

# **Applying For Admission/ Waiting List Procedures**

## **How to Apply**

The policy of the HA is to ensure that applicants are treated in a fair and consistent manner. Families wishing to apply for any of the HA's programs are to complete a pre-application.

The application process will be undertaken in two phases: a preliminary application (referred to as a pre-application) will be taken first. When the family comes to the top of the waiting list and the PHA is ready to schedule an enrollment interview for final eligibility determination, the PHA will take a formal application (referred to as a full application) and verify all of the information provided or claimed by the applicant.

### **Acceptance of Pre-applications:**

Interested persons may apply at the Department of Community Services at any time. An applicant must be at least 18 years of age or older to apply or otherwise be a legal adult recognized by the courts. In this case legal documentation of such must be submitted with the application. The Department's policy is to never close the waiting list; therefore, the waiting list is always open.

Any family asking to be placed on the waiting list for Section 8 rental assistance will be given a pre-application to be completed. When the application is returned to the HA, the date posted as received establishes the family's date of application for placement on the waiting list.

Pre-applications are dated and stamped when they are received by the HA. Duplicate active pre-applications and/or full applications will not be honored except as noted in below.

Individuals who have a physical impairment that would prevent them from making application in person may mail their pre-application or may call the HA to make special arrangements to complete their pre-application.

Pre-applications do not require an interview, but the HA will provide an interview for full applications for eligibility when the family's name reaches the top of the waiting list.

## **Pre-Application Procedures**

The HA will use a basic pre-application form, based on the Personal Declaration Form recommended by the Inspector General's office. The information is to be completed directly by the client. The purpose of the pre-application is to place the applicant on the waiting list and to obtain sufficient data to provide necessary waiting list reports to HUD and to enable HA analysis of housing needs for purposes of policy development.

The pre-application will contain this basic type of information:

- Names and ages of all household members
- Sex and relationship of members
- Address(es) and telephone number(s)
- Amount and source of all income (including income from assets held such as interest on Certificates of Deposit or savings accounts)
- Information on handicaps and disabilities of family members
- Information related to potential preferences (though preferences will not be verified or assigned until completion of a full application)
- Marital Status
- Social Security Number

All pre-applicants are assigned a ranking status Rating 2.

The information on the form will not be verified until the client has been selected from the application pool for final processing. Final eligibility will be determined when the full application process is completed and the information verified.

Applicants are responsible for informing the HA, in writing, of changes in family circumstances (including place of residence and mailing address) and are responsible for responding to requests from the HA. No changes will be accepted by telephone or via third parties.

Failure to provide information, as requested, will result in the applicant being removed from the waiting list. When pre-applications are removed from the waiting list, the HA will maintain a log of applications removed. No additional notification will be sent to the applicant.

## **Notification of Pre-Application Status**

When the pre-application is received, the applicant will be informed of the date recorded on the application and the waiting list position number at that point in time. The information with respect to eligibility criteria (and current date being processed) will be placed in writing and mailed to the applicant to the last reported address.

## **Preliminary Briefings**

At least twice each year (more frequently if necessary), the HA will conduct preliminary briefings. The top 25-50 category Rating 2 applicants on the waiting list will be advised of the briefing and will be required to attend a briefing session prior to completion of a full application (as detailed below).

During the briefing, Section 8 Program rules and regulations, HA policies and procedures, and Waiting List processing will be reviewed. Applicants will be provided several opportunities to attend a preliminary briefing. Failure to attend a briefing prior to scheduling of an enrollment interview will result in removal of the applicant from the waiting list.

## **Enrollment Interview/Completion of a Full Application**

When the HA anticipates that a Voucher is available to be issued, category Rating 2 applicants on the waiting list will be scheduled for an enrollment interview, based first on ranking category, then date and time of pre-application. During the enrollment interview, the applicant will complete a full application. The family will be asked to complete the Personal Declaration Form prior to the enrollment interview. The HA will interview the applicant by asking questions and completing the full eligibility application form.

Based on the full eligibility application form, ranking preferences will be assigned.

It is the responsibility of the applicant to attend the scheduled enrollment interview. It is the applicant's responsibility to reschedule the interview if s/he misses the appointment. If the applicant does not reschedule and/or misses the scheduled meetings, the HA has the right to reject the application. Applicants will be notified in writing that the appointment was missed and they will be advised that they have five days to contact the HA regarding the appointment or their name will be removed from the waiting list.

