



Final Transcript

HUD - US DEPT OF HOUSING & URBAN DEVELOPMENT: Housing Counseling Certification

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SPEAKERS

Virginia Holman
Patricia Breslin
Jerry Mayer
Terri Redmond

PRESENTATION

Moderator Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for standing by and welcome to the Housing Counselor Certification call. At this time all participants are in a listen-only mode. Later we will conduct a question-and-answer session. [Operator instructions]. As a reminder this conference is being recorded.

I would now like to turn the conference over to our host, Ms. Virginia Holman. Please go ahead.

Virginia

Thank you. Good afternoon and welcome to today's webinar on the Housing Counselor Certification process, specifically for you members of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency Network.

Before we start I do want to go over some logistics of the webinar. As the operator said, the audio is being recorded, and we will be posting a playback number along with a PowerPoint and a transcript on the OHC page on HUD Exchange. We'll send out a Listserv when that archive has been updated, and that usually takes seven to ten days. As the operator said, all your lines are currently muted, but we will be opening them up for questions.

I did send out a handout this morning to everyone who had registered, but the presentation is also available in the control panel on the right hand side of your screen. If you just click on the document name you'll be able to download that.

We do want your questions so there will be a question-and-answer period at the end of the webinar, and the operator will give you instructions on how to ask your questions or make comments.

But there's some other ways to ask your questions. Your questions are very important to us. Again, on the panel on the right-hand side of your screen there is a box that is labeled questions. If you just type your question in there, we will be having staff monitoring those questions. And if after the webinar is over or at any time in the future you have a question about this webinar or any housing counseling topic, you can send it to housing.counseling@hud.gov and be sure to put the webinar or other topic in the subject line so we get it to the right person.

If we do open all the lines, please mute your phone. It's a major distraction when they're not muted. Most of your phones do have a mute function, so please use it.

At the end, there will be a brief survey that comes up after we close out the webinar, so please take it. We really look at your comments very seriously so we continue to improve our webinars since they are one of our major training tools.

You will also be getting an email from GoToWebinar and it will often say my name, Virginia Holman. It's going to thank you for attending, and that comes out within 24 to 48 hours. It is going to say that this is your

certificate of training. Please be aware that there is no attachment. The certificate is, in fact, that email. So print it out and save it for your records when you have to document your training.

At this point I'd like to turn the webinar over to Patricia Breslin, whom I am sure you all know. Patricia?

Patricia

Thank you, Ginger. Hi, everybody. This is Pat Breslin. As you know, I'm the HUD Compliance Officer, PHFA. First of all, I welcome you. We are so fortunate that we are able to get Jerry Mayer to talk to our agencies only, and we're very grateful to him. I also want to thank you for calling. I want to suggest that you all ask a lot of questions. Jerry is here, I am here, and Terri Redmond is also here. So we suggest that you ask any questions you have. This is a great opportunity.

The last thing that I want to say is please stick around. Terri has an announcement that she's saving until the end, and it's worth listening to. So without further ado, Jerry, I'm turning it over to you.

Jerry

Thank you very much, and thank you Pat and Terri and all the members of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency for coming to today's webinar

to learn about Housing Counselor Certification. That's my name up there on the screen, and I'm the Director of the Office of Outreach and Capacity Building in HUD's Office of Housing Counseling.

Today's agenda, we're going to cover some overview of HUD's Housing Counseling Program and give you some program updates. Then we're going to talk about certification, some resources, and other information that you can use, and then we'll conclude with your questions.

HUD's Office of Housing Counseling, our mission is to help families obtain, sustain, and retain their homes. We do this through you, our network of HUD-approved housing counseling agencies. There's about 2,000 or so of those nationwide right now, and HUD helps them out by monitoring their compliance with our regulations and overseeing things like their independence and conflict of interest issues and helping them with content and standards.

We also connect our collective clients with you through our website. We have a search engine on hud.gov and also the CFPB has a zip code-based search engine on their site as well that helps the clients find you. We also

provide grant funding for qualified applicants, and there'll be more about that later in this presentation.

