

## **2.0 Applicant Eligibility**

This chapter defines the criteria that have been established by HUD and by Pensacola Housing for admission, and for denial of admission, to Pensacola Housing's HCV program. Additional admission criteria may apply to special voucher programs such as VASH, FUP, FSS, and TBRA.

Pensacola Housing's policy is to apply these criteria objectively and consistently to all applications received, and to give applicants every opportunity to demonstrate their eligibility.

Applicants will be provided the opportunity to explain their circumstances, to furnish additional information, if needed, and to receive an explanation for any decision made by Pensacola Housing regarding their eligibility.

Please see Chapter 3, "Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity," for additional information on program access and eligibility.

To be eligible for participation in Pensacola Housing's voucher programs, an applicant must:

1. Be a "family," as defined below, which must have a head of household, spouse, or co-head who is at least 18 years of age or an emancipated minor;
2. Be within the applicable income limit as established annually by HUD;
3. Furnish verification of Social Security Numbers for all family members, if they have been assigned a Social Security Number;
4. Be a United States Citizen or Eligible Non-Citizen;
5. Not owe money to Pensacola Housing or other PHAs;
6. Complete the application process, and provide truthful and verifiable information about income and personal circumstances;
7. Cooperate in the verification process while the application is reviewed and processed;
8. Meet Pensacola Housing's criminal history standards; and
9. Meet Pensacola Housing's participant history standards (if the applicant is a former participant of the program).

The eligibility criteria are defined further below.

### **2.1 Definition of Family**

For the purposes of this program, the definition of family includes, but is not limited to, the following:

1. An individual, who may be an elderly person, a near-elderly person, a disabled person, a displaced person, or any other individual who is at least 18 years of age or an emancipated minor;
2. A woman who is pregnant;
3. A group of persons residing together. Examples of such groups include, but are not limited to:
  - a. A family with children. Note that a child who is temporarily away from the home because of placement in foster care is considered a member of the family for the purposes of this program;
  - b. A family without children;
  - c. An elderly family, meaning a family whose head of household, spouse, co-head, or sole member is a person who is at least 62 years of age. An elderly family may include two or more persons who are at least 62 years of age living together, or one or more persons who are at least 62 years of age living with one or more live-in aides;
  - d. A near-elderly family, meaning a family whose head of household, spouse, co-head, or sole member is a person who is at least 50 years of age but below the age of 62. A near-elderly family may include two or more persons who are at least 50 years of age but below the age of 62 living together, or one or more persons at least 50 years of age but below the age of 62 living with one or more live-in aides;
  - e. A disabled family, meaning a family whose head of household, spouse, co-head, or sole member is a person with a disability. A disabled family may include two or more persons with disabilities living together, or one or more persons with disabilities living with one or more live-in aides;
  - f. A displaced family, meaning a family in which the members have been displaced by governmental action, or whose dwelling has been extensively damaged or destroyed as a result of a disaster declared or otherwise formally recognized pursuant to Federal disaster relief laws; or
  - g. The remaining member or members of a participant family who remain in the assisted unit when other members of the household have left the unit.

## **2.2 Definition of Disabled Person**

For the purpose of Pensacola Housing's voucher programs, a person with a disability is defined as an individual who permanently or temporarily:

1. Has a disability as defined in Section 223 of the Social Security Act; or
2. Has a developmental disability as defined in Section 102 of the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act; or
3. Is determined to have a physical, mental, or emotional impairment, as defined by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or has a history or record of such impairment; or is perceived by others as having such an impairment; or
4. Is receiving Social Security Disability or SSI benefits based on a determination of disability by the Social Security Administration.

5. This definition does not exclude persons who have the disease of acquired immunodeficiency syndrome or any conditions arising from the etiologic agent for acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.
6. In accordance with 24 CFR Part 5.403, individuals are not considered disabled for eligibility purposes solely on the basis of any drug or alcohol dependence.

Pensacola Housing will verify a person's disability only to the extent necessary to ensure that applicants are qualified for deductions used in determining adjusted income; that applicants are entitled to any preference they may claim; and that applicants who have requested a reasonable accommodation have a need for the requested accommodation.

It is a violation of Section 504 of the Americans with Disabilities Act and of the Fair Housing Act for Pensacola Housing, or any PHA, to inquire whether an applicant or participant is capable of living independently.

### **2.3 Definition of Head of Household**

The head of household is the adult member of the household who:

1. Has the legal capacity to enter into a lease under state and local law;
2. Will be issued the voucher;
3. Will sign the lease;
4. Will maintain utility accounts for the assisted unit; and
5. Will be responsible for ensuring family obligations under the lease and the Housing Choice Voucher agreement are met.

