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## OLR Bill Analysis

### sSB 146

#### ***AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE RENTAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAM AND OTHER HOUSING VOUCHER PROGRAMS.***

#### **SUMMARY**

This bill makes various changes to the Department of Housing's (DOH) Rental Assistance Program (RAP; see BACKGROUND), including the following:

1. establishes in statute the amount of time a RAP participant initially has to find housing;
2. creates new statutory requirements related to housing unit inspections under the program, including specific inspection timelines;
3. requires DOH to begin payments to unit owners within 10 days after a RAP participant's tenancy begins;
4. gives DOH discretion to set maximum rent levels by zip code (rather than by municipality, as current law requires) in a way that promotes the program's use in all municipalities;
5. requires DOH to create an online tool for calculating the maximum allowable rent a unit owner can charge and the monthly assistance the department would pay for a unit; and
6. authorizes DOH to adopt regulations for electronic signatures and document submissions.

The bill also requires DOH to annually assess the maximum rent amounts provided under RAP, as well as other housing voucher programs, and adjust these amounts based on certain considerations. It additionally extends certain requirements to other DOH-administered housing voucher programs that, under current law, apply only to RAP.

Lastly, the bill makes technical and conforming changes.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2024

## **CHANGES TO RAP PROCEDURES**

### ***Issuance of Rental Assistance Certificates***

By law, DOH issues rental assistance certificates to eligible households it selects to participate in RAP (i.e., certificate holders). The bill gives certificate holders up to one year, from the date a certificate is issued, to find housing under the program. It allows DOH to extend a newly issued certificate's effective period for an additional 180 days for good cause. (It is unclear if this provision applies to current certificates or just to prospective ones issued after the bill's effective date.)

Current program regulations require certificate holders to enter into an approved rental agreement within 90 days but allow DOH to extend a certificate's expiration up to 90 days (i.e., 180 days total). This 180-day maximum can be further extended if the department finds good cause to do so (Conn. Agencies Regs., § 17b-812-5). (DOH's RAP Administrative Plan states that a special extension beyond the 180-day maximum may be granted if there are documented and verified circumstances that (1) are beyond a family's control and (2) affect the family's ability to find suitable housing.)

### ***Housing Unit Inspections***

Under the bill, any DOH-required initial housing-unit-eligibility inspection must be done within five business days after a certificate holder submits a request for tenancy approval to the department. The bill requires DOH to (1) send a written notice with the inspection date to both the unit owner and certificate holder and (2) do re-inspections, following a failed initial inspection due to defects in the unit, within three business days after the unit owner certifies in writing to the department that the defects have been corrected.

### ***Online Tool for Rent and Assistance Calculations***

The bill requires DOH, by June 1, 2026, to create a publicly accessible tool on its website that does the following:

1. calculates the maximum allowable rent, including any utility allowance, that a housing unit owner can charge a certificate holder based on the unit's location and physical characteristics and
2. estimates the monthly rental assistance DOH would pay for the unit based on monthly rent and a certificate holder's projected income.

### ***Electronic Signatures and Documents***

The bill authorizes DOH to adopt regulations for electronic signatures or document submissions (e.g., applications, approvals, reports, or other required agreements for RAP administration). It requires the department to accept electronic signatures and document submissions until it adopts the related regulations. (The bill does not specify a process for doing so.)

### **ADMINISTRATION OF HOUSING VOUCHER PROGRAMS**

The bill also requires DOH to take certain actions related to its administration of RAP and other housing voucher programs (including the federal Housing Choice Voucher (HCV) program). Specifically, the bill requires DOH to do the following:

1. administer RAP and any other housing voucher program to promote housing choice for program participants and encourage racial and economic integration (under current law, this requirement already applies to RAP);
2. inform participants in these programs that their housing assistance may be used in any municipality, and to the extent it is feasible, help them find housing in the municipality of their choice (under current law, this requirement already applies to RAP);
3. do an annual assessment to determine if maximum rent amounts under these programs give participants housing opportunities in all of the state's municipalities and zip codes (based on statistically representative rental housing survey data it selects);

4. adjust the maximum rent levels for these programs accordingly;  
and
5. post the assessment on its website.

The bill also specifies that RAP certificates and housing vouchers may be used for housing in any municipality to the extent federal law allows (as is the case for RAP certificates under current law). Additionally, it presumably requires DOH to administer RAP in a way that ensures no participant is displaced if the program is not funded (but the bill appears to reference the incorrect subsection in existing law).

Lastly, the bill requires DOH to adopt regulations to implement these provisions.

## **BACKGROUND**

### ***Rental Assistance Program***

RAP is a DOH-funded program that helps very low-income families afford decent, safe, and sanitary housing in the private market. Recipients of RAP certificates may choose any private rental housing that meets the program requirements.

### ***Related Bills***

sHB 5336, favorably reported by the Housing Committee, requires DOH to assess housing assistance payments under the federal HCV program and attempt to equalize housing assistance payments under state housing voucher programs to the HCV standards.

sSB 6, § 25, favorably reported by the Housing Committee, has nearly identical provisions to § 2 of this bill on RAP and other housing voucher programs.

## **COMMITTEE ACTION**

Housing Committee

Joint Favorable Substitute

Yea 15 Nay 0 (03/07/2024)