

Technical Assistance Collaborative | GMT20201214-180047_Mainstream_1920x900

LIZ STEWART: Thank you for joining today's webinar, Mainstream Voucher-- Leasing During COVID-19. Before we do intros and go over the agenda, I just want to cover a few webinar logistics. Hi, my name is Liz Stewart. I'm with the Technical Assistance Collaborative, and I will be facilitating the webinar today, along with some other colleagues that we're going to be introducing.

So there's over around 300 people joining today, so we have a large audience. So all lines are muted. So only the presenters today will have their video and audio function. So your lines are muted and your video is turned off as well.

You can submit questions through the Q&A box, and we encourage you to do that throughout the presentation so that we can see what questions are coming in as we're presenting the material and be ready to do Q&A at the end. If you have any technical issues, please use the chat box feature and direct your questions directly to Laura Harris. You can also use the chat feature throughout the presentation. We might be asking you to highlight some of the things you're doing at your PHA and we'll say go ahead and put in the chat box what you're doing.

And just make sure when you do that that you chat to all attendees and panelists, not just the panelists so that of the other PHAs that are also participating can read the great things that you're doing or challenges maybe that you want to highlight. This webinar is being recorded, and the recording, the slides, and the transcript will be posted to the HUD Exchange. So just please make a note of that, that you will be seeing this presentation posted.

OK, I'd like to hand it over to Ashley Matthews at HUD.

ASHLEY

MATTHEWS:

Thank you, Liz. My name is Ashley Matthews and I am the main point of contact for Mainstream Vouchers at HUD Headquarters. I'd like to thank all of you for joining today's webinar. I'm really happy to have the Technical Assistance Collaborative here today to provide this information on leasing Mainstream Vouchers during COVID-19. If we could go to the next slide, I just wanted to go over-- this is actually the last of a three-part webinar series.

The first two webinars, Mainstream Voucher Basics and Mainstream NOFA Preferences and Strategies for Target Populations, those are going to be available for playback on HUD Exchange. So if you weren't able to attend those in-person-- live-- not in-person, but live, you can tune in at a later time on HUD Exchange.

And we will also be working on some topic guides and community of practice opportunities in the late winter and early spring. With the topic guides, we hope to get-- to answer a lot of those frequently-asked questions that we're getting in a really easy-to-digest topic guide that we can have on our website so you can have that accessible to you as well.

I also wanted to say that this is so timely, this webinar today, on leasing during COVID-19, because we have so much leasing to do. The authority that was provided to HUD under the CARES Act allowed us to put a lot of money out pretty quickly this year. So we will have awarded over \$225 million for Mainstream Vouchers just in 2020. So that's going to translate to probably-- my estimate is 35,000 unleased available Mainstream Vouchers by early 2021.

A lot of people have asked about the opportunity where we put out \$150 million. We made an announcement last month of the first awards. We will be making an announcement hopefully in the next couple of weeks for the remainder of those awards. And we got more applications than we're able to fund, so we have stopped accepting applications, but we will be letting everybody know about the final decisions on that opportunity.

And so I just look forward to this webinar today. It's going to be-- it's great, because we have a lot in place right now due to COVID for waivers that will help you hopefully get your vouchers leased as soon as possible. So thank you, everyone, and I'll turn it back to Liz.

LIZ STEWART: Great. Thanks, Ashley. So real quick, I just want to just introduce-- for those of you that haven't been able to participate on the first two webinars, I'm Liz Stewart with the Technical Assistance Collaborative, and TAC been assisting with these webinars, this webinar series, and also will be assisting with the development of those topic guides and the community of practice that Ashley talked about.

And for those of you that may not know us, TAC is a Boston-based nonprofit consulting firm. We have-- we are a national TA provider and we have a lot of expertise in issues around housing, homelessness, serving vulnerable populations. So we're hoping that this webinar series has been helpful and that we'll also be able to work more with some of the PHAs that are participating today through the

community of practice. And Lisa, what would you like to introduce yourself?

LISA SLOANE: Yeah. Good to be unmuted. Lisa Sloane, hi. I work with Liz at TAC and I'm excited to be working with her on this project. I think the numbers that Ashley put out a minute ago are a big challenge to all of us to work together to really get all these vouchers and stuff, especially during this difficult period where people with disabilities are at risk in the community and living in a nursing facility, whether they're homeless, that we're going to do whatever we can to help you help those folks in your community get to safer, better places to live.

LIZ STEWART: Great. Thanks, Lisa. OK, let's start things off with a poll just to see who-- well actually, sorry. Before we do the poll-- sorry, Laura-- I wanted to quickly cover what the flow of today's webinar is going to look like, the agenda for today. So we already just did the introductions and welcome.

Then we're going to do an overview of the Mainstream Vouchers for those of you that may just be joining this webinar series. Just want to be clear on what Mainstream Vouchers are. Then we'll move into discussing some of the specific COVID-19 waivers and funding that HUD has made available, and then go into leasing strategies and considerations. And again, we will have time at the end for Q&A, so make sure you are putting your questions in the Q&A box.

OK, now we can go ahead and do the audience poll. So if you could just outline here what your role at your agency is, or if it's other, you could put in the chat box what your role is. And Laura, when you think a good amount of folks have responded, you can go ahead and share those results.

OK. So about 50% of the folks on the call today serve in a PHA management role capacity. 30% other PHA staff, 12% PHA executive directors. And then we have about 2% are service providers and then 7% other roles. So I'm glad we have some other folks joining the call because one of the things we continue to talk about is that having partners in your Mainstream Voucher Program are important.

OK, so now we'll go ahead and go into an overview of Mainstream Vouchers. Just to ensure that everyone on the call is clear about the basic requirements of Mainstream Vouchers, we outline those here. Mainstream vouchers serve households that include a non-elderly person with disabilities defined as any family

that includes a person with disabilities who is at least 18 years old and not yet 62 years old at the time of admission.

And the assistance can either be tenant-based or project-based rental assistance. And while Mainstream Vouchers assist a special population, it's important to remember that Mainstream Vouchers follow the same program policies as the regular tenant-based voucher program. And the funding and financial reporting for Mainstream Vouchers are separate.

