



**Housing Authority
of the
City of Georgetown**

**Section 8
Tenant Information Packet**

Welcome to the Georgetown Housing Authority Section 8 program!

This packet is to give tenants information on the Section 8 program. It will explain what your rights, responsibilities and roles are, basic information on landlord's rights and responsibilities, and what the Housing Authority's responsibilities are. If you have any questions at any time regarding the Section 8 program, please call your Section 8 Specialist:

Housing Choice Voucher/Section 8 Specialist

P.O. Box 60

501 Janis Dr.

Georgetown, TX 78627

Office: 512.869.6918

Fax: 512.869.7348

www.georgetownha.org

Introduction

The Section 8 program (also known as the Housing Choice Voucher Program) is a federally funded program which helps families pay their rent. Families are able to select a unit of their choice in the private rental market. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) funds the program nationally while the Georgetown Housing Authority (GHA) administers the program locally. Most Housing Authorities across the nation have their own Section 8 program, which may differ in the rules and regulations of the program.

The primary goal of the Section 8 program is to give eligible families an opportunity to afford quality housing in the private rental market. Families pay approximately 30% of their gross monthly income towards rent and the Section 8 program pays the balance of rent directly to the landlord.

Owners/ landlords sign Housing Assistance Payment (HAP) contracts with the Housing Authority. These contracts are the rules that the owner must follow to remain a landlord on the Section 8 Program and to receive the Housing Authority's housing assistance payment. Tenants sign leases with the landlord just like the private rental market, but they also agree to abide by Housing Authority program rules. The Housing Authority enters into a contract with both the landlord and the tenant to make sure that rents are calculated correctly, paid on time, and that Section 8 rules and regulations are followed.



Roles and Responsibilities

Section 8 balances relationships between owners, landlords, tenants, and the Housing Authority. The following summarizes the responsibilities of each.:

Owner/Landlord

- Screen families to determine if they will be good renters
- Maintain the housing unit by making necessary repairs in a timely manner
- Collect the rent due by the tenant
- Manage the property and enforce the lease
- Comply with the rules of the Housing Assistance Payment Contract (contract with the Housing Authority)
- Notify the Housing Authority if the tenant vacates the unit

Housing Authority

- Reviews all applicants according to policy and determines who is eligible for the program
- Explains the rules of the program to families and property owners
- Issues a voucher to the family
- Inspects the unit for compliance with standard Housing Quality Standards (HQS)
- Approves the unit, owner, and lease
- Makes housing assistance payments to owner in a timely manner
- Reexamines the family income and composition at least annually and adjusts the rent and makes changes in rent portion when income or family composition changes
- Reinspects the unit every year to ensure the unit meets housing quality standards
- Ensures that the owners and families follow program rules
- Recruits new owners

Family

- Provides the Housing Authority with complete, honest, and accurate information in a timely manner
- Locates a unit
- Attends all scheduled appointments
- Maintains the unit and repair any damages caused by family or guests beyond normal wear and tear
- Follows the rules of the lease
- Pays their portion of the rent on time to the owner
- Follows all the rules and family obligations under the Section 8 program



Selecting a Unit

Families may select a unit of their choice in the private rental market. You can find a unit by looking at the landlord listing through the Section 8 program, newspaper ads, phone books, apartment locaters, etc. Families will be required to enter a one year (12 month) lease, so make sure the unit is a safe and convenient home for your family.

Tenant Screening and Information GHA May Provide to Owners

Owners are encouraged to screen families on the basis of the family's rental history. GHA does not make any claims to a family's expected behavior or suitability for tenancy based on the Housing Authority's admissions policy.

GHA may provide the owner the family's current and prior address as listed in the Housing Authority's files AND the name and address, if known, of the current and prior landlords. Such requests must be made in writing.

Application Fees and Security Deposits

All application fees and security deposits are the responsibility of the tenant. The amount you pay must not be more than the charge to any other applicant, regardless of income.

Rent Limits

The rent must be comparable to a similar, unassisted unit. A rent reasonableness study will be conducted to determine if the rent requested by the landlord is too high. The Housing Authority will compare locations, quality, size, type of unit, age, amenities, housing services, maintenance and utilities to other units to make this decision. **All requested rents MUST BE APPROVED FOR AN INITIAL LEASE OR ANY RENT INCREASES. It is against program rules for a tenant to pay more in rent or a landlord to take more in rent than is agreed in your contract.**

Steps to Participate in the Section 8 Program

- Once you receive your voucher, you have 60 days to locate a unit.
- If you have found a unit and the landlord agrees to lease to you, you must submit a Request for Tenancy (RTA) before the expiration date on your voucher.
- When the RTA is received, the Housing Authority will determine if the family can afford to rent the unit based on their income. This is called an “affordability calculation”.
- If the unit is affordable, an inspection will be requested.
- The unit **MUST** pass inspection before you can move in. GHA will **NOT** pay any assistance on any units that have not been inspected and passed.
- After a unit passes inspection and the rent amount is approved, the rent portions will be calculated and the Housing Assistance Payment contract will be prepared. It can take an average of five (5) to ten (10) days to prepare this paperwork.
- A notice will be sent to the family and the landlord. This letter will include the approved rent amount, effective date of the HAP contract, the family’s rent portion and the housing assistance payment amount. Housing Assistance Payments will NOT begin until the Housing Assistance Payment contract is signed and a signed lease is received. The Housing Authority will NOT pay any rent for living in a unit prior to a signed contract and/or lease.



