

ADDENDUM
HOUSING CHOICE VOUCHER
INFORMAL REVIEW AND HEARING POLICY
(Housing Commission of Talbot)

Informal Review Federal Requirements

Pursuant to 24 CFR 982.554:

§982.554 Informal review for applicant.

(a) *Notice to applicant.* The PHA must give an applicant for participation prompt notice of a decision denying assistance to the applicant. The notice must contain a brief statement of the reasons for the PHA decision. The notice must also state that the applicant may request an informal review of the decision and must describe how to obtain the informal review.

(b) *Informal review process.* The PHA must give an applicant an opportunity for an informal review of the PHA decision denying assistance to the applicant. The administrative plan must state the PHA procedures for conducting an informal review. The PHA review procedures must comply with the following:

(1) The review may be conducted by any person or persons designated by the PHA, other than a person who made or approved the decision under review or a subordinate of this person.

(2) The applicant must be given an opportunity to present written or oral objections to the PHA decision.

(3) The PHA must notify the applicant of the PHA final decision after the informal review, including a brief statement of the reasons for the final decision.

(c) *When informal review is not required.* The PHA is not required to provide the applicant an opportunity for an informal review for any of the following:

(1) Discretionary administrative determinations by the PHA.

(2) General policy issues or class grievances.

(3) A determination of the family unit size under the PHA subsidy standards.

(4) A PHA determination not to approve an extension or suspension of a voucher term.

(5) A PHA determination not to grant approval of the tenancy.

(6) A PHA determination that a unit selected by the applicant is not in compliance with HQS.

(7) A PHA determination that the unit is not in accordance with HQS because of the family size or composition.

(d) *Restrictions on assistance for noncitizens.* The informal hearing provisions for the denial of assistance on the basis of ineligible immigration status are contained in 24 CFR part 5.

HCT Policy on Informal Reviews

If the program applicant is denied assistance by the standards set forth in the HCT Administrative Plan and believes that the agency made an inaccurate determination or did not follow its policies or HUD rules in making its decision, they may request an informal review. Requests for an Informal Review must be made within 10 business days of HCT giving notice of a written denial of assistance/eligibility letter. Requests can be made either orally or in writing, and the agency will schedule the review on the next date available of the hearing officer. Applicants may request a later date for their review if they require more time to prepare, require the assistance of legal counsel or require special assistance or a reasonable accommodation. HCT has discretion to deny a postponement.

The Process

A hearing officer presides over the informal review. This person assigned as the Hearing Officer is impartial and has no prior knowledge of the applicant record being presented. The Hearing is informal, and follows a prescribed format that first allows the Housing Commission to present the reason, evidence and/or testimony for denial of assistance. Thereafter, the program applicant (or designee/counsel) is allowed to present their counter argument, reason, evidence and testimony (which may also include witnesses) to allow the Hearing Officer to make a qualified determination on the provision of assistance.

Before the informal review, applicants must be given the opportunity to review any relevant file/determination documents. Applicants may request a copy of any of these documents and the agency will strive to provide them complimentary, within reason. Any person, including a lawyer, may represent the applicant at applicant's expense. Any request to review the documents must be made in a timely manner in advance of the hearing. Documents will also be available for review at the hearing, but the hearing will not be continued or unreasonably delayed to allow review if the request is not made in advance of the hearing.

Both parties must appear at the scheduled review. If either does not, the hearing officer has two choices: decide that the absent party has given up the right to a review, or postpone the review if reasonable, extenuating circumstance preventing one of the parties from attending.

The hearing officer regulates the process. If any participant, including any witness, is abusive, threatening, or excessively disrespectful, the hearing officer has discretion to continue the review for another time, exclude the offending person from the review, or take such other reasonable action as to allow the review to continue forward without interruption. Evidence may be considered without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings. The Hearing officer has discretion to allow the parties to speak out of turn and allow rebuttal and sur-rebuttal as the situation requires

After the Review

The officer will consider all evidence introduced at the review. He or she will render a decision in writing to the applicant within 10 business days of the date of the review meeting. The notice will include a determination of the officer's reasons, the facts relied upon and a resolution of all material disputes of fact.

