

CHA Bulletin

Published by Caribou Housing Agency for Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Participants and Landlords
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Caribou Housing Agency
25 High Street
Caribou ME 04736

Lisa Plourde
Housing Director
lplourde@cariboumaine.org

Sue Ouellette
FSS & Homeownership
Coordinator
souellette@cariboumaine.org

Telephone:
(207) 493-4234

Fax:
(207) 376-0178

Hours:
Monday – Friday
9AM – 4:30 PM



WE'RE HERE FOR YOU!

Dear CHA Section 8 Participants & Landlords:

CHA is taking extra precautionary measures to ensure the wellbeing of our participants and staff during COVID-19. Please know we are still here for you and care for you.

While we are closed to walk-ins and in-person interactions, as recommended by the CDC, please remember that you can still contact our office at 207-493-4234 or send us an email.

We encourage you to stay informed and take the necessary precautionary measures for yourself, your neighbors, and your community. Don't Panic, Stay Informed.

Sincerely,

Lisa Plourde

Lisa Plourde
Housing Director

CARIBOU HOUSING'S WEBSITE & FACEBOOK

Looking for more information on Section 8 rental assistance, as a participant or landlord? Need a form to report a change in household income, or want to request a rent increase? Looking for an application for a friend so that they can apply for Section 8?

Check out the Caribou Housing Agency's website:

<http://www.cariboumaine.org/index.php/departments/caribou-housing-agency-2/>

We are also on Facebook, as Caribou Housing Agency, like and share the page for updates & news regarding Section 8 and other resources.

LIVE-INS & UNAUTHORIZED GUESTS

Section 8 Participant: Allowing someone to stay in your unit that has not been approved by the Housing Agency and added to your voucher is a program violation.

** Caribou Housing Agency has a Guest Policy, 14 consecutive days, or 30 cumulative days in a 12 months period.*

Any person that is found to be staying in a rental unit, without approval from CHA and your landlord may result in termination from the program. Please do not jeopardize your assistance by allowing people to live in your home who are not on your voucher.

Landlords, if you suspect that your tenant may have an unauthorized guest (longer than your lease or CHA policy), please address this with your tenant immediately. If the situation is continuing, then send an eviction notice and notify the Housing Agency so that we can follow up with a termination from the program. Your cooperation is appreciated



With the snow melting, sun shining, and birds singing, it is the perfect time to tidy up the yard to get ready for a beautiful spring.

The Caribou Code Enforcement Officer has some tips for tenant and landlords, as he is out driving around town looking at blight properties.

- Undisposed of trash, furniture, appliances, etc.
- Piled up rotting leaves and branches
- Broken/cracked windows
- Broken/rotting house siding
- Missing roof covering
- Broken/collapsed roofing
- Broken/rotting/missing steps, decking, handrails
- Abandoned vehicles or vehicles with expired registrations
- Outbuildings

If you have any brush that you would like to have taken away (in Caribou, only), Caribou Public Works is planning a clean-up week, May 11- 14th. They will only pick up brush, no garbage.

MEDICAL & RECREATIONAL MARIJUANA USE



While medical & recreational marijuana is legal under Maine state law, the federal law remains unchanged and does not permit that the use or possession in federally subsidized units.

Marijuana, whether used as medical or recreational, is categorized as a Schedule I drug by the federal government and you can be prosecuted by the federal government. Caribou Housing Agency is funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, which is a subsidy of the federal government.

This means CHA must follow the federal law. Please be advised that if CHA gets reports of marijuana usage inside or around any CHA assisted units, or that a participant is using marijuana off of CHA property, these reports will be taken seriously and you may be in violation of your Family Obligations and risk your Section 8 Voucher being terminated.

RENT INCREASES

We've recently had several landlords contacting us with questions regarding the Housing Agency's policy on rent increases and initial contract rents. Section 8 tenants must be notified with a 60-day written notice of a rent increase, regardless of the amount of time the tenant has resided in the unit. A copy of the notice must also be sent to the Housing Agency for approval and signed by the tenant. Landlords may not request rent adjustments in the voucher program to be effective prior to the expiration of the first term of the lease.

