



GARDNER HOUSING AUTHORITY

HCV (Section 8) Program
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INFORMAL HEARING PROCEDURES

16-III.A. OVERVIEW (REPEATED FOR CONTINUITY)

Both applicants and participants have the right to disagree with, and appeal, certain decisions the PHA that may adversely affect them. PHA decisions that may be appealed by applicants and participants are discussed in this section.

The process for applicant appeals of PHA decisions is called the "informal review." For participants (or applicants denied admission because of citizenship issues), the appeal process is called an "informal hearing." PHAs are required to include informal review procedures of applicant an informal hearing procedures for applicants in their administrative plans [24 CFR 982.54(d)(12) and (13)].

16-III.C. INFORMAL HEARINGS FOR PARTICIPANTS [24 CFR 982.555]

PHAs must offer an informal hearing for certain PHA determinations relating to the individual circumstances of a participant family. A participant is defined as a family that has been admitted to the PHA's HCV program and is currently assisted in the program. The purpose of the informal hearing is to consider whether the PHA's decisions related to the family's circumstances are in accordance with the law, HUD regulations and PHA policies.

The PHA is not permitted to terminate a family's assistance until the time allowed for the family to request an informal hearing has elapsed, and any requested hearing has been completed. Termination of assistance for a participant may include any or all of the following:

- Refusing to enter into a HAP contract or approve a lease
- Terminating housing assistance payments under an outstanding HAP contract
- Refusing to process or provide assistance under portability procedures

DECISIONS SUBJECT TO INFORMAL HEARING

Circumstances for which the PHA must give a participant family an opportunity for an informal hearing are as follows:

- A determination of the family's annual or adjusted income, and the use of such income to compute the housing assistance payment,
- A determination of the appropriate utility allowance (if any) for tenant-paid utilities from the PHA utility allowance schedule,
- A determination of the family unit size under the PHA's subsidy standards,
- A determination to terminate assistance for a participant family because of the family's actions or failure to act,
- A determination to terminate assistance because the participant has been absent from the assisted unit for longer than the maximum period permitted under PHA policy and HUD rules,

- A determination to terminate a family's Family Self Sufficiency contract, withhold supportive services, or propose forfeiture of the family's escrow account [24 CFR 984.303(i)].

Circumstances for which an informal hearing is not required are as follows:

- Discretionary administrative determinations by the PHA,
- General policy issues or class grievances,
- Establishment of the PHA schedule of utility allowances for families in the program,
- A PHA determination not to approve an extension or suspension of a voucher term,
- A PHA determination not to approve a unit or tenancy,
- A PHA determination that a unit selected by the applicant is not in compliance with the HQS,
- A PHA determination that the unit is not in accordance with HQS because of family size,
- A determination by the PHA to exercise or not to exercise any right or remedy against an owner under a HAP contract.

GHA Policy:

The PHA will only offer participants the opportunity for an informal hearing when required to by the regulations.

INFORMAL HEARING PROCEDURES NOTICE TO THE FAMILY [24 CFR 982.555(C)]

When the PHA makes a decision that is subject to informal hearing procedures, the PHA must inform the family of its right to an informal hearing while it informs the family of the decision.

For decisions related to the family's annual or adjusted income, the determination of the appropriate utility allowance, and the determination of the family unit size, the PHA must notify the family that they may ask for an explanation of the basis of the determination, and that if they do not agree with the decision, they may request an informal hearing on the decision.

For decisions related to the termination of the family's assistance, or the denial of a family's request for an exception to the PHA's subsidy standards, the notice must contain a brief statement of the reasons for the decision, a statement that if the family does not agree with the decision, the family may request an informal hearing on the decision, and a statement of the deadline for the family to request an informal hearing.

GHA Policy:

In cases where the PHA makes a decision for which an informal hearing must be offered, the notice to the family will include all of the following:

- The proposed action or decision of the PHA.
- A brief statement of the reasons for the decision including the regulatory reference.
- The date the proposed action will take place.
- A statement of the family's right to an explanation of the basis for the PHA's decision.
- A statement that if the family does not agree with the decision the family may request an informal hearing of the decision.
- A deadline for the family to request the informal hearing.
- To whom the hearing request should be addressed.
- A copy of the PHA's hearing procedures

SCHEDULING AN INFORMAL HEARING [24 CFR 982.555(D)]

When an informal hearing is required, the PHA must proceed with the hearing in a reasonably expeditious manner upon the request of the family.