So what is housing counseling? Well, you all know what it is because you all live and breathe it every day. But the definition from the final rule is housing counseling is independent expert advice customized to the need of the consumer to address the consumer's housing barriers and to help them achieve their housing goals and must include these items, and these are very important.

We're going to talk about this a few times on this call today. But in general, a unit of housing counseling, that which you are going to count on your 9902 form, contains client intake, a budget, financial and housing affordability analysis, an action plan, except for reverse mortgage counseling—the action plan is very important to the client—any referrals that the client might have been provided, and a reasonable effort to follow up with the client and determine what the outcomes were, and also determining to file, and group education.

So what is group education? According to HUD, is provided for one or more people, it could be a classroom setting, it could be online, it could be

a conference call, or any other delivery method that may evolve over time.

The major differences from one-on-one to counseling to group are that it's not customized for individual needs and it does not offer that individual financial analysis, or that client action plan, but it can be the foundation for an individual counseling session to follow up. And, of course, all housing counseling agencies must offer that one-on-one counseling on the same topics as the group education should the client want to take it further.

Nationwide, this is what we saw in FY16 in terms of housing counseling activity. You can see that that group education on the upper right of that pie chart at 32%, mostly first time home buyer education. So 32% of the approximately 1.2 million clients seen in FY16 received group education for home ownership, a small smattering of rental as well but mostly home ownership. Then the pre-purchase one-on-one counseling was about 19% of the counseling activity. Between the two of them, about 50% of the clients being seen nationwide are being seen for home ownership related activities.

Then on the upper left, there's your foreclosure percentage, about 26%.

But if we had been looking at this slide in 2009, that would have been about two-thirds or more of the pie chart. So it has shrunk and has been

largely replaced by the group education and the pre-purchase education for home ownership.

Also nationwide, about 10% of our clients are rental clients, getting rental for counseling and about 7% are reverse mortgage. That 4% over there on the lower left, that aqua color that is your post-purchase education, helping people be good home owners once they have completed the purchase of their home.

The smallest slide but probably the most important is homeless counseling at 2% nationwide. And we really wish that more homeless folks were being counseled by our HUD-approved agencies, and hopefully we'll see that in the future.

Now, if we look at the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency's affiliates, just in isolation there are 43 agencies reporting and there was about \$1.3 million in funding in FY16. And you all saw together about 23,000 or so clients. You can see that group education at 21%, I'm going to flip back to the other slide, and you can see that's 32%, so you guys are seeing slightly less group and about the same amount of first time home buyer. But you're seeing way more rental, about double the national average on

rental. And you're also seeing about double on homelessness as well.

You're seeing less HECM, doing a little more post-purchase, and just a slightly bit more of the mortgage delinquency counseling.

It's interesting, sometimes when you see the differences between various groups, sometimes we break it out by state, sometimes we break it out by the group that we're talking to and you can really see the PHFA's priorities in counseling here are a little bit different than what we see nationwide.

The national impact of one-on-one counseling, and I'm going to break this out for the PHFA, about almost 270,000 work with a housing counselor to develop that sustainable household budget, super important. About 293,000 received fair housing information. About 197,000 nationwide improved their financial capacity and about 190,000 gained access to the resources to help improve their housing situation. So these represent real success stories that you're a part of.

Now if we look at the PHFA, and what you're all doing, about 14,000 of the people that you worked with, that you helped sustain that household budget or develop that sustainable household budget, about 5,500 gained

access to those resources to help improve their housing situation. About 5,100 improved their financial capacity, and about 4,900 households that received information on fair housing, fair lending, or their accessibility rights. That's the people in the state of Pennsylvania that you all helped through the Housing Counseling Program, and it's a lot of people. You guys did really wonderful work and here's the impact.

Some program initiatives that we have, I'm going to show you a slide in a moment about different kinds of research that we're doing. We currently have a research study underway where we're proving once again the value proposition of housing counseling, and we'll talk about that in a minute.

