



**COLUMBUS METROPOLITAN HOUSING AUTHORITY**  
COMMUNITY. COMMITMENT. COLLABORATION.

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Friday, March 11, 2022

Contact: Mike Nowlin  
Cell: 989-450-0855

**Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority Board approves plan to modernize Housing Choice Voucher program in effort to improve services to 40,000 Franklin County residents**

*Move toward new system will save CMHA \$1.2 million annually and is modeled after successful launches of similar transitions by other large public housing agencies*

**Columbus, OH** – The [Columbus Metropolitan Housing Authority \(CMHA\)](#) announced today it will move forward with plans to modernize the administration of its Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program, which has remained largely unchanged since its debut in 1974 and is now the agency’s largest program, serving approximately 40,000 Franklin County residents.

When implemented, the \$1.2 million annual cost savings realized by contracting with a private vendor and employing the new model for administering HCVs will be redirected toward the creation of more affordable housing units, as well as improving services provided through CMHA’s nationally recognized RISE EnVision Center.

The move comes as federal funding for administration of the HCV program continues to fall short of the actual need, CMHA officials said. Hiring a vendor to manage the HCV program may reduce CMHA’s HCV workforce by approximately 48 positions, though CMHA officials anticipate rehiring several of those employees to fill existing vacancies in other CMHA departments. In addition, CMHA intends to offer transition benefits and support services to affected employees.

“CMHA is always looking for more efficient ways to serve our clients,” said CMHA Board Chairman Stanley Harris. “Like we have done in other areas, we believe we have an obligation to our residents and the public we serve to consider the most effective way to deliver services.”

Since the HCV program’s inception 48 years ago, most large public housing authorities in the U.S. have run the program using some form of a “case work” model that emphasizes face-to-face meetings, which could take more than 120 days for an applicant to get approved and housed.

With the evolution of federal government processes and the ability to leverage technology to carry out the application and approval processes on a remote, online basis, CMHA’s interactions with clients have become much more transaction-based and no longer require the traditional in-person meeting model.

Accordingly, the board approved the plan to partner with national organizations to leverage technology to provide direct e-service to residents – wherever they are. When the new model is fully implemented, residents will have access to technologically advanced systems and processes from the privacy of their homes and, of course, will continue to have the option of interacting with CMHA staff in person.

At the same time, CMHA has enhanced its Resident Services Department within The RISE Center to expand its capacity to provide residents with needed social services in addition to handling HCV applications.

The CMHA Board of Commissioners voted in support of the plan during its March 3 board meeting.

“We concluded that the old model simply doesn’t work,” said Harris. “It’s time to adopt a model that has already been proven at other large public housing authorities across the country.”

Section 8 housing is rent assistance administered by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Congress established Section 8 housing programs with the Housing and Community Development Act in 1974. The goal was to ensure that low-wage earners could find safe housing outside of public housing options.

The HCV program provides housing assistance for very low-income families, the elderly and people with disabilities, allowing them to live in quality affordable housing in the private market. Since housing assistance is provided on behalf of the family or individual, participants are able to find their own housing, including single-family homes, townhouses or apartments in neighborhoods of their choice. Participants are free to choose any housing that meets the requirements of the program and are not limited to units located in subsidized housing projects.

A family that is issued a voucher is responsible for finding a suitable unit where the owner agrees to rent under the HCV program. Rental units must meet minimum standards of health and safety, as determined by CMHA.

A housing subsidy is paid to the landlord directly by CMHA on behalf of the participating family. The family then pays the difference between the actual rent charged by the landlord and the amount subsidized by the program.

The program not only helps renters, but it also provides landlords a steady, guaranteed income. CMHA currently pays Franklin County landlords over \$8 million per-month through its voucher program and the authority is looking to expand on this effort.

CMHA announced March 2021 its plans to issue an additional 1,000 housing vouchers through 2022, bringing the total number of individuals and families in Franklin County receiving rental assistance to 13,500.

But the need for HCVs in Franklin County still far exceeds the available supply, with 24,000 individuals and families on CMHA’s wait list for federally subsidized housing assistance. The Affordable Housing Alliance of Central Ohio estimates that 54,000 low- and moderate-income families pay half of their household incomes on housing.

The RISE Center is first of its kind for Columbus and one of only five similar federally approved operations in Ohio. It provides a one-stop shop that links all Franklin County residents with adult education, family planning, health and employment services to remove barriers to economic self-sufficiency.

Examples of services provided at The RISE Center include helping Franklin County residents:

- Apply for emergency rental assistance and utility bill payment plans and understand their lease agreement.
- Sign up for health insurance, unemployment and food assistance.
- Find employment, housing, medical care and educational opportunities.
- Manage health and well-being, including understanding illnesses and medications.
- Learn more about family planning, pregnancy care and care for the entire family.

“We view CMHA’s ultimate objective as helping individuals and families obtain affordable housing while also connecting them to vital services and support programs they may not know exist in our community,” Harris said.

###

**About CMHA:** *CMHA helps people access affordable housing through collaborative partnerships, promotes neighborhood revitalization and assists residents in accessing needed social services. CMHA has more than doubled its portfolio of housing over the last five years. It owns over 4,500 units of affordable housing and through its Housing Choice Voucher and Project-Based Rental Assistance Programs provides rental assistance to nearly 250,000 Ohio and Washington, D.C., residents. Approximately 71% of the units in the CMHA portfolio are affordable to renters making 80% AMI or less.*