

# Section 8 Housing

An explanation of  
the Section 8  
Housing Choice  
Voucher Program



**Charles County Department of Community Services**  
8190 Port Tobacco Road, Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677  
301-934-9305 • 301-870-3388 • 301-932-6004  
Maryland Relay Service: 711 • Relay Service TDD: 1-800-735-2258  
Equal Opportunity County • Say No To Drugs  
[www.charlescounty.org](http://www.charlescounty.org)

The Department of Community Services administers a variety of programs intended to improve the availability of housing in Charles County.

The Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is one that provides direct financial assistance to renters who otherwise may be without safe and sanitary housing.

The responsibilities and requirements of the Section 8 Program are detailed in this handbook in order to facilitate an understanding of the program and to ensure continued benefits for county residents.

As with all Department of Community Services programs, your comments and suggestions are encouraged.

Margaret E. Cheseldine  
*Director*

# Section 8 Housing

An explanation of the  
Section 8 Housing Choice  
Voucher Program



# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction .....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>The Section 8 Voucher Program .....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>Owner Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Tenant Responsibility .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Housing Authority Responsibilities .....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Q &amp; A for Owners &amp; Tenants .....</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Inspection Information .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Housing Quality Standards.....</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>Making a Choice .....</b>	<b>35</b>

# Introduction

The Charles County Department of Community Services' Housing & Community Development Division and the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) manage the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program.

This handbook will explain program requirements to both the tenant and owner of rental properties. Please refer to it when you have questions about the program or your rights and responsibilities.

Department of Community Services staff are also available to assist you with problems that may arise or to answer any questions not addressed in this handbook. The Department operates Monday through Friday, 8:00 A.M.-4:30 P.M.

## What to have ready when you call

Please have the following information ready when you call the Housing & Community Development Division:

- ◆ Name, address, and phone number
- ◆ Your status (either tenant or landlord)
- ◆ The name of your landlord or tenant
- ◆ The reason for your call

This booklet will explain the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program, procedures for leasing, and owner, tenant, and Housing & Community Development Division responsibilities, as well as answer commonly asked questions.

# The Section 8 Voucher Program

The Section 8 Voucher Program uses federal funds to provide assistance to low-income families and the elderly.

Eligible persons will be issued a housing voucher, allowing them to search for an apartment or vacant house in the private rental market. Any house or apartment selected by participants in the Section 8 Voucher Program must be suitable, meet their needs, and meet Housing Quality Standards (HQS).

In the Section 8 Voucher Program, the amount of subsidy is based on family income and the balance of the rent is paid by the family directly to the landlord.

Applicant eligibility is determined through a screening process wherein income and expenses are verified. After applicants meet the eligibility criteria, they are issued a housing voucher.

## Introductory tenant briefings

The Housing & Community Development Division schedules explanatory meetings to assist the tenant in complete understanding of this program. The following information will be presented:

- ◆ Terms and definitions
- ◆ How to determine correct house or apartment size
- ◆ How to figure housing and quality costs
- ◆ How payments are made
- ◆ How to secure a lease
- ◆ Security deposits

- ◆ What to do if you want to stay in your present unit
- ◆ What to do if you want to move
- ◆ How to explain the program to a landlord
- ◆ What to do after finding a unit
- ◆ Tenant's rights and responsibilities
- ◆ Owner's rights and responsibilities
- ◆ Housing Authority's responsibilities
- ◆ How eligibility is determined
- ◆ Discrimination-how to recognize and deal with it

**Section 8 definitions  
and terms**

The following terms are used when referring to the Section 8 Voucher Program

**Very low income** A family with an income that is 50 percent or less of the area's median income level as determined by the U.S. Census.

**Housing voucher** The document awarded by the Housing & Community Development Division declaring program eligibility and describing the terms and conditions for that participation.

**Lease** A legal document describing the relationship and agreements between landlord and tenant.

**Gross rent** The amount of the approved contract rent plus the estimated utility allowance for that unit.

**Total tenant payment** The monthly amount paid by the tenant towards rent and utility costs.

**Contract rent** The amount agreed upon by the tenant, the Housing & Community Development Division, and the owner as the monthly rent for an apartment.