**Note:** An emancipated minor may be a head of household.

### **2.4 Spouse of Head of Household**

The spouse is the husband or wife of the head of household.

### **2.5 Co-Head of Household**

A co-head of household is an individual who signs the lease and voucher agreement and who is equally responsible, with the head of household, for lease and Housing Choice Voucher agreement obligations. A household may have a spouse or a co-head, but not both. A co-head cannot be a dependent.

### **2.6 Live-In Aide**

A live-in aide is a person who resides in the household and who meets the requirements for a live-in aide described in Chapter 3.

### **2.7 Multiple Families in the Same Household**

Two families living together (for example, a married couple, their adult child, and that adult child's spouse and/or children) may be treated as single voucher household, as long as the household meets program eligibility requirements.

## **2.8 Joint Custody of Children**

The following guidelines will be used to determine voucher program eligibility of children who are subject to a joint custody agreement:

1. If custody is split unevenly, children will be considered a household member of the parent with whom they primarily reside (51 percent of the time or more).
2. If custody is split evenly (50/50), the parent wishing to include the child in a voucher household will be required to certify, and provide supporting documentation to establish, that the child resides primarily with the applicant or participant. Examples of supporting documentation include tax returns showing the child claimed as a dependent, or the child's school records.
3. Any family with children in a joint custody or temporary guardianship arrangement wishing to include those children in a voucher household will be required to certify that the child is not listed as a household member in any other unit receiving a subsidy from a federal, state or local housing program.
4. If a child is included in a voucher household administered by Pensacola Housing and subsequently appears on the Multiple Subsidy Report in HUD's EIV system, Pensacola Housing may open an investigation. If it is determined that the criteria defined above have not been met, the child will be removed from the voucher household for the purposes of HUD reporting; and, if appropriate based on remaining household composition, the payment standard for the family will be reduced at the next reexamination.

## **2.9 Eligibility of Students**

On December 30, 2005, HUD published a final rule implementing a new law pertaining to the eligibility of students for Section 8 housing. HUD guidance was published in a notice in the April 10, 2006 Federal Register and is available at <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2006-04-10/pdf/06-3365.pdf>.

Under this rule, a person is not eligible to separately receive Section 8 assistance who:

- Is enrolled as a student at an institution of higher education (a detailed definition of this term is provided in the April 10, 2006 Federal Register notice, pages 18149-18150); and
- Is under the age of 24; and
- Is not a veteran of the United States military; and
- Is unmarried; and
- Does not have a dependent child; and
- Is individually ineligible for Section 8 assistance; and

- Has parents who are, individually or jointly, ineligible for assistance.

In summary, the Federal Register states: *“If a student is enrolled at an institution of higher education, is under the age of 24, is not a veteran, is unmarried and does not have a dependent child, is individually ineligible for Section 8 assistance, or the student’s parents are, individually or jointly, ineligible for assistance, no Section 8 can be provided to the student. Unless the student is determined independent from his or her parents, as discussed in this guidance, the eligibility of a student seeking Section 8 assistance will be based on both the student and the parents being determined income eligible for Section 8 assistance.”*

Note: HUD’s April 10, 2006 guidance on student eligibility does not apply to a student residing in a Section 8 assisted unit with his or her parent or parents, or to a student residing with his or her parent or parents who are applying to receive Section 8 assistance.

The rule also provides that, in determination of student income, financial assistance in excess of tuition assistance received by the student will be included in annual income for determination of eligibility for Section 8 assistance. However, if student loans are part of the financial assistance package, the loan proceeds will not be included as annual income.

## **2.10 Income Eligibility**

To be income eligible, the applicant family shall, at the time the family initially receives the Housing Choice Voucher, be a family that is:

1. An extremely low-income or a very low-income family. “Extremely low-income” means a household whose gross annual income does not exceed the higher of the Federal Poverty Level or 30 percent of the area median income established annually by HUD for Escambia County. “Very low-income” means a household whose gross annual income does not exceed 50 percent of the area median income established annually by HUD for Escambia County; or
2. A family that has been continuously assisted under the 1937 Housing Act. (An applicant is continuously assisted if the family has received assistance under any 1937 Housing Act program within 120 days of voucher issuance); or
3. A family that is displaced as a result of the prepayment of a mortgage or voluntary termination of a mortgage insurance contract under 24 CFR 248.165.

Families whose annual income exceeds the very low income limit for their family size will be denied.