Important Rules

- During the term of the lease, the family must report ANY change in family composition or income within TEN days of the actual occurrence. Not reporting these changes can constitute fraud and result in your assistance being terminated and monies due to the Housing Authority.
- The Housing Authority is required to review your income and family composition at least once a year, normally at the time your lease is up. The rent portions will be recalculated and a Rent Change Notice will be mailed to the owner and the landlord. Tenants must immediately comply with the new rental amount according to the effective date of the letter.
- The Housing Authority is required to inspect your unit at least once a year. We may also perform a complaint inspection if it is determined that the owner is not maintaining the unit. Any problems will be noted and a letter mailed indicating a repair deadline. The owner or landlord is required to repair the item within 30 days (or 24 hours for life-threatening problems.). The family is responsible for any tenant damages caused by normal wear and tear.
- If the family vacates before the end of the lease, the owner must notify the Housing Authority. HAP can only be made while the family is living in the unit. Families who leave the unit without notifying the Housing Authority or owner may be terminated from the Section 8 program.
- If you want to request an extension beyond the sixty days to locate a unit, a request must be made in writing to the Section 8 office. Requests are not automatically granted. They will be approved on a case-by-case basis and will be for a maximum of sixty days, in two thirty day increments.

Moving to a New Unit

- Leases are for one year.
- Tenants must request to move in writing. Moves must be approved by the Section 8 office before you can move. Only families in good standing with the program may be approved to move. Good standing means there are no lease violations, debts, or Section 8 program violations.
- If the lease agreement is being terminated before the end of the lease, the landlord and the tenant must both agree in writing.
- The new unit must meet all the requirements (rent reasonableness, inspection, etc) before it will be approved.

Moving to Another Housing Authority

- You can transfer (port) to another Housing Authority's Section 8 program as long as the following are met:
- You currently have a valid voucher and are in good standing with the Section 8 program
- You are under the income limits for the Georgetown Housing Authority
- You must contact the receiving Housing Authority

Requesting a Complaint Inspection

- Submit request for repairs in writing to the owner/ landlord. Make sure your request is dated.
- If repairs are not made in a reasonable time, return a written request for a complaint inspection to the Section 8 office
- Section 8 will contact the landlord and the tenant to investigate the complaint and try to resolve the problem
- If the complaint is not resolved in a timely manner and the request is a reasonable one, a physical inspection of the unit will be made by the Section 8 staff.
- Section 8 may take appropriate action, to include cancellation of the contract if either of the concerned parties fail to follow the rules in the contract.

Informal Hearings

When your family is terminated, you have the option to request a hearing to see if you can still receive assistance. The following explains what a hearing is and what the steps are to request a hearing:

1. Why was I denied?

You were denied for one or more of the following: a negative criminal history (no conviction required), rental history, possible fraud or misrepresentation, or another reason as listed on your denial letter.

2. What can I do?

You can request an informal hearing.

3. What is an informal hearing?

An informal hearing is where an applicant can dispute the Housing Authority's decision to deny assistance or terminate a family from the program. You discuss your case directly with a hearing officer. Only the hearing officer can listen to your explanation and determine whether you can still receive assistance.

4. How do I request an informal hearing?

You can request a hearing in two ways:

- a) You can request a hearing at the time of your interview if a case-worker notifies you of the decision to deny your file at that time.
- b) You will receive an official denial letter by mail. Once you receive your denial letter in the mail, you can also request a hearing within ten days from the date of the denial letter.

You must put your request for a hearing in writing and either fax, mail or bring it to the main office in person.

5. When will I receive a hearing?

You will receive an appointment letter for a hearing in two to three weeks from the date you receive your official denial letter in the mail. The appointment letter will be mailed out at least ten days before your hearing.

6. What happens if I do not attend?

If you do not attend the hearing, your right to a hearing will be forfeited and your file will remain closed.

7. Can I reschedule the hearing?

You can only reschedule hearings for medical reasons or emergencies. You must bring written proof of the reason to reschedule your hearing, such as a doctor's letter or letter from your employer.

8. What do I need to bring to the hearing?

You will need to bring any documentation that supports your case. You can bring letters of reference, probation documentation showing you are in compliance, letters from the police department showing that your case was dismissed, etc. You can also bring witnesses, legal representation or caseworkers.

9. What happens after the hearing?

You will receive written notification approximately two weeks after your hearing with one of two decisions:

- a) If the Hearing Officer upholds your denial, this means your file is closed and your assistance is being terminated.
- b) If the hearing Officer reinstates your file, your assistance will continue and you will be allowed to remain on the program.

10. Can I appeal the decision of the Hearing Officer?

No, you cannot appeal a hearing decision. Once the Hearing Officer makes a decision, that decision is final.



Housing Quality Standards

Overview

Before the Housing Authority can make payments on behalf of a tenant family, the unit must meet HUD's minimum Housing Quality Standards (HQS). The Housing Authority will inspect the unit for HQS initially and at least once annually. At the time of inspection, the unit should be "move-in" ready. This will prevent delays in the housing assistance payments.

Most Common HQS Failed Items

- Non-functioning smoke detectors
- Missing or cracked electric outlet covers
- Railings not present where required
- Peeling exterior and interior paint
- Trip hazards caused by installed floor coverings (carpet/vinyl)
- Cracked or broken window panes
- Inoperable burners on stoves or inoperable hoods
- Missing burner control knobs
- Inoperable bathroom fan/no ventilation
- Leaking faucets or plumbing
- Holes in interior walls
- No temperature/pressure relief valve on water heaters