

# Overview:

## EA Shelter Exit Voucher Program

Last Updated: 2/5/2024



# Learning Objectives

By the end of today's training, you will be able to:

- 1 Explain which families exit vouchers serve and what they can be used for
- 2 List the differences between an HCVP and a MRVP voucher
- 3 Identify who is responsible for which step in the voucher process
- 4 Describe the end-to-end voucher process, from application to unit rental
- 5 Describe the inspections process for any unit rented using a voucher

# Background The EA Shelter Exit Voucher Program





# Background: Shelter Shortage in Massachusetts

**On August 8, 2023, the Healey/Driscoll Administration declared a state of emergency due to a severe lack of shelter in Massachusetts.**

- The Emergency Assistance (EA) Family Shelter program provides shelter to families and pregnant persons at immediate risk of homelessness
- However, this program has reached shelter capacity, and families are now being placed on a waitlist
- To help more families safely exit shelter into stable housing and free up shelter capacity, EOHLC set aside a combination of 1,200 Housing Choice Voucher Program (HCVP) and Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP) vouchers for families in EA shelters
- These vouchers specifically target families who have been in EA Family Shelter for over 18 months as of August 8th, 2023



# The EA Shelter Exit Voucher Program

To speed up the leasing process and expedite exits from EA Family Shelter, EOHLC is implementing additional flexibilities around eligibility, issuance, and the leasing process for HCVP and MRVP.

**EOHLC is working with the Division of Rental Assistance (DRA) to refer eligible families to Regional Administering Agencies (RAAs) for expedited assistance with:**

- 1** Voucher eligibility screening
- 2** Issuance of vouchers
- 3** Leasing

**These vouchers, both HCVP and MRVP, will be administered as regular vouchers and subject to Moving to Work (MTW) and MRVP policies.**



# HCVP and MRVP

HCVP and MRVP are similar vouchers programs that help tenants pay their rent. Each program has their own guidelines for applicant eligibility and health and safety standards for the unit.

## Housing Choice Vouchers Program (HCVP)

A federally-funded program (commonly known as Section 8 Vouchers) that can pay for a portion of an applicant's rent. Typically, applicants will pay 30% of their income towards rent.

## Massachusetts Rental Voucher Program (MRVP)

A state-funded voucher program that can help applicants pay rent. Typically, applicants will pay at least 30% of their income towards their rent.

There are two types of MRVP vouchers:

1. Vouchers tied to a tenant
2. Vouchers tied to a housing unit

**Both vouchers have an initial term of 120 days. Extension periods can be granted.**



# Program Goals

## The goals of this initiative include:

- ★ Increase how quickly vouchers are issued by streamlining program rules and regulations
- ★ Help families who have been in the EA Family Shelter program longer than 18 months exit into stable housing
- ★ Increase the supply of available EA Family Shelter units by successfully exiting families
- ★ Increase voucher utilization: ensure any vouchers sitting unused by a family can be given to the next family in line



# Housing Search Assistance and Bonuses

EOHLC will ensure that households receive housing search assistance through EA service providers. This will include helping families locate units, providing transportation to units, outreaching landlords, assisting with document collection, and providing some move-in costs and landlord incentive payments.

There are three types of financial benefits for exit vouchers to help facilitate faster leasing:

HomeBASE	RAA	Landlord Incentives (via RAA)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Tenant’s first month’s rent portion</li><li>• Moving expenses</li><li>• Furniture</li><li>• Utility payments or arrearages</li><li>• Real estate broker fees</li><li>• Realtor incentive commission</li><li>• Security deposit (where not payable by RAA)</li><li>• One month bonus payment</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• First month’s Housing Assistance Payment (HAP)</li><li>• Monthly HAP payments</li><li>• One-time security deposit</li></ul>	<p>Landlords may access up to \$4,000 for items including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lease-up/sign-on incentive of one month’s rent</li><li>• Repairs needed to pass inspection</li><li>• Fund for tenant-caused damages beyond regular wear and tear in excess of the security deposit</li></ul>

