

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Department of Health and Human Services
Inter-Office Memorandum

DATE: April 25, 2012

TO: Marina Dimitrijevic, Chairwoman - Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

FROM: Héctor Colón, Director, Department of Health and Human Services
Prepared by James Mathy, Housing Administrator, Housing Division

SUBJECT: Report from the Director, Department of Health and Human Services, Requesting Approval of the updated Administrative Plan for the Housing Choice Voucher Program

Background

The Director, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) is requesting approval of an updated Administrative Plan for the Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) for the Housing Division. The HCVP provides rental assistance to eligible families in Milwaukee County and currently assists more than 1,700 families. The rules and regulations of HCPV are determined by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). Each individual program is afforded choices in regards to its policy, which are included in the Administrative Plan. The purpose of the Administrative Plan is to establish policies for carrying out the program in a manner consistent with HUD requirements and also incorporate goals and objectives specific to the local program. The Administrative Plan is the core of the program, providing consistency, clarity and guidance for the participants, program staff and the community. DHHS is now requesting that the County Board approve the revised Administrative Plan for the HCVP program.

Discussion

The current HCVP Administrative Plan was drafted and adopted in 1999. An updated plan was recommended by members of the local HUD field office and Milwaukee County's Audit Department in a 2010 audit. Therefore, the DHHS Housing Division has worked to complete a full updated revision of the HCVP Administrative Plan, which incorporates current federal regulations, HUD guidelines, as well as program specific policies. To ensure a comprehensive plan is in compliance with HUD Guidelines and Federal Regulations, a model plan was used along with the services of an outside consultant.

Due to the fact that the Administrative Plan is such a fundamental part of the HCVP, the Division has sought feedback from staff and program participants by posting a draft on the Milwaukee County website and sending a mailing to all landlords and tenants participating in the program advising them of the online posting. The Division also invited all of the landlords to come to the office to view the proposed plan and has encouraged feedback via written submission or by attending the program's Annual Resident Advisory Board meeting on April 30, 2012. The Advisory Board was recently created to promote HUD best practices.

A solid Administrative Plan is vital for the success of the HCVP. The updated and improved plan will contribute to the program in the following ways:

- The updated Administrative Plan will serve as a valuable resource to the HCVP staff. This is a highly regulated program which lends to confusion, inconsistency and incorrect determinations. The Plan incorporates federal regulations, HUD guidelines and program policies in one comprehensive directive, offering clarification and guidance to staff, and assisting in their decision making.
- The updated Administrative Plan will aid in the consistent application of policy among program participants. Staff will have the ability to refer program participants to a written resource in support of their decisions. The previous Plan does not provide substantial support for these disputes therefore the updated Plan will reduce the volume of informal hearings and allow the program to remove participants that are not adhering to program requirements. The Plan will facilitate proper implementation of program requirements providing a safeguard against fraud and program abuse.
- Program consistency will assist the Division in analyzing funding and making appropriate decisions for program maintenance being mindful of the program goals of efficiency and equitable fund distribution.
- With the advice of a professional consultant, the proposed policies are well thought out and have the budget and program goals in mind. Implementation of these improved procedures will streamline processes and distribute funds in a manner that allows the Division to assist more families with existing staffing and funding.

The updated Administrative plan reinforces current verbal policies and procedures and also institutes program changes. Some of the most evident changes include:

- The subsidy standards will assign one bedroom for each two persons within the household (with exception of persons of the opposite sex other than spouses and children under the age of 5). The current subsidy standard results in additional bedrooms being assigned because of age/gender. Subsidy amounts are based upon number of bedrooms assigned. Families will always be allowed to rent a unit with more bedrooms as long as it is within the granted payment standard. The tighter subsidy standard guidelines will allow the program to assist additional low income families. This is important due to the lengthy waiting list for the HCVP.
- The updated Administrative Plan contains clear language in regards to participant obligations. Written expectations and well-defined consequences will aid the staff in the enforcement of program guidelines. Written policy protects the program against fraud and abuse.
- Procedural changes will result in a more streamlined process. This efficiency will assist staff in meeting payment deadlines.

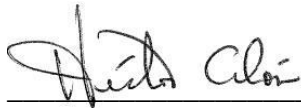
For all of these reasons, it is crucial that Milwaukee County's Housing Choice Voucher Program operate under an updated and improved Administrative Plan. Board approval of the plan is required by HUD. Upon board approval, the Administrative plan will be submitted to HUD for their review.

Recommendation

The Director, Department of Health and Human Services, recommends that the County Board of Supervisors approve the Housing Choice Voucher Program Administrative Plan.

Fiscal Effect

There is no anticipated fiscal effect as a result of this approval.



Héctor Colón, Director
Department of Health and Human Services

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