



# The BULLETIN

Quarterly news about Section 8 in Seattle

MARCH 2008

For landlords and service providers

**1** It's that time again: We're about to conduct another Section 8 waiting-list lottery

**2** SHA proposes revising its criminal history screening of Section 8 tenants

**3** Words & phrases to steer clear of in advertising your vacancies

**4** Renters insurance: good for your tenants, good for you

## Section 8 update

### New Section 8 waiting-list lottery scheduled



Dear housing provider,

THIS MONTH, as we did in 2006, Seattle Housing Authority (SHA) will create a new waiting list for its Housing Choice Voucher program (Section 8) by means of a mail-only lottery. If you know people who might be interested in the program, please pass this information along.

The 2006 lottery produced a waiting list of 4,000 households chosen at random by a computer program. All households on that list have now been contacted, and so a new list is needed.

Printed lottery sign-up forms will be available beginning Tuesday, March 25 at SHA offices and facilities across the city. On the same day, the lottery sign-up form will also be available for downloading and printing from the SHA website, [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org).

Sign-up forms will also be available beginning Tuesday, March 25 at every Seattle Public Library branch, Seattle Neighborhood Service Center, Seattle Community Center, and DSHS Community Service Center located in Seattle city limits, and at other locations to be determined. SHA will post information on its website about other places across Seattle that will stock lottery sign-up forms.

Any person 18 years old or older (or an emancipated minor) may sign up for the lottery no matter where he or she lives. Only one person per household may sign up.

After the mail-in deadline, SHA will send a postcard acknowledging receipt to everybody who

sent in a sign-up form. Once all forms have been processed, at least 4,000 names will be selected at random. These will form the new Section 8 waiting list.

SHA will send a letter by May 9 telling lottery winners that they won a position on the lottery, what that position is (1/4,000, 150/4,000, etc.), and how, when, and where to actually apply for housing.

For a household to be entered into the waiting list lottery, its sign-up form must be mailed to the post office box designated on the form and must be postmarked no later than Tuesday, April 8.

Updated information on the lottery will be provided on SHA's recorded Waiting List Lottery Hot Line, **206-239-1674**.

#### CRIMINAL HISTORY SCREENING CHANGES PROPOSED

ON P. 2 OF THIS *BULLETIN* is an article outlining proposed changes to SHA's screening criteria for program applicants' criminal history. At present, people who have been convicted of various crimes must wait for various intervals before we can provide them housing-assistance vouchers. For the reasons set out in the article, we propose instead a uniform waiting period of 12 months, the standard in use by King County Housing Authority.

I am coming to our next regular Landlord Workshop on Tuesday, March 18 to answer questions about this proposed change and to address other matters you may wish to discuss. The meeting will be here at PorchLight from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m. I look forward to meeting and talking with you then.

*Lisa K. Cipollone-Wolters*

LISA CIPOLLONE-WOLTERS  
DIRECTOR OF HOUSING ADVOCACY  
AND RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS  
206-239-1523

## Section 8 policies

### Changes to applicants' criminal history screening proposed

Seattle Housing Authority is considering new screening criteria with respect to criminal history information for applicants to the Housing Choice Voucher program (Section 8). The proposal calls for the modification of the criminal background criteria currently in use to be generally less stringent with respect to an applicant's history of convictions.

Currently SHA requires a variable waiting period after an applicant has been penalized or jailed for an offense. This waiting period has ranged from 20 years for homicide to two years for burglary or criminal assault. We're proposing to change this waiting period to a uniform 12 months, the standard in use by King County Housing Authority.

These regulations apply only to eligibility for a voucher. And all people we assist must abide by the Section 8 Participant Obligations (lease compliance, etc.) or face removal from the program.

Moreover, the proposed changes are not intended to affect participating landlords' screening practices or requirements. Landlords in our Section 8 program, who are expected to conduct their own independent reference checks, may deny housing to any applicant they determine does not meet their tenant suitability standards.

Some housing providers work to provide stable housing for people with criminal records, and making these changes will make it easier for SHA to provide financial assistance to these people. The proposed changes will increase efficiency and understanding of the rules and regulations by instituting a uniform standard, helping to reduce regulatory barriers to housing for people who are homeless. Currently, SHA and the King County Housing Authority have different criteria, which can cause confusion among people who have applied for assistance with both authorities.

