

PRESS RELEASE



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HABC Contributing 50 Additional Housing Choice Vouchers to Decrease Baltimore Homelessness

With the pandemic causing even more people to land in shelters or encampments, HABC increases investment to help homeless families find permanent homes

(BALTIMORE – April 13, 2021) – With the pandemic exacerbating Baltimore’s homelessness epidemic, the Housing Authority of Baltimore City (HABC) has allocated 50 additional Housing Choice vouchers to assist families who lack suitable housing.

This increase brings the total number of vouchers the housing authority now sets aside annually for the homeless initiative through the city’s Coordinated Access program to 900.

These 900 vouchers are in addition to another 2,355 vouchers HABC allocates for special populations of homeless individuals and families. Those other populations include, homeless veterans, family unification, re-entering citizens, and others.

These additional 50 vouchers set aside to assist homeless families, at this point in the city’s history, are a lifeline.

“All of us at HABC feel a tremendous obligation to attack the immense problem of homelessness that the city of Baltimore faces,” said HABC CEO Janet Abrahams. “We do not want to see people living under bridges or in encampments – and as we have done over the past several years, we are efficiently putting our money where it can make the biggest impact.”

Families referred to HABC for these 50 vouchers are coming from the Mayor’s Office of Homeless Services. HABC works in tandem with the city’s Coordinated Access system, a centralized process for determining a homeless family’s appropriate housing option and accompanying services.

Once the city refers a family to HABC, the agency’s Housing Choice Voucher Program assesses whether the applicant meets the eligibility requirements to be given a voucher. The family then uses the voucher to locate suitable housing and thereby uses the

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assistance provided by the voucher to pay the monthly rent and utilities at a privately-owned unit. In some cases, families are referred to units where the voucher subsidy is already linked to that property. (This is referred to as a project-based voucher).

“The city’s case managers stay with the families from six months to two years, depending on the agency and how long the individual is willing to participate in the program,” said HABC Senior Vice President for the voucher program Corliss Alston. “The city has stepped up its services, which was one of our requests before agreeing to provide these additional permanent housing opportunities.”

HABC has a history of setting aside vouchers for homeless populations, but these additional 50 take the agency to its highest level ever of special set-asides. Even among households now in the voucher program, the housing authority estimates that about a quarter of them could not afford an adequate place to live without any rental assistance.

This collaboration with the city is unlike an earlier program where public housing units were set aside, and the city had to fund 50 percent of the vacancy rehabilitation cost. With these vouchers, HABC provides the rental subsidy at an average of \$920 a month.

These specially designated homeless mitigation vouchers represent only a portion of the 19,000 vouchers HABC funds at an annual investment of nearly \$220 million. That is in addition to the agency’s public housing programs, including the ongoing rebuild of the Perkins, Somerset, Oldtown community, a sweeping \$1 billion initiative.

“We can’t solve the homeless problem for the city, but we can be major contributors to progress toward that goal. Our Housing Choice Voucher program is making a powerful impact, not only in helping people, but also on the city’s economy,” CEO Abrahams said. “At the same time, despite the pandemic, we are repairing and bringing more and more public housing properties back into service. We want to serve as many people and improve as many neighborhoods as possible.”

About HABC

HABC is the fifth largest public housing authority in the U.S., providing quality affordable housing. The agency creates diverse and vibrant communities, provides opportunities for self-sufficiency, and builds pathways for strong partnerships.

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