



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

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

## **Public Housing Notice 2019-08**

To: Local Housing Authority Executive Director  
From: Amy Stitely, Associate Director, Division of Public Housing  
Subject: Opening of the Online Common Housing Application for Massachusetts Public-Housing (CHAMP)  
Date: April 10, 2019

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I am pleased to announce that effective April 10, 2019, DHCD is launching the internet based, state-wide public housing application and centralized waitlist system known as CHAMP to the public. As you know, this system was mandated by the legislature as Section 14 of Chapter 235 of the Acts of 2014. The Eligibility and Selection Criteria regulation, 760 CMR 5.00, has been updated to incorporate CHAMP and is effective April 10, 2019. The notice of changes to the regulation and instructions for comments can be found on the DHCD Legal Resources webpage at <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dhcd-regulations-current-regulations-and-proposed-amendments>.

Applicants can apply using the CHAMP application online at [www.mass.gov/applyforpublichousing](http://www.mass.gov/applyforpublichousing) or can download a CHAMP paper application on DHCD's website, [www.mass.gov/dhcd](http://www.mass.gov/dhcd). The Universal Standard and Emergency Applications have been removed from the DHCD website and replaced with new downloadable paper applications. Remember the CHAMP system and CHAMP paper application may be used only for state-aided public housing. There are separate paper applications for the Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) and the Alternative Housing Voucher Program (AHVP). These are posted on the DHCD website in the Rental Assistance Program page. At this time, the CHAMP system does not take applications for federal public housing, Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8), MRVP or AHVP, so paper applications for those programs must be entered into a separate waitlist management system.

### Applicant Assistance

The CHAMP online application provides guidance and helpful tips to applicants as they fill out their application. DHCD's website also has been updated, and it now contains the CHAMP application, instructions on how to complete an application both online and on paper, general information about the state-aided public housing programs, income limits, common questions and answers, and further information about how an applicant can update their application.

An applicant telephone Help Line is now available at 1-866-483-6445. Currently, this Help Line does not provide live telephone assistance and instead, after a series of recorded messages, asks applicants to leave

a message for follow up. DHCD has a goal of returning calls within three business days, and turning on live assistance by the end of April.

### Paper Applications

LHAs are encouraged to emphasize the ability and benefits of applying through CHAMP online. However, if a paper application is requested, you must provide it either in person or through the mail. All LHAs must enter any paper application received for the state-aided public housing program in CHAMP regardless of whether the applicant has applied at your LHA or whether your LHA administers the program that the applicant wants to apply for. To make the data entry of information into the system as seamless as possible, the CHAMP paper application replicates the CHAMP online application. Remember, the applicant's initial priority and preference is based on the information that they provide in the CHAMP application (self-claim). No supporting documentation is needed at the time of application.

### Key Policy Changes

All state-aided public housing program waitlists are open. In accordance with 760 CMR 5.00, applicants will be placed on the appropriate LHA program waitlist automatically by the CHAMP system. CHAMP does this based on the information provided in the Housing Selections section of the application. The applicant can only select LHAs that offer the program they want to be considered for. For example, if an applicant applies to an LHA that only has an elderly/handicapped program, the applicant cannot apply for family housing at that LHA.

Now that the CHAMP application and centralized waitlist system is online, the "Global Refusal" function is active. The "Global Refusal" rule is a limit on the number of times an applicant can fail to accept an offer of housing without any effect on other housing selections. An applicant can receive up to 3 unit offers without it affecting their application state-wide. An applicant who fails to accept three unit offers in a five year period will be removed from the waitlists for all programs at all LHAs for which the applicant applied. If the applicant re-applies to any of those programs at those LHAs, then for a 3 year period, the application will not be granted the same priority/preference that it previously had when the application was removed from the waitlist. For the first two offers of housing that are not accepted by the applicant, the application will only be removed from that program waitlist at that LHA, and the application will not receive the same priority/preference that it previously had for a 3 year period. (See 760 CMR 5.10(4))

### Local Housing Authority Assistance

DHCD is offering technical and programmatic support to LHAs in several different ways. An LHA CHAMP User Group was formed several months ago to create an open dialog between DHCD and LHAs regarding the technical and programmatic aspects of CHAMP. We encourage people to channel their feedback to this user group which includes representatives from Avon/Holbrook, Brockton, Chicopee, Framingham, Ipswich, Malden, and North Andover Housing Authorities.