GHA Policy:

- A request for an informal hearing must be made in writing and delivered to the PHA either in person or by first class mail, by the close of the business day, no later than 10 business days from the date of the PHA's decision or notice to terminate assistance. The proposed action or decision of the PHA.
- The PHA must schedule and send written notice of the informal hearing to the family within 10 business days of the family's request.
- The family may request to reschedule a hearing for good cause, or if it is needed as a reasonable accommodation for a person with disabilities. Good cause is defined as an unavoidable conflict which seriously affects the health, safety or welfare of the family. Requests to reschedule a hearing must be made orally or in writing prior to the hearing date. At its discretion, the PHA may request documentation of the "good cause" prior to rescheduling the hearing.
- If the family does not appear at the scheduled time, and was unable to reschedule the hearing in advance due to the nature of the conflict, the family must contact the PHA within 24 hours of the scheduled hearing date, excluding weekends and holidays. The PHA will reschedule the hearing only if the family can show good cause for the failure to appear, or if it is needed as a reasonable accommodation for a person with disabilities.

PRE-HEARING RIGHT TO DISCOVERY [24 CFR 982.555(E)]

Participants and the PHA are permitted pre-hearing discovery rights. The family must be given the opportunity to examine before the hearing any PHA documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. The family must be allowed to copy any such documents at their own expense. If the PHA does not make the document available for examination on request of the family, the PHA may not rely on the document at the hearing.

The PHA hearing procedures may provide that the PHA must be given the opportunity to examine at the PHA offices before the hearing, any family documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. The PHA must be allowed to copy any such document at the PHA's expense. If the family does not make the document available for examination on request of the PHA, the family may not rely on the document at the hearing.

For the purpose of informal hearings, documents include records and regulations

GHA Policy:

The family will be allowed to copy any documents related to the hearing at a cost of \$.25 per page. The family must request discovery of PHA documents no later than 12:00 p.m. on the business day prior to the scheduled hearing date.

The PHA must be given an opportunity to examine at the PHA offices before the hearing any family documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. Whenever a participant requests an informal hearing, the PHA will automatically mail a letter to the participant requesting a copy of all documents that the participant intends to present or utilize at the hearing. The participant must make the documents available no later than 12:00 pm on the business day prior to the scheduled hearing date.

PARTICIPANT'S RIGHT TO BRING COUNSEL [24 CFR 982.555(E)(3)]

At its own expense, the family may be represented by a lawyer or other representative at the informal hearing.

INFORMAL HEARING OFFICER [24 CFR 982.555(E)(4)]

Informal hearings will be conducted by a person or persons approved by the PHA, other than the person who made or approved the decision or a subordinate of the person who made or approved the decision.

GHA Policy:

The PHA has designated the following to serve as Hearing Officer:
Krishonna Murray, Executive Director

Attendance at the Informal Hearing: Hearings may be attended by a hearing officer and the following applicable persons:

- A PHA representative(s) and any witnesses for the PHA,
- The participant and any witnesses for the participant,
- The participant's counsel or other representative,
- Any other person approved by the PHA as a reasonable accommodation for a person with a disability.

CONDUCT AT HEARINGS [24 CFR 982.555(4)(ii)]

The person who conducts the hearing may regulate the conduct of the hearing in accordance with the PHA's hearing procedures.

GHA Policy:

The hearing officer is responsible to manage the order of business and to ensure that hearings are conducted in a professional and businesslike manner. Attendees are expected to comply with all hearing procedures established by the hearing officer and guidelines for conduct. Any person demonstrating disruptive, abusive or otherwise inappropriate behavior will be excused from the hearing at the discretion of the hearing officer.

Hearings are closed if the parties requesting the hearing do not show up or call to reschedule the hearing within 15 minutes of the scheduled hearing time.

EVIDENCE [24 CFR 982.555(E)(5)]

The PHA and the family must be given the opportunity to present evidence and question any witnesses. In general, all evidence is admissible at an informal hearing. Evidence may be considered without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings.

GHA Policy:

Any evidence to be considered by the hearing officer must be presented at the time of the hearing. There are four categories of evidence.

- Oral evidence: the testimony of witnesses
- Documentary evidence: a writing which is relevant to the case, for example, a letter written to the PHA. Writings include all forms of recorded communication or representation, including letters, words, pictures, sounds, videotapes or symbols or combinations thereof.
- Demonstrative evidence: Evidence created specifically for the hearing and presented as an illustrative aid to assist the hearing officer, such as a model, a chart or other diagram.
- Real evidence: A tangible item relating directly to the case.