To the right side of the screen you can see this "Beat the Odds" poster, and housing counseling agencies should have received at least one English and one Spanish version of this poster in the mail. If you have not received this poster, let me know and we'll get one out to you. It's also available for download on our HUD Exchange website.

Just a couple of things that I want to point out, which really talks about why housing counseling is valuable. On the left side of that poster, a homeowner's net worth according to studies by the Federal Reserve, a

homeowner's net worth is 36 times that of a renter. While rental counseling is very important and certainly sustaining people in rental housing is very important, home ownership, as you can see since this is National Home Ownership month, really has a great effect on families and their net worth.

Also, if we look at foreclosure activities, studies show that a consumer who visits a housing counselor as opposed to simply trying to reach out and contact their lender without any help, if they go to a housing counselor, they're 283% more likely to receive a loan modification. That just speaks to the efficacy of HUD-approved counseling agencies and the activities they do to help consumers.

On our website also, you'll find tool kits for you all. If you have a topic that you think we need to address in a tool kit, we want to know about it. So just send us an email at housing.counseling@hud.gov and we will crank out a tool kit as quick as we can because we want to make sure that we're providing you with the technical assistance that you need to do your jobs.

Another initiative that we have going on is our Housing Counseling Federal Advisory Committee. The committee meets on a quarterly basis and they advise us about our housing counseling policies and procedures and they gather information. It's been a really great committee so far, and we're looking forward to lots more in the future.

So here's some of those studies. There are eight of them listed here. You can see, they come from the Federal Reserve, the Urban Institute, independent researchers, Freddie Mac, and on and on. They all prove that housing counseling is effective and valuable, and these are all on our website. You can certainly cite any of these studies and the information in those studies when you're doing your own advertising about housing counseling or applying for grants or anything else that you would need to quote some facts or figures about how housing counseling works. You can see the first one right up there is from the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia. Since this is a Pennsylvania audience, that one deserves a good look by everyone on this call.

Housing counseling grants in FY16, we had \$42 million. We have completed processing the applications for the supplemental NOFA in FY17. The FY17 budget had \$55 million instead of the \$42 million, so

that's a bit of a bump, hopefully for everybody. We are planning on getting the announcement out about the FY17 supplemental comprehensive NOFA very soon.

Keep watching HUD's website and its press releases and keep watching the Listserv and we should be posting something there very soon. Now for FY18, it's not listed here, but for FY18 the administration has asked for \$47 million, which is very generous. And we look forward to a successful outcome on the budget there.

Housing Counselor Certification, we might as well get to the main topic of today's meeting. We published a final rule on December 14, 2016. It was in the Federal Register. The final compliance date for that rule will be August 1, 2020, and that is based on the latest Federal Register notice that we just published on May 31st, which announced the availability of the Housing Counselor Certification exam on August 1, 2017. That is also in the Federal Register with the citation listed here. We sent out a Listserv earlier last week which gives you all of the links to that Federal Register notice. Please refer to that if you want to read it in detail.

So what are the benefits of certification? I think the number one benefit is creating that professional recognition for housing counselors, and that's going to elevate their value in the eyes of the consumers. That credential for counselors will put them on the same footing as anyone else in the real estate transaction. Everyone has a license or certification. Whether you're an appraiser, or a real estate agent, or a title guy, or whoever is involved in real estate transaction has some sort of a credential.

Up until now, housing counselors had no credential at all. What we're hoping is that this will put housing counselors on the same footing as any other real estate professional out there. I think that this is going to raise the visibility and awareness of housing counseling and also in terms of other programs and scholarships and grants, it's definitely going to raise the visibility for housing counselors there too. Because those programs are going to start, in terms of complying with this new rule, is they're going to start saying that their counseling activities have to be done by a HUD-certified housing counselor working at a HUD-approved agency.

We really think that is going to help amplify that housing counseling is very important for all consumers, and especially helping them avoid scammers and con-artists. Because those people will not have a certificate

that shows that they're a HUD-certified counselor, whereas HUD-certified counselors working at HUD-approved agencies will have that certificate. And when we do our messaging we're going to be telling consumers to ask for a HUD-certified housing counselor, and that is something that the scammers and the con-artists will never be able to show that they have.