**Section 8 voucher contract** Agreement between the Housing & Community Development Division and owner.

**Utility Allowance** The amount to be considered fair payment for utilities whether paid by the tenant or the owner. Allowances will vary according to size of rental unit and area. In issuing the Housing voucher, the Housing and Community Development division will

Number of Bedrooms	Minimum Family Size	Maximum Family Size
1	1	2
2	2	4
3	4	6
4	6	8

determine the appropriate unit size fo each family by applying the following criteria:

**Deciding where to live**

When your name has been reached on the waiting list and your eligibility has been verified, a housing voucher that is valid for 60 days will be issued to you. Under the Section 8 Voucher Program, you may continue to reside in your present home or apartment, provided it meets HUD quality and performance requirements of being decent, safe, and sanitary. Each housing unit must be an acceptable size for the number of residents.

**Staying in your present house or apartment**

If you wish to remain in the housing unit you currently occupy, you may do so as long as it meets HUD quality and performance requirements. Again the unit must be of the proper size for the number of residents as defined under program regulations.

In order to stay in your present unit, meet with your landlord and explain that you have been issued a Section 8 Voucher in the program and that you would

like for him/her to participate in the program as well. Keep in mind that your current rent and utilities cannot exceed the amounts allowed for the program.

If your current unit is deemed larger than one which would be allowed for the number of persons residing in it under the Section 8 Program guidelines (refer to page 4), full assistance may not be available. The Housing Authority will only approve a rent based upon the participant's need and the unit size authorized for the particular family.

**Steps to take when you plan to move**

If you plan to move to a new unit, check the local papers for listings, and leave your name with real estate agents who manage rental properties. Check the areas of Charles County in which you are interested in living; oftentimes apartments and houses are not advertised through the paper but through yard signs. The Housing & Community Development Division can also provide you with an available unit listing. Finally, inform your friends, relatives, church, or neighborhood center that you are searching for a new place to live; they may know of available housing.

**Relocation areas**

Persons assisted under the voucher program have the right to move anywhere in the United States where a voucher program exists after residing in Charles County under the Section 8 Voucher Program for at least one year.

**Presenting the program to owners**

Regardless of whether you plan to move or to stay in your present unit, you should understand the Section 8 Voucher Program well enough to present the facts to an owner or potential landlord.

The first priority when meeting with a current or potential landlord is to inquire about the monthly rent. It is extremely important to determine an exact dollar amount before agreeing to rent. The rent must fall

within the guidelines of the Section 8 Voucher Program.

The following list contains essential facts that should be explained to a landlord or owner:

- ◆ Explain that you have been issued a voucher from the Housing & Community Development Division.
- ◆ Tell the owner that he/she will receive a portion of the rent from the Section 8 Voucher Program.
- ◆ Explain that a contract between the owner and the Charles County Department of Community Services will be in effect.
- ◆ Inform the owner that a lease of at least one year must be signed by both parties to satisfy the Housing Authority's requirement.
- ◆ Emphasize that the rental unit must be inspected by a representative of the Housing Authority to ensure compliance with government housing quality standards.
- ◆ Assure the owner that the Housing Authority will be available to answer any questions and explain any requirements throughout the term of the lease.

**Leasing procedures**

Once a rental unit has been decided upon, certain steps must be taken to complete the requirements of the Section 8 Voucher Program.

A one-year lease between the landlord and program participant is necessary under program guidelines. Any lease must be approved in advance by the Housing Authority.

When a program participant selects a rental unit, it is understood that all lease agreements will be between the owner and the participant. The Housing Authority will provide a lease addendum.

After a voucher has been issued, the landlord must complete a Request for Lease Approval form (HUD 52517A) to determine responsibilities and type of utilities. The landlord must also provide a copy of the proposed lease.

During the unit inspection, the Housing Inspector will complete a Housing Quality Standards Inspection Booklet. Within 10 days of the inspection, participants and owners will be informed in writing of the determination of the inspection if the unit does not comply with HUD-mandated housing quality standards and lease approval. Re-inspection will be performed upon completion of repairs.

Following lease approval, the owner and participant will meet with a Housing Authority representative. All questions will be answered, and both parties will sign the lease. The Section 8 Voucher Program contract will be signed by the owner and the Housing Division. After the paperwork has been completed, the participants may move into the rental unit.

# Owner Responsibilities

All rental property owners participating in the Section 8 Voucher Program will deal directly with the tenant. Units must be maintained according to HUD housing quality standards.