The suggested new criteria will continue to conform to regulations stipulated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. HUD currently mandates denials of applicants for certain past criminal activity. SHA would continue to deny Housing Choice Vouchers in accord with these regulations, which include denial for methamphetamine production, for a consistent pattern of violent behavior and for other serious crimes. (For example, if a household has been evicted from federally assisted housing for a drug-related crime, that household is denied a voucher for

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three years after the eviction.) Seattle Housing has discretion to grant or deny applications based on numerous factors, and may demand proof that household members have completed drug rehabilitation.

The proposed changes were discussed with interested stakeholders at a meeting in January. The Board of Commissioners was briefed in mid-January and will receive additional information before the proposal is acted on in mid-April.

We will be discussing these changes along with screening and enforcement issues at our March Landlord Workshop; see box below. If you plan to attend, please contact **Mike Jung** at **206-239-1672**, or via e-mail to **mjung@seattlehousing.org**, so we'll have an idea of the number of people interested.

## Landlord

### *Tuesday workshops*

**Tuesday, March 18, 2008, from 5:30 until 7:00 pm**

### **Screening & lease enforcement**

Discussion of proposed changes in SHA's criminal background check evaluation criteria  
with Director of Rental Assistance Programs  
*Lisa Cipollone-Wolters*

Avoid problems by screening prospective tenants  
What to do if there are problems with your tenant

What are "Participant Obligations?"  
How does SHA enforce them?

What's the relationship between the lease  
and the HAP Contract?

*Workshops are held the third Tuesday  
of every month, February through November  
[No workshop in May 2008]  
from 5:30 until 7:00 p.m.*

*in the PorchLight Community Room  
907 NW Ballard Way, Suite 200, Seattle*

## Keeping clear of Fair Housing issues

### Staying clear of discriminatory language in advertising vacancies

#### What words and phrases can I use, and which must I avoid, in advertising my rentals?

Fair housing laws prohibit the making, printing and publishing of advertisements which state a preference, limitation or discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, handicap, familial status, or national origin. The prohibition applies to publishers as well as to those who place real estate advertisements. Here is a summary of HUD's policy guidance on advertising:

#### 1. RACE, COLOR, NATIONAL ORIGIN, ANCESTRY

Do not use words that describe the housing, the current or potential residents, or the neighbors or neighborhood in racial or ethnic terms. Ads with neutral phrases are OK.

2. RELIGION An ad may be discriminatory if it uses a legal name containing a religious reference ("Roselawn Catholic Home") or a religious symbol such as a cross. However, such an ad is OK if it includes a disclaimer (such as "This Home does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, handicap or familial status"). It is OK to use descriptions of properties or services that do not state a preference for particular residents. It is OK to use secularized terms, symbols or phrases relating to religious holidays (such as Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, and St. Valentines' Day images) and such phrases as "Merry Christmas," "Happy Easter," etc.

3. SEX / GENDER Ads for single-family dwellings or separate units in a multifamily dwelling should contain no explicit preference, limitation or discrimination based on gender.

4. DISABILITY / HANDICAP It is OK to run ads with descriptions of properties, services, facilities or neighborhoods and ads that describe required resident conduct. And it is OK to advertise descriptions of accessibility features.

5. FAMILIAL STATUS Ads should neither limit the number or ages of children nor state a preference for adults, couples or singles. It is OK to advertise descriptions of the properties, services and facilities or neighborhoods.

To learn more, go online to see HUD's guidance regarding advertisements at

[www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/sect804achtenberg.pdf](http://www.hud.gov/offices/fheo/disabilities/sect804achtenberg.pdf)

or contact your local Fair Housing agency.

In the box at right are examples of words and phrases that may not, and may, be used in advertising vacancies.