In accordance with HUD requirements, Pensacola Housing will ensure that at least 75% of households leased up as new admissions in a fiscal year shall be extremely low-income. If Pensacola Housing determines that it’s in danger of missing this goal, it may suspend issuing vouchers to applicants at the very low income level for a period of time, until the target percentage of extremely low income households has been met. Households at the very low income level will retain their position on the waiting list during this time.

Income limits apply only at admission and are not applicable for continued assistance, even for families who opt to move to a different unit within Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction, or to exercise portability. However, as income increases, the HAP will decrease.

### **2.11 Income Eligibility for Families Exercising Portability**

The applicable income limit for admission to the program is the income limit for the area in which the family is initially assisted in the program.

For families who apply to the program through Pensacola Housing, this means the applicable income limit for issuance of a Housing Choice Voucher is the income limit for Escambia County, except for families who request to exercise the portability option as an applicant. Families who request to port out without first leasing up in Escambia County must meet the income limit requirements for the receiving PHA's jurisdiction.

Families who are moving into Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction under portability, and have the status of applicant rather than of participant at their initial PHA, must meet Escambia County's very low-income limit in order to be issued a Housing Choice Voucher in this jurisdiction.

Families who are moving into Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction under portability and are currently program participants at the initiating PHA do not have to meet the income eligibility requirements for Pensacola Housing's jurisdiction.

### **2.12 Mandatory Social Security Numbers**

Prior to admission, all applicants are required to provide verification of Social Security Numbers for all family members six months of age and older who have been assigned a Social Security Number. This requirement also applies to persons joining the family after the family has been admitted to the program, except for the addition of individuals under the age of six who do not have an assigned Social Security Number. For such individuals, verification of a newly assigned Social Security Number must be provided within 90 days of being added to the household.

Persons who provide Social Security Numbers, but cannot provide verification, can retain their place on Pensacola Housing's waiting list for a period of 90 days, but cannot be admitted to the program until verification is provided.

Failure to provide verification of Social Security Numbers is grounds for denial or termination of assistance.

### **2.13 Exemptions from Social Security Number Disclosure**

Individuals who were program participants as of January 31, 2010, who are 62 years of age or older, and who had not previously disclosed a valid Social Security Number are exempt from disclosure, even if the individual moves to a new assisted unit.

Persons who have not been assigned a Social Security Number must certify that they have never been assigned a Social Security Number and can only be included in an applicant household if they do not contend to have eligible immigration status and are part of a “mixed” family, under 24 CFR 5.216(a), 5.516, 5.518, 5.520.

## **2.14 Citizenship/Eligible Non-Citizen Status**

Applicants must provide verification of eligibility based on citizenship or immigrant status at admission to the program.

The status of each member of the household is considered individually for the citizenship/eligible immigrant requirement before the family’s status is defined.

Only those family members who are U.S. citizens or eligible immigrants may receive benefits from the HCV program. Eligible immigrants are persons who are in one of the immigrant categories set forth in 42 U.S.C. Section 1436(a).

Despite the ineligibility of one or more family members, a mixed family may be eligible for partial assistance. See Section 2.14.1, Mixed Families, below.

A family without any eligible members that was receiving assistance as of June 19, 1995, may be eligible for temporary deferral of termination of assistance.

### **2.14.1 Mixed Families**

A mixed family is a family that includes at least one member with citizenship or eligible immigrant status and another member or members without citizenship or eligible immigrant status. A mixed family is eligible for assistance as long as at least one member is a citizen or eligible immigrant. Assistance for such families will be pro-rated according to the number of residents who are citizens or have eligible immigrant status.

### **2.14.2 Ineligible Families**

Ineligible families are those families in which no members are eligible for assistance.

### **2.14.3 Appeals**

Applicants who are denied admission because of immigrant status are entitled to an informal hearing, as provided in Chapter 21 of this Administrative Plan.

## **2.15 Criminal History Requirements [24 CFR 982.553]**

Pensacola Housing will conduct criminal background checks on all adult household members, including live-in aides. If the individual has lived in the local jurisdiction for the past five years, this check will be made through state or local law enforcement or clerk of court records. If the individual has lived outside the local area, Pensacola Housing may contact law enforcement agencies where the individual has lived previously, or request a

check through the FBI's National Crime Information Center (NCIC).

The Housing Department will deny assistance to any adult household member who has one or more drug related or violent-crime-related felony convictions within the past three years.

Applicants who were incarcerated for a drug or violent-crime-related felony become eligible for HCV program assistance three years after their release from incarceration.