And this next slide just shows the applicable guidance for Mainstream Vouchers. So again, because it follows the same requirements as your regular housing choice voucher program, it follows the same regulations that apply to that program. So 24 CFR Part 982 and 983 if you're project-basing vouchers. There's also PIH Notice 2020-01, and that is specific to the Mainstream Program and it just outlines the eligibility criteria that we just talked previously about. It outlines and reiterates that there's the one waiting list requirement for the housing choice voucher program.

So that means that the PHA must have one waiting list for tenant-based vouchers and that includes Mainstream Vouchers. Any preferences adopted by the PHA apply to those vouchers, not just Mainstream. And it also outlines how to report vouchers in PIC and VMS. And again, if you have any questions about some of the basic requirements of Mainstream Vouchers, I would suggest that you go and check out our first webinar which is currently posted on the HUD Exchange because that delves a little bit more into some of those basic requirements around the waiting lists and other administrative aspects.

There are also a lot of FAQs posted on the PIH Mainstream Voucher page from the FY17 NOFA and the FY19 NOFA. So that's a great resource to look to, especially if you got an award through one of those NOFAs. And then the PIH Mainstream Voucher page also has a lot of resources on it as well.

OK, so now we're going to go ahead and move into talking about some of the notices PIH has published establishing waivers and funding that can help PHAs improve their ability to continue to assist Mainstream-eligible households during the pandemic. There are four notices that you see outlined here that we're going to discuss, but it's important to note that PIH has put out multiple notices related to

COVID-19, and our intent today is to cover those most relevant to funding and leasing of Mainstream Vouchers.

So basically what you see on this slide is not the universe of COVID-19 waivers from PIH or from HUD, so you just want to be mindful of that since I'm sure for many of you, you're operating maybe not just the Housing Choice Voucher Program, but some others that may apply to you. So today we're just going to be looking at the particular notices that are outlined here, PIH Notice 2020-09, PIH Notice 2020-22, PIH Notice 2020-33, and PIH Notice 2020-18.

So those first two notices on that slide and outlined here are notices that are specific to the Mainstream Vouchers. PIH Notice 2020-09 was published in May of 2020 and it authorized a 30% increase in Mainstream Vouchers for those PHAs awarded in FY17 and FY19. And if you are one of those PHAs, you will have already seen the award letters for those go out.

The second notice was PIH Notice 2020-22, and this notice provided a non-competitive opportunity to apply for new Mainstream Vouchers, and those were-- that opportunity was what Ashley was talking about earlier and that HUD had announced the first batch of awards for this opportunity last month. And it sounds like the awards for the second amount of funding is going to be coming out fairly soon.

Another piece of the 2020-22 notice was the availability of specific waivers for Mainstream Vouchers which related to Mainstream eligibility age, criminal background screening, and the initial lease term. And those waivers are now actually captured in another notice that we're going to talk about, PIH 2020-33. So just want to be clear that there were these three waivers that are outlined, and some of you may have already adopted those that were in 2020-22, but now they're actually captured in this subsequent PIH 2020-33 notice that we're going to cover right now.

So PIH Notice 2020-33 outlines a number of waivers that were already established in previous waivers. It supersedes Notice PIH 2020-05 and PIH 2020-13. So some of these you may have already seen in previous notices, but it's important to note, this is now the notice that is in effect. And it also adds those waivers from the

Mainstream 2020-22 notice that I just talked about.

And the purpose of the waivers are to provide administrative relief to various aspects of PHA operations to ensure critical functions can continue. And those critical functions that HUD is talking about are ensuring that you can continue to issue vouchers so families can find housing, that you are able to process RFTAs so families can be approved to move into unit, processing requests for portability moves, ensuring occupancy of public housing units, and completing re-examinations of participants who have experienced a decrease in income.

So the notice includes waivers applicable to Housing Choice Voucher Program, which includes the Mainstream Vouchers as well as Mod Rehab, as well as Indian housing block grant and Indian community development block grant programs, and there are over 30 waivers applicable to the Housing Choice Voucher Program and three specific to Mainstream. And this slide just shows some of those areas that are covered in the waivers. And again, we're not going to be able to get into all of these areas today. We're going to be focused on those waivers that are going to allow you to lease Mainstream-eligible households as quickly as possible during COVID-19.

As a quick reference, though, within the notice there is a chart that has all of the waivers listed and their applicable availability period. So kind of reduces a large portion of the narrative down into a chart. And Laura, if you can share that link with folks so that they can just take a look at that. It's a Word document, and I think it's really good at just summarizing all of the different waivers that exist out there since it is-- there is a lot of information to take in and it kind of summarizes it down to a easy-to-read chart and outlines those availability periods that you have to be mindful of.

So if you are interested in adopting one of the waivers that are outlined in PIH 2020-33 along with any alternative requirements that the PHA outlines, you don't need to get any kind of specific HUD approval, you're just required to keep the written documentation in your files and record which waivers that you're applying to your programs and the effective dates.

The PHA is required to publicly post or otherwise make available to the public a list of what the waivers are and the alternative requirements that are adopted as soon

as practical, and also notify any effective residents and owners of any impacts of the waiver or alternative requirement may have on them. So you as a PHA can determine what kind of posting that would look like. It could be a posting to the website, it could be posting it in central or satellite offices at properties. So you kind of determine what that notice is going to look like to ensure you're meeting that requirement.

And then the next notice that we're going to talk about is PIH Notice 2020-18. And this outlines eligible expenses for CARE Act funds as well as administrative fees under the Fiscal Year 2020 Appropriations Act. So under the CARES Act, these supplemental administrative fee funding can be used for two purposes. One is any currently eligible administrative cost during the period that the program remains impacted by COVID-19, and then the second is these new COVID-19-related activities, including activities to support or maintain the health and safety of assisted individuals and families and costs related to the retention and support of participating owners.