The following obligations must be met by owners participating in the program:

- ◆ Rental units must be kept up to decent, safe, and sanitary standards and are certified to be so through the monthly endorsement of the Housing Authority check.
- ◆ All management and maintenance functions must be performed.
- ◆ All owners must adhere to HUD requirements of nondiscrimination in housing according to state and federal law.
- ◆ All obligations under the terms of the lease must be met.
- ◆ For the Section 8 Voucher Program, the rent can be increased after the first year. A tenant must pay any rent increase over the applicable payment standard or choose to move to a new unit. A notification of rent increase must be sent to the tenant at least 60 days prior to the anniversary date of the lease and Section 8 Program contract.
- ◆ The rent must be reasonable or it will not be approved by the Housing Authority.

# Tenant Responsibility

Tenants also have certain duties and obligations to fulfill as participants in the Section 8 Voucher Program. The following requirements must be fulfilled by all program participants:

- ◆ Always respond promptly to any written communication received from the Housing Authority.
- ◆ Make sure that the Housing Authority has your current address and phone number.
- ◆ Fulfill all terms of the lease.
- ◆ Obtain all utilities in the name of the head of household or spouse living in the household and pay utility bills as required.
- ◆ Pay the owner and utility company at the first of the month.
- ◆ Respect the rental property; do not participate in any illegal activities and do not cause loud noises or overcrowding. Inform the police of any suspicious activities in the neighborhood. The Housing Authority has the right to terminate assistance to tenants who are convicted of violent criminal activity or drug-related activity.
- ◆ Be considerate of neighbors.
- ◆ Do not permit boarders or lodgers to live in the unit; if visitors plan to stay more than a few days, inform the Housing Authority.
- ◆ Notify the landlord of any needed repairs or damages.
- ◆ Give the landlord and Housing Authority proper notice according to the lease and program guidelines

**Facts and reminders for participants**

dissatisfied with this policy, refer him/her to the Housing Authority.

- ◆ Report immediately all changes in family income and assets, family size, and composition to the Housing Authority for adjustment of total tenant payment.

- ◆ Submit to an annual unit inspection.

- ◆ Submit to an annual unit recertification to determine continued eligibility to receive housing assistance.

The following items are additional facts to keep in mind as a participant in the Section 8 Program:

A voucher is valid for 60 days and will expire at the end of that time. If a unit has not been found in that time, the participant is to inform the Housing Authority in writing of the need for an extension of time. Adequate reasons for inability to locate a unit must be provided as well. The extension may or may not be provided by the Housing Authority depending upon the circumstances.

Any unit considered must conform to standards concerning lead paint.

Monthly rent should be reasonable in relation to location, condition, and services.

Every participant must submit to annual recertification in order to determine continued eligibility for assistance.

If the owner requires the payment of a security deposit, the tenant is responsible for the full amount, not to exceed one-month's rent. In addition, deposits for keys, mailbox keys, pets, and other items are not included in the Section 8 Program. If a landlord is dissatisfied with this policy, refer him/her to the Housing Authority.

**Maintenance and housekeeping tips**

If the unit selected has hardwood floors, they should be cleaned with a damp mop and a well-diluted cleaner. Tile floors can be cleaned with a damp mop and a detergent. A light coat of a self-cleaning wax ensures that the floors will keep their appearance for a long period of time. Furniture should be placed on rubber casters, caps, or coasters to prevent scratching of the flooring.

Painted walls and woodwork should be dusted at least once a month. Fingerprints and marks can be washed off with diluted cleaner as they occur. All walls should be washed yearly.

Kitchen cabinets should be cleaned with a damp cloth and soap specially formulated for use on wood surfaces.

Stove burners need to be kept clean and properly adjusted. The enamel parts of a stove can be wiped with a mild cleaner when cold. Enamel will crack; therefore, take special precautions not to drop objects on the stove surface. Burned-on stains can be removed from a drip pan or burner with steel wool or a mild abrasive cleaner. However, never use steel wool on enamel. Remember that gas stoves are for cooking only; they are never to be used as a heat source.

Ovens should be cool before they are cleaned. Remove all racks, bottom plate, broiler pan, and grill. Oven cleaner can be used to remove burned on food or grease, but do not use it on the oven door seals, plated finish, or the exterior. A small saucer of ammonia left overnight in an oven will make cleaning much easier.

Refrigerators should be placed on cooler settings in the summer and turned back in the winter. To defrost, turn the control to "off" and remove frozen food and ice trays. Place pans of hot water inside the freezer

and replace with hot water as needed. Remove ice and frost as it loosens. Do not use sharp objects to loosen ice. Wipe out the interior, replace food, and then set temperature control to previous setting. The exterior can be cleaned with a mild cleaner.

