

FALL 2005

NEWS FOR OWNERS AND MANAGERS IN THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Your One-Stop Help Center: 619.578.7777

It's coming! It's on the way! What is "it"? It's the Housing Commission's new Call Center—our effort to provide faster service to you and your assisted renters. From October 10 on, all you'll need to remember is one phone number: 619.578.7777.

Why is the Commission initiating this new process? It's because over the years our Housing Choice Voucher program has grown to over 12,000 participating families living in units managed by 6,500 owners/

managers. This has made communicating with us difficult. When staff (including the owner liaison) is on the phone with other callers or in meetings with clients, they are not available to take incoming calls. As a result, rental owners and managers as well as voucher holders leave hundreds of messages each week for different Commission staff members. This often leads to a game of phone tag when staff tries to return those calls. In other cases, people without answering machines do not know we are trying to reach them.

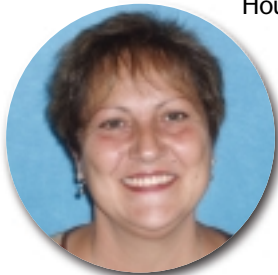
We have come up with an innovative solution to this problem. Effective October 10, we will open the new Rental Assistance Call Center. Staffed by six people (see photos, left), its purpose is to help ensure more callers will reach a live person at the Housing Commission and not be forced to leave messages. The Call Center is for the use of both participating families and owners. People who staff the Center—trained professionals with extensive knowledge about Rental Assistance programs, policies, and procedures—will be able to answer your questions, address your concerns and provide you with the information you need.

As the new team steps up to the plate, longtime owner-liaison Lynda Brophy will move on to other responsibilities within the program. "I'll miss this job—it's truly been one of the best assignments I've had at the agency. But it's exciting that the new Call Center will be in place," said Brophy.

"Hello, how can we help you?"



Mary Gelbman



Theresa Ahamed



Charmen Jackson



Gwen Miller



Mamie McCall



Melissa Haro



Property Manager Welcomes Call Center

As the assistant manager for a 451-unit apartment complex where more than half the tenants have Section 8 vouchers, Martha Marquez often needs fast information about the Rental Assistance program. "Many times tenants come here [to the office], and they have questions that we can't answer," said Marquez, explaining that in such cases she would have to contact different Housing Commission staff members for information for each tenant. "I would usually have to leave a message, then wait for them to call back—and when they did, sometimes I'd forget why I was calling them because I have so many tenants!" she said. Marquez added that while most of her phone calls to staff were about routine matters, some were about more urgent situations—such as when an elderly tenant who lived in an upstairs unit had suffered a stroke and needed to move to a first-floor unit as soon as possible.

Marquez was delighted to learn about the Housing Commission's new dedicated customer service line—the Call Center (619.578.7777), to debut October 10. (See story on front page.) "That's a very good idea—it will make my job much easier," she said.

Thirty-day Notice for 'Cause' Still Permitted Under New Court Ruling

The California Supreme Court ruled on June 13 that Section 8 tenants must receive a 90-day notice for lease terminations that are issued without "good cause." In other words, extended noticing is now required when owners choose to discontinue the rental agreement for reasons not related to lease violations. A 90-day notice must also be given when a landlord decides to not renew a rental lease for any specified term.

Attorneys for the San Diego Housing Commission filed an opinion with the court in favor of the property manager's side. Our position was that it was in everyone's best interests to keep the Section 8 Rental Assistance program as similar to the open market as possible. We highly value your participation in the program—and our success depends on your support. It was our position to discourage any actions that would make the program less appealing.

The good news is, even with the new ruling, you still have the right to issue shorter-term eviction notices (including 30-day eviction notices) when the eviction is for "cause," such as failure to pay rent. In all cases, please remember to always send the Housing Commission copies of any notice sent to your tenant.



For information and clarification on what types of notices to send tenants, please seek legal counsel. Note: attorney referrals and information about California tenant/landlord law are available through the San Diego County Apartment Association's member services department (www.sdcaa.com). The Apartment Association also offers periodic, no-cost "Smart Landlord" classes that provide helpful information about noticing requirements, fair housing, tenant screenings and other topics. (For more information, call SDCAA's Tiffany Sharrot, 858.751.2208.)



VIEWpoint is published by the Rental Assistance Department as a way to keep rental owners/managers updated on issues and policies regarding our programs. If you have any ideas for future stories—or if you would like extra issues sent to your staff—please contact Community Relations Specialist Janine Rojas at janiner@sdhc.org.



Good Neighbors
**San Diego
Housing Commission**

- ◆ 1625 Newton Avenue
- ◆ San Diego, California
- ◆ 92113-1038
- ◆ www.sdhc.net



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