



Commonwealth of Massachusetts
**DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING &
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT**

Charles D. Baker, Governor ◆ Karyn E. Polito, Lieutenant Governor ◆ Janelle L. Chan, Undersecretary

Public Housing Notice 2019 -02

To: All Local Housing Authority Executive Directors
From: Amy Stitely, Associate Director, Division of Public Housing
Subject: Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Public Housing (CHAMP) Update
Date: January 30, 2019

Last December, in an email update to local housing authorities (LHAs), DHCD announced that we were planning to launch CHAMP to the public in late January/early February of this year. However, due to challenges LHAs have encountered after the recent system-wide merge of applications, DHCD is no longer able to hold to this timeframe. Launch is now delayed to allow us and LHAs time to address the impact on LHA waitlists.

We are issuing this notice to let all LHAs know that DHCD is actively working on addressing what we believe is a one-time, acute administration challenge. Below we've provided guidance on how to address it. In addition, DHCD is willing to assist LHAs with extra administrative costs that have been incurred as a result of merge and is creating a new Vacancy System waiver for situations where impacted LHAs are unable to lease units in a timely manner.

So what happened?

After merge was completed to establish the centralized waitlist in CHAMP, LHAs were seeing changes to their own individual waitlists. This was because merge established one individual application for each applicant which reflected the applicant claims. The CHAMP application, now a single application shared among all LHAs where the applicant applied, reflects the most recent information. Possible reasons that your LHA waitlist has changed are: (a) the applicant provided different information to multiple LHAs; (b) the effect of CHAMP calculating priority based on applicant self-claim, and; (c) different determinations made by LHAs based on the information provided by the applicant. The result is that an LHA may have many more applicants at the top of their waitlist with a priority/preference claim than were present prior to merge. We are aware that LHAs are experiencing a delay in filling vacant units due to the number of applicants that they have to screen in order to identify an applicant who can readily verify the priority that they have claimed on their CHAMP application.

Next Steps:

A working group of LHA staff and DHCD staff is being convened to discuss impacts, best practices, and remedies. LHA participants include small, medium, and large LHAs from both urban and suburban cities/towns. This group will continue to advise DHCD as we continue to move to CHAMP launch and, later, system enhancements.

As stated above, we believe that the sudden change to some LHA waitlists is a one-time occurrence due to the merge and should not be an issue going forward. To address the immediate situation and launch to the public as soon as possible, we are requesting that LHAs:

1. review their program waitlists resulting from merge,
2. send the Priority/ Preference screening letter package to all applicants whose claims resulted in Priority 1-5 on your program waitlists, and
3. Determine priority and preference status for all. (See attached instructions for what to do with applicants who do not respond)

This will ensure that LHAs will have a pool of verified applicants when a vacancy occurs or that LHAs will only have to verify priority and preference if an applicant has applied claiming a higher priority than those applicants that were on the list the last time you verified priority and preference of the existing pool.

Detailed Priority and Preference Screening instructions and DHCD form letters for you to use when contacting all Priority 1-5 applicants are attached to this communication. We have also posted them in HousingApps, in "Miscellaneous, Documents, Forms, Letters".

Operating Budget and Vacancy Policy Relief:

We realize that screening all applicants will be an unanticipated cost to the LHA and that some LHAs may require additional staff time. Accordingly, DHCD will allow a one-time exemption to the LHA 400-1 Operating Budget for mailing costs and additional help. Understanding that some LHAs have already started the process described above and sent applicants the Priority/Preference screening letter, DHCD will grant an exemption for mailing costs and additional staffing for the period covering January 2, 2019 to March 31, 2019.

In order to be granted the exemption(s) an LHA must:

Determine additional staff or an increase in part time staff hours are needed and submit a request to your Housing Management Specialist through email. The email must explain how your waitlist was impacted, stating the number of applicants on the waitlist now with a Priority 1-5 in comparison with the number prior to merge. The LHA should describe what it requires for additional capacity, how you will meet this need, and the estimated hours and cost.

To receive an exemption for staffing an LHA must either:

- Option 1: Increase the hours of part time staff.
- Option 2: Hire temporary staff.

To receive reimbursement for mailing costs an LHA must provide an invoice to your Housing Management Specialist.

LHAs have demonstrated the additional time it is taking to fill vacancies resulting from the impact on your waitlists. DHCD is, in response, working on a revision to the vacancy system to allow LHAs to request a vacancy waiver due to prolonged vacancies resulting from CHAMP merge. Once the system is updated, we will issue further guidance under separate notice.

In closing, we understand the impact of the merge on your waitlists and the concerns it has raised as well as the resulting increased workload. For these reasons, DHCD is delaying the launch of CHAMP until the bulk of these merge issues resolve. Please remember that Global Refusal (3 unit offer) is not in effect and applicants cannot use the Housing Selection/Finder attachment to the CHAMP application until we launch to the public.

In the meantime, please watch for additional guidance, as we will continue to provide Webinars to cover specific topics, issue user tips, and respond to PHASRS tickets.

Quick Tip regarding PHASRS:

A quick tip about PHASRS login credentials. Your PHASRS password is set as a default password that was provided to you at migration until you change the password. The password is NOT your CHAMP password unless you changed the default password to your CHAMP password. Please see the attached instructions for how to access PHASRS. If you have tenant selection staff that did not receive PHASRS credentials please submit a PHASRS ticket on their behalf. Provide their name, email, and local housing authority in the ticket. If you cannot access PHASRS please try the default password. If you still cannot access PHASRS please contact Joyce Taylor at joyce.m.taylor@mass.gov. There is an independent link to PHASRS in the instructions if you can't access it because you are locked out of CHAMP.

Attachments:

Priority and Preference Screening Instructions

Notice of Priority/Preference Screening for State-Aided Housing (b3)

Checklist of Required Verification Documents for Housing Situation Priority Status (b4)

General Authorization for Release of Information (b2)

Physicians Verification of Severe Medical Emergency (b6)

Housing Search Form (b7)

Housing Situation Priority Policy for LHAs (a6)

How to Access the Public Housing Application Support Request System (PHASRS) Instructions