

Section 14.0 INFORMAL HEARING PROCEDURES FOR PARTICIPANTS

14.01 Consideration of Circumstances

In deciding whether to terminate assistance because of action or inaction by members of the family, the LA must consider all of the circumstances in each case, including the seriousness of the case, the extent of participation or culpability of individual family members, and the effects of denial or termination of assistance on other family members who were not involved in the action or failure.

The LA may impose, as a condition of continued assistance for other family members, a requirement that family members who participated in or were culpable for the action or failure to act will not reside in the unit. The LA may permit the other members of a participant family to continue receiving assistance.

If the LA seeks to terminate assistance because of illegal use, or possession for personal use, of a controlled substance, or pattern of abuse of alcohol, such use or possession or pattern of abuse must have occurred within one year before the date that the LA determines and notifies the participant of the decision to deny or terminate assistance. In determining whether to terminate assistance for these reasons the LA will consider evidence of whether the household member:

- has successfully completed a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program (as applicable) and is no longer engaging in the illegal use of a controlled substance or abuse of alcohol;
- has otherwise been rehabilitated successfully and is no longer engaging in the illegal use of a controlled substance or abuse of alcohol; or
- is participating in a supervised drug or alcohol rehabilitation program and is no longer engaging in the illegal use of a controlled substance or abuse of alcohol.

14.02 When a Hearing is Required

LA hearing procedures will be provided to families in the briefing packet. The LA will give a participant family an opportunity for an informal hearing to consider whether the following LA decisions relating to the individual circumstances of a participant family are in accordance with the law, HUD regulations and LA policies:

1. determination of the family's annual or adjusted income, and the use of such income to compute the housing assistance payment;
2. determination of the appropriate utility allowance (if any) for tenant-paid utilities from the LA utility allowance schedule;

3. determination of the family unit size under the LA subsidy standards;
4. determination to terminate assistance for a participant family because of the family's action or failure to act; or
5. determination to terminate assistance because the participant family has been absent from the assisted unit for longer than the maximum period permitted under the LA policy and HUD rules.

In cases described in items 4 and 5 above, the LA will provide the opportunity for an informal hearing before the LA terminates housing assistance payments for the family under an outstanding HAP contract.

14.03 When a Hearing is Not Required

The LA will not provide a participant family an opportunity for an informal hearing for any of the following reasons:

1. discretionary administrative determinations by the LA;
2. general policy issues or class grievances;
3. establishment of the LA schedule of utility allowances;
4. LA determination not to approve an extension or suspension of a certificate or voucher term;
5. LA determination not to approve a unit or lease;
6. LA determination that an assisted unit is not in compliance with HQS. However, the LA will provide the opportunity for an informal hearing for a decision to terminate assistance for a breach of the HQS caused by the family;
7. LA determination that the unit is not in accordance with HQS because of the family size; or
8. a determination by the LA to exercise or not exercise any right or remedy against the owner under a HAP contract.

14.04 Notice to the Family

In the cases described in items 4 and 5 of Section 14.03 entitled "When a Hearing is Not Required," the LA will notify the family that the family may ask for an explanation of the basis of the LA's determination, and that, if the family does not agree with the determination, the family may request an informal hearing on the decision.

In the following cases described in items 4 and 5 of Section 14.02 entitled “When a Hearing is Required,” the LA will give the participant prompt written notice that the family may request a hearing within ten business days of the notification. The LA hearing procedures will be provided to families in the briefing packet. The participant should be given the opportunity to submit a written request to reschedule an informal hearing. The participant will be granted only one opportunity to reschedule an informal hearing.

The notice will contain a brief statement of the reasons for the decision and state that, if the family does not agree with the decision, the family may request an informal hearing on the decision within ten business days of the notification. The informal hearing must be conducted within 60 days from the date of the notice.

14.05 Hearing Procedures

The LA and participants will adhere to the following policies and procedures:

1. Discovery

- a. The family will be given the opportunity to examine before the hearing any LA documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. The family will be allowed to copy any such document at the family’s expense. If the LA does not make the document(s) available for examination on request of the family, the LA may not rely on the document at the hearing.
- b. The LA will be given the opportunity to examine, at the LA’s offices before the hearing, any family documents that are directly relevant to the hearing. The LA will be allowed to copy any such document at the LA’s expense. If the family does not make the document(s) available for examination on request of the LA, the family may not rely on the document(s) at the hearing.

2. Representation of the Family

At the family’s own expense, a lawyer or other representative may represent the family.