Some of the key provisions of certification, well, the most important is that all housing counseling provided under or in connection with all HUD programs must be performed by a HUD-certified housing counselor by August 1, 2020. A HUD-certified housing counselor is a housing counselor who has passed the HUD certification exam and works at a HUD-approved housing counseling agency. This is very important that both of these conditions are in place, that they've passed the exam and they work at a HUD-approved housing counseling agency.

Housing counselors will take the exam, and then their executive director will go into our systems and will certify that they work at that agency and only then will a certificate be able to be printed out with the counselor's name and the name of the agency on it. Once a HUD-certified housing counselor leaves the employment of that housing counseling agency, at that point, they go inactive. The executive director will take back that

certificate from them and deactivate them in the system. If they pop up at a new housing counseling agency, that executive director will be able to activate them in the system once again.

With this exam, you take it once and you are essentially certified for life as long as you're working at a HUD-approved housing counseling agency. The reason why we're doing it this way is because we sort of modeled it on the real estate broker-agent relationship that an agent generally hangs their license in a broker's office. We want to do it the same way so that housing counselors are not going out and hanging a shingle out in front of their house and setting up impromptu housing counseling agencies that are not HUD-approved. So this maintains the HUD-approved network of counseling agencies and gives HUD-certified housing counselors a place to hang their certificate.

The certification exam is going to cover six major topics. We'll have a slide on that later, and like I said, you only have to pass that certification exam once. You have to be working at a HUD-approved agency in order to get your certificate, and we will verify that through the aforementioned federal system.

The exam will be available on August 1, 2017, and you can take the test on that date. You will have 36 months or 3 years after August 1st to get it completed. We don't recommend you all run out and do it all at once, even though you can. You may want to elect someone at your agency to go and take the exam and tell everyone how it went afterwards so that you can sort of de-mystify the process for everybody. But you're certainly welcome to take it on August 1st if you want to.

The six major topics of testing are Financial Management and Property Maintenance, Responsibilities of Home Ownership and Tenancy, Fair Housing Laws and Requirements, Housing Affordability, and the Avoidance of and Responses to Rental and Mortgage Delinquency, and the Avoidance of Eviction and Mortgage Default. We have a study guide that's posted on the testing site, and you can study on these topics right now. We're also going to put a practice exam up which we'll have a little more information on in a moment.

So you register and you take the exam at this website:

hudhousingcounselors.com. We're going to post soon a free practice exam and a free study guide update, and that will be available before August 1st. The practice exam is kind of modeled on various states'

Department of Motor Vehicles. What they've done is they post a practice exam so that students can take their driving test over and over again and hone their skills. Then once they feel proficient, they go down to their local motor vehicle and they plunk down their money and they take their test and they do well.

We really feel that an experienced housing counselor who has read the study guide and has honed their skills on their free practice exam will do just fine when it comes to taking their HUD-certified housing counselor exam.

Now, the exam will be either online or at a proctoring site. Both are proctored, by the way, one virtually, the other live. The cost has been reduced. In our proposal rule we said that the cost was going to be \$100 and \$140 to take it onsite. We've gotten the cost down now to \$60 and \$100. But what we recommend, of course, is that you practice on those practice exams and hone your proficiency before you spend any money and then when you do have to plunk down your \$60 it will be money well spent because you'll pass that exam.

The exam is going to be available in English and Spanish, and you can take it multiple times until you pass the exam. But you have to pay the fee each time you want to take the cert exam, so again, those practice exams are really critical to controlling costs. We're going to post, well, we published a Federal Register notice, to announce the availability of the exam on May 31, 2017 and the exam start date will be August 1, 2017. And we're going to publish another Federal Register notice that will notify you of the availability of the practice exam when it pops up.

