



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

Deval L. Patrick, Governor ◆ Aaron Gornstein, Undersecretary

Public Housing Notice 2014-13

To: All Local Housing Authority Executive Directors

From: Steve Carvalho, Acting Associate Director, Division of Public Housing and Rental Assistance

Subject: Online Application and Central Waitlist for State-Aided Units and Vouchers

Date: June 18, 2014

We are pleased to announce that there has been significant progress in developing an online application and central waitlist system for state-aided public housing. As you know, the Central Waitlist was a recommendation of the Commission for Public Housing Sustainability and Reform. It was also included in both the Governor's and NAHRO's housing authority proposed legislation. The primary goal of a central waitlist is to ease the application process for homeless and low-income families and elderly and disabled individuals; however, it should also reduce the amount of hours LHA staff spend administering the application process, waitlists and purges. It is our expectation that, once achieved, we will be able to serve our clients in ways not previously available.

In the fall of 2013, DHCD met with a working group for this initiative composed of housing authority executive directors, advocates for the homeless, and legislators. The group found consensus on the goals for a central waitlist, and the level of information requested in the online application – primarily, that it would be a preliminary application and that the collection of more detailed information and review of that data to determine housing placement would be done by local housing authorities. There was also agreement that a paper application should always be available, in addition to a web-based application, and that, in general, the current waitlist rules and regulations will continue to apply.

In February 2014, DHCD released a Request for Information (RFI). The RFI asked vendors to consider doing an on-line application for a central waitlist for both state-aided units and vouchers, as well as a voucher management system. Preliminary cost estimates, from the three responses received, ranged

between 2 and 7 million dollars. DHCD applied for funding from the Commonwealth's technology agency, Information Technology Division (ITD). Additionally, a request for funding was made by the Joint Committee on Housing for this initiative.

In the meantime, ITD has been exploring alternative procurement methods for the Commonwealth. In January 2014, former City of Boston Chief Information Officer (CIO), Bill Oates, assumed the role of Commonwealth Chief Information Officer (CCIO). Under his leadership, and with the support of Governor Patrick, ITD has taken a much stronger role in overseeing the procurement of IT projects in order to deliver more cost effective and innovative IT services to the Commonwealth. In that vein, and with the partnership of DHCD's Undersecretary Aaron Gornstein, the Central Waitlist project is being considered for a faster and less expensive software development model, one that will also provide a deeper breadth of services.

Built upon the collective experiences of our and ITD's staff, we have come up with a standardized set of data and process requirements that will allow us to proceed at an effective pace. We believe that by providing:

1. A concise set of instructions
2. Ample timeframe to prepare for the output, and
3. On-going dialogue aimed at fine-tuning and refinement of this process,

We can hope to build the best environment to develop software that caters to our diverse and exciting public housing goals.

We have been meeting with ITD staff regularly for the past four weeks. To deliver on this software to the Commonwealth, we have held extensive discussions, evaluated what we have collectively come to know and learn. The deadlines for the likely procurement models are fast and require efficient exchanges of information and strong collaborative partnerships. In addition to the traditional procurement method, ITD is considering using the central waitlist initiative for a statewide innovation competition or developing it in-house. Both solutions would require a mid-July start date in order to have a solution delivered by November 2014.

We have met with Mass NAHRO and ITD is going to meet with them again later this week to explain it all in more detail. We appreciate their input, expertise and feedback on this initiative.

We can't wait to get started, and your efforts are a significant component of this initiative. At this point, we are looking for approximately 10 housing authorities to serve as advisors, test pilots, and supporters as we set final system requirements, test it and then launch it throughout the Commonwealth. These advisor LHAs will be the rest of your representatives in the process - to help ensure that the system is efficient, suits your needs, and has an interface that is simple to navigate such that it requires little to no

training. If you are interested in your LHA participating as an advisor on this initiative, please review the expected schedule below. If you can commit to it, please contact Juliana Gamble, juliana.gamble@state.ma.us.

The schedule for working with these advisor LHAs is as follows:

Site Visits at LHAs – June 19, 20, 23, 24, and 25th

- What: 2-3 hour meeting at LHA office
- Who: ITD and DHCD staff, ED and waitlist staff for individual LHA
- High level walk-thru of the requirements by DHCD
- High level walk-thru of current process by the LHA and/or a brief interview by DHCD to learn about your current process
- Discussion of gaps/pain points within the LHA's for the application process

Meeting to Review System Requirements at DHCD: June 27, 30, or July 1

- What: 2-3 hour meeting at DHCD
- Who: ITD and DHCD staff, at least 1 staff from the 10 advisor LHAs, advocates for the homeless
- Review the final specifications for the system requirements before final edits are made and design competition begins.

Migration Plan for Current Applicant Data at DHCD: Week of July 21

- What: 2-3 hour meeting at DHCD
- Who: ITD and DHCD staff, at least 1 staff from the 10 advisor LHAs (possibly additional LHAs as well), advocates for the homeless, members of working group.
- Facilitated discussion for the development of a migration plan for the LHA's current waitlist data to a central system.

System Demo Day(s): 1+ day(s), Mid-August (or periodically throughout summer and fall if more than 1)

- What: All day meeting in Boston – participants asked to come for at least a half day. Possibly on a Saturday.
- Who: ITD and DHCD staff, at least 1 staff from the 10 advisor LHAs, advocates for the homeless, and the software designers in the competition or from ITD.

- Software designers will be available with an early design of the software – available for initiative advisors to test and provide feedback on how to improve the system interface and ease of use.

If you have any questions about this initiative, please direct those to Juliana as well. We will be releasing an FAQ about the initiative in the coming weeks.

We are very excited to realize this initiative and look forward to your participation.