The period of availability for all CARES Act supplemental administrative fees, including those provided for Mainstream, is extended to-- is currently extended to December 31, 2021. So you're not going to see that date in the PIH 2020-18 notice, it's actually outlined in Notice PIH 20-24. But you just want to know that you can use those fees. Pretty much that's over a year from now that you can use those administrative fees for the activities that are outlined in that notice.

And this slide shows what some of those activities are. There are a number of activities that are outlined in the notice that you can use your CARES Act funding or your FY2020 admin fees to cover. And this list here does not represent all the activities included in the notice, so you really should look carefully at that to see what other activities are included as part of that to see what you may want to implement.

But of particular note for this webinar is the allowability for PHAs to offer owners an incentive payment to participate in recognition of added difficulties of making units available for the program. So that's in the bottom left. So cost to retain or increase owner participation in HCV programs such as incentive costs. So we'll talk more about that as we talk generally about some of the other waivers in Notice 2020-33

in the next section of the webinar.

So Lisa, I'm going to go ahead and hand it over to you to start us off on the next section.

LISA SLOANE: Thanks very much, Liz. Hi, everybody. Next slide. Thank you. So a number of PHAs have found it difficult to get kind of up this ladder from outreach or selection to move-in in a timely manner, and there are a lot of different reasons for that. It may be hard to identify a target population. You've got people on the list, but your application process-- you may have people with disabilities who meet the eligibility criteria on the list, but the application didn't identify that, so you can't find them through your system.

A lot of folks who are in these target populations, people who are homeless, people who are in institutional settings, they may not have the necessary documentation and they may have difficulty getting that-- difficulty getting that themselves. There are challenges in housing search for everybody, and maybe particular searches for people who have difficulty arranging to get out of an institution or getting to see units, for people who have difficult tenancy histories. Some of those are going to be challenges. Many folks are not going to be in a position to save for a security deposit.

So there are going to be all kinds of things that applicants need help with that may not be part-- that may have an impact on quick voucher-- quick lease out and utilization, but are not things that are-- activities that you as a housing authority typically engage in. And COVID in many cases has really intensified some of these challenges.

So as we start to talk about them, we're going to do another poll that looks a little bit-- we'd like to understand how you've been dealing during COVID in terms of your staffing and operations. And so what changes have you all made to on-site staffing operations due to COVID-19? And check any of these that apply. It's a multiple-choice question. If you've made some changes that are not listed here that you want to tell us about, check Other and put those in the chat. And I would suggest that you pick the chat version that allows you to share with all attendees. So we'll give you a few minutes to do that.

I imagine that some of you have changed what you've done over time. So maybe just-- right now what are your staffing operations look like? Thank you.

OK. So great. Some really interesting stuff in the chat box. Only 25% of you said that the majority staff are working fully remote. 56% of you said there's a mix of staff working remotely in the office. 38% of you said in-person appointments are restricted to those needing a reasonable accommodation. 69% of you have established some sort of dropbox or mail slot for documentation submission. 12% of you-- so a very small said that you've only done minimal or no changing to staffing.

So you all-- at 70% of other things, and there's great examples in that chat box. DocuSign. I saw Zoom. I saw Zoom briefing. So lots of creative ways of pivoting during this difficult period. Let's start to talk about how these waivers especially can help you in a number of areas. So next slide, please, Laura. Thank you.

So let's start at the outreach selection eligibility end. In several of the waivers, 01 and 22 from 2020, HUD talks about the importance of partners in implementing the Mainstream Voucher Program, as well as in the NOFAs. This was really emphasized. For those of you who got funding through the FY17 or 19 competition or the bump-up that HUD did, you had sort of selected partners and talked about those through your application process, and some of those are probably on this list here.

Examples would be Continuum of Care, which is the regional entity responsible for the homeless system's response helping the community or set of communities respond to homelessness and working with HUD on that. Centers for Independent Living all over the country. HHS, the federal government funds these organizations that help people with disabilities, with all kinds of things, including transitioning from institutions, getting set up in the community, and providing supports for people in the community.

Service providers for various populations. Your community probably has a homeless service provider, at least one. You probably have a provider who focuses on people with developmental and intellectual disabilities, somebody who focuses on people with psychiatric disabilities. And you may have other service providers as well.

So for those housing agencies, housing authorities who received funds from HUD more recently through the FY2020 notice opportunity or who will be receiving funds in the next few weeks as Ashley mentioned, we would encourage you to reach out to some of these organizations, to identify them in your community. You probably have worked with them in other ways in the past.

They can be really helpful to you in terms of outreach and eligibility. If you can identify people on your waiting list to serve, they can be helpful with that to the extent that there are folks who need assistance with documentation, locating documentation, getting to the Social Security office to get that letter. These are organizations that can help folks-- potentially eligible applicants with that. And these organizations, they want to help. Their clients need housing. And so any opportunity to kind of help that system along, they're going to be willing to do that. And so really encourage you to consider reaching out to them. Next slide, please.

So as many of you have talked about in your responses to the poll, as well as what we see you adding in the chat box, you've established alternative processes as necessary to assist with notification and documentation. You have used electronic transformation of information to families and allowed them to send that to you.

It looked like some folks have used self-service features on your website if you have that available. Providing-- many of you said dropbox apparatuses, and business reply envelopes for families that don't have access to the internet. And that is definitely going to be an issue for many of the households that are eligible applicants here. Think about people who are living in a shelter. They're not going to have their own computer, usually. They may have accessed through a case manager to some electronic means of having Zoom or sending information.

And folks, in an institution, it's possible they'll have a laptop computer, but they are likely having to rely on someone else for that. And that doesn't even cover people who live in rural areas that don't have good access to the internet. Like myself here. You also want to think about changes to your PHA plan and your admin plan, and policies and procedures that can assist in identifying and leasing households quickly.

We talked in the last webinar, as was mentioned, about the adoption of specific

preferences. For example, a move-in preference might help you actually find some people to lease in place, but also help at the same time the homeless system to kind of create some flow so that services are available for people who are just getting off the streets now. So that's something to consider. And you might want to take a look at the last webinar for some other ideas.