Stainless steel sinks should be cleaned daily with a diluted cleaning solution and scoured weekly with a mild cleanser. Do not put grease in the drain.

Bathtubs and bathroom sinks should be wiped out after each use and cleaned weekly with a nonabrasive cleaner. Diluted bleach can be used to remove stains. Toilets should also be cleaned weekly with a bowl cleaner and toilet brush.

Maintain existing shrubbery and trees. Prevent children from swinging on or breaking off the branches.

To conserve water, promptly report any leaks or drips to the landlord for repairs. Make sure that the faucets are completely turned off after each use.

To conserve energy, keep drapes and blinds open during the day to absorb sunshine and closed during the night to insulate the inside from drafts. Turn on exhaust fans only when they are needed. Do not open windows for any length of time during periods of cold weather. Air registers should not be blocked by furniture.

# Housing Authority Responsibilities

The Housing & Community Development Division, as the administrative body for the Section 8 Voucher Program, has certain requirements that it must meet. The following commitments must be kept by the Housing & Community Development Division:

- ◆ Review applications; issue vouchers.
- ◆ Ensure that all participating families and owners are briefed on the specifics of the Section 8 Voucher Program.
- ◆ Supply information regarding prohibited and allowable lease provisions.
- ◆ Inspect the chosen unit and notify tenant and owner of the results.
- ◆ Assist owner and participants in the preparation of all necessary forms and agreements.
- ◆ Prepare and execute the Section 8 Voucher Contract with the owner.
- ◆ Ensure that the owners are paid the housing assistance portion of the rent on or about the first day of each month.
- ◆ Provide assistance to tenants and owners when needed during the continuance of the lease program.
- ◆ Verify each tenant's information regarding family income in order to determine income to establish rent.
- ◆ Verify changes in family size or composition to confirm that the present rental unit meets HUD regulations.

- ◆ Back charge tenants who fail to report any changes in income from the time of the change. Back charges will be due and payable in full or by executing a Repayment Agreement.
- ◆ Inspect rental units at least yearly for quality and performance standards.
- ◆ Recertify participants annually to determine continued eligibility.

# Q & A for Owners & Tenants

**Who is eligible for the Section 8 Voucher Program?**

Anyone who wishes to participate in the program must apply at the Charles County Department of Community Services. The program is designed for low-income families or individuals whose income does not exceed 50 percent of the median income in the area as determined by the U.S. Census.

**Who selects the rental units?**

Families or individuals select their own rental units after they have explained the program to the owner. Participants are free to lease their currently occupied unit or to move to a new unit. No owner is required to rent to participants, and participants are not required to live in any specific unit or location.

**Which rental units are available?**

All existing housing units in Charles County not already subsidized by HUD are acceptable as long as they are deemed decent, safe, and sanitary by the Housing & Community Development Division upon inspection. Also, the unit's rent must fall within program guidelines and be reasonable.

**Is a lease required?**

A lease of no less than one year is a requirement of the Section 8 Voucher Program. Each lease should contain a set of required provisions and must be approved by the Housing & Community Development Division. The required lease addendum is available from the Housing Division.

In addition to the lease, an owner enters into a Section 8 Voucher contract with the Charles County Department of Community Services to receive payments; these contract terms coincide with the lease provisions.

**Who is responsible for maintaining the unit?**

The owner is responsible for general maintenance in order to keep the unit decent, safe, and sanitary. The Housing & Community Development Division does not provide any maintenance services, but will make annual inspections to ensure compliance with government standards. Inspections will be made more frequently if they are requested by either the owner or the tenant.

**Can the monthly rent change?**

Owners may request a rent adjustment annually provided that the request is in writing to the Housing & Community Development Division and the tenant at least 60 days prior to the anniversary date of the lease. The rent must be reasonable to be approved.

**Can owners evict tenants in violation of the lease?**

Owners can evict tenants in the program who are in violation of their lease. According to HUD regulations, owners must evict tenants by initiating a local court action.

**Can owners rent to their son or daughter?**

No. HUD regulations prohibit participants from renting a unit from a family member.

**How does an owner participate?**

The owner must complete and sign the Request for Lease Approval and the assisted lease agreement. In addition, the owner must also execute a Section 8 Voucher contract with the Housing Authority and provide proof of ownership.