Hearsay Evidence is evidence of a statement that was made other than by a witness while testifying at the hearing and that is offered to prove the truth of the matter. Even though evidence, including hearsay, is generally admissible, hearsay evidence alone cannot be used as the sole basis for the hearing officer's decision.

If either the PHA or the family fail to comply with the discovery requirements described above, the hearing officer will refuse to admit such evidence.

Other than the failure of a party to comply with discovery, the hearing officer has the authority to overrule any objections to evidence.

HEARING OFFICER'S DECISION [24 CFR 982.555(E)(6)]

The person who conducts the hearing must issue a written decision, stating briefly the reasons for the decision. Factual determinations relating to the individual circumstances of the family must be based on a preponderance of evidence presented at the hearing. A copy of the hearing must be furnished promptly to the family.

GHA Policy:

In rendering a decision, the hearing officer will consider the following matters:

- PHA Notice to the Family: The hearing officer will determine if the reasons for the PHA's decision are factually stated in the Notice.
- Discovery: The hearing officer will determine if the PHA and the family were given the opportunity to examine any relevant documents in accordance with PHA policy.
- PHA Evidence to Support the PHA Decision: The evidence consists of the facts presented. Evidence is not conclusion and it is not argument. The hearing officer will evaluate the facts to determine if they support the PHA's conclusion.
- Validity of Grounds for Termination of Assistance (when applicable): The hearing officer will determine if the termination of assistance is for one of the grounds specified in the HUD regulations and PHA policies. If the grounds for termination are not specified in the regulations or in compliance with PHA policies, then the decision of the PHA will be overturned.

The hearing officer will issue a written decision to the family and the PHA no later than 10 business days after the hearing. The report will contain the following information:

- Hearing Information: Name of the participant; Date, time and place of the hearing; Name of the hearing officer; Name of the PHA representative; and Name of family representative (if any).
- Background: A brief, impartial statement of the reason for the hearing.
- Summary of Evidence: The hearing office will summarize the testimony of each witness and identify any documents that a witness produced in support of his/her testimony and that are admitted into evidence.
- Findings of Fact: The hearing officer will include all findings of fact, based on a preponderance of the evidence. Preponderance of the evidence is defined as evidence which is of greater weight or more convincing than the evidence which is offered in opposition to it; that is, evidence which as a whole shows that the fact sought to be proved is more probable than not. Preponderance of the evidence may not be determined by the number of witnesses, but by the greater weight of all evidence.
- Conclusions: The hearing officer will render a conclusion derived from the facts that were found to be true by a preponderance of the evidence. The conclusion will result in a determination of whether these facts uphold the PHA's decision.

- Order: The hearing report will include a statement of whether the PHA’s decision is upheld or overturned. If it is overturned, the hearing officer will instruct the PHA to change the decision in accordance with the hearing officer’s determination. In the case of termination of assistance, the hearing officer will instruct the PHA to restore the participant’s program status.

Procedures for Rehearing or Further Hearing

GHA Policy:

The hearing officer may ask the family for additional information and/or might adjourn the hearing in order to reconvene at a later date, before reaching a decision. If the family misses an appointment or deadline ordered by the hearing officer, the action of the PHA will take effect and another hearing will not be granted.

PHA NOTICE OF FINAL DECISION [24 CFR 982.555(F)]

The PHA is not bound by the decision of the hearing officer for matters in which the PHA is not required to provide an opportunity for a hearing, decisions that exceed the authority of the hearing officer, decisions that conflict with or contradict HUD regulations, requirements, or are otherwise contrary to Federal, State or local laws.

If the PHA determines it is not bound by the hearing officer’s decision in accordance with HUD regulations, the PHA must promptly notify the family of the determination and the reason for the determination.

GHA Policy:

The PHA will mail a “Notice of Final Decision” including the hearing officer’s report, to the participant and their representative. This Notice will be sent by first-class mail, postage pre-paid with an affidavit of mailing enclosed. The participant will be mailed the original “Notice of Final Decision” and a copy of the proof of mailing. A copy of the “Notice of Final Decision” along with the original proof mailing will be maintained in the PHA’s file.

HEARING AND APPEAL PROVISIONS FOR NON-CITIZENS [24 CFR 5.514]

Denial or termination of assistance based on immigration status is subject to special hearing and notice rules. Applicants who are denied assistance due to immigration status are entitled to an informal hearing, not an informal review.

Assistance to a family may not be delayed, denied, or terminated on the basis of immigration status at any time prior to a decision under the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) appeal process. Assistance to a family may not be terminated or denied while the PHA hearing is pending, but assistance to an applicant may be delayed pending the completion of the informal hearing.