Upon receipt of the landlord's 60-day written notice to CHA and the tenant, CHA will advise the landlord and the family whether the rent is reasonable and whether it is approved, 30 days prior to the effective change. This notification will be in the form of an amendment for an approved increase or a letter of denial in the event the increase is not approved.

- COVID-19 PANDEMIC -

NOTICE TO PARTICIPANTS & LANDLORDS

Caribou Housing is providing the following guidance and changes to policies for landlords and participants in Caribou Housing Agency's Section 8 Program. This Notice will be updated as new guidance and policy changes are released. Due to Governor Mill's Executive Order 19 FY 19/20, the lobby and office of Caribou Housing Agency is closed to the public. Staff are still working and available via phone, email, and mail until further notice.

EVICTIIONS

As a reminder, under Executive Order 40 FY 19/20, Governor Mill has temporarily halted evictions, unless the tenant who:

- 1.) Posed an imminent risk of harm by threatening or assaulting behavior towards the landlord, another tenant, neighbor or other person;
- 2.) Posed an imminent risk of harm to the property of the landlord, other tenant, neighbor or another person;
- 3.) Violated health, sanitation, fire, house or safety laws;
- 4.) Engaged in an illegal or prohibited trade or activity on the property;
- 5.) Posed a significant nuisance to the landlord, another tenant, or a neighbor; or
- 6.) Caused substantial unrepaired damage to the premises.

NOTICE PIH-2020-05

On April 10, 2020, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued Notice PIH 2020-05 which contains Statutory and Regulatory Waivers for the Public Housing, Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8), Indian Housing Block Grant and Indian Community Development Block Grant programs, Suspension of Public Housing Assessment Systems and Section Eight Management Assessment Programs in response to COVID-19.

These waivers and alternative requirements identified in the above-mentioned Notice allow Public Housing Agencies (PHAs) to keep public housing and Section 8 programs operations to the extent practicable during the COVID-19 pandemic. The following is a waiver list and alternatives that Caribou Housing has adopted for the Section 8 program.

NOTE: once the period of availability deadline has lapsed, Caribou Housing has an obligation to resume normal policies and procedures outlined in its Administration Plan. Adoption of any waiver or alternative does not relieve Section 8 participants or landlords from the requirement of reporting true and accurate information to Caribou Housing at all times in order to effectively administer the Section 8 program.

Annual Re-Examination, Delay

Caribou Housing is required to conduct an annual re-examination of family income and composition.

- HUD is waiving this statutory and regulatory requirement, however:
 - Caribou Housing will only allow a delay in the annual re-examination if the family can show to the Agency that they are unable to comply due to COVID-19 (e.g. hospitalization, extended stays at nursing homes, absent from unit caring for family members).
- Annual re-examinations will be conducted via mail (no in-person appointments).
- Any/all delays in annual re-examinations must be conducted and processed by December 31, 2020.

Interim Re-Examination

Interim re-examinations will be conducted via mail (no in-person appointments).

Housing Quality Standards (HQS) Inspections

In general, Caribou Housing has suspended all routine HQS inspection, unless required under the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA), due to health and safety issues, which include Section 8 contract terminations due to abatements that do not qualify for the repair extension identified in the HQS Abatements section below.

Initial Inspections

HUD regulations requires the PHA to conduct the initial inspection within a certain time frame after receiving the RFTA, and may not approve the assisted tenancy or execute a HAP contract until the unit has been inspected and passes HQS.

- HUD is waiving these requirements and providing an alternative requirement:
 - Caribou Housing may place units under HAP contract by relying on the owner's self-certification that the owner has not reasonable basis to have knowledge that life-threatening conditions exist in the unit.
 - At minimum the Housing Agency must require the owner self-certification but may add other requirements or conditions.
- The waiver for owner self-certification expires July 31, 2020.
- Caribou Housing must conduct an HQS inspection on the unit as soon as reasonably possible but no later than October 31, 2020.

Biennial Inspections

The statute and the regulations require the PHA to inspect the unit no less often than biennial (every two years) during the term of the HAP Contract.

- HUD is allowing a delay in biennial inspections.
- Caribou Housing must conduct an HQS inspection on the unit as soon as reasonably possible but no later than October 31, 2020.