And also, thinking about reducing administration-- excuse me. I'm having a hard time with my mouth today. Reducing documentation burden where possible. So for example, one of the challenges is folks have to document their social security number. And the typical method is having an original social security number card issued by the Social Security Administration.

But if you didn't have yours for whatever reason-- you lost it, you never had it originally, getting it issued right now by the Social Security Office may not be a timely activity. And there are other kinds of documentation that are equally acceptable. And any kind of original document issued by the same administration, the Social Security Administration that shows the person's name and their social security number, like an award letter or a Medicare card, those would be acceptable and would-- that somebody would have that maybe readily available or be able to get it more quickly from Social Security.

Another option would be an original document that's issued by a federal, state, or local government agency that contains the name and the Social Security number of the individual. It could be from a SNAP-- a welfare office, it could be a different kind of Medicaid document. In many states, Medicaid payments are managed by a county agency. But something that was an original document that it was clear was from a public entity with their Social Security number on it.

So being flexible and accepting some of those is going to help you move more quickly through the process and help someone get a housed and leased out more quickly. Next slide, please.

So still under outreach selection eligibility. These are five examples of requirements that have been waived in one of the waivers and now consolidated in that waiver, 2020-33, the revision that Liz talked about. These are all covered, and then these can all help you move forward more quickly in the process.

So the first one is the waiting list public notice. The requirement has been waved to make public notice a little easier for you all, but still transparent and available publicly. You can put the notice in a voicemail message or any kind of general telephone number that you use. You can put it on your website. Many of you have PHA websites.

This waiver which was in place already has been extended through June 2021, like most of these items. So for another six months-- and this is helpful especially if you're going to be in one of the last two waves of receiving these vouchers-- either you've just received notice a few weeks ago or you're going to be receiving, you're going to want to think about whether you are going to need to make public notice or not depending on how you're using your vouchers.

The admin plan. If you believe that you have to make a change to your admin plan because of how you're going to be using the vouchers-- for example, a grant new preference and you feel like that needs to be in the admin plan, you will have a-- HUD's waiving the requirement to be able to allow you to-- excuse me, I got distracted. Allow you to do that without board approval.

And these items previously had to be adopted by last September, but now they're allowing these to be informally adopted, but formally adopted six months from now. So that gives you a lot of flexibility in moving forward we're thinking about targeting in a way that meets local need, whether that's people who are homeless or people coming from institutions, and allows you to move forward more quickly in leasing.

Criminal background screening. The regulations require you to treat everybody the same way. Really, I think for the first time, this waiver allows you to establish screening requirements for applicants for Mainstream Vouchers which are distinct from those in place for the Housing Choice Program generally, although you do have to comply with statutory requirements like the lifetime sex offender requirement.

So for, again, as I mentioned earlier, you're going to be seeing people who have some difficult tenancy histories, and you may be able to create some flexibility that they may even be eligible for through reasonable accommodation, but you'll kind of be streamlining the process by changing your screening criteria rather than waiting

to go through that whole reasonable accommodation request process which can take a lot of time, potentially.

Mainstreaming age eligibility. So this waiver HUD has provided because if things are happening a little slowly and you've got someone who applied just as they were kind of nearing the age maximum for the program and it took a while to issue the voucher, if they're kind of caught between ages 62 and 63, they're allowing you to serve that person. Even though typically you can't serve somebody over age 62, they're giving you some flexibility here. And that's, again, available through the end of June.

And the last requirement is around oral briefings. They're allowing housing agencies-- while a briefing has to happen, that it doesn't have to be in person, but it can be through a webcast, a video call, expanded packet, or other methods that keep both-- if the housing authority staff is not available to do it in-person and the individual who is the applicant-- or now a participant-- is not able to come to the agency in-person. So that gives you a lot of flexibility, again, without necessarily having a reasonable accommodation. This is something you can put in place to make it easier for everybody.

You have to ensure, of course, that when you do these alternative requirements, that they are equally accessible to people regardless of disability. So for example, if you have someone who is deaf who would ordinarily have come to the office and maybe you would have provided an interpreter, and now you're doing Zoom calls for these three things, Zoom allows you to do closed captioning. Zoom allows you to use-- also to do a box with sign language or at least some of-- Webex does and some of the other formats.

So that you can ensure that the participant is really understanding everything-- all the information you're providing in the oral brief-- in the alternative to the oral briefing equally.

So let's look at a couple of FAQs that-- next slide, please-- that dig into some of the questions that folks have had in this area. So Laura, one more slide. Thank you. So let's take a look at this. It can be challenging for applicants to obtain documentation such as Social Security numbers and other information. Can we allow families to

move in and verify these documents at a later date. And the answer is no. The waiver authority granted does not apply to eligibility requirements for admission.

So there are some waiver requirements to obtain documentation at a later date, et cetera, but those all apply to people who are already in the program, who are participants in the program already. But HUD has said that they will take this suggestion under advisement for future consideration. Next slide, please.

So this is about income verification. Do the waivers around family income and composition, annual exam income verification, or EID requirements apply to initial certifications? Again, no, the waiver does not change income verification hierarchy for new admissions to the program. So again, when you have participants who are already in the program and you have-- you've brought them in initially, HUD is being a little more flexible with existing tenants and participants than they are with new admissions at this time. Next slide, please.

So, use of technology. Can I use CARES Act funds for new software to automate the applicant intake in these signature processes? Can we use text messaging to alert applicants on the waiting list of their status? And how about software modules to allow online reporting for interim changes via our website? It's all very creative, very cutting edge from a housing authority.

And HUD believes that while the software could help the PHA maintain social distance, which then prevents the transmission of COVID-19, which would make it eligible under the CARES Act for funding, it also improves the operational efficiency of the public housing and Housing Choice Voucher management and operations. As such, it is a normal Operating Fund and HCV admin fee expense and eligible for CARES Act funds. And then there's a reference for two notices to take a look at for the fees.

And those-- you know what? I didn't check, I'm sorry, but those notices may also be consolidated in Notice 33 as well. So back to you, Liz.