To prepare for the start of the exam, you can register now at hudhousingcounselors.com. You can create your user account. That is the first step towards studying for the exam and then afterwards you can access the user guide and when the practice exams come up you'll be able to take the practice exam. Then you'll be ready on August 1st when that test pops up.

So the final rule on certification is going to apply to all organizations that deliver housing counseling that's required in connection with all HUD programs. Counseling in connection with programs such as CDBG, those are Community Development Block Grants, Public and Indian Housing,

those are your housing authority programs, and HOME funds may be affected.

But what we've done is we've narrowly defined the housing counseling rule. We kind of parsed it out so that we could tell you what is not housing counseling. Those are basically services that provide housing information or just placement or referral services that don't contain that list I showed you earlier, that showed you the client intake and the action plans, and the budgeting, and all that stuff that you do every day when you're seeing a client for housing counseling. If it doesn't contain all that stuff then we really can't define it as housing counseling and they may not be affected by this rule.

Then also routine administrative activities such as program eligibility determinations, simple client intake, which might be done by the receptionist at your housing counseling agency, or some simple case management that provides housing services that's incidental to a larger program such as housing of people with AIDS, emergency shelter grants, or continuum of care, that does not fund housing counseling.

Also fair housing advice and advocacy that is limited to processing complaints and filing claims is also not regarded as housing counseling because none of these things have that full cycle of information that's collected and provided for a unit of housing counseling.

There's also another impact on intermediaries and agency managers to consider. Basically if you're working at an intermediary agency or you're manager of a local housing counseling agency, where you're really just doing funding or overseeing or administering the program and you're not actually counseling anybody, not providing any direct service, then you don't really need to become a HUD-certified housing counselor.

However, if you're working at, and this typically happens at a small housing counseling agency where traditionally sometimes the executive director might step in and do some counseling if a counselor calls in sick, if the waiting room is filled with people and someone needs to see them, if that's going on at your agency then that executive director or that administrator probably should get their certificate. Because if you want to count that on your 9902 report, then whoever does that unit of counseling after the three years after we start testing, which would be in 2020, has to be certified.

What are some of the options for agencies that might be impacted by the certification rule? Well, if you're not HUD-approved now you could apply to HUD for approval or you could join up with an intermediary or a state housing finance agency, much like you all are. You can also partner with an existing housing counseling agency to deliver that housing counseling on your behalf.

You can modify the program in order to become compliant, meaning adding or subtracting services as the case may be to fall into compliance, or the one that we really don't want to see, which is to stop delivering those housing counseling services before the final compliance date. We'd rather see the first three than the last because it's very important that services continue for all clients.

How to become a HUD-approved agency? Here are some of the basic qualifying criteria. Generally a non-profit state or local government agency can apply. There has to be at least one year experience in providing housing counseling and one year of operation in that proposed geographic service area. And you have to demonstrate that you have

sufficient counseling resources. There is a lot more to it, but those are the top four items.

Also, at housingcounseling@hud.gov, you can schedule an appointment with an application advisor who will help your agency work through the application process. For the folks on the phone, this is really if you know of a community organization that is thinking about housing counseling, you can just send them the copy of this webinar, the PDF version so they'll have the information on how to get started.

We've also posted on that website a housing counseling agency eligibility tool. Now, this is a new tool that is sort of a decision tree, and it walks potential agencies through all the different criteria that's required for HUD approval. What it does is it's pretty much a yes or no proposition, and it generates a report at the end of the exercise. It will tell an agency whether they are qualified for the HUD approval process or if they have items that they need to work on in order to become qualified. And if they're qualified, it will help them schedule an appointment with an application advisor to take the next steps. If they are not qualified, then they can take that report and they can work on those items and apply when they feel that they are qualified.

It also includes educational materials on becoming HUD-approved and again, that user report is really important because that'll help you through the next step. A lot of our approved agencies are just taking this eligibility tool sort of to gauge where they are right now in terms of their qualifications, and we've noticed that a lot of agencies seem to be doing it even though they're HUD-approved, they're putting themselves through the eligibility tool just to see where they come out. That's actually good to see, because it's a good educational refresher for agencies as well that are already HUD-approved.