The Agency/Hearing Officer will exercise consideration of circumstances in accordance with 24 CFR 982.552 (c) (2):

Consideration of circumstances. In determining whether to deny assistance because of action or failure to act by members of the family:

(i) The agency may consider all relevant circumstances such as the seriousness of the case, the extent of participation or culpability of individual family members, mitigating circumstances related to the disability of a family member, and the effects of denial of assistance on other family members who were not involved in the action or failure.

(ii) *(Not applicable to admissions).*

(iii) In determining whether to deny admission for illegal use of drugs or alcohol abuse by a household member who is no longer engaged in such behavior, the PHA consider whether such household member is participating in or has successfully completed a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program, or has otherwise been rehabilitated successfully (42 U.S.C. 13661). For this purpose, the PHA may require the applicant to submit evidence of the household member's current participation in, or successful completion of, a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program or evidence of otherwise having been rehabilitated successfully.

(iv) If the family includes a person with disabilities, the PHA decision concerning such action is subject to consideration of reasonable accommodation in accordance with part 8 of this title.

(v) *Nondiscrimination limitation and protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.* The agency's admission actions must be consistent with fair housing and equal opportunity provisions of §5.105 of this title, and with the requirements of 24 CFR part 5, subpart L, protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.

HCAAC is not bound by a hearing officer's decision:

(1) Concerning a matter for which HCT is not required to provide an opportunity for an informal review under this section, or that otherwise exceeds the authority of the hearing officer under the review procedures.

(2) Contrary to HUD regulations or requirements, or otherwise contrary to federal, State, or local law.

(3) If HCT determines that it is not bound by the decision reached after the review, HCT must promptly notify the family of the determination, and of the reasons for the determination.

HCT is not bound by a hearing officer's decision:

(1) Concerning a matter for which HCT is not required to provide an opportunity for an informal review under this section, or that otherwise exceeds the authority of the hearing officer under the review procedures.

(2) That is contrary to HUD regulations or requirements, or otherwise contrary to federal, State, or local law.

(3) If HCT determines that it is not bound by the decision reached after the review, HCT must promptly notify the family of the determination, and of the reasons for the determination.

Review Exceptions (When an Informal Review is Not Required)

The agency does not have to provide an informal hearing to review any of the following:

(1) Discretionary administrative determinations by HCT.

(2) General policy issues or class grievances.

(3) A determination of the family unit size under HCT subsidy standards

(4) an HCT determination not to approve an extension or suspension of a voucher term.

(5) an HCT determination not to grant approval of the tenancy.

(6) an HCT determination that a unit selected is not in compliance with HQS.

(7) An HCT determination that the unit is not in accordance with HQS because of the family size or composition

Informal Hearing Federal Requirements

Pursuant to 24 CFR 982.555:

§982.555 Informal hearing for participant.

(a) *When hearing is required* (1) a PHA must give a participant family an opportunity for an informal hearing to consider whether the following PHA decisions relating to the individual circumstances of a participant family are in accordance with the law, HUD regulations and PHA policies:

(i) A determination of the family's annual or adjusted income, and the use of such income to compute the housing assistance payment.

(ii) A determination of the appropriate utility allowance (if any) for tenant-paid utilities from the PHA utility allowance schedule.

(iii) A determination of the family unit size under the PHA subsidy standards.

(iv) A determination that a certificate program family is residing in a unit with a larger number of bedrooms than appropriate for the family unit size under the PHA subsidy standards, or the PHA determination to deny the family's request for an exception from the standards.

(v) A determination to terminate assistance for a participant's family because of the family's action or failure to act (see §982.552).

(vi) A determination to terminate assistance because the participant family has been absent from the assisted unit for longer than the maximum period permitted under PHA policy and HUD rules.

(2) In the cases described in paragraphs (a)(1) (iv), (v) and (vi) of this section, the PHA must give the opportunity for an informal hearing before the PHA terminates housing assistance payments for the family under an outstanding HAP contract.

(b) *When hearing is not required.* The PHA is not required to provide a participant family an opportunity for an informal hearing for any of the following:

(1) Discretionary administrative determinations by the PHA.

(2) General policy issues or class grievances.

(3) Establishment of the PHA schedule of utility allowances for families in the program.

(4) a PHA determination not to approve an extension or suspension of a voucher term.

(5) a PHA determination not to approve a unit or tenancy.

(6) a PHA determination that an assisted unit is not in compliance with HQS. (However, the PHA must provide the opportunity for an informal hearing for a decision to terminate assistance for a breach of the HQS caused by the family as described in §982.551(c).)