LIZ STEWART: OK. Thank you, Lisa. And just want to remind folks make sure you're putting questions in the Q&A box versus like comments or if you want to share what your PHA is doing in the chat box. So I'm going to talk a little bit more about remote voucher briefings. So Lisa had mentioned the PHA oral briefing waiver that's

outlined in notice 2020-33, but HUD also issued PIH Notice 2020-32 that provides guidance to PHAs on the allowability of remote hearing and remote briefings. And we're going to focus on the voucher briefing piece for the purposes of today's webinar, but just know that that notice also outlines how you could do remote hearings.

And this notice applies to all PHAs that choose to implement a remote environment for a voucher briefing, and it remains in effect post-COVID-19. So that's one key difference between this notice and the waiver that's outlined in 2020-33, is that that one has that period availability that's ending in June 2021, and this one is pretty much in effect and doesn't have an end date until HUD says otherwise.

And so what it says in the notice is that briefings can be conducted via phone, via video teleconferencing, or through other virtual platforms absent a request by a party for an in-person hearing or briefing. And it outlines that the PHA has to ensure equal opportunity and non-discrimination for the remote briefing, particularly for individuals with disabilities and those persons with limited English proficiency.

That you need to identify and resolve technology barriers prior to scheduling the remote hearing or remote briefing. And by that, establishing a way to survey the family, to identify barriers, and then working on a way to resolve those. And depending on the barriers identified, determining whether or not that remote hearing or remote briefing can take place.

So if the participant doesn't have proper technology access that will allow them to fully participate, then the PHA needs to determine whether or not that briefing can actually happen and whether it should be postponed or whether there is an in-person alternative that could be provided. And HUD requires that the family be given the opportunity to examine ahead of time any PHA documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. And in particular for the voucher briefings, HUD requires that an information packet be provided to the family.

And so you'll notice that in the waiver under 2020-33, it outlines that you could just use an extended briefing packet to meet the briefing requirement, and that is not outlined in this notice, so that's another distinction there.

So to ensure equal opportunity and non-discrimination for the remote briefing to

people with disabilities and people with limited English proficiency, the PHA has to make sure the platform use is accessible. That includes ensuring any information, websites, emails, digital notifications, and any other platforms are accessible for persons with vision, hearing, and other disabilities. PHAs are required to furnish appropriate auxiliary aids and services where needed. So that could include audio description, captioning, sign language, and other types of interpreters, keyboard accessibility, accessible documents, screen reader support, and transcripts.

And a lot of this technology is now more readily available through software and apps. And so if you have already started doing this or in the process of planning on doing it, if you just want to put it in the chat to all attendees what you're using, I think that could be helpful for some of the other PHAs that maybe have not considered this yet.

PHAs are required to make reasonable accommodations where needed. So if no method of conducting remote hearing or briefing is available that appropriately accommodates an individual's disability, the PHA needs to reconsider whether it-- whether it needs to be postponed or whether there is a suitable alternative.

And for people with limited English proficiency, the PHA will generally need to coordinate with a remote language interpretation service prior to the remote briefing, and it's possible-- there's conferencing technology that can be provided for remote interpretation. If video technology is available, remote interpretation using video is generally preferred over voice only because of the additional visual cues.

And I will say that within the notice, HUD does outline that having a briefing conducted via telephone only is really like the least preferable way to do this because that's probably not going to be the way that most people can really understand in totality all the information being provided. And for written materials, the PHAs should engage with any language translation service.

So just want to highlight here that within the existing HUD regulations, there's actually no explicit requirement for the oral briefing to be held in person. So this notice kind of outlines that the briefing can be remote, but that you have to provide an opportunity for the remote briefing-- within the remote briefing for the participants to ask questions.

HUD also outlines some specific best practices. So making sure to review voucher applications with the families at a re-examination, and use any other opportunities such as regularly scheduled meetings with the family to remind them of their program obligations to avoid any kind of potential termination. Making sure that the PHA staff reach out directly to tenants by phone after the briefing. Particularly if it is not interactive, it's good to have the staff reach out to make sure any questions have been answered.

And lastly, just making sure that you're considering the impact of families attending briefings remotely on other program functions. So for PHAs that already conduct their re-examinations by mail, if you're also doing remote briefings, that may mean that the families never have a face-to-face interaction with the housing authority. So you just want to consider how this may change or impact your plan accordingly. So again, if any folks want to just outline what they're doing specifically in the chat box, that would be helpful.

Housing search. Just want to outline some of the things that a PHA can do around the housing search. Those partners that Lisa was talking about earlier are really critical to successfully helping households in their housing search. So including negotiating with landlords. So you want to make sure that you are engaged with any of your partners that can assist with the housing search.

Also employing effective landlord engagement strategies, and in some of these we highlighted in our last webinar, so you can go to that, too. But having a single point of contact for your Mainstream Voucher. So a property owner knows who they need to contact if they have questions. Having some flexibility with check runs so that checks can be issued timely to the property owner and that they don't necessarily have to wait a full month or more to get their check if they signed a HAP contract or they leased out midmonth.

Having any kind of incentives to participate. So this could be either through community resources or through the use of PHA admin fees. We also highlight any kind of mitigation funds that may be available through the community. We talked about those in our last webinar. And any kind of alternative inspection methods which we'll talk a little bit more about in the next couple of slides.

Also want to highlight that one of the other waivers in PHA 2020-33 is that PHAs can provide participants extensions to their-- getting-- finding a unit. They can provide extensions to that, and they don't need to amend their policy to do that. So looking at your current policies and procedures and determining if you're actually giving reasonable time frames for people to find units and putting those extensions for identifying the units, then you don't necessarily need to amend your administrative plan if you want to do that.

And this slide highlights some additional landlord engagement resources. So again, you can use your CARES Act administrative fees for cost to retain or increase owner participation. The language explicitly states that PHA can offer the property owner an incentive payment to participate in recognition of added difficulties of making units available to rent while stay-at-home orders or social distancing practices are in effect.

But also recently released one chapter of the Housing Choice Voucher Landlord Strategy Guide Book. Of that link is there. There's a Landlord Resource page that has additional information. And again, you may want to consider using any of the waivers and alternative requirements that are outlined in 2020-33 to streamline aspects of the Housing Choice Voucher Program.