So what became effective on January 13th, one month after we published the final rule? The first thing is a requirement that agencies participating in HUD's Housing Counseling Program that provide home ownership counseling must address the entire process of home ownership. That is from A to Z. That's starting with how to find a house, how to find a real estate broker, how to obtain mortgage financing, home inspection information, everything you need in order to purchase that home.

But what we mean when we say the entire process, it's also what to do after you've closed on your home, how to maintain home ownership and

how to be a good home owner, how to budget and what to expect going forward in terms of maintenance. Then finally in the end, suppose you want to sell your home, well, it also should cover how to go about finding a real estate broker to list your home and sell it once again.

There's also a requirement related to the distribution of home inspection materials and that is the pamphlet that is called For Your Protection, Get a Home Inspection. And we want to make sure that all home ownership clients receive that pamphlet and that should be noted in your files that that pamphlet was provided to the client.

Then there's a requirement related to the misuse of housing counseling grant funds that constitute a material violation. This is a very serious new requirement. This relates to housing counseling grant funds that maybe didn't go to housing counseling or administrative costs, maybe were diverted to something else and something that shouldn't have been purchased with those funds. That could constitute a material violation and forever bar that counseling agency from ever receiving housing counseling program grant funds again.

What we recommend is that if you have a question on the expenditures of your housing counseling grant funds, ask us upfront, ask your HUD point of contact upfront if the proposed expenditure is a good one and they will help you. It is better to ask in advance than fall into this material violation situation. We don't want to see that happen. We will help you with technical assistance to avoid material violations because we want to make sure that you're able to continue providing funds through our Housing Counseling Grant Program.

Finally, there's a new requirement related to the prohibition against distributing any grant funds under the Housing Counseling Program to an organization that's convicted of a violation of a federal election law. I know none of the agencies on the call here today have that situation, but just be advised that it's something that you should probably strongly avoid because we don't want to, again, be unable to provide housing counseling grant funds to great organizations.

So what will become effective on August 1, 2020? That's three years from the date we start testing. That is the requirement that all individuals who provide housing counseling under or in connection with a HUD program are HUD-certified housing counselors.

Then there's the requirement that any agency providing housing counseling under or in connection with a HUD program must be HUD-approved to participate in HUD's Housing Counseling Program. So we have HUD-certified counselors working at HUD-approved agencies providing housing counseling. That's what we want to see on August 1, 2020.

Then there's the requirement that all housing counseling reported on your 9902 report that occurs after that final compliance date of August 1, 2020, must be performed only by HUD-certified housing counselors. If you're going to count it on the 9902, a HUD-certified counselor had to have performed that unit of housing counseling.

What else will become effective is the requirement that group education provided by a housing counseling agency must be overseen by a HUD-certified housing counselor. Now, that doesn't mean you can't continue to have guest speakers. We certainly would encourage a loan originator, or a real estate broker, or an appraiser, or a title company person come to your group education and tell the class what they do. What we'd like to see is, let's say they're a loan originator, come to the class and say, hi, I'm a loan

originator and I want to tell you about the mortgage process, not advertise for their company and not hand out business cards, of course, but just give that overview and identify themselves as working in the industry. By having the course overseen by a HUD-certified counselor, that ensures that all those identity of interest concerns will be covered.

Then there's the requirement that agencies applying to participate in HUD housing counseling programs must meet housing counseling certification requirements, which basically means that they have to have their HUD-certified counselors tested and ready to go in order to be approved to participate in HUD's Housing Counseling Program.

Then, finally, all intermediaries and state HFAs and our multi-state organizations that participate in our program, must ensure to HUD that all of the counseling performed by their affiliates is being done by a HUD-certified housing counselor.

Now there's additional information for you on the HUD Exchange at the above address, and this is in your handout as well, so you don't have to copy down any URL links. What you'll find on our website is a copy of

the press release that announced this and the various Federal Register notices that are coming out.

There's a list of all the programs that are covered by the final rule.