3. Hearing Officer

The hearing will be conducted by any qualified person or persons designated by the LA, other than a person who made or approved the decision under review or a subordinate of this person;

The person who conducts the hearing will regulate the conduct of the hearing in accordance with LA hearing procedures.

4. Evidence

The LA and the family must have the opportunity to present evidence and to question any witnesses. Evidence may be considered without regard to admissibility under the rules of evidence applicable to judicial proceedings.

5. Issuance of Decision

The person who conducts the hearing must issue a written decision within 14 calendar days from the date of the hearing, stating briefly the reasons for the decision. Factual determinations relating to the individual circumstances of the family will be based on a preponderance of the evidence presented at the hearing.

14.06 Effect of the Decision

The LA is not bound by a hearing decision:

- concerning a matter for which the LA is not required to provide an opportunity for an informal hearing under this section, or that otherwise exceeds the authority of the person conducting the hearing under LA hearing procedures; or
- contrary to HUD regulations or requirements, or otherwise contrary to Federal, State or local law.

If the LA determines that it is not bound by a hearing decision, the LA will notify the family within 14 calendar days of the determination and of the reasons for the determination.

14.07 Mitigating Circumstances for Participants with Disabilities

When the LA is terminating assistance, the family will be informed that presence of a disability may be considered as a mitigating circumstance during the informal hearing process.

Examples of mitigating circumstances are:

- a person with a cognitive disorder may not have understood the requirement to report increases in income;
- a person may not understand the need to make regular repayments on a promissory note; or
- minor criminal records for public drunkenness may be due to medication; prior incarcerations for being disorderly may be emotional disorder.

14.08 Hearing Provisions for Restrictions on Assistance to Non-Citizens

Assistance to a participant will not be terminated:

1. on the basis of immigration status if the participant, within all requirements and/or dates specified by Section 5.508 of program regulations, takes all necessary steps to provide required documentation;
2. if the LA has not completed primary and secondary verification of immigration documents submitted by the participant in a timely manner;
3. if the USCIS appeals process under Section 5.514 has not been completed;
4. if the ineligible family member has left the household;
5. if assistance to the participant will be prorated;
6. if assistance for a mixed family is continued in accordance with Sections 5.514 and 5.518 of program regulations;
7. if the LA has deferred termination of assistance in accordance with Sections 5.516 and 5.518 of program regulations.

Assistance to a participant will be terminated if:

1. a declaration of citizenship and eligible immigration status is not submitted by the date specified;
2. USCIS primary and secondary verification does not support eligible immigration status of a family member;
3. the participant family does not pursue USCIS appeal or informal hearing rights; or
4. USCIS appeal or informal hearing decisions are decided against the participant or an individual family member.

14.09 USCIS Determination of Ineligibility

If a family member claims to be an eligible immigrant and the USCIS SAVE system and manual search do not verify the claim, the LA will notify the participant within ten days of his/her right to appeal to the USCIS within 30 days or to request an informal hearing with the LA, either in lieu of or subsequent to the USCIS appeal.

If the family appeals to the USCIS, it must give the LA a copy of the appeal and proof of mailing or the LA may proceed to deny assistance. The time period to request an appeal may be extended by the LA for good cause.

14.10 Informal LA Hearing

The request for an LA hearing must be made within 14 days of receipt of the notice offering opportunity for the hearing or, if an appeal was made to the USCIS, within 14 days of receipt of that notice. The participant will be notified that assistance will not be terminated until the USCIS appeal process concludes.

After receipt of a request for an informal hearing, the hearing is conducted as previously described in this section. If the hearing officer decides that the individual is not eligible and there are no other eligible family members, the LA will:

- defer termination if the participant family qualifies for deferral; or
- terminate the participant if the family does not qualify for deferral.

If any family member fails to provide documentation or certification as required by the regulation, that member is treated as ineligible. If all family members fail to provide, the family will be terminated for failure to provide.

Participants whose termination is carried out after temporary deferral may not request a hearing since they had an opportunity for a hearing prior to the termination.

Participants whose assistance is pro-rated (either based on their statement that some members are ineligible or due to failure to verify eligible immigration status for some members after exercising their appeal and hearing rights described above) are entitled to a hearing based on the right to a hearing regarding determinations of tenant rent and Total Tenant Payment.

Families terminated for fraud in connection with the non-citizens rule are entitled to a review or hearing in the same way as terminations for any other type of fraud.