So not even just that initial lease up, but those things that can happen once a household is lease up-- anything to streamline the program and maybe make it look more appealing for a property owner to participate.

So let's do a poll real quick to see if any of the PHAs that are participating today, if they are currently offering a landlord incentive payment to participate in your program. So you have four choices there. Yes, we have implemented an incentive payment; not yet, but we are planning on implementing one; no, but we're considering it; and no, and we do not plan on it. So Laura, whenever you think that there's a good amount of responses, we can go ahead and share that.

OK. So the majority of folks who responded don't have one and don't plan on it, and feel free to highlight in the chat, again, to all attendees why you've decided you're not-- you don't plan on using that. Then 32% have not, but they're considering it. 7% not yet, but planning on it. And 20% have implemented it. So please share any

thoughts you have around that, especially whether you've decided not to do it or if you have implemented it, maybe share what is working and what challenges you've experienced.

OK. So now we're going to go into some of the waivers around initial inspections. PHA Notice 2020-33 has a number of waivers related to HQS inspections, but today we're just going to review those related to initial inspections, but want to make sure you review the notice for other waivers you can implement related to interim and biannual inspections. So again, this slide doesn't cover all of the waivers related to HQS, but it does outline the waivers that apply to initial inspections.

And ensuring that units are safe, habitable, and of good quality is an important piece of the program, but HUD also understands that the inspection process can take time and it can cause delays in leasing up. So it has established these waivers along with alternative requirements that a PHA can implement. And so the first waiver is just on the general initial inspection requirement.

So the requirement in place in the regulation is that the PHA has to inspect the unit before any assistance is provided to determine whether or not it needs a HQS. And now HUD has implemented a waiver that says the PHA can rely on an owner certification that the owner doesn't believe there's any reason that there are life-threatening conditions that exist in the unit or the units in question instead of conducting initial inspections.

So you don't have to necessarily do an initial inspection, you could just have this owner provide a certification saying they have no reason to believe there are life-threatening conditions. There is an additional requirement beyond just getting the owner certification, and that is that the PHA is required to conduct the HQS inspection on the unit as soon as possible but no later than one year from the anniversary date of the owner certification. And the availability for this ends on June 30, 2021, so that means establishing it for owners by that date.

So you could still have an owner that has an inspection done on June-- or sorry, provides an owner certification on June 29, 2021 and that would still be allowable up to June 30, 2021.

The other initial inspection waiver is on non-life-threatening deficiencies. So a PHA

can choose-- so the requirement that exists in the regulations is that a PHA can choose to approve an assisted tenancy, execute the HAP contract, and begin making HAP payments on a unit that fails the initial HQS inspection provided the failure is the result only of non-life-threatening deficiencies. And then the HAP must be withheld if these non-life-threatening conditions are not corrected within 30 days.

And the waiver for this requirement is that HUD is waiving the requirement to withhold a payment of non-life-threatening repairs are not made in 30 days. So the PHA can provide an extension of up to an additional 30 days to the owner to make those repairs and continue to make payments. And again, the availability for this waiver ends on June 30, 2021.

And then the third waiver is for the alternative inspection requirement. So for that one in the regulations, the PHA has the option to authorize occupancy of the unit prior to the initial inspection being completed if the unit had in the previous 24 months passed an alternative inspection. And then in those cases, the PHA can make the assistance payments retroactive to the beginning of the lease term once the unit has been determined to meet HQS.

And HUD is, as part of the waiver, is waiving the requirement that the PHA has to conduct its own inspection of the unit, and instead, the PHA can commence owner-- sorry, can commence assistance payments based off the alternative inspection and the owner's certification. So as part of that, though, if you were going to implement that to make sure that the PHA conducts the HQS inspection for the unit as soon as reasonably possible but no later than the one-year anniversary date of the owner's certification. And again, the same availability period as the other two.

In addition to those waivers that are outlined in the 2020-33 notice, there was also a notice that went out by HUD in November particularly for remote video inspections. And so this notice-- this notice was just published last month and it's similar to the remote briefing in that it will stay in place post-COVID-19.

And so it gives PHAs specific guidance on conducting HQS inspections using remote video inspections with the acronym being RVI. So in RVIs and HQS, inspector performs an HQS inspection from a remote location using video streaming

technology. We have a person at the inspection site who serves as a proxy, and oftentimes for those that may be already doing it, the proxy can be the property owner that is going to be serving as the proxy.

So within this notice, it outlines some best practices for four different phases within the remote video inspection. So making sure that you do any kind of administrative preparation-- so looking at your admin plans and your annual plan and making any necessary updates. Again, if you decided to choose to do this and you had to make updates to any of your plans, you could also use the waivers around making updates to the plan. So not needing necessarily to have the board approval to do that.

So you could look at implementing remote video inspections in a quick fashion if you wanted to. The other thing just to point out is that you could consider implementing the waivers in place now while you to determine how you want to go forward with conducting remote video inspections. So that's something else to consider.

The other best practices that are outlined in the notice are any kind of pre-inspection planning that you might want to consider. In particular, outlining like any equipment needs that you may have, how to actually perform the inspection and what you need to consider there, who's actually doing it, who should be a part of it, making sure that the tenant has the opportunity to participate. And then post-inspection, what that follow-up looks like.

So want to do a poll to see who is actually currently conducting video inspections. So just outline here, answer the question whether you're doing the inspections-- yes, we've been doing video inspections for a number of months; yes, we just started doing video inspections; no, but we're planning on doing video inspections; and no, and we don't plan on it.

And if you are doing video inspections or you're about to and you have a plan in place, if you could put in a chat if you're using any kind of specialized apps or software, that might be helpful for others on the call. And Laura, whenever you want to share that, go ahead and do that.

OK. Majority are not doing video inspections and are not planning on it. About 23%,

no, we're not doing it, but we're planning on doing video inspections. And then-- so 27% of you are doing video inspections right now. 16% of those have been doing it for a number of months, and 11% just started doing video inspections. So again, if you have-- for the 27% of you that are doing video inspections, if you have any tips or any specialized apps or software that you're using, please highlight those.