There's a chart that shows you the key provisions and the dates and also there's frequently asked questions. Our frequently asked questions are sent in to us by all of you and we have hundreds of them that are posted at that website. It's a searchable database, and it looks like this. You can see that there's about 356 as of the date we took the screenshot. I think there's even more now. And you could put in a key word and it will give you a list of all of the frequently asked questions and answers that relate to that key word or you could just scroll through if you want.

We have topics not only on certification but we also have topics on a variety of housing counseling interests, such as, you can see here, financial management, reimbursements, and HECM. We want your frequently asked questions. When you send them to housing.counseling@hud.gov we will extract that question and we will turn it into something that we can add to our database and maybe your question is answered already.

Because if you've thought of it, perhaps someone else has and maybe it's already here. So take a look at that frequently asked questions site and

add to it if you feel that you need a clarification or you just want to ask a question that you don't see there.

We're doing a lot of outreach on certification. This is part of that right now. We post all of our webinars, including this one on our HUD Exchange page. There's an archive of our webinars and this one will be archived as well. So if you have a colleague that couldn't make the webinar today, they can log on and they can take the same webinar that you're taking right now. On our archive there will be a transcript, there will be an audio recording, and this presentation can be found there, usually about seven to ten days from now.

We also have a training and events calendar and we also list the training and events for our training partners like, NeighborWorks and RCAC and NCRC, National Council of La Raza. They're our training NOFA partners and we fund them to provide training for all of you, especially those scholarships to those NTI-type events. We have registration information for those events also on our calendar. So you're certainly welcome to visit that and click through and obtain your scholarships.

The Office of Housing Counseling can be found at hudexchange.info/counseling, that's the shortcut. The housing counseling testing website is hudhousingcounselors.com. You can email us at hud.counseling@hud.gov and you can also join our Listserv which currently has almost 19,000 subscribers.

Subscribers receive training information and they receive information about certification about grant opportunities, guidance, and new notices that effect housing counseling, and a whole lot more. You can visit the HUD Exchange to sign up or you can just send me an email and say you want to be subscribed. You can send that email to me, I am your presenter, at that email address and I would be happy to subscribe you to our Listserv or if you have any question that you want to pose that you haven't sent to housing.counseling@hud.gov, would like to ask me about anything in this presentation or any other topic, feel free. I'd love to see you emails.

With that, Ginger, we are ready for questions.

Virginia

Okay. Operator, if you would open the lines and give them instructions.

Moderator Certainly. [Operator instructions].

Virginia Thank you and while we're waiting here, we do have a couple of questions written in. One is, if you are an intermediary agency under PHFA do you have to be a HUD-certified agency to be in compliance or just under their umbrella and monitoring?

Jerry That is a great question. There's two ways to participate in HUD's Housing Counseling Program. One, is to be a locally HUD-approved housing counseling agency and you can be that and an affiliate of the PHFA. But the other way is to participate through the intermediary, in your case, the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency. So both are acceptable and both will enable housing counselors to take the HUD certification exam.

Virginia Okay. Here's another one. Do the pre-purchase home buyer education workshop completion certificates or any other completion certificate have to be signed by the student in addition to the agency counselor?

Jerry No, I think just the agency counselor needs to sign that.

Virginia Okay. Then one more, am I understanding correctly that when you pass your housing counseling exam, you must be under a Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency umbrella housing counseling agency to receive your certificate or must you have to be a HUD-certified agency?

Jerry This, again, will reiterate what came in the first question, was that if you are an affiliate of the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency and are participating in HUD's program through their approval, than you're fine. You can take the certification exam and you can become a HUD-certified housing counselor for HUD's programs. The other avenue is to become a locally HUD-approved housing counseling agency and you could still be affiliated with the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency if you chose to go that route as well.

Virginia Okay, and that's all the written questions. Operator, do we have any on the line?

Moderator We don't have any phone questions that actually queued up, but I believe, Ms. Redmond, your line is open if you had any comments.