We have updated the CHAMP system to include user guides within the system. In addition, CyberSense is offering LHA training in the form of webinars, one-hour support calls, and training for new employees. PHASRS, the LHA support request ticketing system, remains in place, and DHCD/Cybersense are actively responding to requests. Lastly, DHCD has also begun to issue CHAMP “Tech Updates” to LHAs in order to address specific topics. These updates are now posted in the Help Tab of your CHAMP account.

Applications, tenant selection forms, and letters that support CHAMP have been posted in the “Documents” Tab in CHAMP for LHAs. In addition, these documents are also posted in the DHCD/LHA HousingApps online system. All LHAs are required to use these documents on their own letterhead without any other modifications. This is particularly important as the documents support the CHAMP system and any deviation could result in a misunderstanding of the regulations by applicants. Please note that in CHAMP you will be able to download an address file for applicants on the Preview List and on the Pull List for a vacancy. These features have been added to address administrative needs of LHAs (See Tech Update #4).

We look forward to the success of CHAMP for applicants, LHAs and DHCD. Our staff is available for support and questions. Attached, for your reference, find LHA Frequently Asked Questions and Answers.

## LHA – Common CHAMP Questions

### 1. Can an applicant apply for state-aided public housing anywhere in Massachusetts?

Yes, an applicant can apply to any available state-aided public housing program at any LHA across the Commonwealth. However, the CHAMP system knows which programs are available at each LHA so applicants will not be able to select any housing programs that don't exist at the LHA where they want to apply. Applicants have to select each individual program at the LHAs where they would like to apply (there is no "Check All" option on the paper or online version of CHAMP).

### 2. Where can an applicant claim Local Preference?

In CHAMP, preferences are automatically assigned by the system in accordance with the place that the applicant identifies as their residential address or their place of work in the application form. An applicant can claim local preference for both the town/city in which they live and for the town/city in which they work. If homeless, an applicant can claim resident preference where they are currently residing or in the town/city where they were living when they were displaced. They will not be able to claim local preference for multiple towns/cities if they work in multiple towns/cities.

### 3. How are Transfers for Good Cause handled in CHAMP?

A Good Cause Transfer requested by a tenant is accomplished by the tenant logging into CHAMP and updating their application. The tenant will be placed on the LHA's waiting list as a Priority 6, Transfer, and the application will be pulled on a waitlist as such.

### 4. How are Administrative Transfers handled?

An Administrative Transfer, one initiated by the LHA, is done outside of CHAMP. This procedure is no different than what LHAs do now. Administrative Transfers do not appear in the waiting list. We recommend that LHAs maintain a record of all Administrative Transfers separate from CHAMP.

### 5. What are the acceptable ways an applicant can request a change to their application?

Applicants now have the ability to update or make changes to their application themselves online through their CHAMP account. If an applicant cannot make changes to their application online, they must send an application update request (forms a5a-a5e) to a Local Housing Authority. All changes in CHAMP made by LHAs to application forms or housing selections on behalf of an applicant must originate from a written request from the applicant. Written requests should be kept on file at the LHA.

If an applicant attaches an update/change form to an email or if the email contains all of the information in the update/change form it is an acceptable request. A Local Housing authority should only make changes to an application if it is clear what the applicant would like changed and the LHA is certain this request has come from the applicant.

**6. How will LHAs know if an applicant needs an accessible unit?**

An applicant will indicate that they require a wheelchair accessible unit or a unit with no stairs in their CHAMP Application Form. If the applicant needs another type of physical modification to their unit they can provide that information in the field on the application for reasonable accommodation requests. Reasonable accommodation requests are not filtered for list pulls, but will need to be addressed by the LHA when making an offer of housing.

