HOW YOU PAY YOUR RENT SHOULDN'T LIMIT HOW FAR YOU CAN GO

BECAUSE WHERE YOU LIVE CAN LIFT YOU UP OR KEEP YOU DOWN, VIRGINIA MUST SUPPORT EFFORTS BY LOWER-INCOME FAMILIES TO MOVE INTO AREAS OF OPPORTUNITY.

Too many Virginians remain trapped in high poverty, low-opportunity neighborhoods where they are locked out from good schools, employment opportunities, and healthy surroundings. While some of them have the means to rent homes in higher-opportunity neighborhoods, landlords often block their moves by refusing to accept their payment, whether it is social security benefits, a housing choice voucher, or other support intended to help families move forward.

The federal government has several programs to assist low-income and disabled individuals access housing. This includes Social Security Disability Income (SSDI), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), and Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8).

The Housing Choice Voucher Program is the nation's largest rental assistance program helping more than 5 million people in 2.2 million low-income families afford housing in the private market. In Virginia, approximately 113,200 people (46,300 households) use vouchers to afford decent, privately-owned housing.

VOUCHERS HELP

10,500
SENIORS,

24,600
PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES,

AND 22,700
FAMILIES WITH
49,300 CHILDREN

AFFORD HOUSING ACROSS VIRGINIA.

WHY IT MATTERS

Pockets of concentrated poverty exist throughout Virginia. This was once considered a problem exclusive to urban areas, such as the City of Richmond. In more recent years, concentrations of poverty are appearing in counties.

Living in areas of concentrated poverty makes it difficult for families to find opportunities to move up the income ladder and keeps them in a cycle of poverty and homelessness. One way to increase access to areas with greater opportunity – where there are available jobs and quality schools – is through obtaining vouchers or other funds to help them pay rent in a community they choose.

In theory, households utilizing federal subsidies have the choice to decide where to live as the subsidy resides with the household, not the property as in the Project-Based Voucher Program. This should give them the ability to leverage the public investment in the subsidy to choose to live close to work or avail themselves of better schools. Unfortunately, however, it remains perfectly legal to deny housing to someone using a voucher, limiting the promise of the voucher.

The cumulative effect of these issues results in a severely constrained rental housing market for lower-income residents which further exacerbates segregated housing patterns and serves to perpetuate intergenerational poverty. Additionally, concentrations of poverty put undue stress on communities and strain the resources of the local economy. Residential and systemic discrimination in the region is well documented and includes disparate educational outcomes, food accessibility, and job and wealth generating opportunities.

VOTE YES ON HOUSE BILL NO. 6 (PATRON - BOURNE)

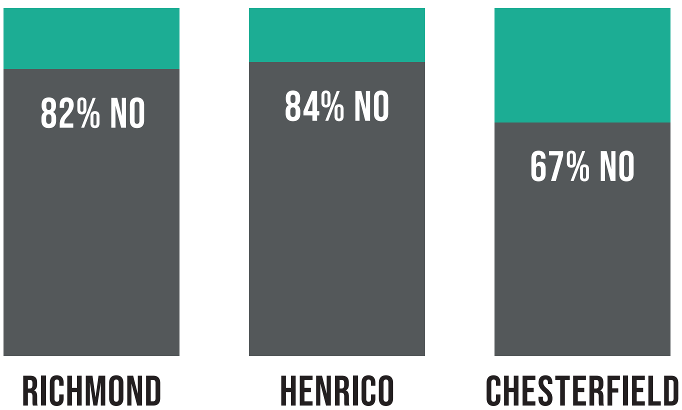
HOME

Housing Opportunities Made Equal of Virginia, Inc. • www.HOMEofVA.org
626 East Broad Street, Suite 400, Richmond, VA 23219 • 804.354.0641 • VA Relay: 711

WHAT WE KNOW

In 2012, HOME contacted 124 apartment complexes in the Richmond metro region to determine if they accepted vouchers. **Just 33(26.6%) replied that they did.** In late 2018, using the online website, *apartments.com*, HOME contacted 139 apartment complexes across the region. Just **26 (18.75)** accept vouchers. It is important to note that 10 of these were Low-Income Housing Tax Credit properties and must legally accept vouchers. Therefore, if removed from the count, the number of apartments accepting vouchers would be **16, or 12%**.

VOUCHER ACCEPTANCE RATES



WHO CAN USE A VOUCHER?

75% of households utilizing vouchers must be classified as “extremely low income” meaning that their income cannot exceed 30% of the local Area Median Income (For the Richmond region, this is $75,126).

Therefore, to qualify for a voucher a household must earn **less than $22,538** annually.

HOW ARE VOUCHERS USED?

Vouchers are federally funded but administered through state and local housing agencies.

Upon securing a voucher, a household has **60 days** to find housing.

The local agency must confirm that the unit meets federal quality housing standards and that the rent is reasonable in relation to similar units in the area.

The household contributes 30% of its income or a minimum rent standard of $50 for rent and utilities.

The voucher pays the rest of the costs, up to a limit (the “payment standard”).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Does adding Source of Income protections require landlords to take renters who have vouchers?

No, it does not require a landlord to accept every applicant – or any applicant – who will pay with a voucher. However, it does require landlords to treat these applicants like all others, which includes looking at credit and rental history, sufficiency of funds, and adhering to a background check. A landlord would not be able to simply deny them because they will pay with a rent voucher.

Will landlords be required to accept less than market rate for rent?

No, landlords are not required to accept less than market rate rent for voucher holders. The voucher pays the difference between the amount the applicant/tenant can afford and the full rent amount, so the landlord is not financially harmed. For example, if the market rate for a 2 BR unit is $1,300 and the tenant can cover $50, then the voucher covers the remaining $1250.

What are the administrative requirements associated with leasing to a voucher holder?

There are just 2 core administrative requirements:

1. Landlords must complete 2 additional pieces of papers – the Tenancy Addendum and the Housing Assistance Payment contract with the voucher administrator
2. Comply with inspection – HUD requires that Housing Quality Standards (HQS) inspections be completed within 15 days of when a tenant requests approval and there are voucher administrators who complete these inspections in far less time. HQS tends to be less strict that the VRLTA requirements for landlords and property maintenance code

Can anyone qualify for a voucher?

No, there is a thorough screening process and a long waiting list.