Re-Inspections

The statute requirements that upon notification to the PHA, that the assisted unit does not comply with the HQS, the PHA must inspect the unit within 24 hours (if life-threatening), or 15 days (non-life-threatening)

- HUD is waiving the requirements;
 - For life-threatening deficiency, the Housing Agency must notify the owner of the reported life-threatening deficiency and owner must either correct the life-threatening deficiency within 24 hours of the Housing Agency notification or provide documentation (e.g. email the Agency) that the reported deficiency does not exist.
 - For non -life-threatening deficiencies, the Housing Agency must notify the owner of the reported deficiency within 30 days and the owner must either make the repair or document that the deficiency does not exist within 30 days.
- This waiver expires July 31, 2020.

Space and Security

HUD regulation establishes a minimum standard for adequate space for a Section 8 family. Specifically, it requires that each dwelling unit have at least 1 bedroom or living/sleeping room for each 2 persons.

- HUD is waiving this requirement if the PHA wishes to assist a current participant that needs to add a member or member to the assisted household as a result of the COVID-19 emergency, and the additional member would cause over-crowding.
 - This provision does not apply to an initial or new lease.
- This waiver will expire either at the end of the current lease term or April 9, 2021 (whichever period is longer).

Absence from Unit

The regulation requires that a family may not be absent from the unit for a period of more than 180 consecutive calendar days for any reason.

- HUD is waiving this requirement to allow the PHA discretion in this requirement.
- The Caribou Housing Agency may continue HAP when a family is absent from the unit more than 180 days due to extenuating circumstances (e.g. hospitalization, extended stays at nursing homes, caring for family members).
- If the family is absent from the unit on or after December 31, 2020, the HAP contract will terminate on that date.

Zero Housing Assistance Payments (HAP)

When a Section 8 family's income increases to the extent that the housing assistance payment reduced to \$0, PHAs are required by this regulation to automatically terminate HAP Contract 180 days after the last housing assistance payment is paid to the owner.

- HUD is waving this requirement. The Housing Agency may extend the period following the last payment to the owner.
- The PHA may not extend the HAP contract beyond December 31, 2020.

Homeownership Counseling

The statute requires that to be eligible for Section 8 homeownership assistance the family must participate in a pre-assistance homeownership and housing counseling program required by the PHA.

- HUD is waiving these requirements to allow the PHA to permit the family to purchase the home without fulfilling the normally applicable pre-assistance homeownership counseling requirements.
- This waiver expires on July 31, 2020.

Initial Inspection

The statute provides that the PHA may not begin monthly homeownership assistance payments until the PHA has inspected the unit and determines the unit passes HQS.

- HUD is waiving this requirement. However, the family is still required to obtain an independent professional inspector, and the PHA is required to review the independent professional inspection and has discretions to disapprove the unit for assistance under the homeownership option because of information in the inspection report.
- This waiver expires on July 31, 2020.

Oral Briefings

The regulation requires when the PHA selects a family to participate in the Section 8 program, the PHA must give the family an oral briefing.

- HUD is waiving this requirement and as an alternative requirement allowing the PHA to conduct the briefing by other means such as a webcast, video call, or expanded information packet.
- This waive expires July 31, 2020.

Administrative Plan

The regulation requires that any revisions of the PHA's administrative plan must be formally adopted by the PHA Board of Commissioners or other authorized PHA officials.

- HUD is waiving this requirement to allow PHA administrative plan to be revised on a temporary basis without Board approval.
- Any adopted revisions under this wavier authority must be formally adopted as soon as practicable following June 30, 2020, but no later than July 31, 2020.

Did you remember to update the Housing Agency?

To be able to assist landlords in an efficient manner, the Housing Agency requires that landlords report any updates to their ownership status.

The following updates must be reported in writing:

- Change in ownership name, person to be paid;
- Change in owner's mailing address;
- Change in owner's telephone phone number;
- Change in ownership of rental unit.

Written correspondence to update owner information must include and authorized owner or agent signature.

All correspondence can be mailed to Caribou Housing Agency, 25 High Street, Caribou ME 04736; or fax to (207) 376-0178.

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