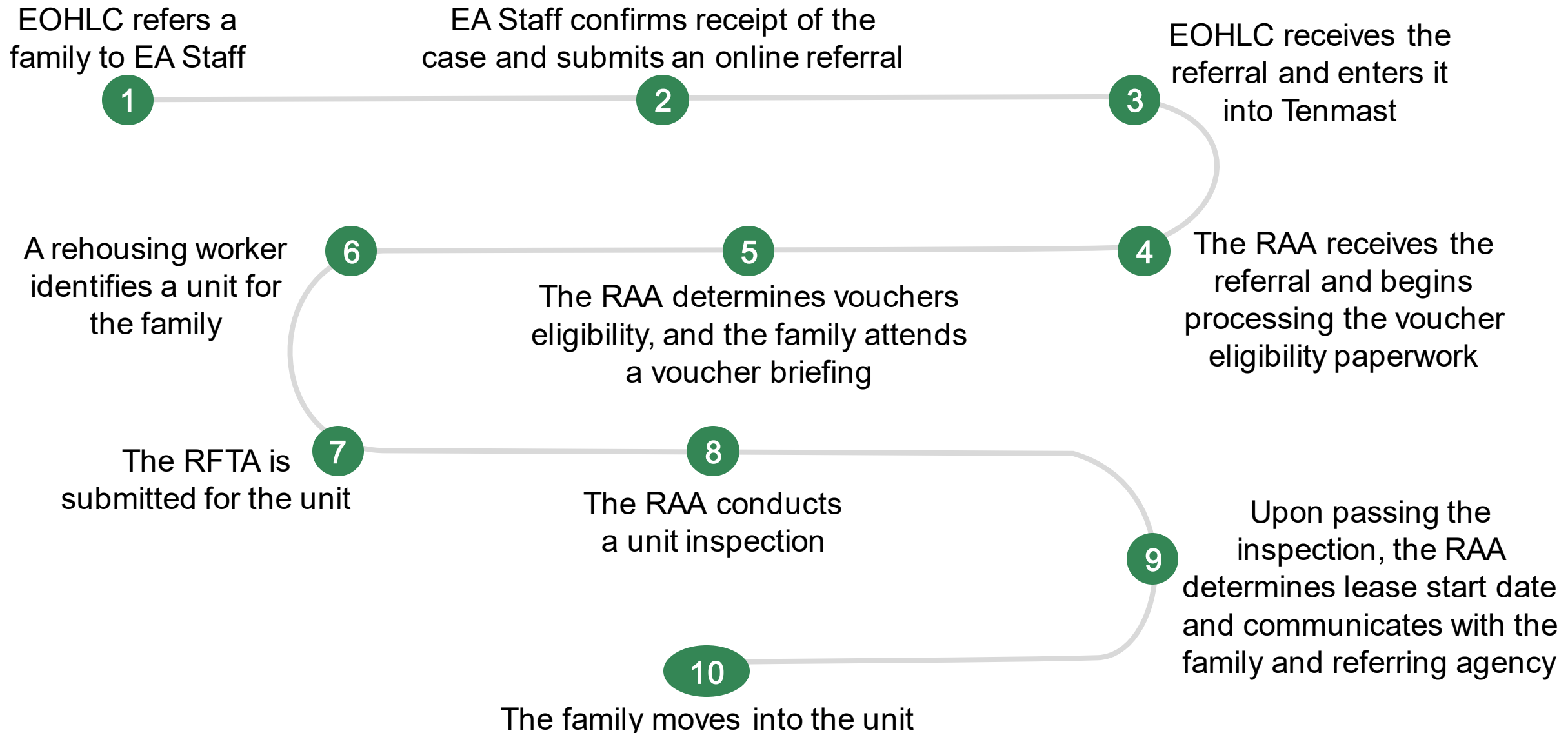


# How it Works





# How it Works: End-to-End Voucher Process





# Who is Responsible for What?

Administration, oversight, and operations of EA Exit Vouchers is managed by DHS, DRA, EA Providers, and the RAAs.

DHS	DRA	EA Providers	RAA's
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Identify families to refer for vouchers</li><li>Share identified families with EA Providers</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Make sure families are referred to the correct RAA</li><li>Provide guidance on HCVP and MRVP program requirements</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Help family submit documentation to the RAA</li><li>Assist families with housing searches</li><li>Outreach to landlords</li><li>Arrange move-in costs and incentives for landlords</li><li>Help with overall tenant readiness</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Conduct voucher eligibility screening</li><li>Decide which program (HCVP or MRVP) is more appropriate for a family</li><li>Brief family on their voucher</li><li>Issue vouchers</li><li>Unit approval, leasing, and contracting</li><li>Overseeing ongoing occupancy</li></ul>



# Verifying Eligibility for a Voucher

The RAA will determine if a family is eligible for a voucher. This includes (a) confirming the family meets the minimum program requirements, (b) reviewing all documentation; and (c) collecting the family’s required forms.

## A: Confirm the Family Meets Minimum Program Requirements

Each voucher program has minimum requirements for a family to be eligible. Confirm each of these are true for the applicant.

Requirement	HCVP Requirements	MRVP Requirements
Household Income	Below 50% of the area median income, using the highest income limit across the state	Below 80% of the area median income for family size
CORI (for household members 18+)	Mandatory Denials and Permissive Denials	
SORI (for household members age 18+)	Mandatory Denials	
Immigration Status	At least 1 household member with eligible immigration status	No requirement



# Verifying Eligibility: **B** - Review family's documentation

Before determining eligibility for a voucher, the RAA should review the family's documentation to determine program eligibility.