Terri Hi, this is Terri Redmond. I did have a question, but you clarified that during your first question about needing to have a certification or could they operate under our network. I thought that that might be something that might be a question or something that they were questioning about the policy, so I just wanted to get that clarified.

Jerry Well, Terri while we're waiting to queue up more questions, I think you had an announcement for the audience.

Terri Yes. Well, in order to support the certification process and to improve performance of counseling services to our consumers here in Pennsylvania, we're going to require that all counselors in our network get a HUD certification.

We understand that's a cost to the agency to prepare, to study, and also the cost of taking the exam and for some there is some apprehension because it is a test and it's a costly test. I mean it's not costly, but it does have a fee attached, so we're going to reimburse the agencies starting probably this fiscal year, reimburse the agency for the cost of the exam, time to study for the exam, so that they can adhere to our policy.

We want all of our agencies and counselors to enjoy the privilege of working in this new credentialized service. So we want to encourage all of our agencies to start studying sooner than later. We have some policies set up to provide some guidance and to answer certain questions about the policy that we will publish and distribute probably this week.

We were just waiting for the final rule, the announcement of the final rule regarding the test to be published. We're excited about the opportunity to be able to support this credential. If you have any questions, I can entertain them now. Pat knows all about this and she also is available to field questions once we distribute the policy.

Jerry

Terri, that is just amazing the level of support, that the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency is providing to its network. It's really unprecedented. I know of no other HFA or intermediary that is doing this for their participating agencies and you're certainly helping housing counselor certification become a reality for all of the counselor's in your network. We really applaud your efforts.

Virginia

We just got, not really a question, but a comment that NHS of Greater Berks thanks you very much for your plan.

Terri

You're welcome. We also want to support the idea of all of our agencies getting a HUD certification as well, being certified or approved under HUD. I know some of you enjoy the privilege, I think, of providing the service and you're really contributing to the standards that PHFA has bestowed upon you with being under our network.

But I believe HUD will be utilizing this opportunity to market to consumers regarding this credentialized process. So I think that the consumer will probably want to recognize not only the counselor that is providing the certification but also that they are working with not only a PHFA participating agency, but also a HUD-approved agency as well, although that's not a criteria for being in our network.

We are going to be encouraging our agencies that are not HUD-approved to get HUD-approved as well. If anyone is concerned about what I'm saying, our standards are a bit higher than HUD's so if you were already approved as a PHFA agency, you would be able to meet the criteria to get HUD approval. It's just really about taking the time, setting the goal to submit the information to HUD to be considered.

Jerry We have a comment from Lorraine of the Office of Housing Counseling.

Lorraine Thank you very much, Jerry and Terri, that's awesome news, thank you for your support. I just wanted to reiterate what Jerry had said earlier. Just last week we re-launched the HUD housing counselor's website to add user ID's to them. This is an important step in the process for the certification examination. You can actually go onto the website now and create a user account and we are encouraging everyone to get that taken care of now. It's free. You just need to provide your name and your email address.

Then what's really exciting about having the user ID is you can now track your process for the online training. So when you complete a module and you take a break, you return, you'll go back to where you left off. This is a great improvement to the website. Also, it will definitely get you ready for certification so we are encouraging you. You can take that step now. Thank you, Jerry.

Jerry Thanks, Lorraine. That's really good information for the group, we appreciate that. Alright, do we have any other questions from the audience?

Moderator There are no questions or comments queuing up, please go ahead.

Virginia And we don't have any written comments either.

Jerry Alright, well then thank you very much, everybody, for attending today.
You can still ask questions even after the webinar has completed. You can
send those questions at that email address or you can send them to
housing.counseling@hud.gov.

We want your questions, and we will get you an answer within 24 hours,
every question you ask us. And we really appreciate you all attending
today and participating in HUD's program along with the Pennsylvania
Housing Finance Agency. Thank you, everyone, for attending.

Moderator Thank you. Ladies and gentlemen, that does conclude our conference for
today. Thank you for your participation and for using AT&T Executive
Teleconference Service. You may now disconnect.