**What are the lead paint provisions?**

The owner of units built before 1978 must certify that the dwelling is in compliance with HUD lead-based paint regulations, which require that all interior surfaces and those exterior surfaces which are accessible to children under seven years of age be free from cracking, scaling, peeling, chipping, and loose paint or that these surfaces have been treated or covered to prevent children from eating paint. HUD has determined that units built before 1978 may contain lead-based paint.

**Who pays for damages after the tenant moves out?**

The tenant's security deposit can be used according to state and local law. The Housing Authority does not pay for damages.

**Is a security deposit acceptable?**

A landlord is allowed to collect a security deposit not to exceed one month's rent. This amount is to be paid by the tenant.

# Inspection Information

## The inspection process

The inspection process begins with a Request for Lease Approval and proposed lease. The Request for Lease Approval must be completed in its entirety. It is very important to make sure that the address, complete with apartment number, and phone numbers are correct. Inform the Housing & Community Development Division if the unit is currently occupied or vacant because someone must be present for the inspection to take place.

## Comments before the inspection

The cooperation of both the landlord and tenant is necessary for the inspection. The Housing Authority cannot pick up keys or inspect unlocked units without a representative (tenant and/or landlord) who is 18 or older. Over 500 units are inspected annually; 80 percent of these need second inspections.

Although tenants are primarily responsible for taking care of their units and promptly reporting problems, a unit that has been properly prepared for move-in by a landlord will most likely encourage good housekeeping tendencies. The kitchen and bathroom fixtures and appliances, as well as the walls and windows, should be cleaned. No trash or debris should be in the unit upon inspection.

The Housing Authority encourages landlords to inspect units themselves between two-and four-month intervals. Tenants must be given 24 hours notice. Tenants are also encouraged to bring landlords into their units to show that they are maintaining their unit properly.

**Hints before the inspection**

If timely repairs are not made by the landlord, the tenant may be given a new voucher to move.

Keep windows from breaking when cords or chains are broken by adding a metal tension bar that is inserted in sash track on one or both sides.

To eliminate holes in plaster from door knobs, add a door stop.

To keep carpet or linoleum from fraying or tearing, add a metal strip on the edge at doorways and steps.

**Most common fail items**

The following list contains items that most commonly cause a unit to fail inspection:

- ◆ Water heater release valve does not have a metal discharge line 6-12 inches from the floor.

- ◆ Chipped or flaking paint on window sills in unit built before 1978 that are occupied by children under six years of age.

- ◆ Windows at entrance level, near roofs, or fire escapes without locks.

- ◆ Electric stove burners that do not work and gas burners that require a match to light.

- ◆ Handrails that are loose or missing four or more risers.

- ◆ Cover plates missing on electrical switches and outlets.

- ◆ Lack of smoke detectors on each level.

**Inspection timeline**

An initial inspection takes place within 15 days of the receipt of the Request for Lease Approval.

The annual inspections take place within 60 days of HAP contract renewal. If a unit fails, a letter listing the repairs needed to pass and the reinspection date is sent to the landlord with a copy forwarded to the

tenant. The reinspection date will be 45 days from the original inspection. If the unit fails inspection a second time, rents are abated; if the unit is reinstated at a later date, no back rent will be paid by the Housing Division.

When a unit passes inspection, the Housing Authority starts payments from the date the tenant signs the contracts. No payments are made effective until contracts are signed with the Housing Office.

#### Inspection policies

To ensure fairness and equal treatment to all tenants and landlords, the following policies apply:

- ◆ The tenant, landlord, or a representative of either who is at least 18 years old must be present for the inspection.
- ◆ Key pickups and unlocked doors cannot be arranged due to liability and safety concerns.
- ◆ Any request for extension of repair completion must be submitted in writing within 30 days and documented. Each request is reviewed on a case-by-case basis and will not automatically be granted.
- ◆ Any complaints from a tenant or landlord must be in writing. The procedure for complaints is a threefold process. First, the other party must be notified that a problem exists and be requested to fix it. If no action is taken, the other party should be sent a letter listing the problems with a copy forwarded to the Housing Division. If the problem is still not resolved, send a request for complaint inspection to the Housing & Community Development Division with a copy forwarded to the negligent party. An inspection will be scheduled as soon as possible considering the nature of the complaint.
- ◆ Move-out inspections must be requested within five days after the scheduled move out.

