

A Message from the Executive Director

COVID-19 Action Plan

The Mercer County Housing Authority (PHA) is working hard caring about people and places in this time of a national health crisis. The PHA is still open for business. We are housing people in need. The PHA is closely monitoring the rapidly changing situation regarding spread of the COVID-19 virus. In recent days, the World Health Organization designated COVID-19 as a pandemic, a national emergency has been declared, and the Governor declared a peacetime state of emergency.

The health and safety of our residents that we serve on a daily basis, as well as our 35 employees, is our highest priority. The PHA is actively engaged with Governor Wolf's directives as well as following guidance from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

COVID-19 Action Plan

1. PHA-Owned and Managed Affordable Housing (Public Housing, Scattered Sites, PBRA); Resident Services and Housing Choice Voucher (Section 8) Department

Applicant Interviews:

- All in-person intake appointments will be done in the lobby. A clip board with the forms marked where to sign will be given to the applicant. There will be no face to face interviews. We are also offering the option for applicants to be mailed an intake packet and be given a phone interview.

Approving/Denying Files:

- Applications recommended for approval or denial will be submitted through the mail by rental technicians and specialists to the appropriate supervisor for review.

Resident Hearings:

- All in-person denial hearings are cancelled.
- Applicants may appeal their denial by submitting via fax, email or US mail, a written explanation of why their denial should be overturned, along with supporting documentation, and two community references.

Lease Signings for New Tenants:

- Lease signings and initial unit assignments will continue as usual. We are keeping social distancing as a rule of 3 ft. or more. Move in inspections are to be done separately then reviewed at the lease interview.

Inspections and Accessing of Units:

- All routine annual inspections will be postponed until further notice.
- Life and Safety inspections will be conducted by staff as needed.
- Housing Managers (HM's) will have gloves and masks available.

Transfers: Reasonable Accommodations/Emergency Transfers will continue as usual. No other transfers for household composition will be done at this time.

Rent Calculations/Certifications:

- Re-Exam staff will continue to work on completing income changes. These can be done several ways. While the office is still open to the public, they are to be done via the lobby; forms will be marked for signature and handed out. Income changes reported by the resident will now be done by US Postal Service, email, fax or phone.
- With supporting documentation, a resident may request a financial hardship exemption (Minimum Rent Emergency Waivers).

Resident Work Orders:

- Managers will continue to log maintenance requests. Maintenance staff shall only be sent out on emergency calls and for health and safety issues.
- Maintenance requests will only be accepted via phone or email at each management site.

Housing Services Program:

- Prince of Peace will continue to provide a noon meal to enrolled (senior) participants.
- Meal delivery from other providers are still allowed.

2. PHA-Owned and Managed Affordable Housing (Public Housing, Scattered Sites, PBRA); Maintenance

PHA maintenance staff will continue regular operations and implement a series of enhanced cleaning and sanitization operations:

- Staff will disinfect shared surfaces in hi-rises, community centers and the central office twice a week.
- Supervisory staff will prepare a common checklist for the housekeeper to wipe off weekly.
- Office staff will contribute to the effort by monitoring their own office environments.
- All preventative maintenance inspections shall be postponed until further notice.

Cleaning and Sanitation supplies:

- Waterless anti-bacterial hand soap is available in PHA public spaces so residents can be encouraged to use it in an attempt to ensure they are not unintentionally transferring the virus.
- As supplies become more difficult to obtain, emergency purchasing procedures will be utilized to obtain cleaning supplies and personal protection equipment.

Construction:

- Construction work will continue based upon the scope of the work.

3. Privately-owned PHA Assisted Affordable Housing (Section 8, Housing Choice Voucher HCV) program

Actions affecting people new to PHA program and/or Housing Choice Voucher program:

For scheduled appointments:

- As long as the office is open, there will not be face to face contact. Mark forms where they should be signed, and hand out via the receptionist area. Once they are finished, we will have them use the hand sanitizer, and we will slide forms under the glass. If they have any questions, we will do that via the phone. We will continue to keep the social distancing rule in effect.
- Intake appointments will now be conducted via US mail.
- Briefings will now be held via electronic means.

Actions affecting on going case management of current participants:

- All in-person appointments are suspended until further notice.
- Mailings will include a return checklist as a reminder of all the documents needed and will also encourage participants to return via email, mail, or fax to limit contact.
- Participants may request an in-person appointment if needed.
- Staff will contact existing appointments to cancel the in-person appointment, and to request return of documents by mail, fax, or email.

Inspections of assisted units:

- Inspections for participants moving to a new unit and/or entering our program for the first time will continue. These are needed in order to begin housing assistance.
- Inspectors will have gloves and masks available for each inspection.
- Annual inspections already scheduled (March through May), which cannot be delayed, will only receive initial the inspection and landlords can self-certify repairs completed on any nonlife-threatening deficiency items.
- Participants can request annual inspections if needed. Any annual inspection already scheduled during this time that can be delayed will be delayed for 30 days.
- All re-inspections will be completed via self-certifications.

4. PHA employees:**If you need to stay home to care for young children due to daycare and school closures:**

- Inform your supervisor by phone or email.
- Work remotely, if approved to do so.
- If not approved to work remotely, you may use your accrued leave time (any leave).

If you have been advised to quarantine due to potential exposure to COVID-19:

- Inform your supervisor by phone or email and stay at home for 14 days.
- Work remotely, if approved to do so.
- If not approved to work remotely, you may use your accrued leave time (any leave).
- You may ask for vacation leave, which needs to be approved, per current policy.

If you have COVID-19 and need to isolate:

- Inform your supervisor and HR by phone or email and stay at home until symptoms have cleared.
- Work remotely, if approved to do so.
- If not approved to work remotely, you may use your accrued leave time (any leave).

- You may ask for vacation leave, which needs to be approved, per current policy.

If you need to stay at home to care for a dependent or a family member who is sick with COVID-19:

- Inform your supervisor and HR by phone or email and stay home.
- Work remotely, if approved to do so.
- If not approved to work remotely, you may use your accrued leave time (any leave).

If you have a medical condition and your treating physician is recommending that you maintain social distancing:

- Inform your supervisor by phone or email and email your doctor's note if possible.
- Work remotely, if approved to do so.
- If not approved to work remotely, you may use your accrued leave time (any leave).

If you do not want to come to work because you are afraid that you may come in contact with COVID-19 through the workplace:

- Inform your supervisor by phone or email and request leave.
- You may use your accrued leave time (any leave).

5. Resident Informational Links and Community Resources:

HUD Page on COVID-19: <https://www.hud.gov/coronavirus>

Center for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/>

Governor Wolf: <https://www.governor.pa.gov/>

This PHA COVID-19 Action Plan will be updated on a regular basis. Please visit the PHA's website: <https://www.mchchoices.com>