



HUD Update quarterly report

Affordable Housing Finance

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If a resident is looking for a job, the housing authority will try to give some time for the Moray said.

Other PHA leaders say they are also trying not to be heavy handed about the requirement.

“At this time, we’re implementing it through an awareness and education program,” said Jon Gresley, executive director of the housing authority in Oakland, Calif.

His staff is informing residents when they move in and at renewals. Residents are also being reminded through newsletters.

Echoing the findings of others, Gresley said some residents understand the new requirements while others feel it’s unfair.

Gregg Fortner, executive director of the San Francisco Housing Authority,

agreed the community-service requirement is a tough one to enforce.

He wondered if a judge would evict a family if one member failed to do eight hours of community service.

“We’re implementing it just as effectively as we can,” he said. Like others, officials in San Francisco will be working with residents during their annual reviews. .

PHAs implement controversial community-service rule

By Donna Kimura

Public housing authorities (PHAs) from coast to coast are implementing a controversial new federal mandate that requires certain public housing residents to perform eight hours of community service per month.

The intentions behind the rule may be good, say several PHA leaders, but they are finding it to be a delicate and costly issue.

There’s some feeling that the requirement unfairly targets individuals living in public housing. The requirement does not apply to Sec. 8 families or those receiving other forms of federal assistance.

“People in public housing pay rent,” said Judith Goldiner, staff attorney at the Legal Aid Society of New York. “We don’t understand why they have to perform community service to keep their apartments. That seems fundamentally unfair.”

Homeowners receive a mortgage tax deduction, and tobacco farmers receive subsidies, but they aren’t required to perform community service, she said.

Goldiner and others also say that the policy raises other concerns, including insurance and liability issues for PHAs when requiring residents to perform community service.

Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) introduced H.R. 1431 last year, seeking to repeal the requirement.

For financially strapped PHAs, the mandate is also a tough one to administer and one that came with no funding even though it will cost thousands of dollars to operate and enforce the community-service requirement. The Boston

Housing Authority estimates that it could cost as much as \$100,000 a year. In Seattle, officials think the program could cost them between \$50,000 and \$75,000 per year.

The National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials has opposed the requirement, calling it an “unfunded mandate” that creates administrative burdens.

Congress mandated the community-service requirement as part of the Public Housing Reform Act of 1998. The



requirement, however, has only recently been implemented.

In general, the rule requires unemployed adult residents of public housing to perform community service. Residents such as the elderly and the disabled are exempted.

In New York City, the housing authority estimates that about 80% of its residents qualify for an exemption based on existing data such as age, said spokesman Howard Marder.

The housing authority has also added several more categories to increase the number of different exemptions to 20.

“It’s enormously complicated,” said Rick Parker, executive director of the Athens Housing Authority in Georgia. For example, the rule applies to individuals and not households, which could create multiple start dates for the program.

His staff has been closely looking at the requirement and role playing different what-if scenarios. They estimate that about 300 of its 3,000 residents may be affected.

“It’s a very dynamic situation,” Parker said, noting that the numbers of residents involved could fluctuate with the economy and as people gain and lose jobs.

The Seattle Housing Authority has earned praise for its efforts in implementing the community-service requirement. Officials there put together a working group made up of staff and community members last year, who met regularly.

Notification of the requirement has recently become part of the orientation for new residents. For existing residents, the requirement is being implemented with their annual reviews.

Seattle officials have also established a database of residents who would receive an automatic exemption such as for age or disability, said Cathy Moray, supportive services coordinator.

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