



## Berkeley Housing Authority

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*William E. Wilkins, Executive Director*

# Section 8 News

## Message from Executive Director

Hello everyone, it has been a challenging year for public housing authorities in general and especially the Berkeley Housing Authority. However, we survived and eagerly look forward to great things 2018 will bring. Believe it or not, the rental market here in the City of Berkeley is starting to soften, which means that we are seeing many more rental listings being offered by landlords for participants in the Section 8 Program.

These changes do not eliminate the fact that owners/property managers will scrutinize applicants by using credit checks and previous rental histories to fill their respective units. However, I believe this provides an opportunity for our clients to utilize their creative skills to move beyond these challenges and present themselves as excellent candidates for the unit (s) being sought for rental.

On another topic, I am continually concerned by the rental selection(s) some of our clients make when seeking new housing opportunities for their families. In the rush or desperation to get a rental unit, many clients accept units without giving full consideration to their family composition, and needs, versus wants. Consequently, they accept a unit that doesn't fully meet their needs and barely passes Housing Quality Standards (HQS). The beauty of the Section 8 Program, as designed more than 40 years ago, is the ability of individuals/families to find decent, safe, sanitary, and affordable housing. This does not mean that you accept something with a promise by the owners/property managers that once you move into the unit, they will make good on their promises; nor does it mean you move into a living environment not suited for your family. Specific examples are: a young family moving into a small (duplex/triplex) where the other occupants are older, or elders moving into smaller, noisy environments.

Remember you are in full control of where you live, and the lease agreement you sign is not with the Berkeley Housing Authority, but the owner of the property. Here are other examples of situations I have heard here at the Berkeley Housing Authority over the past 18 months:

- Unit passes inspection, but tenant thinks floor covering should be replaced. Owner says it will be done after the move in, and this never happens so complaint registered with housing authority to force landlord to fix unit.
- Family moves into a property with unit in the back of house, and is required to use same yard and gate area as main house.
- Family moves into 8 unit complex, with parking spaces in the rear of property, but is told after moving into unit the parking space costs extra.

Always remember the quality of your housing depends on the decisions you make prior to entering into a lease agreement. BHA is here to ensure, through inspections, that your living conditions are decent, safe and sanitary. If you have a problem in between your scheduled annual inspection, you (or your landlord) may request a special inspection. Note: BHA is transitioning to biennial inspections, more details below.

As we attempt to make sure owners/property managers do everything possible to maintain their properties in a decent, safe and sanitary condition, we rely on our clients to cooperate. Far too often, I am made aware of living conditions that need to be corrected ("fail" items on the inspections report), but the head of household is refusing to permit the owner/landlord access to:

- Inspect the unit to assess damage and determine how to make repairs;
- Make the necessary repairs, that may require temporarily moving out of the unit (as long as the owner provides funds for relocation as mandated by Berkeley's temporary relocation requirements).

We will always support our clients when they are being forced to live in conditions that fail to meet HQS, but you must permit the repairs to occur by working with the owners/property managers to allow access to the unit for themselves and those making repairs.

The current administration in Washington, DC is proposing to reduce the HUD budget by more than \$6 billion. Should this happen it will mean a number of changes to programs and operations. But for now, we want to focus on the positive:

- In August I sent a notice out to all of our current Section 8 participants, as well as those who had been issued a new voucher, and individuals on the waiting list (dating back to 2010). The notice was to inform everyone that BHA was approximately \$750,000 short of meeting payments for the Housing Assistance Payments to landlords;
- In October we received notification from HUD that funding would be received in December to ensure that all current families remain on the Berkeley Housing Authority program. This was great news for our current families and landlords, however we are still not able to provide housing assistance to the many families remaining on our waiting list.

I think the Section 8 Housing Choice Voucher Program is a great opportunity for every community to provide affordable housing. We are very pleased to inform you that BHA is being considered for Veterans Assistance Supportive Housing Program (VASH). This is a great program for our veterans, and if BHA receives approval we can begin the partnership with the Veterans Administration to house some of the many homeless veterans living in our community.

Thank you for your continued understanding. I ask that you continue to keep yourself, and members of your family safe in the coming year. May you have a healthy, happy and great experiences in the New Year!

## **Biennial Inspections**

In 2018 BHA will be moving to biennial inspections. This means that for 2018 inspections that pass on the first attempt, our inspector will be back in 2020 (skipping a year). If the 2018 inspection fails on the first attempt, that unit will be reinspected. But the next inspection will not skip a year; our inspector will return again in 2019 (approximately 10 months later) to conduct another Housing Quality Standards inspection. So, before your next inspection in 2018, be sure to test your smoke detectors, carbon monoxide detector (if you have gas appliances), and check the cover plates of your electrical sockets—these tend to be the items with highest fail rates. And remember, if you or the landlord request a Special inspection, we will send our inspector in, no matter how long it has been since your most recent inspection.

## **Who is my Housing Specialist?**

We recently re-assigned some cases; see below for your assigned case worker.

### **Last Name begins with:**

### **Housing Specialist:**

A, B, C, D, K, L and O.....Lynda DeShazier, 981-5482, ldeshazier@ci.berkeley.ca.us  
E, F, G, H, I, J, M and N.....Tracy Jackson, 981-5486, tjackson@ci.berkeley.ca.us  
Mc, P, Q, R, S, T, U, V, W, X, Y and Z.....Althea Maybon, 981-5478, amaybon@ci.berkeley.ca.us  
New Contracts/Portability/Mod Rehab.....Tilda Barnes, 981-5484, tbarnes@ci.berkeley.ca.us

\*\* If you are currently participating in th Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSS), your Housing Specialist is Celinda Aguilar-Vasquez, 981-5483, caguilar-vasquez@ci.berkeley.ca.us.

## **2018 Resident Advisory Board**

Every year BHA updates our Section 8 “Administrative Plan.” As part of the process we appoint a Resident Advisory Board (RAB), and ask those individuals to review the plan and provide comment. Please consider participating as a member of the RAB. If you agree to review the proposed Admin. Plan changes, and attend one meeting to share your comments (approximately 2-hours), you will receive \$50! This is not considered “income” so it won’t change your rent. To volunteer for the RAB contact us in writing by December 20, 2017 at 5 p.m. with your name, address, phone number and email. You can send by regular mail, drop off in the off or email the information to caguilar-vasquez@ci.berkeley.ca.us. If you have any questions call Celinda at (510) 981-5483.