**7. Do LHAs have to offer non-wheelchair accessible units to applicants who have wheelchair accessibility needs?**

Yes, LHAs are required to offer a non-wheelchair accessible unit to an applicant who has requested a wheelchair accessible unit as it is up to the applicant to decide if the unit meets their needs. If an applicant requesting a wheelchair accessible unit appears in a list pull for a vacant non-wheelchair accessible unit and informs the LHA that the unit will not meet their needs, the LHA should forego the screening process with the applicant and select "Wrong Unit Type" as the screening outcome.

**8. I received a new paper application from an applicant who has already applied elsewhere but the information online in CHAMP is different, what should I do?**

If the paper application you received is more recent than the timestamp listed on the application page in CHAMP, then you should update the application in CHAMP using the information provided in the new paper application. You will then be asked to update the timestamp to the date you received this new information.

**9. What happens if an applicant who is being screened for priority/preference does not send back any/all verification documents by the end of the 10 business day screening period?**

On the eleventh business day or later, if you have not received any, or only some, of the verification documents requested after the 10 business day screening period, then in the Priority Review Item in the Applicant's Worksheet, you should select "Incomplete/No Response." The system will assign the applicant Priority 7, Standard Applicant, until either: the applicant brings in documentation supporting the higher priority claim and the LHA grants the claim in the Worksheet; or until the LHA selects "Denied" for the claim in the Worksheet. When the LHA denies the claim the LHA must send a letter stating that the priority or preference has been denied and informing the applicant of the right to appeal. Denying priority/preference does not remove the applicant from the housing authority's waiting list, the system moves the applicant to Priority 7, Standard Applicant.

**10. What happens if an applicant who has been pulled on a list for a unit vacancy does not send back any verification documents in response to the Notice of Screening for State-Aided Public Housing by the end of the 10 business day screening period?**

When you pull a list to fill a vacant unit you are required to send all applicants on your pulled list the Notice of Screening for State-Aided Public Housing. If the applicants on your pull list also need their priorities/preferences verified, you must also send those applicants the Notice of Priority Preference Verification (see the above question for how to handle applicants who do not respond to the Notice of Priority Preference Verification letter). It is possible that an applicant will not respond to one or both of these notices. When the applicant does not respond at all to the Notice of Screening for State-Aided Public Housing follow the instructions below:

1. Applicant was sent the Notice of Screening for State-Aided Public Housing and did not respond at all within the 10 business day screening period for a Pull List:
  - a. **Option 1:** On the eleventh business day, click “Assign Screening Outcome” on the List Pull interface for this applicant. The Screening Outcome for this applicant will be “Unscreened” which means they will not be eligible for a unit offer for the unit you are currently trying to fill. The applicant will remain on your list.
  - b. **Option 2:** On the eleventh business day, go the Applicant’s Worksheet and find their Qualifications Review Item. Set the Qualifications Review Item to “Disqualified” using the drop down. This will “Reject” the applicant for failure to provide information necessary for the processing of their application. You must make a local note to this effect. Once you are done in the Worksheet, you must assign the Screening Outcome for the applicant which will give them a Screening Outcome of “Rejected” for this List Pull, and their status will also become “Rejected” which means they will not be eligible to go to the Offer stage, and they will be removed from your waitlist. You must send the applicant the Notice of Ineligibility or Disqualification for State-Aided Housing in order to inform them of their appeal rights.  
**PLEASE NOTE:** You can only remove an applicant from a waitlist for failure to respond when they fail to respond to the Notice of Screening for State-Aided Public Housing sent in relation to a Pull List for a vacancy. You cannot remove an applicant from the waitlist for failure to respond to the Notice of Priority Preference Verification at any time.
2. Applicant was sent the Notice of Screening for State-Aided Public Housing and partially responds within the 10 business day screening period for a Pull List for a vacancy:

On the eleventh business day, go to the Applicant’s Worksheet and address each Review Item to the extent that you can, given the documentation provided to you by the applicant. After you have fully processed the information they have provided, click “Assign Screening Outcome” button. If the Applicant was not fully verified, they will not be eligible for a unit offer for the unit you are currently trying to fill.