(7) a PHA determination that the unit is not in accordance with HQS because of the family size.

(8) A determination by the PHA to exercise or not to exercise any right or remedy against the owner under a HAP contract.

(c) *Notice to family.* (1) In the cases described in paragraphs (a)(1) (i), (ii) and (iii) of this section, the PHA must notify the family that the family may ask for an explanation of the basis of the PHA determination, and that if the family does not agree with the determination, the family may request an informal hearing on the decision.

(2) In the cases described in paragraphs (a)(1) (iv), (v) and (vi) of this section, the PHA must give the family prompt written notice that the family may request a hearing. The notice must:

(i) Contain a brief statement of reasons for the decision,

(ii) State that if the family does not agree with the decision, the family may request an informal hearing on the decision, and

(iii) State the deadline for the family to request an informal hearing.

(d) *Expeditious hearing process.* Where a hearing for a participant's family is required under this section, the PHA must proceed with the hearing in a reasonably expeditious manner upon the request of the family.

(e) *Hearing procedures—* (1) *Administrative plan.* The administrative plan must state the PHA procedures for conducting informal hearings for participants.

(2) *Discovery—*(i) *By family.* The family must be given the opportunity to examine before the PHA hearing any PHA documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. The family must be allowed to copy any such document at the family's expense. If the PHA does not make the document available for examination on request of the family, the PHA may not rely on the document at the hearing.

(ii) *By PHA.* The PHA hearing procedures may provide that the PHA must be given the opportunity to examine at PHA offices before the PHA hearing any family documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. The PHA must be allowed to copy any such document at the PHA's expense. If the family does not make the document available for examination on request of the PHA, the family may not rely on the document at the hearing.

(iii) *Documents.* The term "documents" includes records and regulations.

(3) *Representation of family.* At its own expense, the family may be represented by a lawyer or other representative.

(4) *Hearing officer: Appointment and authority.* (i) The hearing may be conducted by any person or persons designated by the PHA, other than a person who made or approved the decision under review or a subordinate of this person.

(ii) The person who conducts the hearing may regulate the conduct of the hearing in accordance with the PHA hearing procedures.

(5) *Evidence.* The PHA and the family must be given the opportunity to present evidence, including but not limited to bringing witnesses, and may question any witness. Evidence may be considered without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings.

(6) *Issuance of decision.* The person who conducts the hearing must issue a written decision, stating briefly the reasons for the decision. Factual determinations relating to the individual circumstances of the family shall be based on a preponderance of the evidence presented at the hearing. A copy of the hearing decision shall be furnished promptly to the family.

(f) *Effect of decision.* The PHA is not bound by a hearing decision:

(1) Concerning a matter for which the PHA is not required to provide an opportunity for an informal hearing under this section, or that otherwise exceeds the authority of the person conducting the hearing under the PHA hearing procedures.

(2) That is contrary to HUD regulations or requirements, or otherwise contrary to federal, State, or local law.

(3) If the PHA determines that it is not bound by a hearing decision, the PHA must promptly notify the family of the determination, and of the reasons for the determination.

(g) *Restrictions on assistance to noncitizens.* The informal hearing provisions for the denial of assistance on the basis of ineligible immigration status are contained in 24 CFR part 5.

HCT Policy on Informal Hearings

Program recipients must follow the terms and conditions of the Housing Choice Voucher issued by the Housing Commission. Should the agency make the determination that a recipient has failed to meet the conditions of the voucher requirements or violated the federal program rules, program assistance may be terminated in accordance with 24 CFR 982.555 aforementioned.

If the program recipient believes that the agency made an inaccurate determination or did not follow its policies or HUD rules in making its decision, they may request an informal hearing. Requests for Informal Hearings must be made within 10 business days of HCT giving notice of a written termination (or benefit modification/determination) letter. Requests can be made either orally or in writing. For convenience the agency will include a Request for Hearing Form in the letter.