A decision against a family member, issued in accordance with the USCIS appeal process or the PHA informal hearing process, does not preclude the family from exercising the right, that may otherwise be available, to seek redress directly through judicial procedures.

NOTICE OF DENIAL OR TERMINATION OF ASSISTANCE [24 CFR 5.514(D)]

The notice of denial or termination of assistance for noncitizens must advise the family:

- That financial assistance will be denied or terminated, and provide a brief explanation of the reasons for the proposed denial or termination of assistance.
- The family may be eligible for proration of assistance.
- In the case of a participant, the criteria and procedures for obtaining relief under the provisions for preservation of families [24 CFR 5.514 and 5.518].

- That the family has a right to request an appeal to the USCIS of the results of secondary verification of immigration status and to submit additional documentation or explanation in support of the appeal.
- That the family has a right to request an informal hearing with the PHA either upon completion of the USCIS appeal or in lieu of the USCIS appeal.
- For applicants, assistance may not be delayed until the conclusion of the USCIS appeal process, but assistance may be delayed during the period of the informal hearing process.

USCIS APPEAL PROCESS [24 CFR 5.514(E)]

When the PHA receives notification that the USCIS secondary verification failed to confirm eligible immigration status, the PHA must notify the family of the results of the USCIS verification. The family will have 30 days from the date of the notification to request an appeal of the USCIS results. The request for appeal must be made by the family in writing directly to the USCIS. The family must provide the PHA with a copy of the written request for appeal and the proof of mailing.

GHA Policy:

The PHA will notify the family in writing of the results of the USCIS secondary verification within 10 business days of receiving the results.

The family must provide the PHA with a copy of the written request for appeal and proof of mailing within 10 business days of sending the request to the USCIS.

The family must forward to the designated USCIS office any additional documentation or written explanation in support of the appeal. This material must include a copy of the USCIS document verification request (used to process the secondary request) or such other form specified by the USCIS, and a letter indicating that the family is requesting an appeal of the USCIS immigration status verification results.

The USCIS will notify the family, with a copy to the PHA, of its decision. When the USCIS notifies the PHA of the decision, the PHA must notify the family of its right to request an informal hearing.

GHA Policy:

The PHA will send written notice to the family of its right to request an informal hearing within 10 business days of receiving notice of the USCIS decision regarding the family's immigration status.

INFORMAL HEARING PROCEDURES FOR APPLICANTS [24 CFR 5.514(F)]

After notification of the USCIS decision on appeal, or in lieu of an appeal to the USCIS, the family may request that the PHA provide a hearing. The request for a hearing must be made either within 30 days of receipt of the PHA notice of denial or termination, or within 30 days of receipt of the USCIS appeal decision.

For the informal hearing procedures that apply to participant families whose assistance is being terminated based on immigration status, see Section 16-III.C. The informal hearing procedures for applicant families are described below.

INFORMAL HEARING OFFICER

The PHA must provide an informal hearing before an impartial individual, other than a person who made or approved the decision under review, and other than a person who is a subordinate of the person who made or approved the decision. See Section 16-III.C. for a listing of positions that serve as informal hearing officers.

EVIDENCE

The family must be provided the opportunity to examine and copy at the family's expense, at a reasonable time in advance of the hearing, any documents in the possession of the PHA pertaining to the family's eligibility status, or in the possession of the USCIS (as permitted by USCIS requirements), including any records and regulations that may be relevant to the hearing.

GHA Policy:

The family will be allowed to copy any documents related to the hearing at a cost of \$.25 per page copy. The family must request discovery of PHA documents no later than 12:00 p.m. on the business day prior to the hearing.

The family must be provided the opportunity to present evidence and arguments in support of eligible status. Evidence may be considered without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings.

The family must also be provided the opportunity to refute evidence relied upon by the PHA, and to confront and cross-examine all witnesses on whose testimony or information the PHA relies.

REPRESENTATION AND INTERPRETIVE SERVICES

The family is entitled to be represented by an attorney or other designee, at the family's expense, and to have such person make statements on the family's behalf.

The family is entitled to arrange for an interpreter to attend the hearing, at the expense of the family, or the PHA, as may be agreed upon by the two parties

RECORDING OF THE HEARING

The family is entitled to have the hearing recorded by audiotape. The PHA may, but is not required to provide a transcript of the hearing

GHA Policy:

The PHA will not provide a transcript of an audio taped hearing.

HEARING DECISION

The PHA must provide the family with a written final decision, based solely on the facts presented at the hearing, within 14 calendar days of the date of the informal hearing. The decision must state the basis for the decision.