If you don't plan on doing it, and I'm assuming you have a reason for that, if you just want to share what that reason is, kind of why you decided not to go about doing that, maybe it's because you're going to go ahead and use the initial inspection waiver, and so you're not planning on really performing any inspections and just having the owner certification, and then once things are, so to speak, back to normal, you'll just restart your process, maybe that's what's going on there.

So whatever information you can share in the chat I think would be helpful for everyone. OK. So we've been kind of going through the whole process here of outreach, and now we're leading up to the lease-up and move-in. So we want to highlight those waivers that exist related to that. So someone has found their unit and they have a unit. It passes inspection, it gets to establishing the lease term, but the owner right now, for whatever reason, is not interested in signing for more than a year, or maybe the tenant is not interested in that.

And so the first waiver is-- sorry, the first waiver highlighted here, the requirement on the initial lease term is that under the Housing Choice Voucher Program, voucher participants must enter into an initial lease term with the owner for one year unless the PHA determines that a shorter term would improve housing opportunities for the tenant and the shorter term is the prevailing market practice.

The waiver established for Mainstream Voucher holders-- this is specific just to Mainstream, not for regular Housing Choice Vouchers-- is that the PHA can now enter initial lease terms of less than one year regardless of whether the shorter lease term is the prevailing market practice. And the period of availability for that ends on June 30, 2021.

And then the other waiver related to sort of lease-up and move-in is on the execution of the HAP contract, and this applies to the both mainstream and the regular Housing Choice Vouchers. The regulation in place states that the PHA may

not make any housing assistance payments to the owner until the HAP contract is executed. The regulation provides that the PHA has to use its best efforts to execute the HAP contract before the beginning of the lease term and that the HAP contract can be executed no later than 60 days from the beginning of the lease term.

And HUD is waiving this requirement through the Notice 2020-33 to allow PHAs to execute the HAP contract after the 60-day deadline has passed and make housing assistance payments back to the beginning of the lease term. However, the PHA and the owner have to execute the HAP contract no later than 120 days from the beginning of the lease term. So it now has increased from 60 days to 120 days, and that availability, like most of the other waivers, ends on June 30, 2021.

And here is an FAQ that might be helpful in lease signing. Can we switch to electronic signatures for leases and forms? Do we need a third party verification software for validation? And the answer to this actually depends on what your state or own agency's policies say. There are no requirements for third party verification for these documents in public housing or the Housing Choice Voucher regulations.

So from HUD's standpoint, you can do electronic signatures on any of the forms that the tenant needs to sign, including the lease and the HAP contract. So that's going to be more dependent on the state or your own agency's policies, which again, if your state allows it. You may want to look at your agency policies if for some reason they don't allow it and make those changes to allow documents to get signed and move more quickly, including doing the dropboxes that it sounds like for the most part the majority of people on the call are actually doing.

And then some last staffing capacity considerations. And again, people have been-- agencies have been dealing with the impacts of COVID-19 for a while now, so you may have already established a lot of these and that's great, but just depending on where you're located, making sure that you are identifying key contacts and decision-makers and alternative ways to reach them since a lot of the normal staffing operations may have changed. Identifying, authorizing secondary and tertiary contacts if the key contact is not available.

Assessing what your current remote communication strategies are and identifying any additional enhancements. Utilizing flexible work sites-- so telecommuting,

having flexible work hours, telework can be a primary strategy along with social distancing and position reassignments. And from that earlier poll, it sounds like some of you, that's kind of where you've decided is-- which makes the most sense is to kind of do a mix, a hybrid approach.

And then lastly, just making sure that you are making staff aware of any wellness programs that you have just as we're all dealing with this. So that is it for sort of the main strategies that we're going to highlight today. Again, we talk a little bit more in detail on leasing strategies specific to some of the preferences that you may have established if you got a FY17 or FY19 award. So just want to make sure you can go back and look at those on the HUD Exchange if you want more information there.

We've also outlined some additional resources here. So there are specific FAQs that PIH has been putting up related to COVID-19 and some FAQs specifically on reporting of any CARES Act funding. So those two links there. Reminder, again, that all of-- the webinar today and the two previous ones are going to be-- either are going to be posted to the HUD Exchange so you can check those links there. And I think now we're going to go ahead and answer some of the questions that have been coming in.

ASHLEY

MATTHEWS:

All right. Thank you for that, Liz and Lisa. So we've got a lot of questions in. I've answered lots of them in the Q&A. So if you haven't been checking there, please do. Check out the answers that I've provided. One thing that has come up a few times is our policies around voucher extensions. And I just want to-- I don't know if we actually-- I should have thought you put more of a highlight on this in the presentation, but voucher extensions, right?

So the normal policy for voucher extensions is that it's up to the PHA to set the policy. HUD doesn't place any limit on how many voucher extensions can be made or the length of the voucher extensions. That should normally just be in your administrative plan what you as a PHA are doing.

Under normal circumstances, it's always appropriate to-- you have a family that includes a member with a disability and there is a nexus between the fact that they have a disability and they need more time to find a unit, you should always be granting reasonable accommodations if that's the case and looking at this

population of mainstream eligible families that's going to be very likely that people might need a reasonable accommodation extension to their voucher.

During COVID, in PIH Notice 2020-33, we have a waiver to the fact that you normally have to follow your own policy. Now you can actually stray from your own policy and maybe be a little bit more generous with your extensions because of the situation going on with COVID. So basically, PHAs already have a lot of flexibility on voucher extensions, the length, the number of extensions. You have a lot of flexibility with reasonable accommodations on a normal basis, and now you have even more flexibility with that.

So if that is something-- if you have families that are having a really hard time finding a unit, it might make it easier for everyone to give them more time to look for a unit, because you've gone through that initial eligibility screening and you've have gotten it from the waiting list. And so-- and you want them to find a place to live. So that's just one thing I want to highlight for everyone, that please don't hold back on the voucher extensions if you think that they are needed.