The Process

A hearing officer presides over the informal hearing. This person assigned as the Hearing Officer is impartial and has no prior knowledge of the case being presented. The Hearing is informal, and follows a prescribed format that first allows the Housing Commission to present the reason, evidence and/or testimony for termination/modification of assistance (which may include witnesses). Thereafter, the program recipient (or designee/counsel) is allowed to present their counter argument, reason, evidence and testimony (which may also include witnesses) to allow the Hearing Officer to make a qualified determination as to continuation, modification or termination of future assistance. The Hearing officer has discretion to allow the parties to speak out of turn and allow rebuttal and sur-rebuttal as the situation requires.

Before the hearing, recipients must be given the opportunity to review any relevant file/determination documents. Recipients may request a copy of any of these documents and the agency will strive to provide them complimentary, within reason. Any person, including a lawyer, may represent the recipient at the recipient's expense. Any request to review the documents must be made in a timely manner in advance of the hearing. Documents will also be available for review at the hearing, but the hearing will not be continued or unreasonably delayed to allow review if the request is not made in advance of the hearing.

Both parties must appear at the scheduled hearing. If either does not, the hearing officer has two choices: decide that the absent party has given up the right to a hearing, or postpone the hearing if reasonable, extenuating circumstances prevented one of the parties from attending. HCT has discretion to deny a postponement.

The hearing officer regulates the process. If any participant, including any witness, is abusive, threatening, or excessively disrespectful, the hearing officer has discretion to continue the hearing for another time, exclude the offending person from the review, or take such other reasonable action as to allow the review to continue forward without interruption. Evidence may be considered without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings. The Hearing officer has

discretion to allow the parties to speak out of turn and allow rebuttal and sur-rebuttal as the situation requires

After the Hearing

The officer will consider all evidence shown at the hearing. He or she will render a decision in writing within 10 business days of the hearing. The notice will include a determination of the officer's reasons. The Agency/Hearing Officer will exercise consideration of circumstances in accordance with 24 CFR 982.552 (c) (2):

Consideration of circumstances. In determining whether to deny or terminate assistance because of action or failure to act by members of the family:

(i) The agency may consider all relevant circumstances such as the seriousness of the case, the extent of participation or culpability of individual family members, mitigating circumstances related to the disability of a family member, and the effects of termination of assistance on other family members who were not involved in the action or failure.

(ii) The agency may impose, as a condition of continued assistance for other family members, a requirement that other family members who participated in or were culpable for the action or failure will not reside in the unit. The PHA may permit the other members of a participant family to continue receiving assistance.

(iii) In determining whether to terminate assistance for illegal use of drugs or alcohol abuse by a household member who is no longer engaged in such behavior, the agency consider whether such household member is participating in or has successfully completed a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program, or has otherwise been rehabilitated successfully (42 U.S.C. 13661). For this purpose, the agency may require the applicant or tenant to submit evidence of the household member's current participation in, or successful completion of, a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program or evidence of otherwise having been rehabilitated successfully.

(iv) If the family includes a person with disabilities, the agency decision concerning such action is subject to consideration of reasonable accommodation in accordance with part 8 of this title.

(v) *Nondiscrimination limitation and protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking.* The agency's termination actions must be consistent with fair housing and equal opportunity provisions of §5.105 of this title, and with the requirements of 24 CFR part 5, subpart L, protection for victims of domestic violence, dating violence, or stalking

HCT is not bound by a hearing officer's decision:

(1) Concerning a matter for which HCT is not required to provide an opportunity for an informal hearing under this section, or that otherwise exceeds the authority of the hearing officer under the hearing procedures.

(2) That is contrary to HUD regulations or requirements, or otherwise contrary to federal, State, or local law.

(3) If HCT determines that it is not bound by a hearing decision, HCT must promptly notify the family of the determination, and of the reasons for the determination.

Hearing Exceptions

The agency does not have to provide an informal hearing to review any of the following:

- (1) Discretionary administrative determinations by HCT.
- (2) General policy issues or class grievances.
- (3) Establishment of HCT's schedule of utility allowances for families in the program.
- (4) an HCT determination not to approve an extension or suspension of a voucher term.
- (5) an HCT determination not to approve a unit or tenancy.
- (6) an HCT determination that an assisted unit is not in compliance with HQS. (However, the agency must provide the opportunity for an informal hearing for a decision to terminate assistance for a breach of the HQS caused by the family as described in §982.551(c).)
- (7) an HCT determination that the unit is not in accordance with HQS because of the family size.
- (8) A determination by HCT to exercise or not to exercise any right or remedy against the owner under a HAP contract.