



PLACING APPLICANTS ON A WAITING LIST FOR PROJECT-BASED PUBLIC HOUSING

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Public housing authorities generally use one of three methods to order applicants on a waiting list for a unit in a public housing development:

- first come, first served;
- lottery; or
- preference categories.

Housing authorities using preference categories give certain groups, for example individuals who are homeless or victims of domestic violence, preferential placement on waiting lists.

ISSUE

In Connecticut, do housing authorities give preference to homeless individuals when placing them on a waiting list for a unit in a public housing development?

This report addresses housing authorities receiving state assistance, as well as those receiving federal assistance. We limit our discussion of federally-assisted authorities to those that are assisted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). While other federal agencies such as the Department of Agriculture also finance housing developments, most in Connecticut are HUD-assisted.

SUMMARY

Homeless individuals do not automatically receive preference for public housing, but they can depending on how the housing authority places applicants on its waiting lists. (In addition to waitlist position, an applicant's access to public housing also depends on whether he or she meets general eligibility criteria such as income requirements.)

When the number of public housing applicants exceeds the number of available units, housing authorities create a waiting list. Housing authorities use one of three methods to order applicants on waiting lists: (1) first come, first served; (2) lottery; or (3) preference categories. Under the preference categories method, housing authorities can give preferential status to homeless individuals; under the other methods they cannot.

Pursuant to Connecticut’s fair housing regulations, state-assisted housing authorities can order applicants using the lottery or preference categories method (Conn. Agency Regs. § [8-37ee-305](#)). Pursuant to HUD regulations, federally-assisted housing authorities can order applicants using the first come, first served or preference categories method ([24 CFR § 1.4](#) and [24 CFR § 960.206](#)). If there is a tie under the preference categories method, housing authorities break it using one of the two other methods.

Table 1: Authorized Methods of Ordering Waiting Lists

<i>Waiting List Type</i>	<i>State</i>	<i>Federal</i>
First come, first served		✓
Lottery	✓	
Preference categories	✓	✓

WAITING LIST TYPES

First Come, First Served

When housing authorities use the first come, first served method, they order applicants based only on application date and time. For example, a housing authority might open its waiting list from October 1 to October 31; the first applicant on October 1 is placed at the top of the waiting list. Subsequent applicants are placed on the list in the order that they submit their applications.

Lottery

When using the lottery method, housing authorities place applicants on the waiting list in random order. For example, a housing authority might open its waiting list from October 1 to October 31, during which time it receives 100 applications. After the application period ends, the housing authority conducts a lottery to place each eligible applicant on the waiting list in order of 1-100.

Preference Categories

When housing authorities create a waiting list using the preference categories method, they give applicants meeting certain criteria preferential placement. Federally-assisted housing authorities have the discretion to identify groups for preferential placement provided they (1) take into account local housing needs and priorities and (2) comply with fair housing laws ([24 CFR § 1.4](#) and [24 CFR § 960.206](#)). State-assisted housing authorities are required to use the preferences established in state regulations, although they may add preference categories with the housing commissioner’s approval (Conn. Agency Regs. § [8-37ee-305](#)).

In both state- and federally-assisted housing, if applicants have the same preferential status (e.g., score), the housing authority must use either the first come, first served or lottery method to break the tie ([24 CFR § 960.206](#) and Conn. Agency Regs. § [8-37ee-305](#)).

Federally-Assisted Housing Authorities. Housing authorities receiving federal assistance have the option of using a binary or point system when assigning preferential status to applicants. (According to Connecticut's Department of Housing, those located in Connecticut use the binary system.)

When using a binary system, an applicant who qualifies under at least one of the preference categories is added, using either the first come, first served or lottery method, to the portion of the list reserved for individuals with a preference. All other applicants are added, using either method, to the portion of the waiting list for individuals ineligible for preferential treatment. Individuals on the preferential-status portion of the list receive housing first.

When using a point system, each preference category is assigned a point value. Applicants receive points for each category under which they qualify and are ordered on the waiting list based on their scores. If two or more applicants have the same score, the housing authority breaks the tie using the first come, first served or lottery method.

State-Assisted Housing Authorities. The state generally requires housing authorities receiving state assistance and using preference categories to use the categories and point values established in state regulations (Conn. Agency Regs. § [8-37ee-305](#)). The four general categories are:

- substandard housing (e.g., inadequate heating or cooking facilities);
- living situation (e.g., living in a shelter);
- income-to-rent ratio (e.g., paying over 50% of income toward rent); and
- least likely to apply (an optional preference category for individuals who do not live in the area because of racial patterns or cost, for example).

Like federally-assisted housing authorities using a point system, state-assisted housing authorities place individuals on a waiting list based on their scores. They break ties using either the first come, first served or lottery method.

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