We have received a lot of questions about the HQS waivers and the remote video inspections. I'm not the expert on those topics. We do-- and the waivers. Anything in the waiver Notice 2020-33, we have a mailbox, that we actually have dedicated resources that are working that mailbox. There's like a whole team of people that are responding to these.

So I would definitely recommend that people send their questions directly to that mailbox if you have questions about the waivers. And the best part is that that's what feeds our FAQs that we're putting up on COVID. So then there's the-- everybody gets the benefit of your question and it gets on our website. And I will put that in the chat box so everybody has it.

OK. And let me see what else we have. There are a few questions and we always get questions where I just feel like I need to do some more research and to provide you a really accurate response. And this is something that's come up a lot. What are sort of the minimum documentation requirements for getting somebody on the program. We received a question about birth certificates and that people are having a really hard time getting birth certificates and is that really necessary?

I want to do a little bit more research on that and we can definitely make sure that we cover in the topic guides what-- for eligibility determination, what are those minimum documents that you need to get? But I do want to do a little bit more research before I say something that is not accurate. OK, let me see what else we have.

All right. Someone asked-- and this is-- if you haven't attended or you didn't attend the waiting list and preference webinar, I would definitely recommend that you attend that because we get into all the details about waiting lists and preferences. But someone asked about if we have a waiting list that's done by date and time, would it be unfair to use a preference?

That's-- I mean, that's how preferences work. They are meant to-- if you have a policy goal or you're trying to serve a certain population, the preference is meant to do that. So somebody that's been sitting on your waiting list for a long time that doesn't meet the preference criteria might get upset by that, but that is the reason that we have preferences and it is OK to establish a preference as long as it's not for a discriminatory criteria.

OK. So I don't know how much more time-- how many questions do you want me to answer, Liz?

LIZ STEWART: I mean, I think you could-- I think you have time to answer two or three more.

ASHLEY MATTHEWS: OK. All right. What documentation does the PHA need to show to determine short lease term is important to lease up rates? So I don't think there's any specific documentation. I think that for right now, what the waiver is saying in Notice 2020-22, that waiver is saying that you don't-- the PHA doesn't need to do any kind of proof of that shorter lease terms are necessary to increase lease-up rates.

So that is not something you need to worry about now. After June 30, 2021, if you want to lease someone up that has a shorter lease term, I would-- shorter than one year that's standard, I think you just need to look at your local market area and determine if this is really opening up opportunities to people in your area if you allow shorter lease terms. So that's a decision that you're making at the PHA level about your local market and the opportunities that are available.

OK. Someone asked if extensions are allowed past, well, December 31, 2020. I'm assuming that means extensions for the voucher, and if that's the case, then definitely. As I was just describing, voucher extensions are-- HUD does not have very many limits on voucher extensions at all and you could absolutely extend beyond the end of year.

All right. Is there any chance of getting an extension of time to lease the first round of these vouchers? We got our first allocation in March right before the pandemic. So one of the questions I answered already is about the extensions. In the NOFA we had said that you should lease your vouchers within 12 months of the effective date. So whenever your major voucher's effective, it will be one year from then.

In the FAQs, the COVID FAQs on our website, we've said we're extending that another six months. You have 18 months from that effective date. Right now we're not-- I mean, honestly we're not in the mode of trying to take vouchers away. We know it's really difficult with leasing right now and there's a lot of need and basically circumstances are changing on a daily basis. And so we are not planning right now to take any vouchers away, and really, there aren't any awards that would be reaching that 18-month period any time soon.

So we also said in the PIH Notice 2020-09 that we would give 18 months from that whenever those accords became effective. And then for this \$150 million that were in the process of awarding right now, we said 12 months from the date that the vouchers become effective, and part of that was just because the reasoning was very related to COVID and that it's an emergency need, and PHAs were coming in specifically to apply for the vouchers for COVID, and so that's why we didn't give a longer than 12-month time period.

So I think the advice I have is just do what you can to get your vouchers leased up. It's not-- we're not kind of sitting there with a timer sort of-- try to come the day after your vouchers expire and take them away. I think right now everybody just wants to help PHAs do what they need to do to get these leased and get people housed.

All right. So I think I've answered all the questions I can answer right now. I would encourage everyone to-- I would encourage everyone to use our mainstreamvouchers@hud.gov email box. It really makes a difference to give us

feedback on the program, really. There's not always something that we can do based on your questions, but sometimes we can. Sometimes we can make policy changes, sometimes we can put waivers in place, and sometimes we can clear up misunderstandings that PHAs have that are giving them a lot of heartburn.

So it's really valuable to me when you guys ask questions through our mainstreamvouchers@hud.gov mailbox, and sometimes I can provide you useful information. So I would-- even though our webinar series is over, I would still encourage you to use that mailbox, mainstreamvouchers@hud.gov, and get your questions to us so that we can answer them, and also get feedback on how things are going.

Because it can be kind of difficult being at HUD and not at a PHA, kind of finding out how things are working on the ground. So that's a great opportunity for you guys to share how things are working. And if there are opportunities for us to improve the policies of the program, we would love to know what we can do.

So I don't think there's anything else that I can answer right now. So I would just thank you all for attending the webinar.

LIZ STEWART: Ashley, just one more thing I just want to add. We are developing, as part of this webinar series and the community practice that's happening, we are going to be creating topic guides. So to Ashley's point, the more sort of information that you provide to HUD via these questions, we can use that, and if there is clarification-- maybe it's not going to be a change necessarily in policy, but if there's clarification needed, we can use that information in the development of these topic guides.

And because it is the end of the webinar series, I just want to thank everyone for participating. All the PHAs have provided a lot of great questions. You've shared a lot of information in the chat. Appreciate that. And Ashley, just want to say thank you to you for giving your time and answering all the questions throughout these three webinars, we really appreciate it.

So hopefully this webinar as well as the last one will be up on the HUD Exchange soon, and you'll have an opportunity to view it. And you'll be seeing topic guides and more information on the community practice forthcoming. So thank you, everyone. Have a good day.

ASHLEY

Thank you.

MATTHEWS: