



April 20, 2004

**United States
Department of
Agriculture**

Food and
Nutrition
Service

Northeast Region

10 Causeway St.
Room 501
Boston, MA 02222

Food Stamp Program Regional Letter 04-17

Subject: Public Housing and Mandatory Standard Utility Allowances

The Farm Bill, in Section 4104, changed the way we treat utility expenses when:

- The household:
 - Lives in public housing
 - Uses a shared utility meter
 - Is billed only for excess utility expenses, and
- The State agency mandates a Standard Utility Allowance (SUA).

A State agency that mandates the SUA must give the entire SUA to the household that is described above.

This new provision makes things simpler by eliminating previously required different treatment for the above-described residents in public housing and residents of private housing. The new provision did not otherwise change the way state agencies determine a household's eligibility for the SUA.

Question

Does the term "public housing" include private housing that is subsidized, directly or indirectly, by government money?

For example, suppose a charity receives money from a government agency. The charity then helps a family with its rent payment for an apartment in a privately owned apartment building. Would we consider that apartment to be public housing?


Answer

While the regulations do not define "public housing", we believe its meaning is limited to traditional government-owned housing.

However, in this case, it doesn't matter. All eligible program participants now receive the same treatment. As long as these households have out-of-pocket utility expenses, they can all receive the entire mandatory SUA.

If you have questions on this information, please contact Susan Mahan at (617) 565-6382.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mary A. Ferris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'M' and 'F'.

Mary A. Ferris, Chief
State Program Improvement Section
Food Stamp Program
Northeast Region