTH 2: "I thought that Section 8 tenants cannot be evicted."

Not true. The regulations of the Voucher program require voucher holders to comply with their lease in order to receive subsidy. Not only can they be evicted like any other tenant, tenants who don't comply with a lease place their ability to receive future subsidies in jeopardy.

MYTH 3: "It's harder to deal with compliance issues with Section 8 tenants than non-voucher holders."

Actually, if you document everything in writing, we think it's easier. Because tenants can actually lose their voucher, there is an extra incentive for subsidized tenants to maintain a good tenancy.

Unfortunately, landlords sometimes don't inform us of continual problems until the tenancy is in jeopardy. The best policy is to send us a copy of your correspondence at the same time you send it to your tenant. Without your cooperation, we may have no way to know if a problem is habitual or indicates that a tenant is unable to handle the responsibilities of the voucher program.

When a landlord has documented an issue of noncompliance in writing, there is a range of actions SHA can take to help. We often begin with a written reminder to the tenant of their obligations under the program regulations to comply with their lease. We may ask the tenant to come in for a counseling session. In cases where the compliance issue is serious or represents a repeated pattern, SHA may also conduct fraud investigations and recommend the subsidy be terminated. The tenant will have an opportunity to defend his or her actions in a hearing, but if the termination is upheld by the independent hearing officer, the household will lose its voucher.





Inspectors corner

Inspection report: Enemy or ally?

Each year, we conduct an inspection of your rental unit. The majority of the time, nothing turns up that is defined as a health or safety hazard according to the Housing Quality Standards (HQS), but if it does, we will send you a report. While the deficiencies are often minor and easily fixed, no one likes getting bad news. By thinking of the inspection report as your ally rather than your enemy, you can turn that bad news into good (or at least useful) news.

Three reasons that the inspection report is your ally:

1. It's free.

While it would cost you time to do it yourself or money to hire someone else, at this time there is no charge for the inspection. In general, the HQS covers health and safety items. HQS does not cover cosmetics damage or wear and tear. Be aware that those would not normally be noted on our inspection report unless the deterioration has reached a point where it poses a hazard (such as loose or torn carpets, excessive mold, or damaged lead-based paint.)

2. You can find out about problems early before they become more expensive to fix.

Many landlords know the value of staying on top of ongoing maintenance, so they stipulate in their leases that they may perform their own periodic inspections of their rental units (always with advance notice, of course.) Others rely only on our yearly inspection to monitor the condition of the unit. Either way, an inspection report issued by a third party can be a great tool in your property management toolbox.

3. You can use it as a tool to enforce your lease for property damage caused by tenants.

Although the inspection letter is addressed to the housing provider (our term for "landlord"), it doesn't mean we believe that the landlord is solely responsible for causing all deficiencies or neglecting repairs. We are simply reporting on what needs to be done in order for us to continue to subsidize the unit. We send a copy of the deficiency letter to tenant as well, so both parties are aware of the deficiencies and can communicate about making sure the repairs get done.

Some items, like a leaky roof, would obviously be the responsibility of the owner to fix. However, some HQS deficiencies may be due to accidents or neglect caused by the tenant, such as a broken window or missing smoke detector batteries. If the tenant fails to cooperate in addressing any damage they caused, the owner can serve the tenant with a written notice citing a lease violation, and forward a copy to SHA. ●

Paint repairs and winter weather

If you have received an inspection notice about deteriorated paint on the exterior of your unit that could contain lead, you will have until May 31 to have it repaired, instead of the usual 30 days. If this applies to you, you'll receive an "Extension waiver to repair deteriorated paint" explaining the details.

However, within the 30-day time period, you still must:

- Repair any noted deteriorating interior paint
- Clear paint chips debris off the ground and properly dispose of them
- Complete any other repairs noted on the inspection report

Landlord workshops: NEW TIME!

New and seasoned landlords alike are invited to bring questions and issues to monthly workshops at a more convenient evening time:

5:30 pm, every third Tuesday

at PorchLight, 907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200

Upcoming dates: March 15, April 19, May 17

The new time falls outside of PorchLight's normal business hours of 9:30 am-4:30 pm, but we will open the door for workshop participants at 5:20 pm.

Questions? Call Sven Koehler at 206-239-1672



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

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

Tenant based: 206-239-1636
 Tenant based: 206-239-1619
 Mod. rehab./project-based: 206-239-1649

NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals: 206-239-1623
 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



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

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 Standard
 US Postage Paid
 Seattle, WA
 Permit 1294

THE BULLETIN: Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle

MARCH 2005

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 206-716-1310, extension 13.



...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.