The head of household and spouse and any family members 18 years of age or older, (or family representative) are required to attend the interview and sign the housing application and related required forms. Exceptions are made for the severely handicapped.

All adult household members must sign the HUD Release of Information Form, Citizenship Declaration and other forms as required in order for the application to be considered complete.

Verifications will be conducted in accordance with Chapter 9 Verification Procedures.

If the HA determines at the interview that more information or verification is needed, the applicant will be given or sent a request for information letter, requesting that the applicant provide the requested information within 15 days of the date of the notice.

If there is no response after 15 days, a second request for information letter will be sent with a response requested within an additional 15 days from the date of the second notice.

If there is no response to the second request for information letter, the applicant will be removed from the waiting list. If the applicant later wishes to have consideration, the individual must reapply.

## **Establishing Ranking Preferences**

At the enrollment interview, ranking of applications occurs, based on the following criteria:

- Rating 1a = applicants who live and/or work in Charles County and who are eligible for targeted assistance when specialized allocations are available
- Rating 1b = applicants who live and/or work in Charles County but are not eligible for targeted assistance.
- Rating 2 = all pre-applicants prior to enrollment interview.
- Rating 3 = all other applicants.

In order to receive a rating of 1a or 1b, the applicant must be a bona fide Charles County resident, have a demonstrated history of Charles County residency if not residing in the county at the time of the enrollment interview, or be employed in Charles County.

Bona fide residency must be substantiated to the satisfaction of the HA. Examples of suitable documentation include verification that a family member, prior to the date of the enrollment interview letter, was:

- enrolled in a Charles County school
  - registered to vote
- or during the past 24 months has:
- paid taxes in Charles County
  - executed a previous lease in Charles County

Applicants receiving a rating of 1a or 1b may then be offered assistance following the enrollment interview based on eligibility criteria and in accordance with targeted assistance and program eligibility requirements.

Applicants receiving a rating of 3 will be returned to the appropriate ranking section of the waiting list. Once ranking is established, ratings may be changed only as follows:

- Applicants whose circumstances change after assignment of ranking preferences and wish to have their rating reviewed based on changed circumstances will be requested to

submit a new pre-application, which automatically will update their ranking to rating 2; however, a new processing date is then established based on submission of the new pre-application.

■ Should policies or regulations regarding ranking preferences be modified, applications assigned ratings of 3 will then be eligible for reconsideration of the full application. Applicants still bear the responsibility of notifying the HA of changes.

The HA will maintain both pre-applications and full applications for any applicants who received a rating of 3 at the enrollment interview, should an applicant wish to submit a second pre-application in accordance with the above.

Rating 3 applicants may be offered a second enrollment interview only when all category 1 and 2 applicants have been considered.

## **Special Selection of Applicants**

Should the HA be provided an allocation of Section 8 Vouchers targeted to assist a particular population, such as the disabled, only those applicants meeting the qualifications for the special allocation will be issued the corresponding vouchers. Accordingly, those persons on the waiting list who do not qualify for the special allocation may be bypassed in order to reach those who do qualify.

The HA currently administers the following special allocations program:

- Mainstream Voucher Program-Section 8 Vouchers for applicants with a disabled family member. Periodically, housing choice voucher funding is available to provide services to disabled families. The Mainstream voucher assistance enables elderly and non-elderly persons with disabilities, who often face difficulties locating suitable and accessible housing on the private market, to lease affordable housing of their choice. The eligible applicant must be the head or spouse (or the sole member) of the household with a disability.

### **Income Targeting**

As defined in the Quality Housing & Work Responsibility Act of 1998 (QHWRA), no less than 75% of new participants in a fiscal year may have incomes that exceed 30% of the area median income. Therefore, at least 75% of new enrollees must have incomes that fall at or below this amount. Traditionally, Charles County has met this requirement.

Issuance of new Vouchers however, will be monitored so as to ensure the above requirement continues to be met. In order to ensure compliance, the HA may periodically implement a temporary preference system for very low income applicants. As a result, those persons on the waiting list who do not meet the preference may be bypassed in order to reach those who do fall within the applicable income limit of making no more than 30% of the area median income. Once the Housing Authority has met the requirement for the year, other applicants will then be considered.

