



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance
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Field Operations Memo 2004-26
July 15, 2004

To:  **Transitional Assistance Office Staff**

From: **Cescia Derderian, Assistant Commissioner for Field Operations**

Re: **Local Housing Authority (LHA) Placement Program – Identifying Families**

Overview

The Department, in collaboration with the Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD), is proposing another new initiative to help families move from shelter into permanent housing. This program is called *The Local Housing Authority (LHA) Placement Program*. Eligible families will participate in this shelter program for up to six months. At the end of the program, each family will assume tenancy for their unit or another unit at the local housing authority site.

Purpose of Memo

The purpose of this memo is to introduce the new housing program and advise ICMs, AU Managers and/or Homeless Coordinators how to identify EA families for participation in the program. At this time, only the Taunton and Worcester TAOs have a local housing authority ready to place families. In the near future, when additional LHAs join the *Local Housing Authority (LHA) Placement Program*, the program will be offered to other TAOs and information will be sent about referring the family to the local housing authorities for an initial interview and subsequent placement.

In preparation for the *LHA Placement Program* becoming available statewide, TAOs should begin identifying families for referral to the program.

Only families who meet the basic eligibility criteria discussed later in this memo will be considered for this program. In addition, the family must fully understand and be willing to accept the conditions of the *LHA Placement Program*.

What is the LHA Placement Program

Currently there are two local housing authorities with vacant units that are accepting families: the Worcester LHA and the Taunton LHA. Due to the limited number of available units, **only the Taunton and Worcester TAOs are referring EA AUs to these sites.** It is expected that the Taunton and Worcester LHAs will find additional units throughout FY'05.

DHCD continues to talk with the other local housing authorities regarding the *LHA Placement Program*. It is expected that the program will have LHAs across the state participating in the program later this month or in August 2004. Each participating LHA will set aside approximately 10 units for this program during FY'05. **Updates to this memo will be sent to the TAOs as more LHAs become ready to accept EA families.**

- The *Local Housing Authority (LHA) Placement Program* provides housing at no cost to the family for six months.
- A family may participate in the program for up to six months or until the family is determined ready for LHA tenancy, whichever comes first, unless the family leaves the program for other permanent housing or the family's EA shelter benefits are terminated prior to that time.
- At the end of the six months or when the family is determined ready for tenancy, whichever comes first, the family will assume responsibility for the full rent, i.e., 32 percent of their income, either for the apartment they currently occupy or another unit at the local housing authority.
- A family that signs a lease for a unit will have their EA benefits terminated as they are now housed.
- A family that is selected to participate in this program by both the LHA and/or DTA and refuses to participate will be subject to the same regulation as if the family refused shelter placement. Refusal to participate will result in EA termination.
- The ICM, AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator and an LHA Case Manager will work with the family to prepare to assume responsibility for the unit in a short period of time, to offer guidance to the family and to resolve any issues. DTA will provide necessary support services: child-care services if the adult is working or in a training program (through the ESP program for TAFDC AUs or the Homeless Child-Care Service program), transportation services for the adult if employed (through the Access to Jobs Program) and referrals to other agencies, as needed.

Note: Some local housing authorities specialize in housing for the elderly or disabled and do not accept families. Families may only be referred to the LHAs that agree to participate in this program.

**Criteria for
Participating in
the LHA
Placement
Program**

The following criteria will apply to families statewide. A family must meet the following criteria to be considered for the program:

- While in shelter, an intensive assessment must be completed on the family's readiness to assume responsibility for rent, prior local housing authority history, CORI check, credit check, prior landlord history, an assessment of services needed by the family, a reassessment of services already in place, including child care, transportation, counseling, etc;
- The family must have an adult member who the Department determines would be a good participant in the *LHA Placement Program* and
 - is receiving a stable monthly income which includes receipt of a federal- and/or state-assistance benefits, RSDI, SSI, child support, UC, and/or veterans' benefits; or
 - is currently employed; or
 - is currently participating in an education or training program.

There are certain issues that the local housing authority would view as potential program ineligibility/disqualification issues. The ICM, AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator must take these into consideration before recommending the family to the LHA director/designee. These issues are based on past housing infractions, which if repeated would interfere with the rights of or threaten the health and/or safety of other tenants, LHA employees or the housing unit.

The ICM, AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator should be aware of any past housing infractions that the family may have by reviewing the EA record. The following is a list of the ineligibility/disqualification issues that the LHA will use to determine appropriate referrals for the family. If the ICM, AU Manager or Homeless Coordinator is aware of these issues before the initial case conference, steps can be taken to either resolve the issue or it may be decided to not refer the family to the program. **Previous housing infractions do not necessarily preclude the family's participation in this program.** In determining whether to accept the family, the LHA will consider:

- The severity of the issue;
- The amount of time which has elapsed since the occurrence of such issue;
- The degree of danger to the health, safety and security of others or to the security of the property of others or to the physical conditions of the housing development and its common areas if the conduct reoccurred;

**Criteria for
Participating in
the LHA
Placement
Program
(continued)**

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- The disruption and inconvenience any reoccurrence of the infraction would cause the LHA; and
 - The likelihood that the family's behavior will be substantially improved.
- Issues that the LHA consider in determining appropriate referrals include:
- The family does not intend to occupy public housing as a primary residence;
 - A member of the family is a current user of one or more illegal controlled substances. Usage within the past 12 months is considered current;
 - A current family member's behavior disturbed a neighbor(s) in a prior residence and that behavior if repeated, would substantially interfere with the rights of other tenants or the LHA employees;
 - The family displayed living habits or poor housekeeping at a prior residence that if repeated, would pose a substantial threat to the health or safety of the tenant or others;
 - A current family member has engaged in criminal activity that if repeated, would interfere with or threaten the rights of other tenants or LHA employees or the common areas of the LHA;
 - The family has a history of nonpayment of rent. However, if the tenant paid at least 50 percent of his or her monthly income for rent each month during a tenancy but was unable to pay the full rent, an eviction for nonpayment of the balance shall not disqualify the individual from public housing;
 - The family has failed to provide information reasonably necessary for the LHA to process the applicant's application;
 - The family has a history of failure to meet material lease terms at one or more prior residences;
 - The family has misrepresented or falsified information on a prior local housing authority application within the last three years, and could not show the misrepresentation or falsification was unintentional; or
 - The family has directed abusive or threatening behavior which was unreasonable and unwarranted towards an LHA employee during the application process or a prior application process within three years.

Identifying Families

To prepare for the expansion of this initiative, ICMs, AU Managers or Homeless Coordinators in all TAOs except in Taunton and Worcester should:

- Review their EA AUs to identify candidates for this program, keeping in mind the criteria listed above ; and
- Discuss appropriate candidates with the TAO Director/designee;
- If it appears that one of the housing infractions discussed above applies to the family, schedule an appointment with the family to discuss further;
- Do not promise housing in a local housing authority to any family; and
- Maintain a list of potential candidates pending additional information about participating LHAs.

Questions

If you have any questions, please have your Hotline designee call the Policy Hotline at 617-348-8478.
