



HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER PROGRAM

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

The Frederick County Division of Housing administers the Housing Choice Voucher Program to enable low income families in Frederick County to find safe, decent, affordable rental housing in the private marketplace. The program provides variable rent subsidies to tenants based on their income; that subsidy is paid directly to the property owner on behalf of the tenant.

Note: In Frederick County, under the Fair Housing protected class of "Source of Income", you may not refuse to rent to a prospective tenant based on their participation in the HCV program.

Q. HOW DOES AN OWNER BECOME INVOLVED IN THE HCV PROGRAM?

- It is by initiating a tenancy with a program client that the owner becomes involved in the program.
- Owners call (877) 428-8844 or visit www.mdhousingsearch.org to place rentals on referral list.
- Eligible families with a voucher contact owners from the referral listing.
- Owners screen the tenant through their standard procedure and decide to proceed.
- The tenant provides the owner with the HCV documents needed to seek The Division of Housing's approval for the tenancy.
- HCV inspects property for compliance with *Housing Quality Standards* (HQS) in accordance with the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) regulations.
- Division of Housing and owner execute the program contract to begin assistance payments.

Q. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS TO A PROPERTY OWNER?

- The Division of Housing's rental assistance portion of the rent payment is paid directly to the owner.
- HCV program clients are monitored regularly for program compliance by Division of Housing staff.
- Unit is inspected annually by a Division of Housing Inspector.

Q. WHAT ARE THE GENERAL HQS STANDARDS (INSPECTIONS)?

Properties must meet general health, safety, and habitability standards; e.g., smoke detectors must be operational, windows must have screens and locks, stairways must have railings, unit must be in good repair, etc. Initial and annual inspections are made of all properties.

Q. WHAT KIND OF HOUSING IS ELIGIBLE?

Any type of rental housing is eligible: townhouses, condos, apartments, duplexes, and single family homes.

Q. WHAT ABOUT THE SECURITY DEPOSIT?

The tenant is responsible for the security deposit. The owner may collect a security deposit in accordance with Maryland State Law. The amount can range, but may not be in excess of amounts charged by the owner to unassisted tenants. The Division of Housing does not offer any assistance towards security deposits.

Q. IS THERE A SPECIAL LEASE FOR HCV TENANTS?

Yes, there is a HUD Tenancy Addendum that must be signed and becomes part of your individual lease. Further, your private lease must state that the lease applies to a HCV program tenancy.

Q. THIS IS A RENT SUBSIDY PROGRAM, HOW ARE THE RENT PORTIONS ALLOCATED?

The rent payment breakdown (tenant payment v. Division of Housing payment) is set according to the tenant's income, household size and other program calculations. Therefore, it may change during the

tenancy; however, it will always equal the contract rent due to the owner. Division of Housing notifies owner and tenant of any change in rent portion calculations.

Q. WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE OWNER UNDER THE PROGRAM?

- They are not much different than that of a landlord with a non-program tenant.
- Landlords are expected to complete their due diligence with screening tenants for suitability (the same criterion must be applied for program and non-program tenants). Establishing program eligibility does not involve all the same criteria as many property owners have for screening tenants.
- Landlords are required to maintain and manage properties as they do in the private market.
- Landlords are obligated to enforce/uphold the provisions of their lease and monitor tenant compliance with that lease.
- Landlords must notify Division of Housing of any condition that affects the unit and/or tenancy. Any notices to tenants should be copied to the Division of Housing.
- Landlords are also encouraged to conduct regular routine inspections.

Q. WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARTICIPANT FAMILIES?

- Pay rent portion when due;
- Pay utilities as required and due;
- Maintain the dwelling, causing no damage in excess of normal wear and tear;
- Report any changes in family program status to the Division of Housing within 14 days;
- Not allow unauthorized person(s) to live in the dwelling;
- Comply with rules of the program;
- Comply with lease terms;
- Comply with all voucher family obligations;
- Complete annual and interim program recertification.

Q. HOW DOES AN OWNER TERMINATE THE LEASE AND/OR HCV PROGRAM CONTRACT?

Maryland State Laws apply to the termination of the lease; it is generally the same as with a non-program tenant. The HUD Tenancy Addendum specifies some other conditions under which a client can be terminated within the first year of the tenancy. After the first year, the owner may terminate for reasons and with notice as prescribed in the lease and per MD Law. Owners must notify the Division of Housing of any Notice to Vacate action. When the lease ends, the HCV Housing Assistance Payments Contract also ends.

Q. WHAT ARE THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIVISION OF HOUSING AS PROGRAM ADMINISTRATORS?

- Determine program applicant eligibility (based on income and other factors);
- Determine rent portion breakdown and notify owners/participants appropriately;
- Send the Division of Housing assistance payment to the owner each month;
- Conduct inspections and tenant certifications at least annually;
- Establish compliance with HUD required rent reasonableness standards; and
- Monitor program compliance.

Q. WHAT ABOUT RENT INCREASES?

A rent increase may be requested after the first year of the lease. The Division of Housing must determine that the rent increase is reasonable in relation to the private rental market. Federal regulations require the Division of Housing to document comparable rentals in the participant file. Owners must give a 60-day notice of any proposed rent increase to the family and the Division of Housing.

For further information, please stop in at the Frederick County Division of Housing at 401 Sagner Avenue, Frederick MD 21701 or call (301) 600-1061.