- ◆ No initial inspection will be performed without the utilities turned on.
- ◆ Requests for Lease Approval will be returned if not completed in full. If any address is a box number, list the street or road and the nearest cross street. If the tenant does not have a phone, list the number of a friend or relative. Use the reverse side of the request to list directions, draw a map, or to provide any other remarks concerning location.
- ◆ If the annual inspection occurs during winter months, take the time to inspect the property before winter to see if it will hold up during those months and until the next inspection.

# Housing Quality Standards

When housing units are inspected, all housing quality standards must be met. The following items are given consideration by the Housing Authority.

## Types and categories of rooms

All units must contain a living room, kitchen, bathroom, and a minimum of one bedroom. These are referred to as rooms used for living. Other rooms used for living are additional bedrooms, finished basement, dining room, television room, enclosed heated porch, or a finished heated attic.

Rooms that are not used for living include utility rooms for washer and dryer, unfinished basement, open porch, or attic.

## Electricity requirements

At least two duplex outlets or one outlet and one permanent light fixture must be present in the living room and bedroom. One permanent light fixture must be installed in the bathroom as well. There are no specific standards for other rooms used for living. Floor lamps, ceiling lamps plugged into a socket, and table lamps are not considered permanent.

## Electrical hazards

Electrical hazards such as spliced or frayed wires, uncovered junction boxes, or unprotected romax or similar wires are not acceptable in any situation. Fuse or circuit breaker panels must be adequate and covered, and all circuits must be identified. Exterior wires and fixtures must be installed and protected properly. The service line should not be frayed.

Broken or frayed wiring, light fixtures hanging from wires with no other support (such as a chain), missing cover and switch plates, badly cracked outlets,

unprotected romax wires below five feet, and extension cords either overloaded or run underneath carpets are all unacceptable.

**Security**

Security is an important item considered during an inspection. Units must have locks that work on all windows and doors, including basements that can be accessed from the outside. In addition, all units must have a common public hallway and a roof, porch, or other outside place that can be reached from the ground. At least one door must lock from both sides and catch without locking; it must also have a doorknob on both sides. Storm windows and doors, if present, must be in good condition.

Storm locks do not replace regular window and door locks. Torn or loose screens on doors are a cutting hazard.

**Window condition**

Each unit must have at least one window in the living room and bedroom. A window or a mechanical exhaust fan vented to the attic or outside must be present in the bathroom. In all other rooms used for living, there must be either natural illumination or an electric light fixture or outlet. Every window must be in good condition.

Windows with badly broken or missing panes or ones that do not shut or keep out the weather when closed are not allowed. Torn or loose screens on windows are also a cutting hazard.

**Ceilings and walls**

Ceilings and walls must be in good condition. Large cracks or holes that allow drafts, severe bulging, and large amounts of loose or falling plaster are not allowed, nor are loose tiles, panels, or paneling that is at risk of falling. Hairline cracks are permissible.

**Floors**

Floors must be in good condition; unacceptable damages are large cracks or holes, missing or warped

	<p>floorboards or coverings, buckled carpets, or loose threads that could cause someone to trip.</p>
<b>Lead paint</b>	<p>Units built before 1978 may have lead paint according to HUD determinations. No chipping, peeling, scaling, flaking, or loose paint is allowable on any unit, regardless of year built, if children under six years of age will be residing in the unit. Such conditions should be reported if discovered. Lead paint is an extreme health hazard to children under seven years old because they may consume it. Lead can cause major health problems, damage a child's brain, nervous system, kidneys, hearing, or coordination, affect learning, cause behavior problems, blindness, death, pregnancy problems, and it can affect a baby's normal growth.</p>
<b>Stove with oven</b>	<p>The stove or oven in a rental unit must be supplied by the owner and present in the unit for a passing inspection. The stove and oven must work. All burners must operate properly, without matches if it is gas stove. All knobs must be on the unit and indicate the correct burners. The oven door must fit properly and have a handle. No hot plates are allowed.</p> <p>A stove too close to a side wall or window is considered hazardous.</p>
<b>Refrigerator</b>	<p>A refrigerator may be supplied by either the owner or tenant. The refrigerator must be in the unit to pass inspection. A refrigerator that keeps temperatures low enough to prevent food spoilage is a requirement. Freezer space large enough for the family's need must be available. The door(s) must have handles and good seals. An electrical outlet heavy enough to handle the energy load must be present.</p>
<b>Sink</b>	<p>A kitchen sink with hot and cold running water, an approved gas trap, and no leaking faucets or drains</p>