What Applicant Needs to Prove	Allowable Documents for HCVP	Allowable Documents for MRVP
Social Security Number	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social Security card</li><li>• Documentation from the Social Security Administration showing the SSN</li><li>• A military record, such as a DD214</li></ul>	Not required
Age	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Birth certificate</li><li>• Mother's letter from hospital</li><li>• Passport or driver's license</li><li>• Self-attestation that includes: the person's full name, their parent's names, exact date of birth, and location of birth</li></ul>	Any document allowed by HCVP program, <b>EXCEPT</b> self-attestation – must have an actual document
Immigration Status (for 1 household member)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Birth certificate</li><li>• Passport</li><li>• Permanent resident immigration card (must show both sides)</li></ul>	N/A - Not required
Identity	<p>(Both programs) A government issued photo ID – this could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Driver's license</li><li>• State ID card</li><li>• Passport</li><li>• Permanent resident immigration card</li><li>• Self-attestation form</li></ul>	



## B: Review Family's Documentation – Income Verification

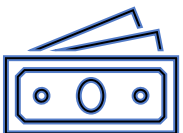
The RAA must review and verify a family's income. Remember: **HCVP** applicants must be below **50%** of the AMI (for the highest income limit across the state) and **MRVP** applicants must be below **80%** of the AMI.

### HCVP Income Verification

1. Household reports their income
2. Review the EIV Income and Income Validation reports for the family
3. Confirm the family's self-reported income matches the report
4. If there are discrepancies between the family's statement and the report, resolve within 60 days
5. Print a copy of the reports and keep with the tenant's file

### MRVP Income Verification

1. Household reports their income
2. Compare the income reported by the household with the income listed in Wage Match



When initially screened for eligibility, a household can **self-attest** their income. **Whenever possible, the RAA should then try to get third-party verification.** If this is not easily available, the applicant can submit an affidavit reporting their income, assets, and expenses.



## C: Collecting the Family's Required Forms

Finally, the RAA must make sure the family turns in the following forms.

### Household Members Form

- A signed family certification form that lists all household members
- This can be filled out independently by the household – no external documents are required

### CORI Authorization Form

- A signed form to authorize the RAA to run a CORI on household members aged 18 and up
- This must be signed by each adult who needs a CORI

### Income Attestation

- A signed attestation that the family has provided all information about their income

### HUD Forms

- HUD also requires various forms
- *We are working to streamline this process – these may change over time*

### (HCVP Program ONLY) Family Declaration Form

- This should be used to run a USCIS SAVE screening for the family



A family has **45 days** to provide documents and forms. If 45 days have passed without the required documentation, the RAA can issue a 2-week grace period. After that, the family is denied and needs to re-start the voucher process.



# Unit Inspections: Initial and Ongoing

Before a family can move into a unit rented using an exit voucher, it must be inspected to make sure meets minimum standards of fitness for human habitation. RAAs conduct both initial and ongoing unit inspections.

**MRVP** units must typically be inspected by a **Board of Health**. **HCVP** units must pass a **Section 8 Housing Quality Standards** inspection.



## Initial Inspections

To expedite inspection, RAAs can pre-inspect a unit up to **45 days in advance** (and without intervening occupancy).

RAAs **may** inspect currently occupied units.

If an owner **self-certifies** a unit has no life-threatening deficiencies, the family may lease the unit and the RAA must inspect it as soon as practical.



## Ongoing Inspections

Once a unit is leased, RAA will conduct an inspection **every other year**



## Complaint Inspection

In addition to the normal inspection schedule, either a tenant or landlord may request an inspection at any time to **respond to a complaint**





# Family Occupancy Rules



- Families must follow all **standard HCV policies** when occupying their residency.
- Standard rules include the rules for:
  - Moves
  - Portability
  - Terminations
  - Informal hearings

## REMEMBER!

Vouchers seek to help families **maintain stable housing.**

Take time to **consider each family's needs** and **extenuating circumstances** before resorting to adverse actions.



# RECAP: Key Things to Know About Vouchers

Remember these key points about EA Shelter Exit Vouchers:

## **Documentation**

Families have **45 days** to provide documentation (*with a 2-week potential extension*).

After that, they are denied so the voucher can be used by a different family.

## **Consider Mitigating Information**

When considering permissive prohibitions, look at all the information available. Heavily consider mitigating circumstances.

## **Finances**

A family's self-declaration of income is acceptable to get the housing search process started. Third-party verifications should be gathered later.

## **Voucher Documentation**

Each program has slightly different documentation requirements. For example, MRVP has no immigration requirements.



# Questions?

Please contact **Natasha Sierra** at [natasha.sierra@mass.gov](mailto:natasha.sierra@mass.gov)

# Appendix