Pensacola Housing will prohibit admission to the program if any member of the household is subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a State sex offender registration program. In accordance with HUD notice PIH 2012-28, Pensacola Housing will use the the Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Database, an online, searchable database hosted by the Department of Justice, to conduct this background screening.

In addition, Pensacola Housing will permanently prohibit admission to any applicant or participant who has been convicted of the manufacture or production of methamphetamine on the premises of any federally-assisted housing.

#### **2.15.1 Criminal Screening for Emergency Housing Voucher (EHV) Program**

For the EHV program, Pensacola Housing will use the required federal criminal screening criteria to deny or terminate assistance from the program, as follows:

- Pensacola Housing will prohibit admission to the program if any member of the household is subject to a lifetime registration requirement under a State sex offender registration program. In accordance with HUD notice PIH 2012-28, Pensacola Housing will use the the Dru Sjodin National Sex Offender Database, an online, searchable database hosted by the Department of Justice, to conduct this background screening; and
- Pensacola Housing will permanently prohibit admission to any applicant or participant who has been convicted of the manufacture or production of methamphetamine on the premises of any federally-assisted housing.

#### **2.16 Consent Authorization Forms**

Each member of the family who is at least 18 years of age, and each head of household and co-head or spouse, regardless of age, shall sign one or more consent forms. The consent forms will include, at minimum, the following:

1. A provision authorizing Pensacola Housing to obtain from State Wage Information Collection Agencies (SWICAs) any information or materials necessary to complete or verify the application for initial eligibility or for continued participation.

2. A provision authorizing Pensacola Housing to request income information from the Internal Revenue Service, the Social Security Administration, the Department of Children and Families, Child Support Services, credit reporting agencies, other PHAs, and other sources, for the sole purpose of verifying income and asset information pertinent to the family's eligibility for assistance and level of benefit.
3. A provision authorizing Pensacola Housing to request information regarding utility accounts.

### **2.17 HUD-Required Denial for Failure to Submit Consent Forms**

Pensacola Housing will not admit a family if any adult member of the family fails to sign and submit consent forms for obtaining information required by Pensacola Housing. This denial is required pursuant to 24 CFR 982.552(b, 3).

### **2.18 Other Requirements**

In addition to denial of admission for the reasons outlined above, Pensacola Housing may deny admission to a family if any family member:

1. Was previously assisted under the program and was terminated for violating any family obligation in the last 3 years;
2. Was evicted from federally-assisted housing in the last 3 years;
3. Has committed fraud, bribery, or any other corrupt or criminal act in connection with any federal housing program, or unlawfully manipulated the application process in any way, in the last 3 years;
4. Currently has a debt with Pensacola Housing or any other PHA. Note that applicants who have a debt with Pensacola Housing based on prior program participation and who have stayed current on a payment plan may request an exception to this requirement, to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis;
5. Has participated in the Family Self-Sufficiency (FSS) program and has failed to comply with the family's FSS contract of participation;
6. Has ever engaged in or threatened abusive or violent behavior toward Pensacola Housing or other housing authority personnel, in the last 3 years, as follows:
  - a) "Abusive or violent behavior" includes verbal as well as physical abuse or violence. Use of expletives that are generally considered profane, racial epithets, or other language, written or oral, that is customarily used to insult or intimidate, may be cause for denial.
  - b) "Threatening" refers to oral or written threats, or physical gestures, that communicate intent to abuse or commit violence.

### **2.19 Screening for Port-In Families**

Pensacola Housing shall use the criminal history requirements, HUD-required denials, and other requirements described above to screen families seeking to port into Pensacola Housing's HCV program, as per 24 CFR 982.355(c, 10).

## **2.20 Notice of Standards to Applicants and Participants**

Pensacola Housing shall give every applicant and participant a written description of:

1. Family obligations under the program;
2. The grounds under which Pensacola Housing may deny or terminate assistance because of family action or failure to act; and
3. Pensacola Housing's informal review procedures for denial of admission to the program and informal hearing procedures for terminating program participation for applicants.

## **2.21 Notice to Owners Regarding Additional Tenant Screening**

Pensacola Housing shall screen applicants for satisfaction of the program admission criteria only. Pensacola Housing does not screen for suitability for tenancy. Screening for suitability is the property owner's responsibility. Pensacola Housing has no responsibility for the family's behavior or conduct as tenants, and has no liability to property owners or others for the acts of HCV program tenants.

## **2.22 Information Provided to Owners**

Upon request, Pensacola Housing will provide to a prospective landlord:

- The name and address, if known to Pensacola Housing, of the prospective tenant's current and immediately prior landlords; and
- The current and immediately prior address of the prospective tenant, as listed in Pensacola Housing records.