## **SAFAH Participation**

Charles County maintains a set-aside preference for Charles County residents who are eligible for assistance under the Section 8/SAFAH (Supplemental Assistance for Facilities that Assist the Homeless) Program. No more than 2% of the current allocation, at any given time, will be designated to assist those classified as homeless families under the SAFAH Program. The 2% is calculated based on non-targeted allocations. Currently, the HA administers an allocation of 604 general vouchers. As a result, 12 Vouchers will be available for use by participants qualifying under SAFAH.

If at any time there are insufficient eligible families for the program, Vouchers will be given to the next otherwise qualified person/family on the waiting list.

Preference for the SAFAH Program will be given to families meeting the following:

- Homeless families with children who are residents of a shelter or transitional housing program that offers services beyond one-night stays; and
- Who are working on goals established with professional case managers in the shelter and/or transitional housing program; and
- Who are willing to work with housing counselors/case managers over a period of time sufficient to accomplish the established goals within a program; and
- Can be certified as meeting this definition by an agency within Charles County; and
- Are on the Section 8 Waiting List. (Potential SAFAH participants who are not on the waiting list at the time of referral must complete a pre-application before an enrollment interview will be scheduled.)

## **Special Allocation**

The HA gives preference to families who are currently receiving subsidy for housing, and who are at risk of losing that housing assistance due to insufficient funding levels. The programs in jeopardy must be currently administered through one of the Charles County Department of Community Services federal rent subsidy programs and must contain funding levels that are insufficient to sustain the subsidy.

## **Final Determination & Notification of Eligibility**

Only one Voucher will be issued per application. After the verification process is completed, the HA will make the final determinations regarding ranking preferences and program eligibility.

Because HUD can make changes in rules and regulations during the review process that affect an applicant's eligibility, it is necessary to make a final eligibility determination. Also, family circumstances may have changed between initial interview and final eligibility determination.

The household is not actually eligible for a Voucher issuance until this final determination has been made. The regulations and/or policies in effect at the time of final eligibility determination will be used in making the determination.

If an applicant is determined ineligible, an opportunity for an Informal Review will be provided in accordance with federal regulations and Chapter 22 of this Administrative Plan.

## **Ineligibility**

If an applicant is determined ineligible as a result of program criteria (e.g.: over income limits), no assistance will be provided through Section 8. Such applicant will be removed from the waiting list and will not be eligible for reconsideration. Applicants wishing further consideration will be required to complete and submit a new preliminary application, which will be placed on the waiting list with an assigned Rating of 2.

## **Termination of Applications from the Waiting List**

When a person's pre-application reaches the top of the waiting list, the applicant will be contacted by mail as to a date and time to come to a preliminary briefing as described earlier in this chapter. Successful attendees of the preliminary briefing will be classified through the rating list as targeted. The Department will then contact targeted Rating 1 applicants to complete a full application to determine their eligibility for the program at an enrollment interview.

Applicants are given two opportunities to attend the meetings. Applicants who do not attend these scheduled appointments and do not call to reschedule will be sent another letter advising them they have 5 days from the date of the notice to contact the HA regarding the appointment or their name will be removed from the waiting list. If there is no response from the applicant within the time period, the application is then purged (removed from the waiting list).

If the appointment letter for the enrollment interview is returned by the post office, as it is unable to be delivered for any reason, and further checking again verifies the letter was sent to the last known mailing address, the application will then be purged and the next applicant on the waiting list will be contacted.

## **Reinstatement**

If a person whose application has been purged prior to the offer of an enrollment interview wishes to have that application reconsidered and returned to the waiting list, the person must submit a request in writing to The Department of Community Services, Housing & Community Development Division. The request will be reviewed and if it is determined the person would have been contacted for an enrollment interview or was

contacted for an enrollment interview within the 2 years prior to the request, the pre-application will be returned to its original place on the waiting list.

If a person whose application has been purged based on failure to attend the scheduled enrollment interview or to contact the Housing Authority (as detailed in above) wishes to have that application reconsidered and returned to the waiting list, the person must submit a request in writing to The Department of Community Services, Housing & Community Development Division. The request will be reviewed and if it is determined by the Chief of Housing & Community Development that the reason for non-response could be justified or eliminated based on reasonable accommodation, the pre-application will be processed based on its original place on the waiting list.