	<p>must be in the unit. A bathroom sink will not fulfill this requirement.</p>
<b>Storage and preparation space</b>	<p>Adequate space to store, prepare, and serve food must be available in all units. A drainboard will not satisfy the requirement of preparation space.</p>
<b>Flush toilet</b>	<p>A flush toilet that works and is secured to the floor in an enclosed room is required for a unit to pass inspection. In addition, the bathroom must have a door that locks for privacy.</p>
<b>Fixed washbasin or lavatory</b>	<p>A bathroom sink with hot and cold running water and an approved gas trap is necessary. Additionally, the sink must be firmly secured and have no leaking faucets or drains. A kitchen sink will not satisfy this requirement.</p>
<b>Tub or shower</b>	<p>A tub or shower with hot and cold running water and no leaking faucets or drain is another requirement for a passing inspection. The caulking and surrounding wall and floor must be tight and secure with no water seepage.</p>
<b>Ventilation</b>	<p>The bathroom must have a window that opens or a mechanical exhaust system that vents to the outside or attic. The fan should not be unplugged nor unduly noisy.</p>
<b>Foundation</b>	<p>The foundation must be in good condition with no serious leaks or holes that will allow air, water, or vermin in; no serious cracks or loose supports should exist.</p>
<b>Condition of stairs, rails, porches, and common hallways</b>	<p>Secure handrails must be present on an extended length of stairs (generally four or more steps or risers). Any porches, balconies, or decks that are more than 30 inches above ground must have a secure railing.</p> <p>Interior stairways with four or more steps also must have a handrail. A handrail with spindles is necessary if the stairway is open.</p>

	<p>All common hallways and interior stairs must have lights that work. No tripping hazards are allowable.</p>
<b>Condition of roof and gutters</b>	<p>The unit's roof must be in good condition with no leaks. If gutters and downspouts are present, they must be in satisfactory condition and securely attached to the building.</p> <p>Evidence of leaks can usually be seen from stains on the ceiling inside of the building.</p>
<b>Condition of exterior walls</b>	<p>Exterior walls need to be in good condition and without large holes or cracks that would allow a great amount of air to get inside.</p>
<b>Condition of chimney</b>	<p>Chimneys cannot have serious defects such as big cracks or many missing bricks. The chimney must not lean as to create the hazard of a collapse.</p>
<b>Mobile homes</b>	<p>Mobile homes must be registered and licensed by the County and placed on the site in a suitable manner that is free from hazard such as sliding or wind damage. Each mobile home must have four tie downs.</p>
<b>Adequacy and safety of heating equipment and water heater</b>	<p>To provide what is considered adequate heat, the system must be capable of delivering enough heat to assure a healthy environment throughout the entire unit. Space heaters, kerosene heaters, or room heaters that burn oil or gas and are not vented to a chimney are unacceptable. Vented space heaters may be acceptable if they provide enough heat.</p> <p>Water heaters require a discharge line that is 6-12 inches from the ground.</p> <p>Gas water heaters are not allowed in bedrooms or other living areas where safety hazards may exist. An exception to this provision may be made if safety dividers or shields are installed in the kitchen or bathroom.</p>

	<p>All heating equipment must have clearance from any combustible material. Flues and chimneys must be secure with no leaks of exhaust gases. Fuel storage and supply lines have to be protected. Return air must be drawn from an area separate from the furnace. Heavy buildup of soot or creosote around the chimney or flue is unacceptable.</p>
<b>Ventilation/cooling</b>	<p>Adequate air circulation during summer months is a requirement that may be achieved through the use of air conditioning, central fan ventilation, or at least two open windows that allow proper air flow.</p>
<b>Approvable water supply</b>	<p>In order to pass inspection, a unit must have a plumbing system that is served by an approvable public or private water supply system.</p>
<b>Plumbing</b>	<p>All pipes should be in good condition with no leaks or serious rust that causes water discoloration.</p>
<b>Sewer connection</b>	<p>Plumbing systems must be connected to an approvable public or private sewage disposal system. Open sewage pipes or backups in lines or the septic system are unacceptable conditions.</p>
<b>Access to unit</b>	<p>Each unit must have an entrance from the outside or a public hall so that private access is available. In addition, the unit must have a number on it. The building is also required to have a number for an address listing in case of emergencies.</p>
<b>Fire exits and smoke detectors</b>	<p>At least two exits from the building are a necessity in case of fire. This requirement can be satisfied by a window that opens if it is on the first or second floor. For units or rooms on the third floor, a smoke detector and emergency chain ladder must also be available.</p> <p>Smoke detectors must be present on every level of the unit; this requirement is also mandatory for mobile homes. Exits must be free from blockage or debris.</p>