INFORMAL HEARING PROCEDURES FOR RESIDENTS [24 CFR 5.514(F)]

After notification of the USCIS decision on appeal, or in lieu of an appeal to the USCIS, the family may request that the PHA provide a hearing. The request for a hearing must be made either within 30 days of receipt of the PHA notice of termination, or within 30 days of receipt of the USCIS appeal decision.

For the informal hearing procedures that apply to participant families whose assistance is being terminated based on immigration status, see Section 16-III.C

RETENTION OF DOCUMENTS [24 CFR 5.514(H)]

The PHA must retain for a minimum of 5 years the following documents that may have been submitted to the PHA by the family, or provided to the PHA as part of the USCIS appeal or the PHA informal hearing process:

- The application for assistance
- The form completed by the family for income reexamination
- Photocopies of any original documents, including original USCIS documents
- The signed verification consent form
- The USCIS verification results
- The request for an USCIS appeal
- The final USCIS determination
- The request for an informal hearing
- The final informal hearing decision

GROUNDINGS FOR TERMINATION DUE TO THE FAMILY'S ACTION OR FAILURE TO ACT

The Authority may at any time deny program assistance for an applicant, or terminate assistance for a participant, for any of the following grounds:

1. If the family violates any family obligation of the program (see Family Obligations form)
2. If any member of the family has ever been evicted from public housing
3. If any Public Housing Authority has ever terminated assistance under the certificate of voucher program for any member of the family.
4. If any member of the family commits drug-related criminal activity or violent criminal activity
5. If any member of the family commits fraud, bribery or any other corrupt or criminal act in connection with the federal housing program.
6. If the family currently owes rent or other amount to the Authority or to any Authority in connection with Section 8 or public housing assistance under the 1937 Act
7. If the family has not reimbursed any Housing Authority for amounts paid to an owner under a HAP contract for rent, damages to the unit, or other amounts owed by the family under the lease.
8. If the family breaches an agreement with the Authority to pay amounts owed to any Authority, or amounts paid to an owner by an Authority.
9. If a family participating in the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSS) fails to comply, without good cause, with the family's FSS Contract or Participation.
10. If the family abusive or violent behavior toward Housing Authority personnel.

FAMILY OBLIGATIONS: HCV PROGRAM (SECTION 8)

A participant may be terminated from a rental assistance program if the participant has violated any family obligation under the program. The family obligations are as follows:

1. The family must supply the information that the Gardner Housing Authority (GHA) or the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) determines necessary in their administration of the program. This includes any requested certification, release and/or submission of evidence of citizenship or eligible immigration status as required by federal regulations.
2. Report all income, assets, and deductions of all family members.

3. Report changes in family composition.
4. Disclose all social security numbers of all family members and sign consent forms for obtaining information according to HUD requirements.
5. Any Housing Quality Standards (HQS) breached which are caused by the family's failure to pay for tenant supplied utilities; failing to have all tenant supplied utilities in the name of the head of household and failure to supply appliances (that the owner is not required to supply under the lease); or damage to the unit (other than ordinary wear and tear).
6. The family must allow the GHA to inspect the unit at reasonable times after reasonable notice. The family must allow the landlord or his designee into the unit to make any and all repairs necessary, within the time frame provided by the GHA to ensure the unit is HQS compliant.
7. The family may not commit serious or repeated violations of the lease or they may be evicted by the owner and the families Section 8 rental assistance subsidy may be terminated by the GHA.
8. The family must notify the GHA and the landlord before the family moves out of the unit or terminates the lease on notice to the owner.
9. The family must promptly give the GHA any notice of eviction from the owner.
10. The assisted unit must be family's one and only residence.
11. The family must receive written permission from the owner to add a person to the family's lease other than a birth, adoption, or the court awarded custody of a child. The GHA is to approve of the composition of the family. The family is to notify the GHA of any birth, adoption, or the court awarded custody of a child. The family must request approval of the GHA to add any other family member as an occupant of the unit.
12. The family must promptly notify the GHA when a family member no longer resides in the unit.
13. The family may engage in legal profit-making activities in the unit. However, the primary use of the unit is to be residential.
14. The family may not sublease the unit, assign the lease, or transfer the unit.
15. The family must promptly notify the GHA of any family member absence from the unit.
16. The family may not own or have an interest in the assisted unit.
17. The family must not commit fraud, bribery, or any other criminal act in connection with Federal Housing Programs.
18. The family members must not engage in drug-related or violent criminal activity.
19. The family may not be receiving another housing subsidy.
20. The family must provide true and complete information to the GHA.