—Courtesy King County Office of Civil Rights

#### According to the King County Office of Civil Rights, it is NOT OK to use these words & phrases...

*adults only bachelor*

*Christian home couple*

*exclusive*

*Ideal for physically fit person*

*private community integrated*

*mature*

*membership approval*

*must be able to live independently*

*no children no children over 12*

*no Jews no Mexicans*

*no playground for children*

*no wheelchairs*

*not suitable for disabled*

*one person*

*perfect for retired perfect for seniors*

*religious landmark restricted*

*singles only white family home*

#### ...but it IS OK to use these:

*apartment community with chapel*

*cozy desirable neighborhood*

*disabled welcome families welcome*

*family room*

*55+ (for dedicated senior communities)*

*fourth-floor walk-up*

*great view jogging trails*

*Kosher meals available*

*master bedroom no bicycles allowed*

*non-smoking*

*private drive quiet streets*

*rare find section 8 welcome*

*sober walk to bus stop*

*walk-in closets wheelchair accessible*

*wheelchair ramp*

...and, if the roommate will share living space:

*female [or male] roommate wanted*

## Inspector's corner

### Peace of mind for your tenants—and for you

Your tenants face the same risks you do if disaster should strike your building. But while your building is likely covered by insurance, your tenants' possessions are not—not unless they've purchased renters insurance. You'd do your tenants a favor, and possibly yourself, by recommending that they look into renters insurance. Premiums for renters insurance are typically very low.

Most renters insurance policies cover losses to personal property from 16 types of perils, including fire or lightning, windstorm or hail, explosion, riot or civil commotion, damage caused by aircraft or vehicles, smoke, vandalism or malicious mischief, theft, and damage caused by malfunctioning household appliances or sprinkler systems.

Note that floods and earthquakes aren't on the list. If your building is in an area prone to either, your tenants will need to buy a separate policy or a rider to cover either.

The chances are good that the company that insures your building will offer renters insurance; if not, your broker will surely be able to recommend companies that do. You might consider providing informative pamphlets and sign-up forms as part of your lease packet. Doing so would provide you the chance to explain that renters, not owners, are responsible for insuring their possessions. Should something happen to a tenant's unit that causes damage, he or she will be less likely to look to you to redress the damages

—Paul Gimmi, Inspector



Phone: 206-239-1500 | Fax: 206-239-1770  
E-mail: porchlight.info@seattlehousing.org | website: [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org)

#### GENERAL QUESTIONS

To speak with a customer service agent about any Section 8–related issue or concern, call 206-239-1728 and press '0'

#### TO LIST AVAILABLE UNITS

Call 206-239-1663 or go to [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org) and click on "Section 8 Landlords" under the "Housing" menu

#### TO CHANGE OWNER INFORMATION

**NOTE:** Changes must be submitted in writing  
Fax 206-239-1770, attention Mike Jung  
Questions? call Mike at 206-239-1672

#### SECTION 8 MANAGER

Barbara Strayer 206-239-1620

#### OWNER LIAISON

Mike Jung 206-239-1672

#### OCCUPANCY SUPERVISORS

Tenant-based—  
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1619  
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1636  
Mod. Rehab. & Project-based 206-239-1649

#### NEW MOVE-IN TEAM

Status of tenancy approvals—  
contracts and leases  
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676  
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635  
New move-ins fax number 206-239-1760  
New move-in team supervisor 206-239-1621

#### INSPECTIONS

Annual inspections & reinspections 206-239-1645  
To reschedule inspections 206-239-1576  
New move-in inspections—  
"Aa" through "Lara" 206-239-1676  
"Larb" through "Zz" 206-239-1635  
Judy Huertas, HQS supervisor 206-239-1621

#### HQS INSPECTORS

Bill Francis 206-721-1457, ext. 10  
Paul Gimmi 206-239-1632  
Sue Nigg 206-239-1639  
Jonathan Shibuya 206-239-1616  
Jason Shirley 206-239-1646  
Nancy Shutes 206-770-6880  
Laura Wait-Hoy 206-721-1457, ext. 11

## 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 it. We are committed to high-quality customer service to clients, participating landlords and our partners in Seattle's affordable housing continuum.

### *Want to learn more?*

Call **206-239-1672** or visit us at [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org) (click on "Housing," then "PorchLight"), or come to our PorchLight landlord workshops every third Tuesday of the month, February through November, at 5:30 pm. (See p. 2.)

## Did you know...

...that SHA's Impact Property Services provides lead-based paint abatement services? Impact Property Services offers affordable, efficient service to help solve your deteriorated paint problems. We have specific expertise and years of experience, and we 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 Impact Property Services today at **206-716-1310**, extension 13.

...that you can find support for owners on our website? Visit us at [www.seattlehousing.org](http://www.seattlehousing.org) today and click on "Section 8 landlords" for helpful information and resources.

...that the City of Seattle provides free information about property owners' rights and city ordinances? Call **206-684-7979** for more information.