## 11. What should an LHA do if an applicant asks where they are on a waitlist?

LHAs should access the Redacted Waitlist Report (Report 15) in the reports section in CHAMP and inform the applicant of their current location on the waitlist (see steps below). Be sure to inform the applicant that this position is only for the specific date and time this report was generated as it may change at any time. Please refer to the *Waiting List Inquiry Response Letter* issued by DHCD. You can find this letter in HousingApps or on the documents tab of CHAMP.

- 1) Find Report 15 on the reports page. Click the dropdown and ensure you choose the date of the most recent report run. Use this date when filling in the top section of the *Waiting List Inquiry Response Letter*.
- 2) In the dropdown, ensure you are choosing the correct program the applicant has asked about. If the applicant is on multiple program waitlists, please pull a report for each program. There are four types of redacted reports by program as follows: Chapter 200, Chapter 705, Chapter 667 and Chapter 667 congregate.
- 3) Download the report.
- 4) Find the applicant's application ID in column A. To do this, hold the control key and press the "f" key. Then type in the application id and click the button "Find All."
- 5) Scroll over to Columns Q to Y. Wherever a number appears that is the given applicant's rank for each of the bedroom waitlists for that program.
- 6) If they are in person or asking by email, then after confirming their identity, please complete the *Waiting List Inquiry Response Letter* and give it to them or email it to them.
- 7) If they are calling to ask for this information, then after confirming their identity, verbally read them where they rank on various lists, and also read them the disclaimer found in the *Waiting List Inquiry Response Letter*. If they would prefer to receive this in writing, please get their email or mailing address and send them the letter.

## 12. Do LHAs still have to maintain a Master Ledger and Waitlist Ledger?

LHAs no longer have to maintain a Master Ledger or Waitlist Ledger as CHAMP now serves as the state-wide master ledger from which each LHA waitlist is established. However, LHAs cannot dispose of their old Master Ledger(s) and Waitlist Ledger(s). (See Sec. of State retention guidelines below)

### 13. How long do LHAs have to retain applicant and tenant documents?

The Secretary of State's Office publishes Records Retention requirements. The link is:

<http://www.sec.state.ma.us/pre/prerecordsmanagement.htm>

Excerpts from guidebook:

**C09-02:** Housing Tenants Records See sub-schedules for specific retention periods. Documents the process to rent or lease housing to qualified applicants. Includes applications, needs assessments, determinations, and leasing files.

**C09-02 (a):** Denied or withdrawn applicant records Retain 3 years. Noted in sub-series a, c, d, and e

**C09-02 (b):** All other records pertaining to tenants and applicants with the exception of those notes in other sub-schedules Retain 3 years after final action.

**C09-02 (c):** Adjustment Slips (rental fee) Retain 1 year after federal audit or state Agreed Upon Procedures (whichever most recent).

**C09-02 (d):** Schedule of Maximum income limits and related correspondence, schedules PHA consolidated supply contracts of PHA consolidated supply contracts. Retain until superseded.

**C09-02 (e):** Housing surveys and census tabulations Retain 1 year after federal audit or state Agreed Upon Procedures (whichever is most recent).

**Note:** LHAs may scan these documents into their computers and maintain them digitally as PDFs so long as they are stored in compliance with the Secretary of State's Electronic Records Management Guidelines.

### 14. What should applicants use as a username when they create a CHAMP account?

Applicants will be required to use an email address as their username when creating a CHAMP account. This will allow them to reset a forgotten password automatically as long as they have access to that email account. If an applicant does not have access to a computer or have an email address they can still apply for state-aided public housing using a paper CHAMP application.

### 15. What should an applicant do if they are having trouble using CHAMP?

Applicants can contact the DHCD Help Line for CHAMP by calling 1-866-483-6445. Some of the most basic issues or questions will be resolved using this Help Line, but anything more complicated will be referred to a Local Housing Authority.

### 16. Who should an LHA contact if they would like to sign up for a CHAMP training?

Scheduled on-going trainings are provided by Cybersense. Those who are interested in attending either an in-person or online CHAMP training should contact Kathlene Arnold at [karnold@cybersensetraining.com](mailto:karnold@cybersensetraining.com)