<b>Evidence of infestation</b>	<p>Rats or large numbers of mice or vermin such as roaches are unacceptable</p> <p>In multifamily buildings, the owner is responsible for extermination. However, it is the responsibility of the tenant to keep the unit clean and free of food particles, dirty dishes, and laundry that cause or aid infestation. In single-family dwellings, the tenant is responsible for the extermination.</p>
<b>Refuse disposal</b>	<p>Each unit should be free from the heavy accumulation of garbage and debris, both inside and outside. Heavy accumulation means large piles of trash, garbage, and discarded furniture or debris. These accumulations usually result in severe levels of rats or infestation of vermin.</p> <p>The unit must contain adequate, covered facilities for temporary storage and disposal of food wastes. Adequate facilities include trash cans with covers, garbage chutes, and dumpsters.</p>
<b>Other interior hazards</b>	<p>The unit's interior must be free from any other hazard not specifically identified elsewhere in this booklet. These hazards include, but are not limited to, protruding nails, broken bathroom fixtures with jagged edges, doors in danger of falling due to faulty hinges.</p> <p>Rooms not used for living should not have other possible hazards such as large holes in the walls, floors, or ceilings, unsafe stairways or tripping hazards, standing water, or anything in danger of falling down or in.</p>
<b>Elevators</b>	<p>If elevators are present, they must have a current local inspection certificate.</p>
<b>Interior air quality</b>	<p>The unit must be free from abnormally high levels of air pollution caused by carbon monoxide, sewer gas, fuel gas, dust, or other harmful pollutants. Abnormally high means that pollutants are consistently present,</p>

<b>Site and neighborhood conditions</b>	<p>constituting a health hazard. Each unit must have adequate air circulation.</p> <p>The site and immediate neighborhood of the unit must be free from conditions which would seriously or continuously endanger the tenant's health and safety.</p> <p>Conditions that will cause a unit to cause fail inspection include other buildings on or near the property that pose serious health or safety hazards, evidence of flooding or major drainage problems, proximity to open sewage, fire hazards, abnormal air pollution or smoke that continues throughout the year, continuous vibration caused by vehicular traffic, and high crime or poverty areas.</p>
<b>Lead paint owner certification</b>	<p>If an owner is required to treat or cover any interior or exterior surfaces, the Housing Division must receive certification that the work has been completed in accordance with standards prior to execution or renewal of the Section 8 Voucher contract.</p> <p>This requirement may be delayed on the exterior only in the event of severe weather conditions.</p> <p>The Housing &amp; Community Development Division will provide a certification form for the owner to sign and date.</p>
<b>Pre-existing conditions</b>	<p>The tenant should compile a list of items that they could possibly be blamed for later but that do not cause the unit to fail inspection. These items include chips, dents on fixtures and appliances, missing parts, scorches, marks, burns, discolorations on carpet, missing or chipped trim on vinyl or walls, cracked windows, torn screens, broken knobs, locks, doors and drawers, leak stains on ceilings and walls, missing or broken shingles, siding, or downspouts, and dead shrubs. A list should be compiled, and copies should be forwarded to the owner and the Housing &amp;</p>

Community Development Division to prevent future misunderstandings.

# Making a Choice

Only the family or individual participating in the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program knows its own needs in certain areas such as room size, closet and cabinet space, tub or shower, unit layout, carpet or wood floors, colors of rooms and exterior, electrical needs, ventilation, presence of yard, style of unit, and the option of house or apartment.

The Housing & Community Development Division decides the adequacy of the items mentioned above; if tenants need more than the Housing & Community Development Division requires, they are free to look for a unit that meets their needs. Staff members are available to answer questions and assist in resolving problems.

## **Charles County Department of Community Services**

8190 Port Tobacco Road

Port Tobacco, Maryland 20677

301-934-9305 • 301-870-3388 • 301-932-6004

Maryland Relay Service: 711

Relay Service TDD: 1-800-7335-2258

[www.charlescounty.org](http://www.charlescounty.org)

