



Push For Section 8 As Legitimate Income

Pressed by HUD officials in advance of the department's new fair housing enforcement campaign, states and communities are conceding to HUD's demands that private landlords must be forced to accept Section 8 housing subsidies as a person's legitimate income.

In recent moves, California, Maryland and Washington are mulling mandatory requirements for all landlords to accept Section 8 subsidies, regardless of whether or not they hold contracts with HUD.

To date, 12 states, plus Washington, DC, and more than 30 communities, such as New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, and Seattle, have conceded to HUD's authority and banned source-of-income bias.

State and local governments face close HUD scrutiny of their spending habits with federal subsidies, such as Community Development Block Grants and other housing grants, if HUD sees any reluctance to concede to its authority.

Under HUD's fair housing enforcement initiative, federal subsidies unwisely spent under the department's new interpretation of the Fair Housing Act could be recalled and repaid and a community could be denied future federal aid for not complying with the Section 8 mandate.

Landlords largely oppose the requirement with most refusing to accept subsidized tenants, complaining about related crime escalation and property vandalism that accompanies many of Section 8 moves from inner-city neighborhoods to suburban apartments. Landlords also object to the mounds of government paperwork they face when forced to accept housing subsidies.

While HUD holds Section 8 subsidies as a legitimate source of income, neither federal law nor California law prohibits discrimination against Section 8 voucher holders.

California State Sen. Mark Leno (D) crafts legislation supported by tenant rights groups that would forbid landlords to discriminate against Section 8 applicants. The bill is expected to face fierce landlord and Republican opposition.

Likewise, Washington state lawmakers are considering a bill to forbid rejecting Section 8 applicants. Seattle is the lone community in the state that forbids discrimination against voucher holders as a protected class. The bill is likely to pass.

Maryland is making a second try to enact legislation. A bill submitted in 2014 failed under landlord opposition.

While Iowa doesn't have a statewide law, Marion, and now Iowa City, are embracing HUD's Section 8 rule.

Utah lawmakers are taking an opposing view. Senate Bill 175 seeks to allow landlords to refuse Section 8 subsidies as a form of income for poor families. Backers concede early action is unlikely because of opposition from housing activists.

Info: See SB 1053 at www.cdpublications.com/docs/8771

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